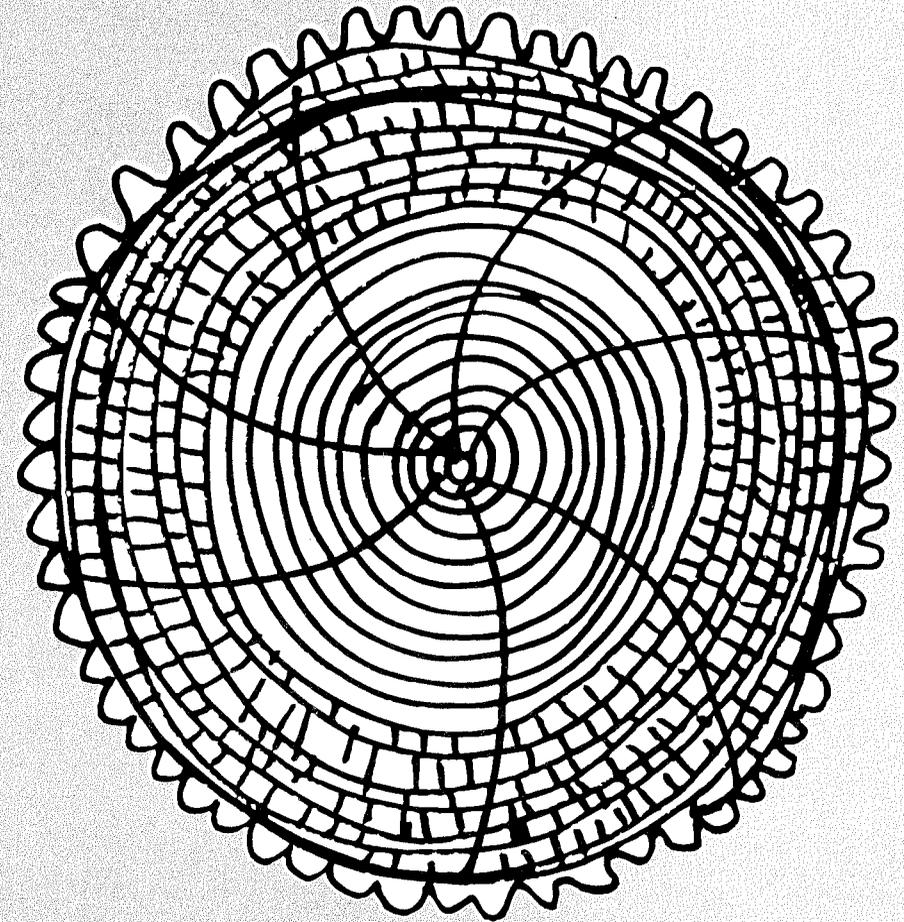


# AlterNation

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## Introduction

Johannes A. Smit

Countering the tendency that contemporary African theatre is only that published with roots in Western dramatic, Mzo Sirayi suggests that this delusion may be rectified by including oral and performance theatre in indigenous languages in curricula. As the disabled comrade in culture-related studies, such a focus may importantly contribute to the appreciation of the dramatic patterns integral to human life and the African cultural heritage. African theatre as communal act is illustrated in view of oral narratives, indigenous African wedding celebrations and the African indigenous doctors' celebration.

Even though a first reading of Zakes Mda's plays may give the impression that their character construction is 'depersonalised', 'weak' and not psychologically developed, Carolyn Duggan argues that a second reading proves the issue to be more complex. Resonating with Brecht's theatrical technique, Mda's perceived lack of 'awareness of self', she reasons, is quite deliberate and due to his concentration on the social and political. His 'analysis of society' calls for ethical and not psychological awareness. Dealing with characters as types allows him to achieve universal resonance beyond the muteness to which colonialism has banished African culture.

On representation in Bushmen ethnographic research, Elsie Leonora Cloete argues that research has not only 'captured' the Bushmen (more than any other culture globally) for purposes of western consumption. It has deprived the Bushmen of 'a past unmediated by a westerner', especially Bushmen women. The problems, she argues, arise from the ethnographic researcher's narrational intervention in the mediation of 'life-histories', blurring of boundaries, shiftings and crossings backward and forward between the narrator's and researcher's geographical, linguistic and cultural contexts, raising questions of authority and authorship.

Focusing on the importance of the 'cultural empathy essential for reinterpreting the frontiers within', Pieter Conradie engages the unhappy history of the Khoi girl, Krotoa,

and Antoinette Pienaar's staged production of the text she wrote on Krotoa and performed in the Castle on December 1995. Tracing the significance of Krotoa's alternation between the Christian van Riebeeck household and her native Goringhaicona and Chainouqua Conradie explores both the realities of cultural prejudices and the possibilities of renewal in the context of miscegenation. Following Pienaar's use of music and the body (dance) in her production, he points to the importance of stylisation for the renewal of theatre and the self's dependence on the Other for self-realisation and re-cognition of itself.

Asserting the importance of questions on colonial female identity, women's roles in colonial society and narratives about their own life experiences, Julie Pridmore points to the fact that existing histories of the Fynn family do not account for Vundhlase, Daughter of Zelemu, Ann Brown and Christina Brown—the women to which Henry Fynn was married. From the scant information available, she pieces together a context accounting for Vundhlase's experiences, contextualises Fynn's move to the Cape and his two year marriage to Ann Brown followed by a more fuller account of Christina Brown. Pointing to gender education for girls/women, she evaluates Christina's diary as that of the wife of a colonial official.

Despite the fact that the Bolshevik Party, the Soviet government and the Comintern were mainly interested in Africa for ideological reasons, Apollon Davidson and Irina Filatova point to important literature published by Soviet scholars and their students. More ideological than academic, the material did raise some important questions, identified problems and generated some ideas which may prove to be valuable still today. These range from the earlier Stalinist interest in promoting class struggle for revolutionary purposes in Africa through the study of economically-related forces in South Africa to Zulu folk tales and Zulu and Xhosa songs. More comprehensive books dealt with the history of the African continent as a whole and as a history of Africans, African societies and peoples, the Union of South Africa after the Second World War and gold.

Beyond nation building within the context of a secular South African state, Anand Singh warns about the national euphoria, the myths of democracy, shared values and non-racialism coupled with an internal amnesia which blur the continuing dividing forces of ethnicity and (fundamentalist) religion. As in other multi-cultural and racially fragmented societies in the world, these myths will never succeed in expelling

the deleterious potential of ethnicity. Distinguishing between the 'culturalisation of politics' and the 'politicisation of culture' as they impact on ethnicity, he critically shows how people from Indian origin and especially one Indian politician engage the former. Following Howe and Mukherji, he asserts that the spectre of the politicisation of culture may be laid to rest if a democratic space is created in which social formations can choose how they define themselves and how they democratically engage on local, regional and national levels.

Overviewing the political agenda of South African postcolonial studies, Kelwyn Sole points to postcolonialists' shortcomings and contradictions. Shortcomings, he argues, arise from their falling prey to the linguistic fallacy, hypostatising discourse (and negotiation) at the expense of being able to account for material culture in its economic sense. Symptomatic is their discursive articulation of race and culture without addressing the historical and context-specific realities of the race/culture nexus as well as materialist concerns about local-global, finance-labour, production-consumption, urban-rural binaries and regional inequalities. Contradictions mainly arise from their textualising practices, ranging from the postcolonial critics' academic (class) positioning (whether black or white) through the allegorising of history, the fragmentation of cultural agency, identity, politics, ideology and conflict to democracy. Sole suggests alternatives.

Arguing that the post-Marxism advocated by some South African English literary-theoretical proponents combines a misrepresentation of Marxian theory with a decontextualisation of post-structuralism, Shane Moran points to their oversimplification of the category of class, the fallacy of replacing the category of class with race and the further marginalising of the already marginalised. He counters this tendency by overviewing the general features of South African 'posts' theory and the revisionist work of a South African Marxist historiographer. Drawing on views by Lyotard and Derrida in the face of the post-modern disenchantment with Marxism's goal of the disalienation of humanity, he then suggests aspects of post-structuralist theories which may prove relevant.

Addressing linguistic questions related to discourse as 'text plus situational context', Nils Erik Enkvist summarises some of the views he has developed throughout his career. These comprise notions of discourse including communication, meaning, redundancy and communicative competence and success concepts also related to

grammaticality, acceptability and appropriateness. Turning to comprehension, he points out that 'linguistic well-formedness' is not a criterium and elaborates on referential and pragmatic meaning and the important roles 'choice', information structure, text strategy and style play in comprehending information transfer.

Addressing questions related to cross-cultural or inter-cultural rhetoric, Enkvist's second article deals with contrastive rhetoric, i.e. the study of patterns of text and discourse in different languages that vary in structure and in cultural background. A sub-branch of applied linguistics, contrastive linguistics moved through various phases to text and discourse analysis focusing on the inferential role a shared knowledge of the world and culture play in empathetic comprehension. Positioning contrastive rhetoric in its interdisciplinary relations, he addresses problems of 'cultural contrasts' and how empirical research may deal with contrastive rhetoric.

Shane Moran positions his review article of Richard Beardsworth's *Derrida and the Political* in the context of the continued economic inequalities and power politics in South Africa. Sensitive to current local rethinking of the relations between academia and politics, Moran contextualises similar Euro-American efforts around Derrida—concerning the apolitical/political nature of deconstruction. After reviewing Beardsworth's arguments in his expository readings of Derrida, Moran shows that his views emanating from his distinction between politics and the political misrecognise deconstruction's relation to its institution as a site of production, complicit in ideology or power and material conditions.

The review article of Rocco Capozzi's *Reading Eco: An Anthology* contextualises Eco's *oeuvre* since the early 1980s in current questions on African hermeneutics. As implicitly argued for in the *Anthology*, the argument is that the writing as well as the interpreting of historical narrative in the context of culture as semiosphere does not sanction hermetic drift. Illustrated in view of Eco's interrelating of his theorising of semiotics and writing of historical narratives, his metadiscursive awareness and novelistic expression, historical narrative in the semiosphere facilitates the growth of knowledge and learning—not only concerning culture but also on questions related to hermeneutics.

## Indigenous African Theatre: The Cultural Renaissance of the Disabled Comrade in South Africa

Mzo Sirayi

Academic discussions and publications usually focus on African contemporary theatre which is not oral in nature and neglect the largely unexplored range of indigenous African theatre. The growing volume of contemporary African theatre has produced the notion that the seed of contemporary African theatre came from Europe. Unfortunately it seems that this notion is shared by the schools or departments of drama in South African universities (the University of Cape Town, the University of Natal, the University of Pretoria, the University of the Witwatersrand, the University of Stellenbosch, the University of Zululand and the University of Durban-Westville), since their drama curricula do not include a study of indigenous African theatre written and performed in African languages.

Scholars in these South African schools of drama consciously or unconsciously entrench the ideology of the original European administrators of colonial South Africa, a ideology that erased the cultural heritage of the African people and replaced it with European art. This ideological tendency is itself a tradition with a history<sup>1</sup>. The curricula of many literature and art departments in African universities (including South African universities) are witness to the neglect of indigenous African theatre.

This article proposes a new understanding of indigenous African theatre, based on the dramatic patterns of human life, and examines a few examples of indigenous African theatre which offer new insights into the peculiar quality of indigenous African theatre. The idea of 'new insights' should not be construed as suggesting that

<sup>1</sup> In 1931 Mary Kelly (1931:10) gave an example of this practice of erasing African art: 'The Holy Cross Mission, Pondoland, has lately been making experiments in drama with the natives of that part, and these experiments have shown several important things. They were concerned with the fact that Christianizing of the natives seemed to mean the removal of much of their natural arts, which were used as an expression of their lowest instincts rather than of any ideal, and they felt that something should be suggested to take their place'. See Mlama's (1991:122) discussion.

indigenous African theatre is a new genre having emerged only a decade, or even a century, ago. The idea of 'new insights' refers to the cultural manifestations or cultural renaissance of theatrical types which have been ignored. My discussion is premised on the belief that the characteristics of indigenous African theatre are

its communal aspect, a collective working in a symbolic language of the fears, hopes and wishes of organic community, a placation of the gods (the natural elements) and a place for the dead who are called upon to intercede for the living. There is no proper "script" and therefore no single author, sometimes not even a proper audience since the audience itself is fluid and indefinable, constantly merging with performers (Nkosi 1981:176).

As a pre-colonial indigenous dramatic art, African theatre continues to be a visual and performing art dependent on forms of communication other than verbal language (Amankulor & Okafor 1988:37).

Clearly a wider concept of theatre is necessary to understand African indigenous theatre. This involves rethinking the concept of theatre as a heuristic device (Fischer-Lichte 1995:1). A concept of theatre as 'cultural performance', which Milton Singer (1959:xii) developed in his introduction to *Traditional India: Structure and Change*, can be used to describe 'particular, instances of cultural festivals, recitations, plays, dances, musical concepts' and the like. According to him, a culture articulates its self-image through such performances and thus represents and exhibits itself to its own members as well as to outsiders. He argues that

for the outsider, these can conveniently be taken as the most concrete observable units of the cultural structure, for each performance has a definitely limited time span, a beginning and end, an organised programme of activity, a set of performers, an audience, and a place and occasion of performance.

This concept of theatre is wide enough to be applied to different non-European as well as European theatre forms, to which the narrow concept of theatre (box-set stage, realism and a dramaturgy orientated towards the linear development of plot and the psychological development of characters) is unsuited.

My analysis of some indigenous African theatre forms will be located within Singer's model. I will analyse the following examples of indigenous African theatre: oral narratives, an indigenous African wedding celebration, and an African indigenous doctors' celebration. These are some examples of popular indigenous African theatre to be found among ordinary people, particularly unschooled peasants and the illiterate. Such examples can be considered as indigenous African theatre because they satisfy the following criteria: limited time-span, a beginning and end, place and the occasion

of performance, an organised programme of activities, a set of performers and audience. Most importantly my study of indigenous African theatre forms is guided by these elements and their collective use within a people's world-view (Amankulor & Akafor 1988:36).

### Oral Narratives

The phrase 'oral narratives' denotes various types of narratives such as myths, legends, tales, riddles and proverbs (Green 1981:71). African oral literature has been ignored and condemned as 'primitive', and scholars of literature have regarded oral literature as savage and backward (Bitek 1973:19,20,36). The missionaries and anthropologists treated African literature as strange and curious objects or experiences (Bitek 1973:19-20; Mlama 1983:6). As anthropologists and researchers continued discovering the artistic and social significance of African art, they shifted their paradigm. They came to believe that oral narratives were not, indeed could not be, indigenous to Africa (Finnegan 1978:29). Possessed by an ideology that found it difficult to see Africa as other than savage and backward, it was not easy for them to appreciate oral literature or to regard it as having originated in Africa. It was the post-*uhuru* period that opened gates for oral narratives in Africa to be regarded as literature. However, the theatricality of oral narratives is still a subject of divisive debate. While many scholars appear to have reached a consensus that oral narratives are a form of theatre, some African scholars in South Africa are still opposed to such a view.

It is against this background that I describe and analyse tales as a theatre form as opposed to an oral literary form. With regard to the description of tales, the narration is brought to action by the story-teller. The story-teller does not have at his disposal some of the theatrical devices employed in other theatre forms, such as many actors to take different roles of characters in a story. Different characters in the story are played by the story-teller although he does not employ particular costumes, a special stage and settings to actualise the story. He dramatizes his narration by the use of various other theatrical devices. For example, a deep voice demonstrates a wicked or frightening character such as a monster. Chattering characterises the liar. Mumbling is employed for stupid characters. Voice techniques are used to create appropriate atmosphere. Whispers or low voices indicate appropriate danger. Emergency situations are indicated by the quickening of the tempo of the voice, whereas a slower tempo indicates an atmosphere of relaxation (Mlama 1983:272). These theatrical devices also demonstrate the narrator's artistic ability to captivate the audience. They further hold the interest of the audience because they are used to suit the situation, develop it and move it forward.

The use of the language in the description of characters, scenery, and atmos-

phere in a way that excites the imagination of the audience and their interest in the story is one of the most important elements of dramatic narration. Proverbs, sayings, similes and metaphors are also used to make the descriptions more vivid and to create a picture that is familiar to the audience. Creativity and skilful use of the language are also important in bringing the action of the story to life through narration (Green 1980:77& Mlama 1983:272-73).

The narration of the tales hinges upon human and non-human characters. Human characters are usually employed in stories which are historically based, such as the genealogy of a king or any common person. Non-human characters are usually employed in religious and philosophical stories and referred to as carriers of the religio-philosophical thought of African people. Sometimes human and non-human characters are combined to drive home a particular philosophical thought. All the characters in the actualisation of the tales, be they humans or non-humans, are given human attributes so that people may identify with them.

The theatricality of the tales is determined by a programme of activity: the occasion of the performance, the time and space in which the performance takes place, the performer and audience, and materials that are employed during the performance. These are the theatrical techniques should be satisfied by any cultural performance in order to qualify and be regarded as a form of indigenous African theatre. Unlike other cultural performances, the tales' theatricality is not methodically organized and pre-planned. It is a question of the coming together of the actor or performer and the audience around the fire at home (in the hut or courtyard or in the grazing or hunting field). Unplanned as it is, the performance of the narration continues smoothly and according to a particular sequence as if it was pre-planned, for it consists of a beginning, a middle and an end which flow from one point to another. It is this sequence that draws the audience into the performance. The audience behaves as if it sees the performance on the stage.

The time and space in which the performance is performed are also paramount. For example, in the case of women and children, where an old woman is the performer, the performance takes place inside the hut. Participants come together around the fire-place or hearth. Men and boys perform in the courtyard where historical performances take place. The hunters would come together anywhere in open space and tell stories. In all these cases, the story-tellers sit among the audience and commence the stories. A women and children's performance usually takes place in the evening when everybody has retired from work. A men and boys' performance takes place during the day, in most cases in the afternoon when boys have come back from herding. The hunters perform their tales around the fire in the evening. The time-limit is determined by the language and artistic skills of the performer which captivate the audience. If the performer has the artistic ability to arouse the interest of the audience

the story is prolonged, but if the performer cannot sustain the interest of the audience, the performance becomes short (Mlama 1983:287 and Omodele 1988:83-87).

The occasion also determines a tale's theatricality. Occasions such as pleasure nights, hunting, herding and courtyard discussion dictate the types of stories to be performed. The stories for pleasure-nights are told by women and children. Women and children approach these tales as creative plays which are performed as mere games (Green 1980:76). The men and boys' stories are performed on occasions such as courtyard discussions, herding and hunting. The stories performed during these occasions are taken in more seriously, while those performed by women are regarded as light-hearted.

The most important materials employed by the performer are language, voice, songs and gestures (Mlama 1983:270)<sup>2</sup>. They are employed further to dictate the theatricality of tales; the creative employment of language in the portrayal of characters, situation and mood contributes to the theatricality of a tale. For example, in the *Krwedebe's* tale, the performer describes a picture of a child whose mother has passed away. His father has to re-marry. The performer describes the pathetic situation in which the child finds herself:

Wahlala kabuhlungu  
imihla ngemihla elila  
kuba kaloku wayebethwa,  
ephekiswa, etheziswa,  
esalusiswa.

She was ill-treated everyday,  
weeping because she was  
beaten, was forced to cook, fetch  
fire-wood from the forest and  
herd the cattle.

<sup>2</sup> Unanimity does exist regarding the identity of the performer in oral performance. Jafta (1978:33) argues that a performer or narrator is a special person, usually an old lady. Leshoai (1981:243-44) argues that the tales are told by the grandmothers. I prefer the accounts of Green and Mlama. Green (1981:76) points out that there are stories that are told or performed by women and others by men. She also implies that boys and girls do perform the stories. Mlama (1983:287) is of the opinion that although anybody can be a story-teller (performer), usually these old women become the best performers. The men and the young members of the family, however, are always given a chance to tell stories. The children even as young as four or five years old are encouraged to tell stories, this being one way of training them in the story telling art.

The repeated verbs 'wayebethwa', 'ephekiswa', 'esalusiswa' describes the state in which the girl finds herself. Through the inward eye the audience sees this girl. They also contribute to building the plot. It is through them that the performer describes and creates the story's moods and tensions in the family with a stepmother. The verbs in this texts have a musical pitch in order to achieve emphasis.

The portrayal of the many roles played by the performer is achieved by the use of voice. A big voice characterises a boy who comes to save the girl from the stepmother. A soft and low voice indicates or characterises the unfortunate girl and her state of trauma:

- Boy: (with a big voice) Xa ndisithi masiye ekhaya  
uye kuba yinkosikazi yam  
ungavuma na?
- Girl: (with a low voice) Ewe ndingavuma.
- Boy: (with a big voice) If I say we must go  
to my home in order to  
get married, will you agree?
- Girl: (with a low voice) Yes, I will agree.

The dialogue between the boy and the girl is indicated by the quickening of the tempo of the voice of the performer. This quickening of the tempo indicates an emergency situation which is intended to rescue and save the victim.

Another role played by the performer is that of a monster or wicked and frightening character. For instance, the girl has been to her home for a few weeks to bury her stepmother. On her way back to her new home, in the big forest she meets a monster. The frightening situation is demonstrated as follows:

- Monster: (with a big voice) Krwebede! krwebede! krwebede!  
uveli phi?
- Girl: (with a small voice) Ndivela ekhaya.
- Monster: (with a big voice) Krwebede! Krwebede! Ekhaya kukho bani?
- Girl: (with a small voice) Kukho umama notata.
- Monster: (with a big voice) Krwebede! krwebede! krwebede!  
ndingabulawa, ndibulawe ujike uze kuhamba apha? Hi?
- Monster: (with a big voice) Krwebede! krwebede! krwebede!
- Monster: Where do you come from?
- Girl: (with a low voice) I am coming from home.
- Monster: (with a big voice) Krwebede! Krwebede! Who is at home?
- Girl: (with a small voice) My mother and father.
- Monster: Krwebede! Krwebede! Krwebede!  
How can you walk here having killed me? Hi?

Song is one of the most important materials or techniques in the creation of theatrical narration. Apart from contributing the development of structural patterns and the development of the story, it is usually used as a communication technique between characters especially human and non-human characters (Mlama 1983:283). For example, in the story of two doves that went to look for Malkhomese who left her two children starving the doves come across many people in one family. The people and the doves communicate through the song:

- People: (shouting) Wabethini?
- Doves: (singing) Asimahobezana okuthethwa,  
Thina!  
Sifun' uMalkhomese  
Thina!  
Wasishiya sisodwa,  
Thina.  
Sadl' umhlaba sakhula,  
Thina!
- People: (shouting) Beat them.
- Doves: (singing) We are not the doves to be beaten!  
We are looking for Malkhomese!  
She left us alone.  
We lived on dust and grew up!

Song is also employed by a performer in order to expose the culprit to other people. Malkhomese, for example, is not known by the people to have left the children alone. The above song is sung by the doves to expose her. Indeed she is exposed and the people respond by chasing her away. Song is employed to entertain and educate the audience (Jafta (1978:63), Green (1981:80), and Mlama (1983:320)).

It could also be argued that the song is used as sympathetic magic to make what is naturally impossible happen (Mlama 1983:284). For example, the above song makes it possible for the doves to fly and carry Malkhomese back to her children. Furthermore, the singing birds in the story can be used for many purposes. Since the birds are able to fly long distances, they represent the carriers of news. Birds are often present in trees and they become witnesses of events, although their presence is often ignored. As such, the birds are often the only witnesses to crimes committed in the absence of human beings. They therefore always provide the missing link in solving the mystery of the crime committed (Mlama 1983:284).

For example, a tale of children who lost their father's bird is told. The children were worried by their father who had warned them not to open the hut where the bird

was. The children, however, invited their friends to come to their father's bird. They opened the hut and it flew away and was lost. The children were worried and went to look for it. The pedagogical lesson in this tale is simple and to the point. The importance of love, co-operation and kindness is taught in many oral narratives. An example is the story of Ndudula and Ndudu, who were twins. Ndudula was caught by a monster while she was collecting firewood from the forest. Her twin brother Ndudu was very frustrated. As a result of love for his twin sister he risked his life for her sake. He found her married to a monster and with two children. The story of an old woman and the jackal cautions people about trickery. This particular old woman lived with her grandchildren. They were school-goers. A jackal came and cheated the old woman while the children were at school. The jackal suggested that they should play a game that involved getting into a pot with boiling water. They were going to alternate. The old woman agreed. When it was the old woman's turn to get into the pot, the jackal closed and tightened the lid of the pot. The old woman cried until she died.

Some oral narratives demonstrate how intellectual supremacy triumphs over physical power. For example, the animals had a meeting. The main item under discussion was a solution to a great drought that had befallen their country. The chairperson of the meeting was the king of the animals, the lion. The first animal that came with an idea was the hare, one of the small animals. The hare suggested that they should collect water. Its idea was undermined by the leopard and the lion and the water remained in the well. But eventually, the hare's idea was accepted and water was collected into a big dam that was dug by animals for water. The animals took turns in protecting the dam and water against anybody who might come and drink. The elephant was the first to look after the water. The jackal who had refused to be part of the scheme came to drink water. It sang a beautiful song that made the elephant fall asleep. The jackal drank the water while the elephant was asleep. All the big animals were given the chance to guard the water but all fell asleep when the jackal came singing. The tortoise's chance came. The jackal attempted the tricks it had performed on the other animals, but the tortoise caught it because of its intellectual acumen.

Finally, this descriptive analysis of oral narratives shows that indigenous theatrical forms do exist in South Africa. Such narratives contain pedagogical elements while simultaneously including entertainment values. When performed in the presence of the audience, they convey their meanings and functions by means of exciting and imaginative theatrical techniques. The stories communicate through symbolic images. As we have seen, the human and non-human characters employed in these stories represent images of various aspects of human behaviour and also represent animal and human characters involved in positive and negative events in everyday life (Green 1981:7; Mlamba 1983:321).

### The Indigenous African Wedding Celebration

Despite cultural diversity, which is attributable to different social, economic, political and geographical circumstances, all African communities in South Africa, that is, Ndebele, Sotho, Swazi, Tswana, Tsonga, Venda, Xhosa and Zulu, practise the 'wedding-celebration' form of theatre. I take my example from a Xhosa indigenous African wedding celebration which I observed and in which I participated in my own region, the Eastern Cape. My approach will be, first, to give a brief description of this celebration by outlining its structural pattern and, second, to present an analysis.

There are two broad structural sections in the celebration: (i) the negotiations or preparations, and (ii) the wedding celebration, *umdudo*.

#### (i) The negotiations

The negotiations involve members of the families of the prospective bride and groom. This is a beginning of many of the dramatic episodes, and is marked by rhetoric, music, praise-names and dance. While the dramatic dialogue is between the prospective in-laws, music and dance are performed by the bride's family. Just as the whole performance is characterised by multivoiced dramatic developments in the sense that various performance-types are performed simultaneously, here the performance includes rhetoric, music, dance and praise names. Men called *oonozakuzaku* represent the groom's side in these negotiations. In fact, *oonozakuzaku* are sent by the groom's family to negotiate with the bride's family. Both families go out their way to choose people who are known of their rhetoric. Their manner of speech is often not dictated by any formulaic style. The dialogue between the *oonozakuzaku* and the bride's family begins as follows:

Bride's family:	Khanitsho ke. Tell us.
Oonozakuzaku:	Sibone isitya kweli khaya. We have seen a vessel in this family.

The *oonozakuzaku* start describing the qualities of the prospective bride. After the descriptions the bride's family summons girls who act as pseudo-brides. The pseudo-brides are presented by the bride's family to the *oonozakuzaku*. The reason for the presentation of the pseudo-brides to the *oonozakuzaku* is to test the *oonozakuzaku*'s sincerity about what they claim to have seen. When the *oonozakuzaku* have finally identified the prospective bride among the pseudo-brides, the bride's family say:

Bride's family:	Betha. Go on.
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One of *oonozakuzaku* stands up to name the beasts and their features for *lobola*. If the negotiations are for princes, *lobola* may amount to a hundred or more beasts. A voice from the bride's family is heard saying: *Ubuziqhuba ngantoni na?* (What did you use to drive these beasts?). The groom's family responds by dramatic action, namely by putting tobacco in front of both the bride's family and the groom's family. A second voice from the bride's side says: *Yenza lingasitsarhi* (Continue to avoid suffocation). The groom's group starts smoking and the bride's family follows their example. After some time the bride's family will make it clear that the tobacco is nice or not nice (*liyaghuma* or *aliqhumu*). The performers are *oonozakuzaku* (groom's family) who stand up and demonstrate by gestures and movements the features of the beasts. The members of the bride's family become the spectators. I should, however, mention that this part is an introduction to the actual theatre performance, for this part involves, as the performers and the spectators, the friends and relatives of the prospective groom and bride.

Linked to this part of the section of the celebration is a communal aspect which is a characteristic of indigenous African theatre. Another important issue to be noted is that a groom's family does not necessarily spend only one day with the bride's family. Sometimes, for example, in the case of the royal family, when the bride's family is satisfied by the groom's side, a national meeting is called in order to welcome and rejoice with the bride's side. During this period speeches, songs, dances and oral poetry might be performed. It is through these speeches, songs, dances and oral poetry that the participants and the audience express their feelings. Their dreams and hopes have come to realisation. As they think of the whole occasion, their hearts become filled with joy and exhilaration. The songs involved are for entertainment and thematic significance. Speeches are intended for communication and expressing of deeply felt feelings and joy.

(ii) The wedding celebration (*umdudo*)

The wedding celebration *umdudo* is located within and guided by a limited time-span (three to eight days), a beginning and end, an audience, performers, an organised programme of activity, and a place and occasion of performance. These criteria determine its theatricality. These techniques are the most basic elements observable in *umdudo* that suggests that it is a form of indigenous African theatre. It is open for everybody, as other nations are invited. Once the nations arrive the celebration starts.

When the negotiations between groom's family and bride's family have been finalised, an organised programme of activity is planned as follows: artistic preparations including making of costumes, drums, rehearsals for actors, musicians and dancers (Amankulor and Akafor 1988:37), and finally the wedding celebration takes place. The bride's side, called *uduli*, goes to the groom's family for the purpose of the wed-

ding celebration—*umdudo*. The wedding celebration takes place in the courtyard, referred to as *inkundla*. This section is dominated by music and dance. The repetition of music and dance does not bore the participants because repetition pleases them, especially if one considers the fact that 'when something pleases the Africans, its repetition pleases them even more' (Traoré 1972:55). The climax of the wedding celebration is on the day of marriage vows—*ukunqumla inkundla*. This day is viewed by Africans as a culmination of various events.

The bride's family and the groom's family sit facing in opposite directions, on the open stage or space in front of the huts or kraals. The bride and groom are present at this meeting. Both sides sing, dance and shout. The men put on their attire, called *isidla* and *isidabane*. The women are also in traditional dress, *isikhaka* and *incebeta*. Young people in general are also present. They are costumed or disguised in indigenous attire. The bride and the two or three girls called pseudo-brides emerge from the bride's family. They go and stand in front of the audience, facing the groom's family. The bride uncovers herself from the head to the abdomen and from the thighs to the feet; that is, the breasts and the thighs are naked. The groom's family looks at her with analytic and critical eyes. The audience reacts positively or negatively depending on whether or not the bride looks like a virgin. The groom emerges from the groom's group and goes to the bride. They exchange *iintshinga*—African wedding necklaces. (African wedding necklaces were and are replaced by European wedding rings at the dull wedding ceremony at the altar where the bride and the groom repeat words that nobody believes in—'I will never look at another woman or man again in my life' (Bitek 1973:3).) The bride starts by taking her *iintshinga* and putting it on the groom and then the groom does likewise. Then they go to the kraal. The bride holds up a spear in her right hand. They stand in front of the gate of the kraal. The bride spears the gate at the left and leaves the spear there. They go back to the audience. As soon as the bride spears the gate the *imbongi* recites the praises. The women shout *kiki-kiki-kiki-kiki*. The two groups of the bride and the groom compete by singing and dancing until the end of the celebration.

Apart from an organised programme of activity as discussed above, there is no fixed time of the month and year that is set aside for the celebration of the indigenous African wedding ceremony. The date is decided by the in-laws once they have agreed on *lobola*, which is part of the preparatory phase. Before the actual celebration the performers from both sides learn and rehearse new songs and new dance-forms for the wedding celebration. Larlham (1982:105) in support of this view writes:

Although it is used to be customary for the party of the bride to repeat old and new well-known songs, the bridegroom generally preferred, for his own party, to introduce something entirely new to mark the occasion. For this purpose, he would secure

the services of some professional 'composer' (*umqambi*), of whom each district could boast of one or two. No fee was charged for the service. A few days before the wedding, the *ukufunda* (to learn) would be announced among the surrounding kraals. The bride, or the bridegroom, would first lead their party through all the proposed older dances. Then the (*umqambi*) would initiate them in his own special new composition.

However, some forms of indigenous African theatre can be performed without rehearsal but from past knowledge and experience. The whole performance becomes episodic, for it consists of different unrelated and related organised programme of activities. Oyin Ogunba (1978:22) is correct to suggest that indigenous African theatre

... is organized on an episode basis. An actor comes forward and dramatizes a historical event or a myth or simply creates a scene with his appearance and general bearing and this act may have little or no relationship at all with preceding or subsequent act; indeed two acts mimed in sequence at a festival may in history have been separated by centuries.

Ogunba's description of an organized programme of activities of indigenous African theatre will be understood as the discussion unfolds.

The bride is usually accompanied by young and old girls, young men and a few old men. They form a group called *uduli*. The *uduli* arrives at sunset and is welcomed by its in-laws by being accommodated in any home prepared for the purpose. While the most important part (the actual celebration) is dominated by songs, dance forms and oral poetry, the climax and most exciting episode is the scene of marriage vows—*ukucanda inkundla*. Singing and dancing are a means of expressing appreciation of the bride and the groom. This is a social occasion in this celebration with messages of joy, well-wishes and blessings which are directed to parents of both (bride and groom) through songs, dance forms and oral poetry. Culturally, *ukunqumla inkundla* is meant to assure the groom's side that the bride is a virgin, hence she has to uncover her head to the abdomen and from the thighs to the feet so that her in-laws are able to make the critical analysis which will determine whether or not the bride is a virgin. The main focus of the analysis is the breasts and thighs. The exchange of *iintshinga* is a symbol of cleavage between the groom and the bride. The bride's act of spearing the gate symbolises commitment to the marriage vows. This scene is used as an important means of providing the African society with an opportunity of evaluating its quality of life. The bride is used as the main character in determining whether or not the African women still value the purity of unmarried women.

Another scene begins with a performance by women of the groom's side, who perform various dances and songs and also imitate various duties to be performed by

the bride, such as carrying of firewood, fetching of water, ploughing and hoeing. Apart from the women of the groom's side, this scene is an important means of acknowledging the contribution of individual poets, dancers and singers to social living. The creativity of these individuals is used to enhance collective social experience while at the same time providing a critical means of evaluating the creativity of individuals (Agovi 1980:143). The performers move to and from the audience and they interact with the members of the audience. Since there is no blueprint script the performance is marked by spontaneity which forms part of performance. The sequence of performance is determined by performers who come forward as individuals or in a group and perform as they wish. The presence of an active audience influences the direction of a performance as a result of its involvement or participation (Agovi 1980:148). If the audience does not respond it becomes very difficult for the performers/actors to enjoy and rise to the level of the occasion.

I should also comment on the functions and meanings of the songs involved in this performance. For example, the song

Amalongwe hay' amalongwe,  
Amalongwe soze siwabase ,  
Saya kwamkhozi sacel' inkuni,  
Batsh' ukusinik' ingxowa yamalongwe.

Dried cow-dung no dried cow-dung,  
We shall never make use of dried cow-dung to make fire,  
We went to the in-laws,  
They gave us a bag of dried cow-dung.

is used for entertainment and thematic significance. It arouses the feelings of performers and audience. The manner in which the performer renders the song provokes the audience to respond with great enthusiasm. They become co-participants, patrons, chorus, as well as critics or judges of the performer's communicative ability (Mvula 1991:13). The song also warns the bride against looking down upon unmarried women. It also teaches that marriage should not make her egocentric, for her husband's family is not better than other families. The teachings apply to the groom as well. More importantly, this song combined with dance is used ideologically to arm the bride with knowledge of her social responsibilities. It ridicules laziness and teaches her that laziness will not be accepted by her in-laws.

The performers are not trained specialists. All those members of the community who are gifted in acting are free to perform. However, young children and old people cannot perform in some African communities. While the performers are not trained, together with the audience, they play an important role in the performance. It

is upon performer-audience participation that the theme, style and success of the occasion are determined. They are determined by way of songs, dance and the like. For example, the song

Namhla siyakushiya, namhla uzothukwa,  
Bath' uligqwirha mntwan' asemzini.  
Namhla siyakushiya, namhla uzokhala,  
Bathi unemicondo mntwan' asemzini.  
Zunyamezele zunyamezele zunyamezele,  
Mntwan' asemzini.

Today we leave you, today you will be insulted,  
They say you are a witch, our child.  
Today we leave you, today you will cry  
They say you have got thin legs, our child.  
Be tolerant, be tolerant, be tolerant,  
Our child.

demonstrates the nature of the occasion. The song becomes a group activity with the performers and audience joining and interacting in singing and dancing. It also teaches the bride to be tolerant since she will be stigmatised by her in-laws. This song represents a foreshadowing of the future that is acted out in song and dance. It is also a kind of window into the future that the brides look into and sees herself in an endeavour to prepare herself for the awaiting domestic routines. The idea is to make her decide whether she would like to see herself in the image of success or failure like the character in the musical. The song contains a fundamental element of the prophetic message which is hidden in it. Since it is sung in a provocative and trance-like manner, the future is projected in the form of prophetic utterance. The notion of prophetic and visionary beliefs becomes a cultural feature characterising the African marriage. While the message of the song is directed to the bride, the audience supports the performer by way of giving or responding to the performer. Without the feedback of the audience the performer might not succeed in conveying the message. The song is also marked by parallelism. The use of this technique by the performer is intended to achieve emphasis and make a song memorable, sweet, meaningful. It includes an aesthetic device which indicates a performer's mastery of the poetic discourse. The repeated syntactic and semantic forms and resultant rhythm achieved through parallelism carry the meaning of a song (Mvula 1991:32).

### African Indigenous Doctors' Celebration

The African indigenous doctors' celebration is one of the oldest celebrations in Africa.

It has always been functional and communal and has always reflected and highlighted the world-view of African communities.

Before I give an analysis of the African indigenous doctors' celebration, it is necessary to establish whether or not this celebration is a form of indigenous African theatre. Jafta (1978:20-21) in her MA thesis discusses the African traditional doctors' celebration as a form of indigenous African theatre. In her concluding remarks she writes:

This is a ritual song and dance of diviners that is generally regarded as of a communicative kind with the ancestors. The diviners celebrate with it and invoke the presence of the ancestors with it. They also get their inspiration from it so that they become extremely sensitised to the presence of evil and their divining powers are easily aroused.

Similarly Sithembiso Nxiyema, who is one of the powerful African indigenous doctors at Holy Cross, Lusikisiki, argues that the African indigenous doctors' celebration is a kind of drama which is intended, among other things, to reconcile the ancestors and those who are still alive, and also to entertain the unseen and the members of the community (Personal interview 1993). Ngcamphalala, a cultural historian in Swaziland, who has experienced African indigenous doctors' celebrations in other African states, such as Swaziland, Zimbabwe and Malawi, maintains that the African indigenous doctors' celebration is a form of indigenous African theatre whose roots are grounded in the African soil (Personal interview 1993). It is important to mention that there are various types of indigenous doctors' celebrations, such as *ukuthwasa*, *ukuvumisa* and the like. In this essay, however, I deal with *ukuthwasa*. My analysis is based on the Tsonga community in South Africa. The structure of the celebration is as follows:

#### (i) A Call to Priesthood

African indigenous doctors are born, not made. One does not decide to be an indigenous doctor. One is called by the ancestral spirit. In support to this view, Broster (1981:24) writes that no one becomes an indigenous doctor, an *igqirha*, by personal choice. Each individual experience a definite call from an ancestral spirit, whom she/he must serve for the rest of her/his life. The period is called *kuthwasa* in Tsonga.

#### (ii) The Training Period

The period of training differs from community to community, but among the Tsonga people it takes from three to ten months. During this period the trainee wears a particular attire and avoids smoking, sex and drinking. Language usage also changes. More importantly there are evening gatherings involving dance, songs and drumming that bring the trainee very close to the ancestral spirit. These gatherings are open to the

public. There are also dramatic scenes 'of a rather private kind, with a minimal audience and often no audience at all' (Okpewho 1992:262).

### (iii) The Graduation Ceremony

This takes about two to three days. It is a public gathering of African indigenous doctors, friends or visitors, community members and relatives. The doctors sing, beat drums, dance and so forth. The African indigenous doctor who has been instructing the trainee is presented with gifts. The graduation ceremony is dominated by songs and dance, which perform the same function as the dialogue in a play. Generally, the occasion is marked by one theme which runs through these songs. Okpewho (1992:263) states that

the exchange of songs plays much the same role as the dialogue in a play. Though it does not lead to a conflict of wills between characters, it certainly yields an emotional counterpoint that brings the performance to a charged climax. The language of the songs and the dramatic movements contribute to the sublimity of the representation in the performance.

It is important to mention that in contemporary times the indigenous African doctors are organized as the Association of African Indigenous Doctors. They attempt to revive and promote their cultural activities as theatrical performances. They are mobile theatre groups. It is not uncommon to see them in their best costumes moving from village to village competing with dance and songs.

The African indigenous doctors' celebration as a form of indigenous African theatre is performed for and by individuals who have been visited or caught by spirits or dead relatives. Like the indigenous wedding celebration, the African indigenous doctors' celebration is performed at no fixed time of the year. The determining factor is the afflicting spirits and the afflicted person, who becomes a patient or candidate for initiation into the indigenous African medical field, which is called *ukuthwasa*. During this period of *ukuthwasa* the candidates, the doctors and the audience usually meet in the evenings almost every day for a performance. Various dances, songs and drumming are performed. The candidates and the doctors raise their hands to the sky and point down to the floor as they dance and sing. They also look up and down. For example, the song

Ndza kayakaya minoo,  
Hoo aha hee, hee!  
Ndza kayakaya ndzi na maxangoo,  
Hoo, aha, hee, hee!  
Wa kayakaya n'wanangoo.

Hina hi losile,  
Vangoma hi yo haa!  
Hi losile, vangoma hee!  
Tonga siya duma.

I move from pillar to post,  
Hoo aha, hee, hee!  
I move from pillar to post because of trials and tribulations,  
Hoo aha hee, hee!  
My child is also suffering.  
We greet you,  
You diviners haa!  
We greet you, diviners, hee!  
The famous ones.  
(Translated by D.J. Risenga)

signifies that the candidates and doctors are communicating with the deceased relatives. It is also intended to invoke the ancestors, for the whole performance is an occasion for divination. Apart from evening performance, the candidates might perform at any time when the spirits move them to perform.

The actors, that is, candidates and doctors, become para-human actors, for they are believed to have taken the form of the ancestors, that is, actors who could be described as non-human. Since this is a religious occasion, the actors put on a costume, which has been chosen according to the choice and taste of particular ancestors, and make-up that relates directly to their dramatic intentions and may also reinforce their act through improvisation (Agovi 1980:149). When the ancestors are possessed by the spirits their bodies are transformed and muscles ripple up and down. The audiences rejoice as they see the actors being possessed by the spirits, for it means the spirits are ready to help, bless and heal the actors. Since this phase takes place in a relatively small space or in a hut, the audience is very small. Its involvement in the performance is through clapping of hands, drumming and singing.

The most important phase is the graduation ceremony, which takes about two to three days. Doctors, friends, community members and relatives are invited. The notion of two to three days satisfies the criteria of limited time-span and a beginning and end that determine the theatricality of this performance as a form of theatre. The main actors in this episode are the graduands and doctors. The relatives, friends, and the head of homestead are members of the audience, who become co-participants at a later stage.

The programme of activity is organized as follows: this part is divided into different phases with different episodes, such as ceremonial beer drinking, sacrificial

beast slaughtering and the actual performance which involves dancing, singing and drumming. Some of the episodes are related and some are not. They take part in the courtyard. In fact the programme of activity is the continuation of the performance which has taken place in a hut. The act of beer drinking and sacrificial beast slaughtering during a graduation ceremony means that conferring of the status of a doctor upon the graduands by the doctors who have been supervising them. It also shows the co-existence of rituals with cultural performance. After conferring the status of a doctor upon the graduands, the doctors and graduands as performers begin to dance and sing. The dancing and singing are accompanied by drums. The performers sing and dance in a circle. The theme of the song is the same as *Ndza kayakaya minoo* above. However, in this context the function of the song and dance is to arouse feelings of joy and gratitude to the spirits and those who contributed to the success of the whole occasion of divination. As the performers dance and sing, the audience become co-participants by way of supporting the audience. They also express their joy and gratitude to the spirits for blessing and healing the graduands. The audience's hopes and dreams are expressed through the dancing and singing. The interaction between the performers and the audience is also regarded as a communication between them, for it is upon the interaction that most of the members of audience express their joy, appreciation and congratulation to the performers whose dreams have been realised on the one hand. It is through interacting with the audience on the other hand that the performers show that they are grateful to the members of the audience for their help and support.

In most cases the graduands and the doctors put on their special costume, powdered white clay and white beads. They (the costume, powdered white clay and white beads) signify the kind of occasion being celebrated. They also stand for the deceased relatives and powdered white clay and white beads are used because ancestors are believed to be white. According to African ways of life, everything representing the deceased relatives is white in colour. The graduands and doctors are believed to be representing or to have taken new identities as spirits, ancestors and deceased relatives. The graduands and doctors become the para-human actors since they are believed to be the integration and fusion of spirits and matter. To put it differently, they are a fusion of human beings and non-human beings who assume completely new identities as actors. As a result of the force of the role concept, the audience accept their new role identity and are prepared to enter into their (the actors') world of conscious impersonation. Acting in this context becomes an attempt to act out an imagined identity that is credible to the audience (Agovi 1980:152).

The graduands and doctors, as para-human actors, employ songs, dances, mimes, sounds and expressive gestures of the face, hand and feet. The songs and dances are intended to drive the para-human actors to the point of being possessed by the ancestral spirits and they might be in a trance. They also mean to tap communal or indi-

vidual understanding of an event (Balistreri 1979:171). Through the songs and dances, emotions are raised and expressed. As Ola Rotimi (1990:255) states:

... the traditional African theatre appeals to the emotions as it does to the intellect. ...[T]o the performer in the traditional African theatre, it is just as pertinent to involve the spectator emotionally as to become himself involved with the spirit of the character which he sets out to portray. It can therefore be inferred that in traditional African theatre the emotions and the intellect are both complementary gateways to the human essence.

In addition, the songs as they are sung by both the actors and audience serve to strengthen the theme of divination. They also become a source of aural enjoyment for the audience. Rotimi (1990:255) argues similarly that songs serve as a medium of accenting theme (as usually evinced in a refrain), for commenting on topical issues, for accord-ing auditory pleasure, and for providing stimulus to dance.

Concerning movements and mimes, the para-human actors convey thoughts and feelings that are representational and religiously vital. The para-human actors occupy the stage as individuals or groups of three or so. An individual para-human actor comes forward, in front of the audience and performs or dances. She/he might be followed by another individual or group. Their appearance before the audience creates a different sequence of scenes, which might be related or not related at all to preceding scenes. This occasion necessitates the definition of the term 'audience'. Agovi (1980:154) defines 'audience' in indigenous African theatre as a group of people to whom a message or performance is directed. It includes different categories, such as spectators or observers, who may be present at a performance without necessarily being the focus of attention or the focus of the message. It may also include non-human audiences such as spirits and ancestors, who are often the focus of attention in religious indigenous African theatres. This implies that the indigenous doctors' celebration involves both human and non-human audiences and performers because it is a religious occasion with messages that are directed to the human beings and to the spirits and ancestors.

The human audience participates in singing, clapping of hands and, in some cases, verbally. When the audience responds actively as a way of showing appreciation, the para-human actors become more spiritually involved in their performance, leading to a heightened evocation of voice, an intensified projection of group sentiment and an expressive interpretation of the songs. The songs become a direct channel for communication between the actors and the audience (Agovi 1980:153). At one stage, the following song is sung:

Ha wu vona ntirho, ha wu vona,  
Thokozan' thokoza bakithi!  
Ha wu vona ntirho wenu,  
Thokazan', thokozan' bakithi!

We see the ceremony we see it,  
Thokozan', thokozan' dear people!  
We see your ceremony,  
Thokozan', thokozan', dear people!  
We see it, it is marvellous.

(Translated by D.J. Risenga)

As the actors sing and dance, the audience become co-participants as a way of giving moral support. Some members of the audience sing and some beat drums. As the audience continues to support the actors by way of providing a dynamic rhythmic background, the actors dance and sing, looking up and down, raising their hands and arms. At times the actors move graciously and beautifully, holding up their sticks. The whole process is an indication that the spirits are with them and the occasion is blessed. The repetition of 'ha wu and thokozan' bakithi' reflects joy and blessing that come from the spirits. The message of the song is intensified by the repetition of blessings and joys as expressed in each sentence. The use of the exclamation mark 'bakithi!' indicates the communication between the actors and the audience. The actors seem to be informing the audience that the occasion has been graced by the spirits.

With regard to the non-human audience, such as spirits and ancestors, the communication channel is established by the para-human actors through songs, drumming and dances. The requests and messages are directed to them and in turn they should possess the actors. Once the actors become possessed by the spirits and ancestors, it is believed by the human audience that the spirits and ancestors are physically present to bless the occasion. The celebration continues until everybody is satisfied and that would be an end of the occasion. The doctors' celebration satisfies the criteria that determine the theatricality of performance.

### Conclusion

Indigenous African theatre forms distinguish indigenous African theatre from contemporary African theatre. The characters are both status and creative roles and are not developed. Performance is dominated by songs, dance and drums which are performed in the open space theatre. Among many of the theatrical aspects are forms of episodic actions which are not determined by cause and effect. More importantly, African theatre forms do not only make use of action and speech but also dance, music and mime

in presenting their experiences. African theatre forms are not separate institutions but integral elements of a dramatic experience.

I would like to suggest that, firstly, drama students go out and study indigenous drama in the field, and that indigenous drama be recorded with video machines to enable students to study it. Secondly, that indigenous drama be transcribed into written script so that it can be studied in the same manner modern drama is studied. And thirdly, that indigenous theatre be brought into the lecture hall and made into a festival by students and lecturers, in the same manner that the festival is presented in the countryside. Then we might begin to glimpse the potential of South African theatre forms.

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## Things of Darkness: Character Construction in the Earlier Plays of Zakes Mda

Carolyn Duggan

An important dialectic in western-based studies of African literature concerns the problem of the so-called weakness in character construction. The camps are divided but the two main opposing views, while they agree on the outcome, differ as to the reasons. The Albert Gérard (1971:111) camp would maintain that character depiction in African literature is defective in the main:

In tribal societies, little attention is paid to individual inwardness. A person's awareness of self is primarily as a member of a group, and not—as is the case in Western society—as an autonomous individual whose chief legitimate preoccupations are with his own personal identity, rights and privileges. This fundamental culture trait has many literary implications. Not only are African writers notoriously clumsy in the expression of strictly personal emotions such as love but also, more generally, their interests are ethical rather than psychological, and they are seldom able to present convincing individual characters. Their societal outlook drives them to turn character into type, so that the reader's response is one of moral edification rather than one of imaginative empathy.

Fanon (quoted in Bhabha 1994:110), on the other hand, attributes the state of the colonised person as one of 'absolute depersonalisation'. Bhabha (1994:114) in the same essay, discuss and attribute 'this colonial alienation of the person—this end of the "idea" of the individual' to the effects of colonialism. They all seem to agree then on the absence of a clearly defined sense of individual self in African society and consequently in African writing, whatever the causes.

On first reading Zakes Mda's plays, the initial impression would be that here is a perfect set of proofs for the above hypothesis and that all that remains to be done is to decide on the camp affiliation.

This view, however, proved to be wrong. Of course one is a product of one's history and one's culture, and Mda would surely be no exception. But there is definitely a deliberateness in his lack of 'individual inwardness' or 'awareness of self'. Not only does he share this trait with Brechtian theatrical technique. His focus on the

social and political requires a certain shying away from the individualistic. There is a weighting in favour of the ethical over the psychological, but the main reason is that the individual is not his subject: his subject is people in groups—society. Mda has taken every opportunity to avoid inwardness in his characters for fear of clouding the main purpose, i.e. the analysis of a society.

Mda's characters are without exception, types. One needs not go further than the *dramatis personae* to identify this pattern. He goes to great lengths not to name them. Even when he goes so far as to introduce a name, that very fact is highlighted by means of juxtaposition. Consequently, the name loses its impact as a means of identification. Generic names such as Man, Young Man, Old Man, Woman, Lady etc. abound and it is blatantly obvious that these characters are broadly representative of their types. The young man in 'The Hill' (TH), for example, is Everyman. Although it is set in Lesotho, this persona need not even be confined to Africa. He is typical of the young—innocent, idealistic and enthusiastic—and is specific in that he is desperately poor. The details of his existence are peripheral. The essence is universal—to the deprived. From a small rural village he must make his way in the world to help support his family—a tale told the world over. There is hardly a country that escapes the young's moving away from its countryside—young men in particular. Post-colonialist countries in particular seem susceptible to their young's moving to the cities, often due to poverty.

Although Mda sets up his characters as types, this does not preclude their individuality. While he observes generalised situations and conflicts, he engages his audience through the quirks and foibles of his individuals. Personally, Young Man exudes an innocent and touching trust in humanity. Things will come right because he has been told to have faith and he believes what he has been told. In the first part of the play he displays this naiveté with an assurance that is typical of the young. His reassurances, for example, to the Man (and, obliquely, to himself), are sprinkled with optimistic clichés:

We must retain our faith, child of my mother .... You need faith. I survive on faith. That is why I don't despair .... Faith can do anything. They teach us that it can move mountains .... We have retained our faith for two months, child of my mother. We must not lose it now. They promised me at the NRC that things will be right soon. I shall see them on Monday (TH 82f).

This is the view expressed even in the face of being fobbed off by the NRC for two months and being ignored by the Nun (symbolising religion and the church).

His enthusiasm is unquenchable and he looks forward to his life on the mines despite warnings from Man and Veteran. 'I am ahead—reaching for success' (TH 83)

he says and will not be deterred by the Man at his lack of experience. He looks for the positive and focuses on it. 'I have not served them [the mines] yet, but I am young and strong. And I don't have tax arrears' (TH 84).

Even when Mda becomes a little more specific, his characters are still broadly general representations. The Lady and the Woman in 'And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses' (GSD), apart from representing prostitutes and housewives respectively, are defined by their names. The Lady attests by her name to the importance she needs to place on her appearance but she also serves as an example of pre-feminist concerns. Feminists disapprove of the term Lady as biased and judgmental but its role here is ironically reversed. She is anything but a lady in the colonial sense of the word. She is described in the stage directions as

... a bit overdressed, albeit in the latest fashion. One can see that there was a conscious effort on her part to make herself appear chic and sexy. Her mannerisms are of a sophisticated woman of the world, but of course, at the end of it all she appears pretentious—even ridiculous (GSD 4).

She wears make-up, she tells us, because most people do—'to improve their looks' (GSD 8). But hers is applied thickly in order to cover-up bad skin. However, the end result is to make her look like a whore. The Woman's dowdiness and her initial appearance of subservience are not incongruous. Of course, she is only a maid and of course, she is exploited sexually by her employer only to be deserted. Of course, she must resort to domestic work to survive—isn't that the lot of a woman? But then, when she turns to political rhetoric and trade unionism we are not surprised—especially when we consider the political correctness of her name.

Other characters are defined by their occupations. We are not in the dark on what to expect from characters who rejoice in designations such as Banker, Businessman, Sergeant, Ofisiri (Officer), Farmer, Labourer, the Nun, the Veteran, Soldier One and Two, not to mention Mourners, Interrogators and Wedding Guests. The stereotypical pictures we are able to call up at the mention of these names are important. They need to be stereotypical because Mda is commenting, as we have seen, on their roles in society. The petty bourgeois servant in the form of Ofisiri in 'We shall Sing for the Fatherland' (WSF) is prepared to exploit his inferiors in the way he has learned by experience. His feelings about the bribery by the hoboese seem quite ambivalent and he has no qualms about raising the price of the bribe from twenty cents to fifty cents in one week. Having got them to give him the required amount he allows them to stay in the park with surely the most understated cynicism: 'Ofisiri (taking the coin): Well, I'll have to leave you. At least you haven't littered the place' (WSF 31). He understands well that he must retain the upper hand despite having been 'only an upstart

trooper' (WSF 32) to Sergeant's NCO status. When he fails to do this at the end of the play he is relegated to the role of prison warder supervising prisoners digging graves because the hoboes froze to death on his beat—surely harsh punishment by his superiors for something not exactly in his control.

Our initial expectations of Banker and Businessman, two cronies in the same play, are modified when we discover that Banker is white in this ambiguous African country ten years after independence. The question is immediately raised as to why this banker is white and not black, especially in view of the power he claims and the control he has, not only over individuals but the running of the country. Despite Businessman's obvious prosperity, his success is suspect and begins to seem hollow when we discover that he, representative of the commercial success of the formerly colonised, is a mere puppet, still under the control of outside (i.e. foreign) and most likely western and white influence. Initially one would be inclined to sympathise with him but the scenario is not so simple and this by virtue of the fact that Mda gives him a name. He is called Mr. Mafutha by the hoboes—meaning 'Mr. Fat' in Sesotho. Allied with the other 'fat ones' (WSF 44) of Maseru West, he has obviously achieved his position at the expense of others in this capitalist society. The huge divergence between his lifestyle and that of the two hoboes as well as his deliberate snubbing them is adequate evidence.

That the two hoboes have names too also serves to foreground their plight. To be called Sergeant-Major ten years after the Wars of Freedom and to be still dressed in army uniform (notably tattered ones) has a two-fold effect. The audience is constantly reminded that they once had status and social function during the war but that these are now robbed of meaning by the total indifference displayed by the other characters. None of the other characters address them by name nor is there any reference by anyone to their military record. Their personal risk for their country's freedom has dwindled into insignificance and, more insidiously, the tattered uniforms seem to suggest that the ideals of revolution have fallen by the wayside.

Janabari (a corruption of January) is merely a joke name and so therefore no name at all. He doesn't even have the dignity of a designation such as Veteran or Soldier, nor even a general name such as Man or Young Man. His name isn't a person's name and it isn't even pronounced properly—he is nothing in the eyes of society. The only affirmation of his existence is his relationship with Sergeant and it is a warm one. Their good humoured banter is comradesly and Sergeant, at one stage, calls him Janie—thus attesting to his humanness and personal right to compassion.

Charley and Tseli in 'Dead End' (DE) appear to have definitive names, but when one considers the pronunciation of Tseli one realises that there is some ambivalence in them. The first two letters in Tseli are pronounced in a similar way to the English 'ch' and so their names are almost identical thus blurring their identities as

individuals. The most individual of all Mda's main characters, they are, nonetheless, approaching anonymity by this phonetic manipulation. Similarly, in 'Joys of War', the child, Nana, appears to have a name, but when it is put alongside her grandmother's and father's names—Mama and Papa—we realise once again that they are, at best, generic. Although Nana is a real name it has a childlike ring, and the character becomes representative of the plight of children and childhood in rural South Africa. Her individuality is thus negated alongside the other two.

When characters address each other, Mda neatly side-steps the problem in many ways. In 'Dark Voices Ring' (DVR) the Man calls the Woman 'mama' or 'ma' while she calls him 'child'—not unusual practice in black South African society. In 'The Road' (TR), Labourer and Farmer call each other nothing throughout the play except for the Jim/*bwana* interlude. In 'Joys of War', Mama and Nana call each other those names, while the two soldiers use 'pally' or 'mate' when addressing one another—most of the time they don't call each other anything. In 'The Hill', Man and Young Man constantly use the phrase 'child of my mother' which has a two-fold effect. On the one hand it establishes a comradeship between them and suggests a fraternal caring relationship while on the other hand its irony is underlined when, in the end, an 'every man for himself' attitude towards the NRC contract supplants all other considerations. Similarly, in 'And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses', the Lady calls the Woman 'sister woman' and invites her to reciprocate. She says she learned it from American tourists which suggests a tenuous sophistication through a brush with the exotic. Initially, it is simply a convenient tag but by the end of the play it has come to suggest an aspiration towards a feminist autonomy as well as an acceptance of mutual dependency.

The only individual names that Mda allows are for off stage characters or for whites. It does not matter that off stage characters may acquire individuality in this way as they have no autonomy in the action of the play or in the minds of the audience. Dr. Zuma, the *sangoma* in 'Dead End', needs his name to conjure up his Zulu cultural 'otherness', thus setting up a confidence, in the minds of the audience, in his medicinal powers. In the end, neither Charley nor the audience is clear about the culpability for Tseli's tragic situation. Is she dying because of Frikkie's blow to her stomach or from Dr. Zuma's medicine that Charley has insisted on her taking?

Nontobeko, the dead baby, needs her name to emphasise her reality in her mother's eyes. It is ironic that Nontobeko, the character in 'Dark Voices Ring' who only exists in her mother's imagination, has a name while the others do not. Labourer's wife, Lucy, in 'The Road', needs her name to confirm the duplicity of her position as Farmer's mistress, while Young Man's sister, Ntati, in 'The Hill', needs her name to allow him to focus on his personal despair at his beloved sister's degradation as a shebeen owner.

It is significant that all the whites both on or off stage, with the exception of Banker, have names and are all Afrikaans. Without their names, their nationalities would be ambiguous so it becomes strikingly obvious that Mda means to emphasise their Afrikanerness. Banker may be any of the former European colonists (i.e. English, Dutch, French, Portuguese, German as well as Afrikaans) and so it is important that he has no name if his universality is to be maintained. But Frikkie du Toit and the Koornhofs (DE), Baas Jan van Wyk (DVR), Johannes Koekemoer and his wife Maria as well as his dastardly foreman Boetie van Rensburg (TR) are all unequivocally Afrikaans. The ruling Nationalist Party in South Africa—the creator of the Apartheid system—was originally exclusively Afrikaner-supported and latterly largely so. Mda seems to be placing the responsibility for exploitation and oppression squarely in their hands.

It is interesting to note further significances in the Afrikaner names in 'The Road'. Boetie van Rensburg is held in extreme contempt by Farmer, not alone for the seduction of his wife but for the fact that he had 'this imbecile habit of sitting with the Bantu labourers in their hovels, drinking their miasmatic beer, and sleeping with their women' (TR 129)—indeed 'a disgrace to the Afrikaner race' (TR 129). The word, boetie, is thus ironic when we note where van Rensburg's allegiances lie but it is even more ironic that Farmer is completely oblivious of any significance in this name and the insult he hurls at Labourer before he realises his blackness—'You Kafferboetie you!' (TR 127) intensifies the dichotomy of his position and the ambiguity of his name.

Finally, during the historical re-enactment scene in the same play, Farmer sees fit to rename both himself and the Labourer. He rudely elects to call the Labourer Jim—a name associated in literature with slavery—because Labourer must act as his slave bearer/guide. (One of the reasons for the Great Trek in 1836 and the opening up by whites of the hinterland of South Africa and the establishment of the two Afrikaner republics was the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1834.) Farmer prefers to be called bwana, a Swahili word meaning master or sir, and consequently foreign to South Africa—thus boosting his status in his own eyes by its exoticism but also serving to emphasise his foreignness and thus his alien position.

The named characters are referred to many times during the course of the plays thus affirming the importance of the names.

An easy conclusion on Mda's characterisation would be that there is a lack of individuality or even humanness. One would be tempted to see the characters, because they are ideological vehicles, as lacking humanness due to their typographical nature. But this very notion is a contradiction because of what they represent. In depicting the plight of a particular group of people in a particular society, Mda is, in fact, stressing their humanness because the problems they illustrate are human ones. All his political

and social concerns have a direct bearing on what is fundamental to all humans i.e. their quality of life. To be black in a white or formerly white-controlled country must cause one, perforce, to focus on one's inferior position in that society and to become conscious of a selfhood as defined by nationalism, racism and, ultimately, a sense of blackness (as a positive affirmation). In addition, Mda presents his audience with plays that are peopled by engaging characters, however representative they are meant to be. While we must surely take Tseli's side in 'Dead End' we do not altogether condemn Charley. His irrepressible wit touches us as much as Tseli's predicament. Although 'Dark Voices Ring' is largely didactic, it ensures—through the Woman—that the audience cares about the outcome. Her acute sufferings at the loss of her beloved child balance the blind selfishness of the Old Man's former position as *induna*. Mda manipulates the audience's emotional response by simultaneously encouraging its concern and forcing it to judge.

Sergeant and Janabari are, perhaps, the most human (and consequently loveable) of all the characters concerned here. In 'We Shall Sing for the Fatherland' their good natured humour and care for each other cannot fail to stimulate the audience's sense of altruism. Their warmth of character, displayed mostly towards each other, but also in their courtesy towards and Sergeant's excuses for the other characters, is juxtaposed by the unremitting coldness they encounter. The other characters are deliberately two-dimensional (with perhaps the exception of Ofisiri), which also serves to highlight their humanity.

Straight didacticism in 'The Hill' is softened largely by Young Man. His unflinching optimism in the face of constant evidence to the contrary emphasises the human predicament of both the present and the future. 'The Road' might also remain within the realms of didacticism but for the link between the two men in the form of Lucy, the wife/mistress. Labourer's hatred for Farmer then becomes personal as well as ideological. Both judgement and emotion are called on and the audience's concern for the outcome is not merely academic.

In 'And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses', both the Woman and the Lady strive for a certain dignity despite the abjectness of their positions. The Lady keeps up appearances literally despite having nothing in the world but the R10 for a bag of rice. The Woman quietly and patiently assists the Lady in joining her in a growing sense of autonomy and they face the future together, no longer victims but agents. This is, perhaps, the least engaging of the plays and may be due to some rather heavy didacticism in parts. But it is relieved in most part by the humanity of the Lady.

In 'Joys of War', the obvious judgement with regard to engagement would be on behalf of Mama and Nana. An old woman and a child would be the obvious focus for the audience's concern, but the two soldiers, while articulating the case for and the lot of an armed rebellion, are far more convincing as points of argument because of

their all too human backgrounds. The audience does not question their right to arms—their humanity has already convinced.

Wilson and Thompson (1975) discuss nationalism in South Africa or indeed the lack of a sense of nationalism. They argue that, because of its multicultural and multilingual diaspora—whether it be white (not united in one group) or the multifarious black groups (divided linguistically and culturally)—there is a distinct lack of syncretism in the South African concept of nationalism:

The concept of nationalism is reserved for movements of national consciousness and organisation among all the African peoples of South Africa. Its basis is thus a perception of a common racial identity, a shared historical experience of subordination, and a common civic status in South African society. There is neither a common traditional language nor common traditional culture, and the common territory is that established by the incorporation of the various African groups into the union of South Africa (Wilson & Thompson 1975:425).

This is the reason why Mda is careful not to focus on a sense of nationalism. True, two of his plays are set in Lesotho and deal with problems particular to that country, but it is obvious that his concerns are with southern Africa as a whole throughout all his plays. He says as much in 'And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses' when Woman tells the Lady:

One day it's going to dawn on you, and on the rest of the others who think like you, that this struggle is not just South African. It is Southern African (GSD 26).

Indeed, this attitude would be wholly in keeping with ANC policy (which is based on class), illustrated, as we have seen, in 'We shall Sing for the Fatherland' (socialism being favoured over capitalism).

Instead of focusing on nationalism or tribalism, Mda points up racism and investigates blackness (either negatively in the form of 'othering' or positively in the form of a sense of selfhood). While racism in itself may be viewed thematically, Mda has his characters embody and express a sense of what it means to be a black person. All of the plays, with the exception of 'We shall Sing for the Fatherland' are illustrative.

Frikkie, in 'Dead End', knows that he can count on a system based on racism when he is able to transfer the responsibility of Tseli's impending death to Charley. Charley explains to God:

And there is Frikkie, arms akimbo, with a big grin hollering to the police 'Vang 'om. What are you waiting for? I will report you to the big baas at the station' (DE 20).

Frikkie expresses an almost axiomatic confidence through his physical attitude—his 'arms akimbo' and his 'big grin' express his sense of racial superiority knowing that the 'big baas' will experience no qualms when it comes to taking sides. White will side with white regardless of the facts of the case and Charley understands this. 'You see, he was in the right .... He was white' (DE 20), he says, not questioning the validity of the statement. He does not refute the concept in any way. To him, people are defined by colour and he seems to accept this as a fact—unpalatable but incontrovertible. God must have a colour too and he pursues the point despite the denial.

The Woman and Old Man in 'Dark Voices Ring' embody the subservient attitude of an oppressed people towards their oppressors. Unable to detect until the last that all their misfortune is as a direct result of the power wielded on racist terms, the Woman is only able to focus on the 'prestige' enjoyed by Nontobeko for having been '[t]he only child on the farm, from the beginning of time, to have been born in the huis of the master' (DVR 56). Racism, in this play, is taken an insidious step further when the Old Man, encouraged by van Wyk and the warder, who are drinking brandy on the stoep of the house, wields his whip all the more:

... when the prisoners winced with pain they went into a great frenzy and pride swelled in the chest of the Old Man. He had the prisoners in his hands—more power than he had ever had before—and he was enjoying it (DVR 62).

The Old Man has collaborated with the warders and has thus become one of them. His punishment in the form of his daughter's death, though harsh, is appropriate. His toadying has backfired. The civil servants, castigated by the Man 'who carry out the repressive laws' (DVR 64) later in the play, are adumbrations of the Old Man. He personifies what they are and what will happen to them.

'The Road', because its main theme is Apartheid, is suffused with racism, and the two characters are representative of the black and white races in South Africa. Although the entire play is allegorical, the two characters are more subtly so. Farmer represents the extreme right wing white Afrikaans Nationalist Government supporter. He is unequivocally racist. His speech, attitudes and demeanour all proclaim him to be so. His conversation is peppered with reference to colour. Initially he claims that he likes blacks when challenged by Labourer—'I have known some of the finest blacks in my life' (TR 125)—and admits to having a black mistress, but he is outraged when he 'discovers' that Labourer is actually black and that he has unwittingly shared the shade of the same tree with him. From this moment on, he unbridles all his racialistic animosity and is seen as an extreme example of a white supremacist. His distaste of Labourer's colour is all the more irrational and ludicrous in that he hasn't recognised it until this moment and it highlights the irrationality of his immediate assumption of

an attitude of unquestioned superiority and arrogance. He immediately assumes the role of master and begins dictating the terms of that relationship.

Labourer, also representative, is more subtly drawn. His role is two-fold. Representative of the black race in general, he is, nevertheless, a 'foreign' black from Lesotho. Ostensibly not used to racist treatment, he has none of the imposed humility expected of the oppressed. He expresses the selfhood of a person devoid of a sense of race/colour and is understandably baffled by Farmer's change of attitude after the colour recognition scene. When he assumes the role of 'Jim' the slave/bearer his attitude changes to one of obsequiousness and he gives an impression of the way Farmer believes blacks should behave. As a foreign black unused to racism he shows how blacks should behave whereas as Jim he behaves as blacks are forced to do in a racist society. Therefore the characterisation in 'The Road' is complex and made all the more so by its quasi simplicity. Labourer represents not only the black point of view of Apartheid, but the view of the outsider of any colour. Farmer, because he is almost a caricature in his extreme behaviour, satirises racialism.

In balance with these broader focuses, Mda then zones in on the notion of black selfhood and explores and develops this area of the human psyche. Chinua Achebe (1966:135) maintains that:

[w]ithout subscribing to the view that Africa gained nothing at all in her long encounter with Europe, one can still say, in all fairness, that she suffered many terrible and lasting misfortunes. In terms of human dignity and human relations the encounter was almost a complete disaster for the black races. It has warped the mental attitudes of both black and white. In giving expression to the plight of their people, black writers have shown again and again how strongly this traumatic experience can possess the sensibility.

Mda's characters, both black and white, all reveal themselves to be products of this disaster. Fanon goes on to define these mental stances and, as far as the colonising whites are concerned, has discerned an overall patronising attitude: 'A white man addressing a Negro behaves exactly like an adult with a child and starts smirking, whispering, patronising, cozening' (Fanon 1968:31). He goes on to quote O. Mannoni:

What the colonial in common with Prospero lacks is awareness of the world of Others, a world in which Others have to be respected. This is the world from which the colonial has fled because he cannot accept men as they are. Rejection of that world is combined with an urge to dominate, an urge which is infantile in origin and which social adaptation has failed to discipline (Fanon 1968:108).

Frikkie du Toit, Jan van Wyk, Johannes Koekemoer, even the Koornhofs, all display the need to dominate. None of them is able to live in harmony with their black

colleagues; instead, all of them observe a distance and maintain a sense of Otherness. Banker is an especially good example of what Fanon is describing. Ten years after independence he is as patronising as it is possible to be. His false bonhomie is given the lie when he makes it very plain who is in charge. Businessman will only gain his position because Banker has had to threaten his customers and he pooh-poohs Businessman's concerns about trouble from white quarters: 'If you do your job well how can they cause trouble for you? The only thing you have to do is to listen to our advice' (WSF). The message is clear: according to Banker, Businessman cannot act on his own initiative—indeed, can he act at all? And Businessman accepts it.

Most people would agree that a sense of the Other is necessary in order to define oneself. What one is not helps to affirm what one is. Bhabha (1994:117), in analysing Fanon's concept of black identity, argues that there are 'three conditions that underlie an understanding of the process of identification in the analytic of desire'. These may be summarised as, firstly: 'to exist is to be called into being in relation to an Otherness'; secondly, a 'space of splitting' i.e. a desire to have the advantages of Others but at the same time maintaining one's own position; and thirdly, identification and transformation by the assumption of an image (Fanon 1994:117).

Bhabha (1994:118) goes on to refute Fanon's assumptions based on the above, and asserts that:

[t]he Other must be seen as the necessary negation of a primordial identity—cultural or psychic—that introduces the system of differentiation (118).

Said (1978:54) developed this concept in terms of the colonial milieu when he explained:

... this universal practice of designating in one's mind a familiar space which is 'ours' and an unfamiliar space beyond 'ours' which is 'theirs' as a way of making geographical distinctions that can be entirely arbitrary. I use the word 'arbitrary' here because imaginative geography of the 'our land—barbarian land' variety does not require that the barbarians acknowledge the distinction. It is enough for 'us' to set up these boundaries in our own minds; 'they' become 'they' accordingly, and both their territory and mentality are designated as different from 'ours'.

This type of mental distancing is clearly seen in the attitudes of the whites in Mda's plays. In 'Dead End', having replaced Tseli's African name with a more acceptable 'white' one, the Koornhofs are constantly 'othering' her: 'What's wrong with you Bantu girls .... You are dirty .... And cut those damn long black nails' (DE 7). Even Mr. Koornhof's sexual innuendo is done at a condescending distance: 'Anna, you are quite a nice kaffir maid' (DE 7.e.a.).

The Old Man in 'Dark Voices Ring' is called 'my faithful induna' (DVR 55) by van Wyk—rather like a pet dog that is owned by a more evolved being. The imaginary phone call by the Man underlines this dominance which insists that any events in the Others' lives must be of lesser importance than that of their 'superiors':

Man: (dials on an imaginary phone) Hello. I am Kaptein's wife. [She is alone and in labour.] Yes, baasie, the wife of the faithful induna. May I make an appointment with him for five o'clock? Tomorrow afternoon, yes .... Well, baasie, I would like to discuss with him family affairs .... Pains in my stomach (DVR 56).

In everything he utters in his short scene, Banker in 'We shall Sing for the Fatherland' epitomises all that colonialism and, more insidiously, post-colonialism is. This probably culminates in the damning statement: 'I met your Ministers about this'. [Note it is 'your' Ministers and not 'our', considering that they are living in the same country.] They too are quite clear about this. They know that without us they wouldn't be where they are now' (WSF). The pronouns say it all. And, of course, everything that Farmer in 'The Road' does and says, is a re-iteration and confirmation of Said's assertions.

The natural result of this sort of Othering is the development of a national or racial sense of inferiority. According to Fanon (1968:93):

[i]n South Africa there are two million whites against almost thirteen million native people [in 1967], and it has never occurred to a single black to consider himself superior to any member of the white minority.

Perhaps, this is an over simplification and not altogether true, especially in the 1960s, but the point is made. Manganyi (1985:156) investigates this aspect of colonialism from a psychiatric perspective, concluding that:

[t]he fixity of the representation of the Other (blackness) which race science places before our eyes pronounces the genetic inferiority of blacks particularly with regard to intelligence'.

Though all the characters adopt an inferior attitude in their dealings with whites, it is perhaps the Lady who symbolises this state of being. Thankfully a practice now going out of fashion, the Lady has ruined her skin with skin lightening creams:

Lady: ... You remember the skin lightening creams we used, eh?

Woman: Very well. Ambi Extra, Artra ....

Lady: Super Rose and all the rest. When we were girls we used them, 'cause we wanted to be white. We bloody hated ourselves, so we used them. They've got some-

thing called hydroquinone in them, but we didn't know it then. All we wanted was to have white skins. Hydroquinone, sister woman, it destroys the skin (GSD 8).

This symbolises perhaps the most profound effect of racial oppression—an attempt to change the unchangeable. As Fanon (1968:98) expresses it:

I begin to suffer from not being a white man to the degree that the white man imposes discrimination on me, makes me a colonised native, robs me of all worth, all individuality, tells me that I am a parasite on the world, that I must bring myself as quickly as possible into step with the white world .... Then I will simply try to make myself white: that is, I will compel the white man to acknowledge that I am human.

It is not sufficient either to

return, after the catastrophe of colonialism, to an unsullied indigenous cultural tradition, as in various forms of cultural nationalism (Williams & Chrisman 1993:14).

As the Woman in 'And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses' says:

It is now time for us to change things. To liberate not only ourselves, but the men themselves, for we are all in bondage! Yes, the men in this free and independent country are in bondage, mostly to their attitudes. That is why you see them sitting back and swimming in the glories of the past (GSD 27).

Chinweizu et al. (1983: 257f) understand fully the need that this sort of historic romanticism satisfies but they repudiate it too:

It was an understandably extreme reaction, offering blanket praise in retort to Europe's blanket condemnation of Africa. But that mythical portrait of traditional Africa can prove to be a new prison. In the task of decolonisation we cannot afford an uncritical glorification of the past. We may brandish our memories of empires of ages ago as shields against Western disparagement but we also know that before colonialism came there was slavery. Who hunted the slaves? And who sold them for guns, trinkets and gin? And the African attitudes and roles which made that slave trade possible, are they not part of that nostalgic past? Are those attitudes not still with us, poisoning our present? How much of this illusion of purity and sanctity can survive the events of the past decade? After all, 'When a nigger kicks a nigger/Where is the negritude?' (Madubuike). Even though other parts of the blame lie elsewhere, we cannot deny our own share of the responsibility.

Mda sees the need for blacks to seize agency and develop a positive sense of blackness. In 'And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses', as has already been seen, the

two women have personified the endemic sense of black inferiority by their attempts at whitening their skin. Typically, as women, they also display the prevalence of defining themselves through men. The Lady makes her living by whoring after a failed marriage while the Woman has been a housemaid for a man and then a mistress. In both cases their salvation has been seen in terms of a man. Marriage, at best, or some sexual relationship with a man is their insurance for the future—and they do not question this. Even the office girls, we are told, have to ‘lay some dirty old man to get a promotion’ (GSD 19). However, Mda takes this feminist issue and extends it in a racial sense. Both women have batted on a man (the same one coincidentally) but, in their case, he is white—and not only white but European. As a European, his allegiance is not with Africa, and, when times get tough, he has a natural leaning towards Europe—an escape from Lesotho for the two women or from Africa when viewed in broader focus. They are not alone. The Lady tells us of the many of her profession who have succeeded in securing just this kind of insurance:

There are many of us who are married all over Europe .... The women now lead respectable lives as housewives. Others have forged careers for themselves. Only a few days ago I met one of my old colleagues. She is visiting home, you know, from Switzerland where she has a successful marriage and a successful career as a singer. She sings gospel music all over the place. Sometimes she gets invited to sing in anti-apartheid rallies all over Europe. You can't get more respectable than that (GSD 21).

Note how the marriage is equated with the career and viewed as success—there is no reference to emotional fulfilment. This is business and success and can only be achieved through a foreign man.

However, by the end of the play, the two women have rationalised their attitudes and consequently their position. They take agency. The Woman, it transpires, has already done this through her trade union involvement but the Lady eventually shows that she, too, has become empowered through the help of the Woman. She says:

When the revolution comes I want to carry a gun. I don't sit in the sidelines and darn socks for soldiers (GSD 33).

The Woman replies:

You don't wait for a revolution. You make it happen.

Lady (carried away): No, I don't sit on the sidelines and sing songs and ululate with melilletsane to make the blood of men boil so that they may bravely march into battle. I carry the gun. I march into battle.

Woman: There is hope for all of us yet (GSD 33f).

They have renounced their dependence on men, and, by inference, European men, and resolve to control and direct their own lives in their own country—Lesotho. This signals positive, affirmative action by women.

A sense of agency then, according to Mda, whether it be as a woman or as a black person is essential if one is to retain any sense of hope for the future. Mda's attitude to Negritude however seems to be ambivalent. Senghor, who claims, along with Aime Césaire, the honour of launching the concept of Negritude is quoted by J.M. Ita (1968:118) as saying:

To launch an effective revolution, our revolution, we had to discard our borrowed garments—those of assimilation—and affirm an existence, that is to say, our Negritude. However, Negritude, even defined as the ‘cultural values of Black Africa’ could offer us but a beginning of the solution to our problem, not the solution itself.

Others, like Mphahlele, would disagree, seeing Negritude as confirming or even categorising an affirmation or intensification of Otherness. He argues that because of the magnitude of the continent of Africa and because of the multiplicity of her peoples, there cannot be a single definable concept. Initially, when the idea of Negritude was first mooted,

... this idea of an African personality took on a palpable shape: something that could express the longings and ambitions, aches and torments, the anger and hunger of our people and shout them out to the outside world (Mphahlele 1962:19).

However, on analysing the concept he finds that, as far as cultural activities are concerned—the arts in particular for example:

... the only culture worth exhibiting [by the proponents of Negritude] was traditional or indigenous. And so they concentrated on countries where interaction of streams of consciousness between black and white has not taken place to any significant or obvious degree, or doesn't so much as touch the cultural subsoil (Mphahlele 1962:27).

This seems to be Mda's attitude. While lamenting the sense of inferiority ingrained in most blacks due to the ravages of colonisation he does not seem to be embracing an attitude of black for black sake—rather an empowering of the person, whatever the colour, gender or politics. As Fanon (1968:8) says: ‘To us, the man who adores the Negro is as “sick” as the man who abominates him’. Chinweizu et al. would seem to be in confirmation with this notion. While agreeing only partly with Mphahlele they also, like Mda, denigrate a vague and romanticised harking back to the past, but applaud and embrace those aspects of Negritude which raise an African nationalist

consciousness and the recapturing and development of African literary traditions within the modern African literary canon.

For too long has the African voice been either silent or ignored. As Said (1985) says:

The challenge to Orientalism and the colonial era of which it was so organically a part was a challenge to the muteness imposed upon the Orient as object .... The Orient was ... not Europe's interlocutor, but its silent Other.

Mda's characters are not mute, and by their universality discourage muteness in anyone with any sense of identification with them.

Many writers have emphasised the importance of group identification in the African psyche and writers as diverse as Charles A. Larson and Senghor attest to the difference between the African and the Western concept of the world in other ways. Senghor (1993:30) asserts that:

the African ... conceives the world, beyond the diversity of its forms, as a fundamentally mobile, yet unique reality that seeks synthesis.

He goes on to explain that what matter for the African,

... is only a system of signs which translates the single reality of the universe being, which is spirit, which is life force (Senghor 1993:30).

And again:

As far as African ontology is concerned, too, there is no such thing as dead matter: every being, everything—be it only a grain of sand—radiates a life force, a sort of wave particle; and sages, priests, kings, doctors and artists all use it to help bring the universe to its fulfillment (Senghor 1993:31).

Larson, twenty years earlier, developed this concept in the difference between African and Western ideas on death for instance. In Western culture, once a person dies he is virtually forgotten but for the African,

the dead are not dead but alive in the trees, the water, the fire ... In Africa the dead cannot be forgotten: they control the destinies of those who are still alive (Larson 1973:469).

As far as nature is concerned:

The African does not think that nature is something he is separate from: for the African there is no ontological gap. He is every bit as much a part of the natural world as his environment is part of him (Larson 1973:469).

In his plays it would seem that Mda displays these ontological concepts, not because they are an intrinsic part of him (which they may well be and therefore he is unable to act differently) but apparently deliberately as part of his individual creative process. 'The conceptualisation of "race", ethnicity and ethnic identity is a major concern both within and alongside post-colonial theory', according to Williams and Chrisman (1993:17). Even so, they also decry the fact that ethnicity should be associated exclusively with people of colour. Black South Africans are what they are now, not what they were and their attitude to what they are now will determine what they might be in the future. In South African terms, however, it seems that the emergence of a positive black sense of self, a sense of black identification and subjectification is essential before there can emerge an all-South African psyche and consequently a real all-South African selfhood.

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## Writing Around the Bushmen: The !Kung, Anthropology and Feminism

Elsie Leonora Cloete

Ethnographers, historians, sociologists, development officers and even novelists always ultimately depart from their scene of research. They take away texts for later transcription, translation, interpretation and reconstruction. The text (and this includes tape recordings, field notes, films etc.), unlike many of the people who are being studied, can travel. The ethical concerns raised about cultural representation are central to the anthropological debate regarding description and/or representation in that the researcher ultimately has control over the keyboard. Marcus & Fischer (1986:ix) are of the opinion that much of modern ethnographic research and writing 'is potentially an experiment' and as such is engaged in

... exploring new ways to fulfil the promises on which modern anthropology was founded: to offer worthwhile and interesting critiques of our own society; to enlighten us about other human possibilities, engendering an awareness that we are merely one pattern among many; to make accessible the normally unexamined assumptions by which we operate and through which we encounter members of other cultures.

One way of 'countering' the problem of representation of the ethnographic subject is to allow the subject to speak for him/herself. The extent to which the ethnographic researcher 'intervenes' in the story of the speaking subject has lent itself to experimental possibilities. The mediated life-history is one such device which highlights the relation between the researcher and the person recalling his/her life story. The life-story or memories of someone may be narrated orally on tape or recorded on film but then the story is arranged, presented, produced in writing by a writer/academic/official. Life-stories blur boundaries in that they shift and cross backward and forward between the geographical, linguistic and cultural contexts of the narrator and researcher and raise questions about authority and/or authorship. Does the person doing the writing call him/herself the author or the editor? Whose signature/name appears on the book? Local examples are that of *Poppie Nongena: One Woman's Struggle Against Apartheid* edited or authored by Elsa Joubert, and *Part of my Soul Went with Him*, the autobiography of Winnie Madizikela Mandela which was written/edited

by Anne Benjamin. Another Southern African example is an ethnographic text by an American anthropologist, Marjorie Shostak, called *Nisa, The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman*.

In *The Songlines* Bruce Chatwin (1988:256) notes that the Bushmen

have no idea of the soul's survival in another world. 'When we die, we die', they say. 'The wind blows away our footprints, and that is the end of us'.

By the same token, Nisa, the !Kung woman who collaborated with Marjorie Shostak (1981:epigraph) says:

I'll break open the story and tell you what is there. Then, like the others that have fallen out onto the sand, I will finish with it, and the wind will take it away.

This idea is also echoed by Stephen Watson in his collection of poems on the Bushmen, *Return of the Moon* (1991). In the poem, 'What happens when you die', he writes,

... the wind blows dust/covering the tracks, the footprints we made .... If not for this wind, our spoor would still show,/our spoor would still show us, as if we still lived (Watson 1991:31).

In a note to his poem, Watson (1991:76) explains that the 'cavity in any new moon' was believed to be 'the "catching-place" for people who had recently died'. The wind may have erased countless footprints and stories left by hundreds of thousands of Bushmen<sup>1</sup>, but the twentieth century West has, in macabre curiosity, nostalgia, in the name of empirical research and possibly also because it feels that the Bushmen still represent a self-contained unit for cultural analysis, decided that it has had to become the 'catching-place' for the Bushmen people.

In twentieth century ethnographic research, the various bands of Bushmen found throughout the Kalahari, Namibia and southern Angola, are probably the most written about, documented, 'caught-up' research subjects in the world. There has been, in this century, a singular determination by anatomists, anthropologists, and lately by exhibition curators, to re-inscribe, to preserve, to re-produce those footsteps and stories scattered in the sand. Marjorie Shostak, an anthropologist loosely connected to the Harvard Kalahari Research Group, is one of these. She has also, to use the words of the subtitle of the book, *Miscasts* (1996) edited by Pippa Skotnes, 'negotiated the presence of the Bushmen'.

<sup>1</sup> In line with academic trends in the 1980s, Shostak refers to the !Kung as members of the San throughout her text. I have followed Guenther's argument (1986) as well as more recent trends and called the !Kung members of the Bushmen.

In 1981, Marjorie Shostak published *Nisa, The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman*. I do not know if Nisa is still alive—she was already in her fifties in 1971 when Shostak last visited the group of !Kung to which Nisa belonged. The book was only published ten years after Shostak's second and final field trip. The real-life Nisa was a member of a small band of !Kung Bushmen who mostly hunted and gathered in the north-west corner of the Kalahari in Botswana. In a series of 21 taped interviews, Marjorie Shostak constructed a life-story of Nisa, whose domestic life-history has been chronologically arranged from early childhood to old age. Preceding each staged chapter in Nisa's life, Shostak introduces aspects of !Kung life and customs in the desert. Nisa is not the woman's real name, neither are the names of settlements, water pans, wells and other characters in the book real. This was done ostensibly to protect Nisa and the people she talked about, her numerous lovers, husbands, friends and enemies. However, considering the remoteness of the area and a climate not altogether hospitable to the urban feminist, as well as the fact that from about that time on, the Botswana Government created a post of Bushman Development Officer, the first incumbent being of the opinion that 'all academics were "rip-off" artists' (Hudelson 1995:22), it is highly unlikely that scores of Bushman groupies from the American Woman's Movement would descend onto the Kalahari. Besides, since 1951, close on one hundred and four anthropologists, not counting development officers, agricultural extension officers, game wardens etc. had all written about the three main Kalahari Bushmen groups. The majority of these 'outsiders', no doubt, would have encountered Nisa, her friends and family already. In a paper on the genesis of the book, published in 1989 Shostak (1989:229) recalls that

I was fortunate not to be one of the first anthropologists to study the !Kung San—fortunate because by the time my first field stay was completed, a large body of data collected by other anthropologists and medical scientists was available. Without this work, my own ability to interpret, make sense of, and relate personal narratives—singular voices within a highly varied range—to a more generalized whole would have been compromised.

Prior to the 1950s there had been numerous 'expeditions' to the Kalahari by mostly South African researchers, including Dorothea Bleek, Raymond Dart and Philip Tobias as well as some British scientists. The American invasion began in the 1950s when Laurence Marshall, who has recently retired from a firm which invented electronic devices such as radar, microwave and 'high-energy trigger mechanisms used in the first atomic bombs' (Hudelson 1995:11), decided to come to the Kalahari with his family because he 'had heard about wild Bushmen who hide behind bushes and shoot you with their poisoned arrows' (Van der Post & Taylor 1984:118). Laurence Marshall's

wife, Lorna, produced an ethnographic work which is still today very highly rated; the daughter, Elizabeth Thomas, wrote a book, *The Harmless People* (1959) which is considered a classic by anthropologists; while the son, John, made movies, many of which are still shown in university anthropology courses and one of which is available as a *National Geographic* video. In between the desert circuses, anthropological safaris with their tent towns, trucks, drivers, cooks, interpreters and field laboratories and the time when the Botswana Government started insisting that any research must be tied to development, the Bushmen produced urine samples, had every conceivable part of their anatomy measured, gave blood, talked for hours to their interviewers, explained over and over again kinship structures, naming rules, the properties of plants, the genealogy of their gods, whether they had souls or not, and so on.

Marjorie Shostak arrived in the Kalahari in 1969, at the end of this era of so-called 'empirical research', at a time when the Women's Movement in the west was gaining strength and at the height of anti-Vietnam war sentiments. At the same time there was also a growing awareness by ethnographers about the predicament of handouts of money, clothes, blankets and especially tobacco, to the peoples they were studying. Shostak and her husband decided to put a halt to handouts, except when people actually worked for or with them. Shostak recalls that she 'was just devastated that [she] had to give out tobacco, the stuff [she] wouldn't put near kids or [her] own body' (Hudelson 1995:18). However, as Shostak (1981:26-7) recalls: 'Once we were on our own, our romanticism was attacked by the !Kung themselves'. The Bushmen, but in this particular case, the !Kung, who for generations had been prodded, pricked, measured, followed all over the place and had answered innumerable questions about their sex lives, were not so easily shut out. Shostak (1981:28) recalls that

One morning when my husband drove the truck, loaded with empty water drums, five miles to the permanent well where we drew water, he found a mound of thorn branches barring his passage. The people from the nearby village soon appeared: 'Do you expect to draw water where you refuse people tobacco?' ... we realised we could not ignore such strong protests. The !Kung demanded a relationship on their terms, not ours.

More specifically, Nisa, the !Kung woman Shostak was eventually to work with, knew how to hustle and harangue. Shostak (1981:28) recalls the first time Nisa made a lasting impression on her by recalling two preceding researchers:

Nancy and Richard? They were the best! Nancy, I greet you! Nancy, hello! Why, she and Richard gave us whatever we wanted: clothes, food and money, all sorts of things. They never refused us anything! Nancy, how I loved her! She was the best white person here. Write and tell her I said so. Ask her for some cloth and money too.

Everyone was stingy compared to her. She was different. She wasn't a European, she was a !Kung! Oh, I would like her to be here right now. She really looked after me.

Nisa was persistent, always pitching up at the camp in the morning, talking about Nancy and Richard, the only common ground Nisa felt she and the new researcher had. Shostak (1981:29) dreaded each day, trying to escape the 'barrage of thinly veiled criticisms'. Finally, knowing that escape was impossible, Shostak decided to use Nisa's voice on her own terms and asked if she, Nisa, would work with her. *Nisa, The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman*, is the result of this collaboration. At this stage of the collaboration, Nisa is not a victim but the smart hustler who bullied Shostak into taking notice of her. The !Kung have for decades been the subjects of intense anthropological interest and ethnographers and other scientists arriving in the Kalahari arrive as known types, not as strangers. Marcus & Fischer (1986:36) note that:

As a result of the intellectual trends at home ... (for example the hard-hitting critiques of Western representations of cultural others), and real changes in the third world, the kind of field sites anthropologists have traditionally sought can no longer be found, or even imagined without dissonance.

Once Nisa had achieved her aim, Shostak (1981:39f) writes early in the 'Introduction' to the book, that:

Nisa and I 'worked very well together'. We often joked about how I (her 'niece') was a child and she ('my aunt') was a woman of vast experience whose task it was to teach me about life.

The kinship terms used, niece and aunt, were determined by Nisa's actual kinship to Hwantla, the !Kung name Shostak accepted. The real Hwantla was Nisa's aunt, and Shostak became the genealogical equivalent. On the final page of the Epilogue, Shostak (1981:371) evokes the kinship term again when her second and final visit (1971) to the Kalahari ends. In their goodbyes Nisa says 'My niece ... my niece ... you are someone who truly thinks about me'. However, in the final sentence of the book, Shostak (1981:371) subverts the kinship relationship, niece and aunt, and imposes a western category on the relationship when she writes:

Almost every experience I have in this life is colored and enriched by the !Kung world and the way Nisa looked at it. I will always think of her, and I hope she will think of me, as a distant sister.

The word 'sister' is probably not intended to bring Nisa genealogically closer to Shostak, but no doubt refers to the sisterhood of early 1980s American feminism—a rather, at

that time, monolithic vision of all women across the world rising up together and reclaiming a place alongside men: a sisterhood conjured out of Shostak's ideal of women's politics and an emergent universal feminism. It is an irrelevant sisterhood for Nisa, as she cannot read the text of her life and words, nor can she intercept the interpretations given, the discourse produced, once Shostak, her notebooks, tape recorder and cassettes have left the Kalahari for an office in America. On her way home, Shostak cannot disassociate herself from the project of writing a book within the paradigms of her discipline and the feminist discourse of America. Nisa is a 'distant sister' in a faraway place where there are few prospects of a better life with less hardships and greater gender equality. Shostak has situated Nisa, but Nisa herself has no hope of situating herself within or even alongside the commentaries that mediate each one of Nisa's stories that break open into the sand. This is a book of many authors, Nisa, the illiterate, but highly articulate and self-reflexive !Kung woman, Shostak, the anthropologist 'putting Nisa's story into cultural perspective' (Shostak 1989:231) and Marjorie who is interested in the Women's Movement. Shostak is not entirely dishonest about her project. In her 'Introduction' she says that:

The Women's Movement had just begun to gain momentum, urging re-examination of the roles Western women had traditionally assumed. I hoped the field trip might help me clarify some of the issues the Movement had raised. !Kung women might be able to offer some answers ... their culture, unlike ours was not being continuously disrupted by social and political factions ... !Kung were experiencing cultural change, [but] it was still quite recent and subtle ... (Shostak 1981:5f).

During the last interview Shostak (1981:369) raises the question of translating and editing the series of chronological interviews and 'putting them down on paper, paper that would be turned into a book'. After some more explanations, Nisa remarks:

Yes, that's good. You'll leave here, and while you're away, you'll write. Then others will say, 'Eh, so this is what you and that woman talked about. These are her words. This is her name'. And if they like your book, they will buy it and help you with money (Shostak 1981:369).

Shostak however, undertakes to contribute some of the money from the sales to the Kalahari People's Fund, a project that would provide funds to erect schools, dig boreholes and wells and, as Nisa hoped, help her 'buy a cow' (Shostak 1981:370). In 1989 Shostak (1989:234) reports that Nisa received her cows and 'has become one of the people with wealth and stature in the changing world of the !Kung'.

During the interviews Nisa is well aware of the mechanics of a tape recorder. In the interview about her earliest memories, her first words are:

Fix my voice on the machine so that my words come out clear. I am an old person who has experienced many things and I have much to talk about. I will tell my talk, of the things I have done and the things that my parents and others have done. But don't let the people I live with hear what I say (Shostak 1981:51).

During the last interview, the 'old man', as Nisa calls the tape recorder, will help the book to be written. Nisa says:

He will talk and you will write .... Also the two of us—he and I. We will be the ones talking to you. Because I am the one who is talking, am I not? (Shostak 1981:370f).

Shostak replies that she will take Nisa's talk home with her, and even though she may be alone, she will be able to write. And this is the moment, when the mediated text is produced, when the ethnographic fiction is fashioned, where the work has been enmeshed, as Clifford (1988:9) calls it,

in a world of enduring and changing power inequalities ... [where] it enacts power relations, but where its function within these relations is complex, often ambivalent, potentially counter-hegemonic.

This is the stage where the oral narrative becomes subsumed to scriptocentric principles.

The publication of Shostak's life-story of Nisa was hailed by feminist anthropologists and the Women's Movement. The centring of Nisa's voice as woman, as informant, as allegory for the base-line of human origins, did challenge the hegemony of a significant section of ethnographic research. In the first place, although women had always been considered in much research involving menstruation rites, kinship structures, and as economic providers in terms of gathered sustenance, this was one of the first times that a woman was exclusively used as catalyst in the rite of passage of the ethnographer herself enabling an understanding of her own womanhood within western society.

After the publication of the book Shostak (1989:231) reports:

There was no doubt that Nisa, aged fifty and experiencing a difficult adjustment to menopause [all her children had already died], filtered her life story through her then-current perspective; there was also no doubt that Marjorie Shostak, aged twenty-four, recently married, a product of the American 1960s, asked questions relevant to a specific phase of her life. I asked Nisa to tell me what it meant to be a woman; her answer was her narrative.

By ostensibly foregrounding and naming, albeit in pseudonymic form, the informant, Shostak's text is part of the recent ethnographic trend:

to name and quote informants more fully and to introduce personal elements into the text [thereby] altering ethnography's discursive strategy and mode of authority (Clifford 1986b:109).

But at the same time, the book perpetuates the traditionalist's<sup>2</sup> myth of the Bushmen people as a kind of 'cultural isolate' (Barnard 1992b:5). To a large extent, ethnographers from Harvard and later, the University of New Mexico, followed the idea of the Marshalls, considering the Bushmen, but especially the !Kung, as having remained largely unacquainted with, and by inference untainted by, the outside world of Tswanas, Hereros, missionaries, traders, hunters and white settlers. Shostak's text straddles a very uncomfortable position in this respect. Nisa herself often refers to events, people and cross-cultural contact which has profoundly influenced or altered her perception of herself. Shostak, on the other hand, is inclined to gloss over cross-cultural contact in Nisa's early life and only towards the end of the text, sadly, acknowledges that the 'old way of life' is threatened from all sides.

In her 'Introduction' Shostak (1981:6,27,e.a.) maintains that although 'the !Kung were experiencing cultural change, it was still quite *recent and subtle*' and that 'money had no place in their traditional economy and had only come to the area recently'. How recent is 'recent'? And how subtle is 'subtle'? It is this aspect of Shostak's text which is the most problematic in that, despite what may be called a successful experiment in foregrounding Nisa as a female informant and teller of a revealing life story, the commentaries by Shostak continually intercept Nisa's tale and deny Nisa and the rest of the !Kung a political, economic and intra-cultural history spanning many, many generations. The way in which Shostak treats Nisa and her fellow !Kung as cultural isolates, proceeds on two levels: Firstly, Nisa personally is considered primarily a member of a hunter-gatherer clan; secondly, the !Kung of the Dobe area in the north-west corner of Botswana and north-east part of Namibia were considered sufficiently isolated to have been spared the colonialist conquests of the more southern Bushmen. There is not much hard evidence to support this.

<sup>2</sup> The argument about the traditionalists versus the revisionists, known as the 'Kalahari Debate', has been cogently summarised by Barnard (1992b & 1996). Although Shostak can be termed a traditionalist in that she feels cross-cultural contact has only been recent and intermittent, she does not subscribe wholly to the Van der Postian mythology of the Bushmen as peaceful, harmless, egalitarian etc. Nisa's story, corroborated by interviewing other women about their lives, contains too many instances of violence, a troubled domestic life and gender inequalities to justify such a label being hung on Shostak.

On the first level, Nisa personally was exposed to a variety of other cultures, and at times adopted or agreed to other cultural practices. She was born in the early 1920s and in her earliest memories casually refers to cans as preferable to ostrich eggshell containers (Shostak 1981:97). When it came time for her to give birth to her first child, when she was between eighteen and twenty one, Nisa recalls that:

[E]veryone says that childbirth is painful. I know what I'll do! When I'm near the end of my pregnancy, I'll go to the white people and give myself to them. They'll open the mouth of my stomach and take the baby out. That way it won't hurt (Shostak 1981:192).

Nisa herself as well as many of her husbands lived and worked for Tswanas or Europeans: they were aware of mechanised transport long before the first wave of anthropologists arrived, adapted to Tswana tribal law when they lived in their villages, and at one stage, when Nisa had left her brutal husband, agreed to a tribal hearing led by the Tswana headman (Shostak 1981:295). Her son-in-law who had murdered her daughter, paid a fine to Nisa as due compensation declared by Bantu tribal law (Shostak 1981:313). Nisa knew about European medicines and at one stage worked for a European household 'for a long time' (Shostak 1981:326,251). It is evident from the text, but largely unacknowledged by Shostak in her chapter commentaries, that the semi-squatter status many !Kung encountered when they were working for Tswanas and Herero pastoralists and herders, also quite often involved the adoption of Bantu ideals about gender roles—a move away from the supposed egalitarianism of the !Kung. In addition, Nisa's desire to get a cow from the collaborative deal between the narrator and the researcher is also a desire for a more sedentary pastoralist type of life.

On the second level, Shostak (1981:345) places the blame for the large-scale extermination of the southern Bushmen squarely at the hands of the Dutch, 'ancestors of the present-day Afrikaner population'. But she fails to mention what happened to the !Kung and other Kalahari Bushmen groups in the previous century, once Livingstone had documented his arrival at Lake Ngami, an area inhabited by the !Kung, and the subsequent ivory trade which sprang up and decimated almost the entire elephant population. She fails to mention the Farini expedition of the 1880s where this American showman journeyed through the Kalahari 'to capture Bushmen for a sideshow, to look for ranch land and ... search for diamonds', or the many hunting and photographic safaris through the area, or the fact that Bushmen, especially in Namibia, were 'hunted down and killed as predatory bandits' (Landau 1996:133,136). A photograph of a !Kung boy taken in Cape Town in the 1870s (part of the Bleek Collection) indicates that even the remoter !Kung were being captured and transported to metropolitan prisons as a result of settler!/Kung contact. Although Shostak admits to intermittent conflict between the Bushmen and their Bantu neighbours and of large-scale ex-

termination by the Dutch, there is no mention of the complicity by the British in most of southern Africa, or the Germans in Namibia or the Portuguese in Angola during colonial rule. Neither does Shostak trace or mention whether the !Kung have always inhabited this relatively inhospitable area covering relatively speaking a minute two hundred and fifty square miles or whether they were forced to move, or flee, from the south or the north.

Finally, Shostak (1981:349) cites the recruitment by the South African Defence Force (SADF) of !Kung trackers and counter-insurgent soldiers in the South African war in South West Africa/Namibia/Angola. What she fails to acknowledge, and subsequent researchers of the so-called revisionist school have been quick to point out, is that many !Kung enlisted with all sides in the war, not only the SADF. This would suggest that voluntary enlistment in the liberation armies and the SADF was already an acknowledgement of acute political sensibilities about where one's allegiances or best food-ticket came from. And yet, Shostak maintains changes in !Kung lifestyle have only been 'recent' and 'subtle'. In actual fact, Shostak is at the end of a long line of direct and indirect interpretative romancers. As far as the series of empirical researchers are concerned, Shostak finds it necessary, like her many predecessors, to place the !Kung as an untainted foil 'against the burden of the modern condition' (Wilmsen 1996:187).

Hudelson (1995:30) notes in a section entitled 'Why do we study the San?', that 'the world has chosen the San to represent a natural state of existence for which it has become nostalgic'. Hudelson (1995:31) opines that:

Sometimes the social environment back home influences the venue of research, independent of theory. The Ju/wasi of NyaeNyae were the perfect salve for the despondent entrepreneur, Laurence Marshall, who had been overwhelmed by warlords of a growing military-industrial complex in the early 1950s. Likewise the remote blue Kalahari sky sheltered many American researchers from turmoil at home during the Vietnam wars. Free of malaria for the most part, and relatively accessible to the outside world, to good medical care and to Western food, the Kalahari is not the hardship site that many modern-day 'explorers' would like us to think.

If it had been Shostak's intention to avoid the turmoil back in America, (she accompanied her fellow-anthropologist husband, Melvin Konner), then she started off by believing in the egalitarian, turmoil-free !Kung society. It was only during the course of her interviews with Nisa, whose testimony was controlled by interviews with other female members of the !Kung, that the so-called 'darker side' of life emerged. Nisa testifies to a great deal of domestic violence—beatings by her parents and her various husbands, infanticide, homicide and murder were all regular interruptions in her seem-

ingly hitherto 'idyllic existence'. Shostak admits in a later publication that 'most of us have participated in one degree or another in the dissemination of utopian ideas about the [!Kung] culture' (in Biesele 1986:71).

Hudelson maintains that

Regardless of how far or how close to reality this image of some San groups is, it has been the reason we continue to study them. They are considered a barometer by which the accuracy of contemporary social theory can be measured, evolutionism, diffusionism, functionalism, human ecology, political economy or sociobiology (Hudelson in Sanders 1995:30).

In similar fashion, Shostak hoped to understand womanhood among the !Kung, so that in one way or another, she could understand the nature of being a woman in her own part of the world. This presents us with one of the dilemmas of being an ethnographer—the subsuming of the self into the so-called 'other'. Shostak relies on an undifferentiated category of womanhood and is thus able to slide self into the other—assuming that the rite of passage is completed. Nisa says in her 'farewell' words that Shostak is someone 'who truly thinks about me' (Shostak 1981:371). But thinking is an awfully long way away from 'practising' like Nisa. There will remain the element of difference always: on the grounds of race, colonialism, culture, the ethics of ethnography, class, economic status.

Shostak does not begin to respond to the fact that she belongs to a group of researchers who can literally afford to be patronising. Neither does she tackle the fact that she is privileged with regard to the woman she has chosen to study, and she fails to acknowledge that the power relations inherent in encounters between ethnographers and their informants can be conveniently erased via gender affinity. Subverting the kinship category of niece into 'distant sister' demands a critical rethinking as to whether there can ever be a sameness within these vast differences. It is significant that Shostak entitles the book *Nisa, The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman*, for, in her 'Epilogue', Shostak (1981:350, e.a.) underlines one of the fundamental problems of ethnographic research when she says: 'It was *my* work, certainly ... but it was *her* story'. The difference between words and work is significant. Working on someone else's story entertains even greater selectivity of material and is done so in terms of all kinds of western criteria: a knowledge of what is more likely to sell, a ruthless editing, an experience of monetary economy, and a need to place oneself academically on the map. The mediated commentaries leading into each chapter dealing with an aspect of Nisa's life are intended to place and situate the words of a woman living in the Kalahari within a social and historical context—but, in effect, these commentaries say more about Shostak than they do about the !Kung. By saying this is 'my work' as

opposed to 'her story', Shostak's claim raises the question of the ineluctability of fictionalisation in any textual 'story' that arises from fieldwork. Certain literary conventions are very consciously used, and acknowledged by Shostak: she admits to extensive editing, to rearranging, to selectivity, to playing the publishing world. This is not unusual and such conventions are used when it comes to arranging so-called empirical research as well. Shostak combines Nisa's voice with her own—but inevitably, it is not so much Nisa's story that matters, but Shostak's voice of contextualisation. It is Shostak's voice which raises issues of publication, of ethnographic power, of scientific and fictional control that give rise to questions about her complicity in new forms of voice colonisation. Shostak, to use Foucault's metaphor of the panopticon, occupies the central supervisory tower—while Nisa, and the other men and women she interviewed as controls for Nisa's story, occupy the supervised cells: they have lost all control over what happens to them in the final piece of work, and they have no recourse to saying, 'this was so, but that wasn't so'. This is a dilemma of ethnographic representation. Who is being represented, and to whom. Do those who are being represented ever have any control over their final representation? Isn't the situating of Nisa, much like her !Kung compatriots, a kind of Kalahari-ism—much in the form of Said's *Orientalism*?

In a sense, Shostak controls the self-definition of Nisa by her mediating commentaries. Shostak asks Nisa, 'what it is like to be a woman?'—and indeed Nisa's story revolves around her position in !Kung society as a woman. In the blurbs on the back cover of the book, *Choice's* review is quoted:

... their work results in the revelation of the universality of women's experiences and feelings despite vast differences in culture and society.

But Nisa's story is that of a woman without a history within the broader context of her people. She has been made into a woman who only gathers, bears children, reads spoor, mourns deaths, and has a great deal of sex. We do not know whether Nisa suffered from a loss of historical memory or if Shostak edited it out from the transcriptions. In any event, it is Shostak (1981:6) who provides a cultural, political and economic history, a history assumed to be representative of generations of sameness, where the changes from outside have been only 'recent and subtle'. This kind of nostalgia for cultural purity or isolation is Shostak's unacknowledged predicament. It places her, as the history maker, in a position of tremendous power. Womanhood has been reified, in terms of the beginnings of the Women's Movement in America, and the ethnographer decides on the place the !Kung specifically, and the Bushmen generally, should occupy in history. The unexplored areas of Nisa's contact with whites and blacks in the area, of a war taking place in traditional !Kung territory, of communal

history, are placed in the control of Shostak. Nisa's value, as a woman, is contingent upon Shostak's own interpretation of an undifferentiated category of woman—but womanhood without a sense of place or even an historical narrative.

We do not know if Nisa was ever asked what her views and perceptions on change and social interaction were before and during the anthropological safaris. The only indication we are given are in the opening scenes of meeting, when Nisa hustles and harangues Shostak for tobacco, blankets, clothes and money. It is in this basic exchange of goods that Shostak acknowledges pangs of guilt, and not in her complicity in depriving Nisa and her people of a past unmediated by a westerner. Nisa is allowed only a domestic and by inference a domesticated memory: she has been reified into a manageable object, and rendered 'authentic' by the researcher. Despite Nisa's own narrative of her life, the anthropologist continues to write around her and, by implication, around the Bushmen.

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## Remembering Eva: The Frontiers Within

Pieter Conradie

They can sing and dance and confabulate with all imaginable Gaiety for Twenty Hours together by the Help only of their ordinary Beverage. Water and Cows-Milk (Kolbe 1731:127).

In 1654 two years after the Dutchman Jan van Riebeeck landed at the Cape to found a refreshment station for the Dutch East India Company that would become the Cape of Good Hope he took into his household Krotoa a young Khoi girl. The Khoikhoi is a collective term for a gathering of indigenous tribes who as hunters and later pastoralists gradually came to settle along the southwestern and immediate southeastern stretches of the coastline of the African subcontinent.

Krotoa had extensive kinship ties with the Khoikhoi groups. She had uncles amongst the Goringhaicona and the Chainouqua, a 'sister' or cousin who was the wife of the Cochoqua chief and most probably a biological mother amongst the Goringhaicona or Peninsulars. The latter were living off mussels and scraps of whatever seafood were available. Described as scavengers they were mistaken as representative of all Khoi culture. In the years to come Krotoa's loyalty towards the different clans would vary as her friendship towards the Dutch did not always endear her to her people. She however showed particular closeness to her 'sister' and the Cochoqua chief Oedoesa to whom she periodically returned.

Van Riebeeck renamed Krotoa. As Eva, she became the first indigenous person to be baptised and converted to Christianity at the Cape, and she was to be regarded as the mother of all descendants educated according to Christian principles. The Dutch obviously welcomed the possibility of acculturation displayed by Eva. The name Eva in itself evokes memories of immemorial bliss and untarnished beauty. Eva became the first real engagement of the Dutch with this country and their naivety and sense for romantic adventure are to be found in the conquest of the people, especially the woman. Within Van Riebeeck's household Eva became a respected individual and from what can be gathered her role as servant gradually improved. Due to her interpretative skills she was soon treated on an equal footing with administrative personnel. The later portrayal of Eva as a drunkard and lascivious woman raises questions as to her role of concubine and the accompanying issues of race and culture within society.

In December 1995, more than three hundred years after the Castle was built, an Afrikaans actress Antoinette Pienaar staged a text written by herself in this fort<sup>1</sup>. The Castle was a fitting venue for Pienaar's performance of *Krotoa* as the year of its inauguration, namely 1674 coincided with the tragic death of this Khoi woman<sup>2</sup>. Being the headquarters of the Dutch settlement Krotoa spent most of her time as a member of Van Riebeeck's household within the confinement of the erstwhile Castle as it was known. Her remains were interred in the church in the new Castle<sup>3</sup>.

As an actress Antoinette Pienaar displays extraordinary impersonation skills. The intimate space of the venue within the Castle suits this lanky and agile actress. Her performance of *Krotoa* exploits the fundamentals of theatre. Pienaar uses no microphone or sound-equipment. She goes bare-foot and wears an ordinary white dress not designed to accentuate the contours of the body. When she did change dress it was not so much part of the script but due to the intensity of her performance. The white dress was exchanged for a black one with the same simplicity of cut stressing perhaps the casualness with which the dress is worn. The colour of the dresses worn may of course be interpreted symbolically. The application of make-up is minimal and most reviews refer to the strong voice, the expressive eyes which keep the audience captivated and the bodily gestures that enhance the animated performance. The decor is almost non-existent except for a solitary spotlight.

The presentation itself consists of seventeen songs sung by Pienaar who is accompanied on piano. These songs are interspersed with narrative in which Petronella, Krotoa's daughter, narrates the life of her mother. Petronella was born out of Krotoa's marriage to Pieter van Meerhoff (Peder Jacobsen) a Danish soldier cum surgeon cum traveller<sup>4</sup>. As narrator Petronella represents the first 'original' South African being the child of a mixed marriage. The songs sung by Petronella relate Krotoa's arrival at the Castle and her being handed over to Van Riebeeck; her baptism; her last night of intimacy with her Khoi lover before she marries the Danish surgeon; her introduction

<sup>1</sup> The 'play' had its debut in March 1995 at the Klein Karoo National Arts Festival.

<sup>2</sup> The previous structure became dilapidated and stood a few hundred yards away from the present Castle.

<sup>3</sup> Malherbe (1990:51) confirms the burial ground. A staff reporter of *The Argus*, 8 February 1996 mentions the Groote Kerk as place of reinterment. The latter is the Dutch Reform Church in Adderley Street in Cape Town.

<sup>4</sup> Petronella later married Daniel Zaayman from Holland. After Krotoa's death Petronella was taken to the island of Mauritius where she got married. She returned to the Cape in 1709 and is regarded as the ancestress of the Zaayman family in South Africa.

to the Dutch language and customs; stories about the sun and moon and about love as told by her mother Krotoa; the death of Krotoa's sister nGai and the rediscovery of her sister as the moon. Other songs mention fear; lost love; betrayal; relationships gone wrong and the envelopment by the moon of the lost and solitary person. The solitude is immediately counteracted by the introduction of the sun representing life and healing. One of the last songs refer to the insensitivity of the Dutch settlers to Krotoa's culture exemplified by the breaking of the clay pot. Petronella immediately responds to this incident with atonement and forgiveness and calls for a new beginning.

Numerous reviewers have labelled Antoinette Pienaar a performer of cabaret. They are most probably guided by the one-woman act, the lyrics, the intimate space and the musical accompaniment. Despite such depiction she has difficulty in defining her own 'pieces' and has declared herself a storyteller or narrator. Insisting thus, she reestablishes the concept of theatre as a space where performance relies mostly on visual and auditory effects. The proximity of an audience to the narrator holds out the promise of interaction. Her presence is often referred to in the gestures and dance movements that are pivotal to the oral presentation. So much so that one reporter complained about the overindulgence in her material! Knowledge in the field of proxemics and kinesics would throw more light on the confines of such found space where a set with minimal theatrical means obviously requires subtle utilisation of the body in conjuring up animated scenes of nature.

Pienaar is reminiscent of the minstrel or bard who is poet, singer, narrator and actor. In the foot-steps of the small band of amateur Afrikaans actors that traversed the countryside during the thirties and forties Pienaar visits the towns and festivals of the platteland (rural areas). Calling her performances cabaret is however not proper as there are significant differences with what most white audiences perceive of as European cabaret. For one, the theatrical accoutrements are minimal as alluded to before. More striking is the lack of satire, explicit social comment and self-ridicule in her songs which is regarded as an integral part of cabaret in its classical sense. Recently hybridisation has become a buzz-word within Afrikaans and broader South African theory of theatre aimed at unifying the divergent strands of theatre convention<sup>5</sup>. Simultaneously visions of an appropriate new form of theatre relevant to all members of the South African population are based on:

<sup>5</sup> See Temple Hauptfleisch (1992:64-83). In an overview of theatrical formations within South Africa Hauptfleisch regards the medium of narration, mime (body) and music as integral parts of performance. His referral to the remnants of older social rituals and performances within present day theatrical convention is particularly significant as it lays the foundation for intercultural comparison and possible resemblance.

... the proven Western experience, but one which is enveloped in the most important elements mentioned above: narration, song, dance, dramatisation, improvisation, and presented with minimalised theatricality that depends more on imagination and the competence of the actor than on finance (Pretorius 1994:76; a.t.).

The above line of argument is advanced in order to reconcile elements of Afrikaans cabaret as represented by its most prolific text-writer Hennie Aucamp with theatrical characteristics endemic to black South African performances. Much emphasis is put on the didactic message enhanced by the addition of music, dance, stylised mime and narration. This however seems open to criticism since forms of theatre within black or white traditions have through time undergone various influences and are themselves the result of hybridisation on an intracultural level. Underlying such argument is an assumption of a particular theatre as uniform and without any ontogeny. However, what does elicit a response to the opinion expressed above is the reference to song and verse and to a lesser extent finance. Especially Pienaar's performance as narrator and impersonator cum dancer begs further explanation as to where her particular art and the purpose thereof fit in.

A possible point of departure would be Pienaar's identification with the daughter Petronella within the play. Krotoa's life and her experiences are relayed through Petronella, the child of the first mixed marriage officially recognised and sanctioned by the Dutch administrators. In a sense Pienaar appropriates Petronella and identifies with her as an inhabitant of Africa, apparently disregarding the colour distinction so poignant a reminder of the South African history. In doing so Pienaar also acknowledges Krotoa the Khoi mother as an archetypal mother figure. Some of the songs deal with the idioms and images of African fauna and nature and are supposedly stories told to Petronella by Krotoa. It therefore becomes clear that Petronella is initiated into Khoi culture by Krotoa. Accordingly Pienaar through her lyrics and dance burrows her way back into her own past. In search of that which she has forgotten or that which was withheld from her through laws forbidding racial integration. Pienaar read the stories of the Bushmen (San) written by an Afrikaans author G.R. von Wielligh and published in four volumes during the period 1919 to 1921<sup>6</sup>. These stories were never assimilated into the Afrikaans literary canon as their illogicality, their total lack of realism, climax and artistic harmony made them inferior to known Western patterns. Even more perplexing was the absence of distinction where humans and animals were concerned. Thus the literary historian and guardian P.C. Schonees (1939:97) could not find merit in these writings at all.

<sup>6</sup> The San and Khoi dichotomy (Khoisan) is explained by Richard Elphick (1985:23-30). In practice the difference or the similarity between them depends largely on the manner of existence, i.e. whether they were hunter-gatherers or herdsmen.

Listening to Pienaar's verse being performed one becomes aware of the 'oral' procedures which makes a distinct formal impression. The repetition of phrases or images, the exclamatory approach, the personification and direct address of inanimate objects, the linking up of divergent spaces, the accumulation of nouns, verbs or larger phrases reminiscent of a mantra and the apparant incohesiveness of the story or narration typify this particular style<sup>7</sup>. Within Afrikaans literature this evocative stylisation can be traced back to authors like Eugène Marais (1927), and more recently Wilma Stockenström (1981) and André P. Brink (1995)<sup>8</sup>. Reliving the past these authors and actors like Pienaar make use of historical documentation, literary genres and hearsay in order to reconstruct out of intertexts—used in the broadest sense of the term—meaningful interpretations for their own life-histories. The appropriation of such material denotes a re-cognition of the self. Making use of whatever is handed over from the past these performers and scribes reconstruct in the manner of the bricoleur. It should be kept in mind however that all attempts remain attempts at reconstruction. In a similiar vein the oral poet tries to recreate his past, but it is as risky as the representations given by European travellers in Africa. The oral poet speaks of a time and space he has not experienced while the traveller's description of Africa is a projection accepted by many Africans as though it existed. It therefore seems necessary to situate Pienaar's performance within the script of a broader South African literary and theatrical text. In doing so one may draw conclusions as to why Krotoa or Eva has become a common denominator in recent texts.

Pienaar's performance is characterised by a headstrong undertaking to tell a story which will involve her audience. The relative small audiences are introduced to a white actress telling a black woman's story but without overt racial rhetoric. The life-story of Krotoa is embroidered upon in terms and images that maps a geographical heimat shared by all irrespective of the cultural differences. Numerous references are made to nature as man's confidant, and nature in itself is represented as the heart-beat of the universe. By being close to nature one lives according to the only natural script. Inspiring her audience Pienaar uses the body as the ultimate medium of ostentation within theatre. In numerous interviews Pienaar confesses that without dance there is no life. She exclaims that she is fond of telling stories but there should be music and not only words. Rhythm is essential in registering life.

<sup>7</sup> Pienaar's rendition of the life of Krotoa was influenced by a poem called 'Krotoa's Story' written by Karen Press (1990). Press' use of repetition, accumulation of words as well as the juxtaposition of images pertaining to nature contrasts Krotoa's culture with that of the Dutch, exemplified by the references to commodities, trade and religion.

<sup>8</sup> Brink in his latest novel *Sandkastele* (1995) explicitly acknowledges that one of his characters is based on Eva's life-history.

It would be an oversimplification if one is to interpret *Krotoa* as a romantic flight into the past. Pienaar speaks of the joys but also of the sorrows of interpersonal relationships. Krotoa's experience of life in all its intensity examines the process of acculturation to which she was subjected. Pienaar's performance besides being an attempt at interpretation becomes a way of reappropriation of the Khoi woman, but with a difference. Contextualising the history of the Khoi will clarify Antoinette Pienaar's attempt at reappropriation.

References to Krotoa during the 340 odd years of documented history are scarce and brief. Jan van Riebeeck's diary or journal is the primary source of information and most historians of the twentieth century relied on *Precis of the Cape of Good Hope*, journals 1662-1670, and 1671 and 1676. In this century local interest in the Khoi led to sporadic publications in 1933, 1942 and two in 1963<sup>9</sup>. The interest shown in Krotoa by an Afrikaans literary historian G.S. Nienaber, as well as by a specialist in the origin of the Afrikaans language D.B. Bosman, underscore the cultural relevance of the Khoi for the Afrikaner. Bosman wrote most of his seminal work during the first three decades of the century when the Afrikaans language was institutionalised in order to foster a particular Afrikaner identity in opposition to British imperialism. Nienaber's writings cover a time span within which Afrikaner nationalism advanced and eventually took power in 1948. The fifties saw the promulgation of the most hideous laws in racial segregation and it is significant that in spite of the abhorrence of racial mixing Krotoa, or at least Khoi culture, retained its attraction.

Krotoa's encounter with the Dutch out of which Afrikaans syntax, semantics and phonology largely emerged represents a momentous incident and one of far-reaching importance. Her conversion and baptism and marriage to the surgeon and traveller Pieter van Meerhoff could be seen as a marriage of convenience as the Dutch had relied on Krotoa's talents as interpreter<sup>10</sup>. Her assimilation into the Dutch culture was highly successful as she did learn the language and became a fluent speaker. In addition to this she accepted Christianity and even persuaded her extended family to convert. She professed to prefer Dutch cooking and material goods and at times appeared to be the only reliable source of information to Van Riebeeck. On the other hand, she was caught up between two cultures. Some of her own people regarded her with distrust and called her a sell-out. The fact that she maintained contact with her own people, as an interpreter she had to, was a living reminder of this awkward situation. At times she would leave the Castle and spent months with her 'sister' amongst the

<sup>9</sup> The publications are: Schapera (1933); Bosman (3 July 1942:7,46 & 10 July 1942:6f); Jeffries (sic) (March 1963:46f); Nienaber (1963).

<sup>10</sup> Krotoa also came to speak Portuguese.

Cochoquas. This departure was symbolically acted out in the manner Krotoa would leave behind her 'Indian clothing' and change into skin hide clothing.

The abhorrence with which European travellers regarded the Khoi or Hottentot custom especially their putative idleness, uncleanliness, eating habits, sexual mores and their dress abound in historical documentation (see Coetzee 1988:17f). Any attempts at scientific proof of the primitive, debased nature of black woman, especially the Hottentot female with her protruding buttocks and enlarged genitalia became the fetishisms characterising Western and European superiority<sup>11</sup>. The physiognomy—bushy hair, flat nose and thickness of lips—skin colour and Khoi genitalia were generally used as evidence that biological differences existed which justify and warrant protection against the pathology that Hottentot and black nature displayed. It has been mooted that Pieter van Meerhoff's promotion to Robben Island as superintendent in 1665 may be attributed to 'keep his wife out of the public eye' (Malherbe 1990:49).

Although miscegenation was not exactly encouraged by the Dutch the commander Wagenaar in 1664 actually held a wedding ceremony at his home for Krotoa and Van Meerhoff. Khoi women in general were not easily enticed into marrying Dutch men as their culture prohibited premarital sex and adultery. The Dutch therefore had found it more easy to coerce slaves or ex-slaves of African, Madagascan and Indian descent into sexual intercourse. Where miscegenation had taken place between Khoi and Dutch it had usually been in the interior of the country at the cattle-frontiers during the eighteenth century, and not at the start of the colony. The Dutch nevertheless experimented with the assimilation of the Khoi and often referred to them as 'our Hottentots'<sup>12</sup>. The Khoi were also preferred being not too black like the other slaves and indigenous groups. They had settled as individual messengers, and later entire families became tenants or agricultural labourers on the Dutch farms. Recent studies have shown that the woman-slave had grown so attached to the farmer and his family, that unlike in other parts of the world, she had opted to stay on after manumission. Her loyalty towards the family had made her a respected and indispensable individual (Shell 1994:329).

Although Eva was tolerated in the political sense of the word as she became confidante and guide of the Dutch her drunken spells and neglect of her children after Van Meerhoff's death led to the following damning epitaph on her death on July 29 1674:

<sup>11</sup> The exhibition of Saartje Baartman or the Hottentot Venus in Paris at the beginning of the nineteenth century being the most famous example.

<sup>12</sup> For a complete description of the Dutch's patronising stand towards the Khoi see Richard Elphick (1985:193-214).

Hence in order not to be accused of tolerating her adulterous and debauched life, she had at various times been relegated to Robben Island, where, though she could obtain no drink, she abandoned herself to immorality. Pretended reformation induced the Authorities many times to call her back to the Cape, but as soon as she returned, she like the dogs, always returned to her own vomit, so that finally she quenched the fire of her sensuality by death ... affording a manifest example that nature, however closely and firmly muzzled by imprinted principles, nevertheless at its own time triumphing over all precepts, again rushes back to its inborn qualities (Schapera 1933:125).

Eva's history may be used as decisive evidence of a botched attempt at acculturation. The by now familiar colonial description of the Other as immoral, of devious sexual nature and uncouth is apparant in the above quotation. The preoccupation with the Other onto whom is projected the own fears and sexual insecurities have elicited different responses in theatrical representations within South Africa. The first example being the drama text written by Andrew Geddes Bain called *Kaatje Kekkelbek, or Life among the Hottentots*. The show was first performed in 1838 by the Graham's Town Amateur Company and enjoyed a long run afterwards. Here the Hottentot woman Kaatje sings in English but speaks in Afrikaans on stage, and in doing so she reflects the social realities of the market-place<sup>13</sup>. Bain had engineered the Queens Highway on the frontier of the Eastern Cape from 1837 and had ample opportunity to familiarise himself with the Hottentot settlement at Kat River. In drawing a comparison between Kaatje and the Hottentot stereotype one notices certain peculiarities. Whilst Kaatje chatters—English for the Afrikaans 'kekkel'—indiscriminately she gives a piece of her own mind on individual rights and the socio-economic hardships she has to endure. She imbibes liquor freely and is jailed which is reminiscent of Krotoa's own history. Like Krotoa she has a white lover and there is an element of melancholy amidst the satirical slant. In Pienaar's performance the songs are interspersed with narration. Here Kaatje sings in English and chatters in between as she gives her social commentary. Both plays use the narration as an interlude to the songs or music hall effect. In the case of Krotoa one is reminded of the injustices of the social set up and the sympathy felt towards Kaatje is partly the result of the conflicting cultural interests. Kaatje however remains a Hottentot Venus at the frontier between white and black. One is overwhelmed by Kaatje's unrestrained outpour of words and her earthiness which evokes an unbridled way of addressing problems. On the other hand Pienaar's songs make no mention of the assumed Hottentot weakness of character but rather shows empathy with the lost of personal happiness. What is even more signifi-

<sup>13</sup> The earliest references to Afrikaans in its printed form are traced back to a newspaper called *De Zuid-Afrikaan* of August 1830. A satirical farce by Boniface, *De Temperantisten* of 1832 being the other example. In both instances Hottentot characters are the mother-tongue speakers.

cant is that almost half of Pienaar's songs are written in English. Alternating between Afrikaans and English during the performance suggests a historical awareness with regard to cultural interaction.

Besides Bain's contribution other male authors like Stephen Black and Athol Fugard also wrote for female characters. One should keep in mind that the role of Kaatje was performed by a man. Whilst Bain had literary intentions Stephen Black produced an unpublished typescript *Love and the Hyphen* which had its premiere in 1908. After being performed from 1908 to 1912 by his own touring company it had a re-run in 1928. Black's play centres around the figure of the coloured Sophie who aspires through miscegenation to break through the class-barriers in order to improve her standard of living. Again written for a female actor the male author who as a newspaper reporter had an interest in coloured affairs, uses Sophie's fecundity and her indiscrete manner to express the material wishes of a disadvantaged individual. As a theatrical impresario Black used satire and with an ear for platitudes his aim was to create instant popularity. His commercial approach was an original attempt at establishing a local professional theatre. However, he had difficulties in finding a suitable Sophie and had to fall back on a white actress who had to acquaint herself with the Cape patois. The satire, frankness and sexual innuendo that characterises Black's play has Sophie as its common denominator. In the case of Antoinette Pienaar's *Krotoa* the main character's melancholy is acted out in a much more personal and less stereotypical manner.

In the last example given here, namely *Boesman and Lena*, written by Athol Fugard and performed in Kaatje Kekkelbek's neighbourhood Grahamstown in 1969, the coloured woman Lena becomes the focus of attention. Her earthy language, brazen approach and body-language, especially the gait as performed by Yvonne Bryceland, focuses on the universal problem of suffering. Although race does of necessity play a role within the South African context one is aware of the universal human hardships suffered and of the social relevance thereof. Lena, like Pienaar's Petronella, goes barefoot and wears a dress that gives an angular contour to the human body. There are references to the mud that cling to her feet which corresponds to the songs that link Petronella and Krotoa to nature and mother earth. Lena's dance of liberation towards the end of the play is reminiscent of Petronella's incitement that song and dance will triumph after all. Lena's song reminds of the poetic licence present in the San stories mentioned earlier on. In Fugard's stage direction Lena's body is emphasised after the ritualistic dance:

[She stops, breathing heavily, then wipes her forehead with her hand and licks one of her fingers.]

Lena: Sweat! You see, Outa, Sweat. Sit close now, I'm warm. You feel me? And we've still got that wood! (35)

Lena remains like all other archetypal Hottentot Eves a woman of nature. In this particular instance her role as seductress is subtly implied although her fecundity is gainsaid by her numerous still-born children and her hardships. In Pienaar's songs life and death are celebrated and dance and rhythm beckons renewal. In the three plays under discussion the women—Kaatje, Sophie and Lena—are portrayed, all by men, as typical South African outcasts. Besides being on the receiving end of political and social practices they stand their ground. Being black their portrayal has a literary tradition. These vary between the two basic images of the untouchable savage and the unattainable as is to be found in European travellers description of Khoi women at the Cape. Underlying these depictions is an obvious obsession by European commentators with race such as displayed in the description of the black woman's sexuality. The myth of the insatiable appetite of black women is often detected in the manner the male commentator portrays the female characters as being close to nature or uninhibited. No surprising then that the poet and literary commentator Stephen Gray (1979:38-39) remarks that Eve's role:

as ambassadress, temptress, mediator and, ultimately, miscegenator, comes to symbolize both the attractions and the intractabilities of inland, that unknown terrain across the ever-shifting frontier.

Within Antoinette Pienaar's performance the medium of dance becomes a point of convergence for the symbolic Eve. The female characters under discussion bear the scars of the submission they have been put through. Krotoa and Kaatje were jailed, and Sophie and Lena attempted different forms of escape out of their personal miseries. Here nature serves as a positive and recurrent theme. The elation with which Petronella Krotoa's daughter reaches out to nature and by means of which she establishes ties with her mother is significant. The continuous references to nature and the elements, as well as the use of the body within her performance speak of a longing for rebirth, of a going back to one's roots, and leaves an indelible impression. Written by herself Pienaar gives expression to nature through song and dance. In a sense impersonation becomes the sensual translation of nature.

Like male historians and authors before her Pienaar seeks to appropriate the land<sup>14</sup>. All writing on nature—and the theatrical performance is undeniably a gestural script—reflects the mythopoeic and carnal nature of the author as he/she imprints him/herself onto the surrounding landscape. One is tempted into reading the female body—especially as a male reader—as representative of nature. One can even romanticise the life-giving powers of nature and elevate the female body to a symbolic level

<sup>14</sup> Michel Foucault (1985:135) neatly points out the manner in which the men of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries resorted to depict nature as *representation*, and not as *mimesis* any longer.

akin to a triumphant archetypal mother container. Yet one is also acutely aware of the trappings of such phallogocentric patterns of thought in which the male glorifies the female body whilst his approach belies his fear of being devoured by the mother-figure. What reasonable interpretations then could be offered to the reappropriation of Krotoa by Antoinette Pienaar?

With hindsight one could extoll the exponents of post-colonial theories and explain how the Other has always been present albeit silent in the discourse of the ruler. Whilst specific discourses emphasised cultural differences intercultural exchanges did take place. In 1991 the author André P. Brink predicted that the Afrikaans writer would free himself from his own exclusivity and seek his identity in the Other. Brink (1991:1-12) maintained that the process of rediscovery would not degenerate into opposing or separate categories but rather become an assimilation of the Other. It is within the assimilation of the Other, however complicated, that I would like to search for an explanation for Pienaar's association with Krotoa. In doing so one is acutely aware of Sigmund Freud's remark that the individual's psychological reality cannot be fully incorporated into the social world.

Sensitive to the face-value of personal statements I nevertheless propose the following scenario. In an interview with me Antoinette Pienaar repeatedly stressed the value of exchange between people. Indeed, she regarded such exchange as the most precious of all gifts. She was dressed in a customary MuSotho costume and had brought along the lyrics of her show. Our discussion took place in the Gardens of the erstwhile Dutch East Indian Company next to Parliament. During various times of our conversation she enthused about the rewarding experience of learning from one another. She then mentioned her brief marriage to an Englishman and spoke of a second marriage to a citizen from Lesotho which was also dissolved. In response to my question for the reason for these untimely divorces she replied that cultural barriers were difficult to break down. Especially within the Sotho-marriage the antipathy towards cultural exchange became extremely difficult to grasp. It therefore seems justifiable to draw comparisons between Krotoa and Pienaar. Both crossed the lines of cultural prohibition, married into the other culture and as women both had been submitted to patriarchal control. Both experienced the reluctance of being accredited individual status as persons, and above all as worthy citizens within the adopted culture. Such explanation seems self-evident. Viewed in much more general terms one could apply the field of object relations within psychoanalysis to describe feelings of trust, anxiety, fear and guilt in order to explain other probable reasons for Pienaar's fascination with Krotoa. This would throw more light on miscegenation, intercultural marriages, the influence of religion especially Christianity, as is the case with Krotoa's conversion. It was indeed baptism which later became an instrument in racial discrimination at the Cape. In the last instance it is easy within the politicised academic profession to use racism as

a common denominator to explain present inequalities. Again I would argue not for the negation of social realities but rather for thorough interpretations of material as well as psychological responses to such conditions.

Pienaar like all concerned citizens is influenced by the *realpolitik* of the day. Notions of gender and racial inequality engage the ordinary South African in everyday life, however subtle or subconscious the level of involvement of the person. Besides these concerns other issues of ecological and economical concern also feature. However, the theatrical performance represents the pathology of everyday life in a much more sublimated manner. The playfulness of the performance and the found space calls for a celebration of meaning for the actors as well as the spectators. The making of meaning or sense represents the ultimate goal of theatrical exchange. Pienaar's earlier reference to inter- and intracultural sharing accentuates the dependence on the Other for self-realisation. The fact that Pienaar has written her own 'script' and has expressed herself through song and inventive dance procedures confirms one of the truths held by psychoanalysis and neurophysiology, namely the importance of the body as the first reality through which the world is experienced. Pienaar is adamant that all impersonation, portrayal and creation remains *her* presentation of the enigmatic figure of Krotoa. As has been suggested before the identification with Krotoa or with Petronella the daughter is a symbolic gesture. A white woman (Pienaar) identifies with the off-spring of the first interracial marriage within this country. Being a child of intercultural exchange she experiences the hybridity of the psyche. Engaging Krotoa means confronting the frontiers within and taking cognisance of history as cultural opportunism.

The inventiveness of the dance, impersonation and the lyrics firmly position Pienaar as an inhabitant of this country. Every reflex whether voluntary or involuntary, is a symbolic expression of the body tracing its contours in the outside world (Rose 1992:98). The abundant celebration of nature in her songs and dance movements becomes a celebration of the body as it 'writes' the outside world. The simulation of Krotoa echoes Pienaar's quest for self-assertion and the translation of her life-world in a manner similar to Krotoa as she tried to convey her world to the Dutch. Traversing the landscape and crossing the frontiers within remain a lifelong undertaking. The language of the body speaks of the residue of body images accumulated through time and space<sup>15</sup>. Sharing and learning about the Other necessarily involves a coming to terms with the aspects of the Other within one-self.

During the month of February 1996 the paramount chief of the Griqua, Andries Abraham Stockenström le Fleur II, requested the visting queen of Denmark queen Margrethe to lay a wreath at the place of Krotoa's burial at the Castle, or the Church

<sup>15</sup> See Grosz (1994:62-85) for a discussion on neurophysiology and corporeal mappings.

where she was reinterred or at Robben Island where she was detained. This request was made as Krotoa's husband Pieter van Meerhoff was of Danish descent. By remembering Krotoa Pienaar displays the cultural empathy essential for reinterpreting the frontiers within. By going back to Krotoa we are reappropriating her for ourselves. In doing so we confirm that going back is also another way of going on.

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## The Wives of Henry Fynn: 'Unwritten but Potentially Transfiguring Texts'? The Untold Biographies of Vundhlazi of the Zelemu and Christina Brown<sup>1</sup>

Julie Pridmore

### Introduction

In his novel *Foe*, J.M. Coetzee provides the mute character Friday with the ultimate narrative power. The actual narrator, Sue Barton, struggles with her own function as author, as well as with Foe as a superior white male and Friday as a subordinate black male (Coetzee 1986). For Coetzee, the power of silence marks the limit of Susan's self-knowledge but at the same time provides the means for Friday's potentially transfiguring mute statements (Coetzee & Attwell 1992: 247). At the same time, Susan herself represents the female voice which underlies a story which on the surface is an imperial narrative, based on one of the earliest European male focused adventure texts, *Robinson Crusoe*. As Ridley (1983:5f) has noted, Defoe's novel marks the beginning of colonial discourse in fiction and as such underpins further empire-based fiction. Susan's narrative voice in *Foe*, Di Michele (1996:157) has pointed out, addresses questions not only of colonial, but of post-colonial female identity.

Foucault has suggested that the agency of a text has an innate power: 'the author's name is not simply an element in a discourse ... it assumes a classificatory function' (Rabinow 1986:107). There are problems however, in applying Foucault to specific colonial situations. Edward Said (1983:221) has used Foucault's discourse analysis on crime and punishment to demonstrate the opposed social forces of the empowered and disempowered, and South African historian Crais (1992:44) has similarly illustrated these power relationships in the mechanics of colonial discourse in the Cape Colony. Third world historians have, however, noted that there are in fact older and

<sup>1</sup> This article was presented as a seminar at the University of South Africa in June 1996. I would like to thank my colleagues in the Department of History at Unisa who commented on it.

more dominant forms of power present in colonial societies (Guha 1984:348f) and Foucault's relevance to colonial discourse is still largely under investigation (Thomas 1994: 20f).

Gender historians in particular, have pointed out that Foucault's analysis cannot be used to address the colonial situation, as power is clearly present in the coloniser's person. It is not, as Foucault would argue, inherent in language and discourse (Sharpe 1993:89). Successive reconstructions of the colonial record have either left women out or presented them in a negative role (Callaway 1987:3). As Spivak (1998:15-18) argues, women have shared with the colonised races an intimate experience of oppression. There is also an inherent danger in using post-modernist theory where 'woman' becomes the nodal point for the post-modern project of reconceptualising Man, Subject, Truth, History, and Meaning. The result of this is that 'woman' exists neither as a person nor a thing, she 'lacks stability and the permanence of historical identity' (Donaldson 1992:119). For instance, white women are given composite iconographic identities in colonial discourse (Frankenberg 1993:16f). In this paper I aim to identify specific individual women who lived within the colonial discourse of nineteenth century Natal, and attempt to discover their respective roles as authors and their own life experiences.

#### **Vundhlase, Daughter of Zelemu: Senior Wife to H. Fynn, c. 1824-1834**

'Bovungana's mother was the daughter of a white man when the Europeans visited the Bay' (Webb & Wright 1982:54). This statement by Mcoyoi kaMnini, an informant to James Stuart in the early twentieth century, is an expression of indigenous views on the European presence at Port Natal. Of Vundhlase, the woman who entered into a relationship with Henry Fynn in the 1820s, we know virtually nothing, except that, as a result of their union, an entire community of mixed-race descendants occupies southern Natal to this day<sup>2</sup>. Vundhlase, according to another of Stuart's informants, was a member of the Zelemu clan (Webb & Wright 1982:146). A.T. Bryant identified the Zelemu as a group who had wandered about the KwaZulu-Natal region, having moved south from the Nkandla district during the reign of Senzangakhona kaJama in the years from about 1810 to 1816. They clashed with the Bomvu and then with Shaka's followers, eventually moving south into the mPondo region. At the time of European arrival at Port Natal in 1824, the Zelemu were living in southern Natal (Bryant 1929: 373).

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that Henry Fynn had no less than four indigenous 'wives', of whom Vundhlase was his first and senior wife. According to Frank Essery, a correspondent with Killie Campbell in the 1950s, Fynn had a total of twelve mixed race children.

Research on the lives of indigenous women in the Natal region has been limited. Jeff Guy (1990:33-47) has suggested that pre-colonial women were effectively the means of reproduction and production and as a result had little control over their lives. Without detailed evidence, it is difficult to reconstruct the kind of gender relations within which Vundhlase lived. The only nineteenth century text by a black woman from Natal is Paulina Dlamini's *Servant of Two Kings*. In this account she described her transition from black to white society:

we undertook many things which since I now feel honestly ashamed, but which at the time we partook of with great pleasure.

She particularly remembered being 'extolled as heroines ... our girls excelled the men!' (Bourqin 1986:28). That women attached to the Zulu royal household did have prominent roles is clearly demonstrated by the career of Mnkabayi kaJama. As Senzangakhona's sister she acted as regent until Shaka took over the Zulu leadership, and was later in charge of Shaka's *ebaQulusini ikhanda* in the mid-1820s. This provided her with political power but, as Laband (1995:18,28) notes, she retained her independence by not marrying. James Stuart's informants listed her grave among those of prominent male leaders, and 'there was no "king" (including Mnkabayi) whose praises were omitted when the cattle of the spirits were sacrificed' (Webb & Wright 1987:117). During the twentieth century, the careers of Solomon kaDinuzulu's sister Magogo and his highest-ranking wife, Matatele (Christina) Sibiya further demonstrate the considerable political power wielded by Zulu royal women (Reyher 1948)<sup>3</sup>.

Paulina Dlamini, although she later converted to a European lifestyle on a Christian mission station, found nothing unacceptable about mixed-race relationships. She noted that John Dunn

became a polygamist .... Cetshwayo held him in high esteem and gave him Zulu girls in marriage .... he ruled over his domain and raised a countless progeny of mixed blood (Bourqin 1986:42f).

European recorders of early Port Natal are more apologetic. Bryant described the white traders seeking 'the black-skinned hands of Native damsels as the next best substitute' to white women (Bryant 1929:373). Bryant's account, however, was the first European text to openly acknowledge Fynn's union with Vundhlase. Earlier writers had avoided the topic since the 1830s as it was socially unacceptable for colonial Natalians to condone mixed-race unions. In British colonies during the course of the

<sup>3</sup> This was highlighted by Marcia Wright in her presentation of the *Zulu Woman* text at the University of Durban-Westville, June 1995.

nineteenth century, 'going native' became increasingly criticised (Hyam 1990:75-78) and European men who persisted in their liaisons with indigenous women were excluded from colonial society (Spurr 1993:84). The early white literature on Natal largely reflected these attitudes (Pridmore 1996a:57f) although there were obvious instances of white men like Henry Fynn and John Dunn who had indigenous wives and half-caste progeny.

However, if the Natal historical narrative was decidedly blank on the subject of mixed unions, African informants had no qualms about telling James Stuart that Fynn, together with Henry Ogle, had 'the largest number' of black wives. Physical contact occurred

on the Zulu plan; that is, any woman required would be specially sent for. She would at nightfall come to the man's house' (Webb & Wright 1976:111f).

An early map of Port Natal illustrates the scattered nature of the white settlement and the way in which individual European men set up their own separate *imizi*<sup>4</sup>. Fynn gradually moved his household, headed by Vundhlase, further away from the white settlement. By the time he left the region in 1834, he had established his *imizi* to the south of the Mzimkhulu river.

Apart from the sketchy accounts provided by Stuart's informants, there is no evidence on the actual nature of Fynn's relationship with Vundhlase or any of his other wives. Later colonial commentators described Fynn's attitude towards Africans as extremely harsh (Pridmore 1994:192f). Neither did the presence of indigenous wives and mixed-race children prevent white men from returning to colonial society, and in September 1834, Fynn left Natal for the Cape Colony. Frank, Fynn's younger brother, had moved to Natal in 1830 and remained in the region until his death in 1840. In accordance with Zulu custom, Frank married Vundhlase as if his elder brother had died. The Fynn *ensimbini* household south of the Mzimkhulu was headed by Frank during the 1830s, and the beginning of a Fynn 'clan' emerged, including in the extended family, several Cele refugees from Zululand<sup>5</sup>. This group was described as 'the *izinkumbi* people (who) are of the Nhangwini, the people of Vundhlase' (Webb & Wright 1982:185). Bryant (1929:561) called these the *izinkumbi* or 'wanderers'. As the Zelemu were originally a clan which had moved about considerably, this definition seems more applicable than Cobbing's (1992:19-21) explanation of the *izinkumbi* as 'locusts' who, led by Fynn, assisted white slavers.

<sup>4</sup> Killie Campbell Africana Library, Fynn Papers, File 26031, Extract 2.

<sup>5</sup> Natal Archives, Bird Papers, vol. 5, evidence of Tom Fynn, pp 15-17. Tom was Frank and Vundhlase's son.

### Ann Brown: Fynn's Return to Colonial Society, 1837-1839

In 1976, Gilbert Fynn, a mixed race descendant of Fynn's told a researcher that 'when Fynn married a white woman he became part of the white people again'. To Vundhlase, Fynn's return to the Cape meant that he was dead, as was demonstrated by her marriage to Frank. Fynn's move marked a complete break with his life amongst indigenous people in Natal. As a newly-appointed colonial official in the Cape government, he was once more a member of European society - a social framework he had left in 1823. His rapid assimilation back into this framework was illustrated by his marriage, within three years of his return, to Ann Brown (Pridmore 1996b:42f). Ann's family were English people from Grahamstown where she was born in 1817 (Davies 1974:16). There is scant evidence on her life either before or after her marriage to Fynn, though it is likely that her parents were English settlers who had emigrated to the Cape during the 1800s.

In terms of the overlying discourse of colonial politics in which he lived after 1834, Fynn could not have made a clearer indication of his move back to white society. European women were generally seen as a civilising influence in British colonies, enforcing the segregation process and the appropriate behaviour of white men (Ware 1992:37f). The arrival of white women in a colonial territory often marked the onset of a deterioration in race relations, or at least a widening of the social distance between colonisers and colonised. The presence of white women replaced the early relationships between white men and indigenous concubines (Strobel 1991:3-6). As Callan (1984:5) has noted,

the mythology of the British Empire ... seems to contain the idea that colonists and 'natives' were able to live happily together until *memsahibs* appeared and insisted upon racial and social separation (Callan 1984:5).

While some Cape historians have suggested a degree of interaction between black and white women in 'frontier' society, it is debatable as to how far this process went in actually breaking down racial stereotypes (Bradford 1996). It has also been suggested that race, although a dominant signifier in Cape society, was not in fact as important as gender in determining the nature of the colonial presence (Ross 1994:111).

Fynn's marriage to Ann lasted only two years, as she died in 1839 and there is practically no evidence to indicate her experiences as the wife of a colonial official on the Cape 'frontier'. What is clear is that Fynn had married Ann not only to demonstrate his return to colonial society, but also through a genuine need for a white companion in an isolated position. His reaction to her death is illustrated by the fact that he neglected his regular correspondence with the Cape government (Pridmore 1996b:42-44).

**Christina Brown: 'Actively Engaged as a Government Officer', 1841-1862**

In 1841, just two years after Ann's death, Fynn married again, this time to Christina Brown. Christina was not related to Ann, and her family were from Zwartkop in Algoa Bay, where she was born in 1821. Her father, John Brown had later moved to Grahamstown, where she met and married Fynn. Like Ann, Christina's parents were also English settlers (Davies 1974:16). Little is known of Christina's life prior to her marriage, though it is possible to assume that she was brought up in an English settler household. Her education was probably similar to that of other young girls in the Cape Colony, with an emphasis on her role in the home and as a potential companion for a future husband. Probable marriage to a colonial employee would involve specific responsibilities for a white woman in the Cape. Although, by the mid-nineteenth century, the home emerged as the moral sphere where women's labour could be valued (Grewal 1996:24f), women also had particular roles of service to the wider empire. As MacDonald has noted, the discourse of gender echoes the imperial plot where 'men command, women serve' (MacDonald 1994:37f). In this 'imperialist project', notes Grewal (1996:67), women accepted and reinforced the positive-negative dichotomy of masculine and feminine function.

Whilst researching Fynn, I examined both his literary background as well as his writing as *colonial* literature (Pridmore 1995). I suggest that an assessment of Christina's contribution to colonial representation, albeit in restricted form, requires a similar approach. While she operated within the clearly developing imperial discourse discussed above, she also had a specific literary background in the type of literature written for girls and young women. During the early nineteenth century, in the period when Christina's generation was becoming literate, narratives written for girls were changing. These moved gradually from the romantic images of female uselessness which focused on chivalry (Brantlinger 1988:141-143) towards more clearly defined Victorian ideas on respectability and submissiveness (Cadogan & Craig 1976:16f). These notions of gender roles were, as Callaway (1987:32-35) has shown, disclosed through and reflected in writing on colonial female themes.

The literature generated by colonial women writers is crucial as a source of evidence on these women's experiences in a masculine-dominated, white ruled empire. Writing as white women they were

attempting to give meaning and connection to their lives in a foreign world where they often felt themselves to be doubly alien (Callaway 1987:3).

Unlike male travel writers, they also felt their accounts to be more accurate and less confused by exaggeration or romance (Blake 1992:9). Christina Fynn's diary,

which covers the years from 1841 to 1868<sup>6</sup>, was not written with publication in mind and there is no evidence to suggest that she intended this journal to be anything more than a detailed account of her husband's career. Like contemporary accounts, Christina records her experiences as a colonial wife, first in the Cape and later in Natal<sup>7</sup>. She recorded how, as the traditional 'helpmeet' to her husband she uncomplainingly followed Fynn to his various duty posts. Christina continued to travel vast distances to be with her husband, even following the birth of their only child, Henry Francis junior, in 1846. In 1857, accompanied by the child, then aged eleven, she undertook the hazardous journey into Zululand in order to accompany Fynn on his visit to King Mpande's envoys. A year later she left her household and child under the care of a Mr. and Mrs. Clarkson while she joined her husband on a tax collection trip in the Mkhomanzi district.

Although these entries indicate that Christina made considerable efforts to travel with Fynn, it is also obvious from her diary that she was often alone. While Fynn was stationed with Maphasa on the Cape frontier, the couple were separated much of the time. Christina recorded these separations and often indicated the exact time - for instance in January 1844, she noted that Fynn had left her for eighteen days while attending to 'government business' at Fort Beaufort. In 1850, while the family resided with Faku in the mPondo territory, she recorded that her husband had been away for two months in Natal, and she also expressed her concern over Fynn's ill-health at this time. In July 1857, following the visit to Zululand, Christina travelled with her son to Algoa to visit her family. On her return six months later she found that her husband had once again been 'called away' by the Governor of Natal. In April 1859, she had to make the trip to Algoa again without Fynn who was occupied with his duties in southern Natal.

The woman who emerges from Christina's brief text is clearly an individual who was more than capable of coping with the demands of being a colonial wife. Isolation, loneliness and inconvenient travel are simply recorded as her responsibilities. At the same time, however, it is possible to identify some of her feelings. Her repeated point about her husband being 'away', might be construed as a negative comment on her husband's duties. Sometimes, there are gaps between events where Christina

<sup>6</sup> The MS of Christina's Diary is in the Natal Archives, Fynn Papers, File 14. A typescript copy is contained in Killie Campbell Africana Library, Stuart Papers. Stuart's typescript only covers the diary up to the death of Fynn in 1862. Unfortunately, space does not permit me to comment at length on this masculine editing.

<sup>7</sup> As the MS is only a few pages long, detailed page referencing is impractical here.

does not record her experiences. She noted that war had been declared on the Cape border in March 1846 and that Fynn junior was born in November of that year. She omitted entirely her move to Colesberg for the birth, and the worrying separation from Fynn at this time. She also does not mention any practical or financial difficulties though these are evident from Fynn's own correspondence.

Christina's motive in constructing her journal becomes clearer in the entries from March 1860 when Fynn resigned from colonial service. For the two years from this date until his death in 1862, Christina supported Fynn in his attempt to obtain a land grant from the Natal government. Part of her plan to obtain this grant lay in her recording, in diary form, a detailed account of Fynn's services to the Cape and Natal governments. She hoped to stress his loyalty to the Crown and thereby obtain a reward for his services. Although Christina was unsuccessful in obtaining a land grant prior to her husband's death, she eventually wrote directly to the Colonial Office and managed to secure a section of land in the Illovo district. Her inscription on her husband's gravestone is an indication of her belief in his long and dedicated service as a colonial official who had been 'for 37 years most actively engaged as a Government Officer' who had carried out his duties, 'much to the satisfaction of both governments' (Davies 1974:22).

### Conclusion: Recording the Fynn Family

Fynn's white descendants from his marriage to Christina are well tabled in Davies' meticulously researched family history, *Twin Trails* (1974). At one level, this text is an instance of the white settler genealogies of Natal which were prominent from the 1970s. Such histories were in part an attempt by English-speaking Natalians to reaffirm their identity in the region, particularly following the 1970 commemoration of the arrival of the 1820 English settlers. Ruth Gordon's editing of *Dear Louisa*, published in 1970 is another instance of this kind of settler genre in Natal literature. However, there is a danger here, as Parle (1995:34,37) has noted, in dismissing such texts merely as examples of 'colonial nostalgia'. *Twin Trails*, although a settler family history, did provide detailed material on both Ann and Christina, thus giving researchers valuable glimpses into the lives of these women as the partners of a colonial official.

Vundhlase and her descendants are conspicuously absent from *Twin Trails* and recognition of Fynn's mixed race descendants has been restricted to fragments of oral material collected by Natal officials. I have indicated above the importance of early twentieth century accounts given by James Stuart's informants. John Bird, who edited and published the influential *Annals of Natal*, was also a collector of information on the Natal past and in 1896 interviewed Frank and Vundhlase's son Tom. Tom remem-

bered that Vundhlase had been a 'good wife' to Frank<sup>8</sup>. This evidence, although extremely sketchy, does give some indication of Vundhlase's status amongst her descendants. As a group, the 'coloured' Fynns have been aware of their heritage and Fynn's son Duka spoke with some pride when he talked to James Stuart about the extended nature of the Fynn 'clan' in the early 1900s<sup>9</sup>.

In the historiography of Natal, and in the more detailed histories of the Fynn family, neither Vundhlase nor Christina were provided with opportunities to be heard. In writing this article I have attempted to break open this long silence and allow both women a voice on their own pasts. Given the nature of the evidence however, their identities seem, like Coetzee's Susan Barton, to be contained in their inability to narrate their stories, rather than in clearly spoken 'texts'.

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<sup>8</sup> Natal Archives, Bird Papers, vol. 5, evidence of Tom Fynn, 1896.

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## South African Society: Soviet Perspectives— 1917 to the mid 1950s

Apollon Davidson and  
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It is a well known fact that throughout the Soviet era the Bolshevik Party and the Soviet government were mainly interested in Africa as a potential ally against world capitalism and imperialism and that, because Soviet research on Africa (as well as all other research) was supported only by the state, the results of this research were inevitably ideologically biased and thus academically invalid. It is more or less generally accepted that this is particularly true about the period of the 1920s-1950s when the Soviet version of Marxism was particularly crude, Soviet censorship particularly strict, and Soviet academics had no direct access to African countries. This is, however, only part of the story and a closer look at the Soviet writing of the time clearly makes this evident.

The mainstream Soviet African studies during the 1920s-1950s were dominated by the Communist International (Comintern) both ideologically and institutionally to such an extent that, strictly speaking, the end of this period should be marked by 1943 when the Comintern was officially disbanded or even by 1937 when it practically ceased to function. However, the next period which emerged with the upsurge of nationalist movements in Africa in the wake of the colonial era, clearly did not begin until the middle of the 1950s and, unlike the 1920s and 1930s, little was happening in Soviet African studies during the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s—which is why we have extended the 'Comintern' period for a decade.

In one of his early works Joseph Stalin (1946:49) wrote that the attitude of the Bolsheviks to national liberation movements should depend on the nature of every particular movement but that

generally proletariat will not support the so-called 'national liberation' movements, since until now all such movements have been acting in the interests of bourgeoisie and have corrupted and distorted the class consciousness of proletariat.

Later the Comintern and the Bolshevik party moved away from this approach but

during the 1920s and 1930s main attention focused on class, not on national liberation struggles. Thus, research was centred on the revolutionary potential of the working class and the prospects of the development of a revolutionary situation in Africa.

Only one Communist party existed in sub-Saharan Africa and was represented in the Comintern (from 1921), the Communist Party of South Africa. Accordingly, the attention of Comintern officials and academics was concentrated on the South African region. Although several prominent leaders from other African countries (such as Jomo Kenyatta) were invited to study at the Communist Universities in Moscow, the majority of students from Africa came from South Africa. This also meant that African studies in Moscow were centred on South Africa's problems. There is much evidence of the hopes of the Bolshevik party and of the Comintern that a revolutionary situation would soon appear in South Africa. In 1928 the Comintern came up with the idea of an 'independent native Republic' in South Africa in order to speed up this process.

The attention on Africa, and especially on South Africa, resulted in the creation of two institutions for the study and teaching of African problems within the Comintern. These were the African Section of the Research Association for the Study of National and Colonial Problems (NIANKP) and the African Department at the Communist University of Eastern Toilers (KUTV). Three Soviet academics were instrumental in the establishment and activities of both bodies: the Hungarian, Endre Sik (1891-1978), a prominent figure in the Comintern who was later to become Foreign Minister of communist Hungary; Ivan Potekhin (1930-1964); and Alexander Zusmanovich (1902-1965).

In April 1929 Sik ([1930]1989) presented a paper 'On Laying the Foundations of Marxist Study of Socio-Economic Problems in Africa' which became the first programmatic plan for Soviet African studies. Sik insisted on the importance of class analysis and stressed that 'special attention should be paid to the history of South Africa'.

Until 1937 when Stalin's purges stifled the Comintern, the African Section of NIANKP collected and reviewed materials on the political and economic situation in African countries, and particularly in South Africa. African and South African students from KUTV and from the Moscow Lenin School (the latter attended mainly by European and American Communists but included a smattering of Africans too) participated in this work and assisted with the materials.

The first Soviet book on Africa was published in 1931 by Georgy Gerngross (1892-1937) (cf. Yug 1931) who was somehow attached to NIANKP. It contained popular essays on South Africa. The most characteristic product of the research activities of NIANKP's African Section was *Forced Labour and Trade Union Movement in Negro Africa* published by Zusmanovich, Potekhin and Tom Jackson (Zusmanovich et al 1933). Tom Jackson was the pen name of Albert Nzula (1905-1934), Secretary of

the Communist Party of South Africa, who in 1931-1934 worked and studied in Moscow.

The scope of analysis and the nature of Soviet approach to African problems during the 1930s are obvious from the titles of articles published in those years by the two most prolific Soviet academics of the time, Potekhin and Zusmanovich. During the 1930s Potekhin published more articles about South Africa than any other Soviet Africanist. Among these were: 'The Union of South Africa: Parties, Trade Unions and other Organisations, the Press and Politicians' (cf. Izotla 1935); 'Agricultural Workers in the Union of South Africa' (cf. Potekhin 1934b); 'National Reformism in the Union of South Africa' (cf. Potekhin 1934a); 'Imperialist Segregation of Natives in the Union of South Africa' (cf. Potekhin 1935b); 'Specific Features and Difficulties of the Struggle for Hegemony of the Proletariat in South Africa' (cf. Potekhin 1935a).

Zusmanovich also concentrated on South Africa but he wrote about the rest of the African continent as well: 'The Agricultural Workers' Movement in South Africa' (Zusmanovich 1933b); 'The Anti Imperialist Movement and the Struggle for the United Front in South Africa' (Zusmanovich 1935c); 'The National Revolutionary Movement and Proletariat in South Africa' (Zusmanovich 1935a); 'On Some Problems of the Communist Movement in South Africa' (Zusmanovich 1935d); 'The Strike Movement in Africa' (AZ 1935a); 'The Working Class in South Africa's Mining Industry' (Zusmanovich 1935b).

No doubt the quality of these studies was not very good. The authors lacked both a proper academic training and sufficient knowledge of foreign languages (although they did lecture to their students in English or French), and they did not have a chance to visit Africa. Moreover, their work was completely subordinated to ideological dogma and political directives of the Comintern. As a result, wishful thinking was often substituted for valid analysis.

Yet some of the problems posed by researchers of NIANKP and KUTV are still discussed by Africanist historians and political scientists today. Soviet academics attempted to study social structures in Africa, the labour movement, political organisations (especially, the South African Communist Party, the African National Congress and the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union—ICU). They were also interested in correlation between race and class. These topics attracted little attention from Africanist historians elsewhere at the time. Moreover, the Russians received some of their materials directly from African countries and worked together with their African students and colleagues who participated in their debates and in some cases became co-authors—a tendency which began to emerge in African studies elsewhere only several decades later.

Some ideas of Soviet Africanists found their way to the West and may have even influenced the birth of new approaches to African history there decades later.

Zusmanovich, Potekhin and their colleagues published their articles in *The Negro Worker*, the journal of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers which was published in English, first in Hamburg, and after Hitler's rise to power, in Copenhagen, Antwerp, New York and Paris. Their South African articles were often reproduced in *Umsebenzi*, the newspaper of the CPSA.

A fascinating example of Soviet academic ideas on and approaches to the nature of South African society is the article published in the *Negro Worker* by Zusmanovich and Potekhin. This article reflected the debate which unfolded in 1934-1935 on whether there was a Black bourgeoisie in South Africa at that time or not (A.Z. 1935b:18,19,22). Some academics thought that an African bourgeoisie did not yet come into existence, others asserted that it did. The authors of the article were of the opinion that a Black bourgeoisie did exist in South Africa but only as individuals, not as a class.

'In South Africa, it is true'—they wrote—

there is no native industrial bourgeoisie. Imperialism has monopolised the entire economy of the country and does not make it possible for native industry to develop. But even here there are some first shoots. It cannot be denied that there are small furniture factories and other workshops in South Africa belonging to natives and employing as many as 10 or even more workers.

The existence of a commercial bourgeoisie—traders, shop-keepers, etc.—was also noted. In the opinion of the authors this was, however, not a class, but rather bourgeois individuals, of whom there were plenty.

The owners of small factories, workshops, the traders, the house owners, the sub-renters of houses, the money-lenders, etc.—these are,

wrote Potekhin and Zusmanovich,

an army of native businessmen living at the expense of the toiling population and receiving profits from the pockets of the native workers and toilers in general.

In the spirit of the time the debate was, of course, not a purely academic exercise with the goal of achieving a purely academic truth. It had a direct relevance to the assessment of the nature of struggle in South Africa, and thus direct political repercussions, for if there were capitalists, they were bound to mess around on the way of the revolutionary movement of South African proletariat. 'Stop these academic arguments about whether there is a native class or not', the authors appealed to their readers,

and explain to the workers that native society is not united, as Seme & Co. depict it, that it has classes, that it contains capitalists who exploit the workers and whose interests do not coincide with the interests of the toilers, and who therefore occupy a special position in the anti-imperialist movement.

The political conclusion was characteristic of the spirit of academic debates of the time and must have sounded quite threatening to the opponents of the authors:

We must get an absolutely clear notion of the question that the denial of the existence of the native bourgeoisie logically leads to the denial of the necessity for a struggle against national reformism, to the denial of the struggle for the leadership of the proletariat in the anti-imperialist revolution.

The approach of the authors to this complicated problem was, no doubt, highly simplistic, their analysis crude and inadequate, and the political conclusions harmful to their own cause, yet this and other articles written at that time in Russia were the first ever attempts at a class analysis of the contemporary South African society. It may be worthwhile mentioning that all these articles were based on numerous South African sources: reports of South African Native Commissioners and other official publications, newspapers, such as *Umteteli wa Bantu*, *The Star*, *The Natal Mercury*. It is difficult to imagine now that all these materials were bought by Soviet authorities during the 1930s and that they were so carefully studied.

Gradually Africanists at and around KUTV and NIANKP acquired better knowledge, academic skills and a broader interest in the societies that they were studying. There are several manuscripts in the NIANKP archives and at least two publications to prove this.

The first was a collection of Zulu folk tales translated into Russian directly from the Zulu language and published by a Leningrad academic, Igor Snegirev (1907-1946), with Nzula's assistance (Snegirev 1937b). This publication is rather unusual for the time, for the translator did not in any way attempt to adapt his Zulu texts to make them easier for the understanding of his reader, neither in the sense of interpreting ethical norms and cultural values, nor in the sense of the language itself. This translation represented the mentality of a large rural segment of Zulu society and was thus an integral part of Soviet social studies.

Snegirev was well aware of the meaning of his cultural studies for social research and stated as much in his article 'Revolutionary Songs of South African Proletariat' in which he translated and analysed the texts of several Zulu and Xhosa songs supplied to him by Nzula and another South African communist, Edwin Mofutsanyana, who also was at that time in Moscow. 'It is quite natural', he wrote,

that new samples of oral literature can not but reflect the changes that occurred during the last centuries, more specifically during the last fifty years, in the social life of native tribes of Africa. In this respect the intense class struggle which is waged by Negro workers against their exploiters in several African colonies must be reflected in oral literature and first of all in songs. The publication of such songs,

he went on,

is, of course, not in the interests of West European Africanists many of whom are connected either with colonial administrations or missionary organisations (Snegirev 1937a:89,90).

It should, perhaps, be noted that one of the songs that Snegirev reproduced and translated was *Mayibuye* and that this was the first ever publication of this hymn outside South Africa and its first translation into a foreign language.

Sik's *The History of Black Africa* existed at that time only in manuscript form. Sik had been working on it during the 1930s and it was several times discussed at the NIANKP. The manuscript which was completed in 1945 contained a detailed albeit crude analysis of societal structures (including the emergence of new social groups), economic and social evolution and forms of social and political movements and anti-colonial struggles on the African continent. The analysis was structured regionally with Southern Africa featuring prominently in the text. The huge manuscript was published in two large-format volumes in English and French only in 1966<sup>1</sup> and was, of course, completely outdated by that time: critics rightly noted numerous factual mistakes and the dogmatism of Sik's approach. But in the context of the 1930s and the early 1940s the book would have looked different for it was, in effect, the first ever attempt to write a history of the African continent as a whole and as a history of Africans, not of European conquests in Africa. Sik did not have enough sources and materials which could have enabled him to give a more valid description of African societies and of what was later called the 'African initiative'—thus the mistakes and wishful thinking in his writing. Had this book been published when it was written, it would have been quite an event in Africanist historiography.

The Communist University of Eastern Toilers was, of course, an ideological rather than an academic institution. As part of its 'revolutionary' education it offered courses in methods of underground work, subversive and military tactics. At the same time, however, it taught courses on world history, on the history of the world revolu-

<sup>1</sup> The second edition of these two volumes, supplemented by another two, was published in 1971-1974.

tionary movement, on the history of the native region or country of the students, on political geography, philosophy and foreign (Western) languages, let alone Russian. Even though this education was heavily dogmatic and ideologically biased it greatly widened the students' perspectives and helped to build up their general knowledge, for the majority of them had come to Moscow with little formal education or none at all. The debate which unfolded around academic projects at NIANKP and KUTV actively engaged the students providing them with further opportunities to develop knowledge and skills which they could later on use in their political careers.

After the Second World War, when the Comintern had already ceased to exist, Africanists were scattered in different institutions of the Soviet Academy of Sciences and at Leningrad University. Their greatest achievement of the early 1950s was a huge collective monograph (more than 700 large size pages), *Peoples of Africa*, edited by Olderogge and Potekhin (1954). This volume was, in fact, a survey of all accumulated information about African societies and peoples (South African peoples among them)—economic, social, ethnographic and cultural.

It was at that time that Potekhin became interested in ethnic problems and processes in Africa and participated in the debate on this subject which was unfolding within the ranks of the CPSA (Forman 1992). This interest resulted in his book, *The Formation of the National Community of the South African Bantu* (Potekhin 1955). Based on numerous contemporary South African documents and publications the book was aimed at proving that two ethnic communities, the 'Bantu' and the 'Anglo-Boer', basically Black and White nations, were being formed in South Africa. Potekhin's argument about the formation of the Black ('Bantu') nation was based on the proximity of African languages and cultures in South Africa (which he showed at length) and on the on-going process of cultural, linguistic and economic consolidation of African societies which he thoroughly researched.

Potekhin showed that industrialisation and the resulting migration and mixing of representatives of different ethnic groups at their work places, first of all in the mines and in the cities, greatly facilitated the process of cultural consolidation. He failed, however, to notice the complexities and complications of this process and ignored divisions and counter-tendencies which made his argument too far-fetched and his conclusions irrelevant. Yet, the idea of studying, first, ethnic consolidation in Africa during the colonial era generally, and, second, of connecting this process with new socio-economic developments in African communities, was an important and interesting innovation for the time; it remains an important aspect of African studies world-wide even now. At the beginning of the 1960s Potekhin introduced this topic as one of the main directions of research in the newly founded Africa Institute of the Soviet Academy of Sciences of which (the Institute) he became the first director.

Two other Soviet studies pertaining to our topic were published at that time. Unlike Potekhin's book, Irina Yastrebova's (1952) *The Union of South Africa after the Second World War*, and Z. Katsenelenbaum's (1954) *South African Gold and Contradictions between Britain and Germany* were practically unknown abroad, although both were well researched.

For somebody who is not familiar with the day to day realities of Stalin's era it is hardly possible to imagine the circumstances under which Soviet Africanists worked at that time. African studies were never singled out as a specific field for purges and repression, yet without exception all Africanists working at that time suffered in some way or other. Some, like Snegirev and Gerngross, were executed in Stalin's prisons; many were arrested and imprisoned; others lost their jobs; yet others were officially reprimanded by Party authorities. People lived in a bizarre, crazy world. When Olderogge and Potekhin were editing *Peoples of Africa*, their colleague Zusmanovich was not able to contribute for he was still in prison. There was a case when a South Africanist received his tutor's review of his thesis from prison for this is where the tutor found himself a short while before the thesis had to be 'defended' (there is a procedure of a formal defence of theses in Russia). Another had his degree—which had already been bestowed on him—withdrawn because it turned out that his thesis had not reflected the 'predatory role of American imperialism'—and this despite its being preoccupied with Namibia at the beginning of the century.

Yet, the fact remains that despite the madness of the situation around them, these people went on researching, writing and publishing. In some cases their writing offered new approaches and ideas which is particularly obvious in their study.

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## Cultural Entrepreneurship and the Culturalisation of Politics Among Indians in South Africa<sup>1</sup>

Anand Singh

### Introduction

The miracle that took place in South Africa's transition from a repressive Apartheid state to a nascent democracy after the April 27 1994 general election, gave the world a pleasant surprise. As religious groups and ethnic minorities competed for attention among the voting masses, a national euphoria around the concept of a 'rainbow nation' acquired precedence over the smaller voices that tried to stake distinctive group-based claims in South Africa's hard won political emancipation. It was clear that the population at large opted at the election polls to place its trust in a new era of nation building within the context of a secular state—in which the concerns of ethnic and religious minorities are underpinned by a national consciousness that is free from ideologies advocating federalism or ethnic states. In apartheid South Africa, ethnicity served as one of its pillars. It kept linguistic and racially defined populations separate from one another. This policy still strongly resonates among certain groupings in the post-apartheid era. For instance, the call for a federal state by the Inkatha Freedom Party in Kwa-Zulu Natal is supported by Zulu nationalism; similarly, the call for a White Afrikaner 'homeland' by various Afrikaner-based political parties is still rooted in ethnically-based Calvinist thinking. In many ways, ethnicity is still being articulated in South Africa in forms of religious and/or racial ethnicity. In much the same way that ethnicity still plays a role in India (Mukherji 1994:23), it is still prevalent among both Zulu and Afrikaner nationalist orientations (see also Venogopaul 1993; Hobsbawn 1990). This may not be at odds with the fragmentation that so many nation-

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states are undergoing since the break-up of the U.S.S.R. and Eastern Europe, but it is at odds with the national consciousness that is emerging in South Africa.

In recent years ethnicity and nationalism merged in distinctive ways in different parts of the world, countervailing the notion of nationalism as it emerged from the incipience of the nineteenth century industrial revolution (Cohen 1974; Gellner 1983; 1987; Griesman 1975). Noting that nationalism is a modern phenomenon aimed at standardising values, allegiances, symbols, beliefs and traditions, Gellner (1987) states that, in the process of nation building, people often forget and underplay the significance of each of these aspects. Seeing this as a form of 'internal amnesia', he reminds us that while the nation building process in Turkey, for instance, followed the trend of the standardisation of values, the Turk, Slav, Greek, Armenian, Arab, Syrian, and Kurd are as distinct today as they had been since the first day of conquest. Gellner (1987:6-10) ascribes this fact to the Ottoman empire's centrally regulated system which fostered a certain independence of national and religious communities. This prevented ethnic melting pot trends. Even more concerted efforts to unite disparate groups—e.g. in the attempted merging of Hispanic and Black societies in the U.S.A. of the 1960s—these efforts were hardly successful (Eriksen 1993:8). The existence of separate groupings in the U.S.A. remain as distinctive as the variations in Turkey or in any other multi-cultural society.

Recognising the force and universal reality of ethnicity, Howe (1993)—in an editorial for a collection of papers on ethnicity—views the issue of democracy and nation building in South Africa as a myth of the democratic panacea. He attacks the issues of non-racialism and democracy as being falsely enshrined in 'the magical cloak of common values, shared beliefs, and national symbols—thrown over our racially fragmented society' (Howe 1993:5). He rightly asserts that what South Africa needs instead, is to build

a new civil society which reconciles interests and identities at the local and regional level with a new South Africanism at the national level (Howe 1993:5).

Intrinsic to this process of reconciling interests and identities are ethnicity and religious fundamentalism. These may function either productively or counter-productively in attempts to build a new-national consciousness. 'Ethnicity' as used by Howe, is here more succinctly explained by Mukherji's (1994:22) threefold outline of the concept, viz. (1) common descent (real or supposed); (2) socially relevant cultural or psychological characteristics; and (3) attitudes and behaviours within a social category (Mukherji 1994:22). However, ethnicity as a political force is not always binding in a consistent manner. For instance, while Africans in South Africa see themselves, as opposed to Whites, as being of common descent, a large fraction in KwaZulu-

Natal wish to see themselves as distinct from other Africans. Many Afrikaners too see themselves as separate from others of European descent. Similarly, religious fundamentalism may manifest in contradictory ways. The rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East in the 1970s, of Hindu and Sikh fundamentalism in India in the 1980s, and the more recent forms of religious sectarianism in the Baltic and East European states is indicative of the challenges that countries face if they attempt to build national consciousness at the expense of group identities. In this context, the sensibility of Peter Vale's warning is apt: 'We ignore ethnicity at our peril—if our society fails to engage it, it may rise to engulf us' (Howe 1993:4).

The sparks of the flames that may rise to consume South Africans in anarchy and ethnic violence are already way past the horizon, with White and Black right-wing groups threatening to hold the country under siege if their demands are not met. For instance, Maré's (1992) account of Zulu nationalism is a reflection of how the militaristic past and numerical strength of an ethnic group is used in the politicisation of its culture to forcefully articulate their position.

But not always can ethnic formations engage in such a process of the politicisation of culture. In this paper I aim to develop three arguments. Firstly, I define the concept of the 'culturalisation of politics' and illustrate its usefulness as a tool of analysis in studies of ethnicity. Secondly, I attempt to show how a section of South Africa's population, viz. those of Indian origin, are asserting their position as a 'minority group' through the culturalisation of their politics. Made-up of multi-linguistic, multi-religious, and multi-regional groups, Indian South Africans have by and large chosen the path of 'internal amnesia' to assert their exclusivity and minority status. And thirdly, I illustrate how, in several ways, their low-key struggle is cogently captured by a self-styled politician whose unique approach to the representation of Indian interests is characterised by the ways and means of a 'cultural entrepreneur'. I argue here that the representations of symbolic forms by a cultural entrepreneur must be located within the political context in which it occurs. What follows below will demonstrate that the cultural entrepreneur in the context of this paper, is not to be seen to stand outside the South African political process. Rather, he or she must be viewed as inseparably linked to it. This said, however, requires closer specification.

There is a fundamental difference between the culturalisation of politics and the politicisation of culture within the South African Indian context. The former, as it pertains to South Africa, is a political option that embraces methods of non-violence but simultaneously highlights present discriminatory practices and cultural alienation from the past (for the people of Indian origin). The purpose of this approach is to gain recognition for what was previously not recognised and to effect social and political change without compromising the identity that Indians have acquired for themselves in the South African scenario. Conversely, the politicisation of culture is an act, often

by violent means, of creating the basis for a distinctive group identity that is intended to develop a political consciousness that will steer its members towards a path of separate existence and political autonomy. Such an approach is articulated by members of the Afrikaner Weerstand Beweging and Conservative Party among white Afrikaners, and the Inkatha Freedom Party among Zulus.

### Contextualising the 'Culturalisation' Process

The issue of ethnicity becomes ever more relevant to the political challenges facing South Africa today on especially two levels. The first is the global dimension that the reassertion of ethnicity has taken, especially in redrawing geographical boundaries and redefining rights and interests; the second is the dynamics that ethnicity has unleashed within the boundaries of South Africa. Within the contexts of frameworks for analyses, theoretical paradigms and empirical realities, ethnicity as a tool of social analysis has engendered an ambiguity that either helps to understand and compare the phenomenon externally and internally, or presents scenarios that are unhelpful to the constraints faced by South African policy makers and academics. Intrinsic to both these factors are the broad generalities that dominate the literature, compounded by the glaring absence of greater detail on how ethnicity unfolds to confront the political, economic, social, religious and related dynamics of everyday life.

Literature on the *global dimensions of ethnicity* has covered three broad issues: attempts to (1) trace the history of the concept and link its current usage to contemporary problems; (2) illustrate how cultural and political processes converge and diverge on significant questions of colonialism and nationalism respectively; and (3) how, nationalist ethnic consciousnesses challenge secular ideologies rooted in nineteenth century rationalism and either call for its radical revision or its total refutation.

Maré (1992:3) traces back the use of the word 'ethnicity' to 1941 whereas Eriksen (1993:3) claims that its first usage is attributed to the American sociologist David Riesman in 1953. Both agree, however, that the word is derived from a much more ancient source, viz. the Greek word 'ethnos' which meant pagan or heathen.

Eriksen (1993:4) informs us that since the 1960s the word 'ethnic group' and 'ethnicity' was widely used in Anglophone Social Anthropology. Politically, it was first used by the British where they were dominant, especially against Jews, Irish, Italians and other victims of subordination. However, the discrimination against such groups did not lead to a denial of either their origins or their social and cultural characteristics. If anything, it helped to entrench the notion of ethnic exclusivity, despite the impositions of a hegemonic force that aimed to standardise so many features in modern day living. Eriksen (1993:9) is correct in arguing that ethnicity is frequently a reaction to processes of modernisation, although they may not necessarily constitute

an aversion for them. Referring to Jonathan Friedman, he emphasises that ethnic and cultural fragmentation and modernist homogenisation are not two arguments or two opposing views of what is happening in the world today, but two constitutive trends of global reality. To Eriksen there are four dominant though not exhaustive empirical foci of ethnic studies viz. (1) urban ethnic minorities; (2) indigenous people, particularly aboriginal inhabitants of a territory; (3) proto-nations i.e. so called ethno-nationalist movements; and (4) ethnic groups in plural societies where 'plural society' refers to colonially-created states with socially diverse populations and where secession is usually not an option and ethnicity tends to be articulated as group competition.

When matched against the regionally based manifestations of ethnic struggles, Eriksen's fourfold categorisation of the subject is too broad to capture situational particularities. Mukherji's (1994) study on the crisis that nationalism and nation building has engendered in India unveils four types of ethnicity, viz. (1) linguistic; (2) religious; (3) caste; and (4) tribal. He describes how each type of ethnicity has produced its own peculiar dimensions reflecting the complexity of historical factors, social diversity, political tensions and local, regional and national articulation of requirements and goals. Unlike Eriksen, who wrote more about what the concept ethnicity covers and consequently avoided its definition, Mukherji (1994:22) states the problematic of doing so but proposes that

the logic of identification of an ethnic group should lie in the internalisations of cultural attributes and/or values by its members, since birth or through long socialisation.

In South Africa, the latter definition fits those groups which have laid claim to 'authentic ethnic identities', irrespective of the challenges that belie their positions. To limit Benedict Anderson's thesis concerning 'imagined communities' to only one national imagined community, in the face of such protagonists, therefore, is tantamount to a distortion of right-wing Afrikaner and Zulu claims of ethnic exclusivism. For them, such claims provision the right to self-determination. Maré (1992) gives a lucid illustration of how history, imagery and symbolism are used to articulate, assert and bargain an ethnic exclusivism in the context of corporate rights.

Almost inevitably, the quest for ethnic identity is inseparably linked to the issue of nationalism, political manipulation and a competition for power. However, there are various levels at which claims for ethnic recognition may be pitched. The nature and velocity of the claims may be determined in various ways. In his examination of the relationship of ethnicity to the democratisation of society Maré (1992) explains the need for understanding the differences between 'ethnic group' and 'ethnic category'. The former is aware of and accepts belonging together and being categorised as similar, whilst the latter is a labelling of a number of people or things according to

similar characteristics, created by an outside observer (Maré 1993:7). Both of these distinctions could serve as an indication of the limits to which requirements may be made accessible or demands may be articulated. Paul Brass (1985) suggests that ethnicity can be made to serve an 'interest group' or 'corporate rights'. In an interest group, demands are confined to mainly civil issues such as seeing to their economic well-being, especially in economic and educational opportunities, and adequate provision of health facilities and housing. In corporate demands there is a transcendence of such expectations—which may include a major say in the political system as a whole, or control over a piece of territory within the country, or a demand for a country of their own with full sovereignty (see Brass in Mukherji 1994:23).

In each of these situations, there is a further dynamic that escapes the tendency to speak generally and in broad terms about ethnicity, viz. the role of 'cultural brokers' or 'ethnic entrepreneurs' (Maré 1992:2). This limitation is almost synonymous to the 'synchronic syndrome' of freezing the time-slot. Such an approach leaves us with two problems. Firstly, ethnic demands and expectations are presented within a framework that ignores the ongoing responses and adaptations that could lead to radical transformations, and which in turn could have implications on people who are called upon to make sense of the world in particular ways. Secondly, the articulation of ethnic concerns as representations of socially undifferentiated calls for recognition, produces a homogeneity that ignores how individual styles of leadership become an expression of collective concerns. Keesing's (1985) words that 'political outcomes are often the result of individual choices and strategies' significantly express this reality. It is in this spirit that Maré (1992:52), in examining the ethnic mobilisation of the 'Zulu nation', claims that 'we have to see who the prime mobilisers are, and what interests the mobilisation serves'. From this point on he proceeds to demonstrate how the Zulu cultural organisation Inkatha, presently operating as a non-racial political party (Inkatha Freedom Party), has highlighted the centrality of a single symbol i.e. the person of Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi. Either as a cultural organisation or as a non-racial political party, Inkatha is viewed widely as a manifestation of Chief Buthelezi's vision of the place and role of 'the Zulus' in the wider South Africa. It is a vision that has illustrated the politicisation of ethnicity largely through Buthelezi's efforts as a cultural entrepreneur, from the platform of a distinctive organisation.

In somewhat similar situations of ethnic mobilisation amongst South Africans of Indian origin, there has been several central symbolic figures who vociferously represented their interests. However, the difference in the ethnic mobilisation between the Indians and the Zulus is that the Indians are constrained to articulate their needs as an 'interest group' whilst the Zulus are making demands in the context of 'corporate rights'. The former arises from the fact of the minority status of Indians and the latter from the Zulu's numerical strength in the country and in the Kwa-Zulu Natal region.

It is their minority status and operation as an interest group that precludes the politicisation of ethnic mobilisation amongst Indians. Instead, it enforces upon them the position of the culturalisation of ethnicity. This demonstrates a deviation from the universally politicised discourse of ethnicity. This position brings two things to the fore. Firstly, it finds itself in association with Jain's plea for a decentralised paradigm aimed at capturing India's organisation as 'unity in diversity'—a unitary state in which a diversity of languages and religions are acknowledged. Following Foucault (1986) and Bondurant (1988) Jain (1994:4) asserts that 'one may strive for the culturalisation of the ideal of national integration in India'. Bondurant's explication of Mahatma Gandhi's experiments with truth and the practice of *satyagraha*, i.e. civil disobedience through non-violence, sets the scene for a difference in approach towards national integration in South Africa, dating from 1890s. *Satyagraha* was a realisation of the force of non-cooperation with the authorities aimed at bringing about social and political change under colonial rule. In many ways, it was a result of a cultural import that was tested, adapted and flourished organically to serve the interests of the Indian minority. As such, it fits the notion of a decentralised paradigm in the context of an interest in national integration in India advocated by Jain. It is an ideal that is not inconsistent with what South Africa is presently striving for.

Secondly, the concept 'culturalisation' aims at revealing its distinctiveness from its derivatives, 'culture' and 'cultural'. The latter two concepts are an expression of norms, values and practices that occur within a synchronised time frame. They are therefore too stagnant to capture the ongoing processes of ever-changing alliance-based politics, political adaptations, and the constant reviewing of strategies and tactics by groups aiming to remain amongst the counted in ethnic mobilisation. If taken as a useful tool of analysis in studies of ethnicity, 'culturalisation' brings out the dynamism of the dialectical interactions that continuously shape and determine images and ideologies of individuals and organisations. The sections that follow attempt to capture these notions amongst those of Indian origin living in South Africa. It begins by briefly reviewing the already well documented history of Indian politics in South Africa, and is followed by a deeper immersion in the politics of a contemporary cultural entrepreneur.

### A Brief History of South African Indian Politics

South African Indian politics is rooted in the humble beginnings of indentured labour and must be understood against the background of a tripartite periodisation of political activity: (1) the period between 1860 and 1894 when indentured labourers and passenger Indians had no popularly elected and authentic leadership; (2) between 1894 and 1960, when South Africa was still a British colony, Indians had to tirelessly fight for

their rights and often used their statuses as British subjects for such negotiation; (3) after 1960, when South Africa became a Republic in 1960 Indians were granted permanent citizenship about a year later but were left without any substantive political entitlements (see also Meer 1969; 1991).

The initial conditions of indentureship were harsh and insensitive to the social, economic and religious needs of Indians. Pahad (1972:12) reported that the colonists' urgent plea for indentured labour from India was not reflected in the treatment accorded to the first arrivals in 1860. They faced prolonged difficulties. A lack of food, shelter, or an interpreter left them confused and in a desolate state. Despite such constraints, the Natal Mercury had reported early in 1865 that the employment of Indian labour had increased the export of sugar by more than 300 per cent from 26 000 in 1863 to 100 000 ton in 1864. Their agricultural productivity and general contribution to the development of Natal province was sustained throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1901 the Protector of Indian Immigrants wrote that the employers realised the indispensability of Indian labour. He pointed out that if Indian labour was withdrawn, 'the country would at once be paralysed'. In 1903 Sir Leigh Hullet felt that 'Durban was absolutely built by the Indian people' (Pahad 1972:13). Such statistics and words of praise reinforced the Indian will to remain in South Africa and encouraged them to consolidate their residential statuses by demanding permanent citizenship. Prior to the arrival of Mahatma Gandhi, political representation for Indians rested more with the Protectorate from the colonial offices than with popularly acceptable or authentically elected leaders. Gandhi's arrival in 1893 and his formation of the Natal Indian Congress (NIC) in 1894 injected a ray of hope on the political possibilities for the Indian minority.

Since then and up to 1946 Essop Pahad had identified thirteen pressure groups and political institutions that represented the interests of Indians. In 1903 Gandhi was instrumental in founding the Transvaal Indian British Association whose structure and aims were similar to the NIC. In order to introduce a mechanism to conscientise Indians, keep them informed and sustain their struggle, he started a weekly newspaper, the Indian Opinion, on 4 June 1903. Initially it was printed in four languages viz. English, Gujarati, Hindi and Tamil, but the latter two discontinued not too long after through lack of support. By the time of the final closure of the paper in 1960, Gandhi's aim of galvanising the multi-linguistic and multi-religious groups to converge around their common problems, was to a large extent achieved.

The character of Indian leadership, the issues for which they fought and the perceptions they created amongst academics interested in their politics vary widely and are sometimes riddled with ambiguity. From four noted writers who covered Indian politics in the twentieth century up to 1960, Ngubane (see Kuper 1957), Kuper (1957; 1965), Pahad (1972) and Frederickse (1990), the former two viewed their con-

tributions as minimal and thinly spread. The latter two viewed their contributions as substantial.

Ngubane claimed that support for co-operation with Africans came mainly from the communists. He denied that Indian interests in South African politics was a popular attempt that aimed at levelling the political playing field. The view was taken further by Leo Kuper who believed that 'in the period 1937 and 1947 Indians remained politically inert' (see Pahad 1972:10). Whilst Pahad refuted this assertion by referring to the good attendance of political meetings and the formation of the Colonial Born and Settler Indian Association as proof of the popularity of political participation, his position is blurred by his inconsistency. In his introduction he claims that 'the mass protest meetings organised by the Indian political organisations were generally speaking well attended' (Pahad 1972:9). In his conclusion, after agreeing with Kuper that the SAIC and its allies were 'caucus' type bodies he declares that:

The Congresses were not mass organisations with a viable branch system, so that decisions were largely arrived at by the small leadership which formed the executive (Pahad 1972:220).

Pahad's thesis begins proper in 1924 when the Union Government introduced the Class Areas Bill, which was the first attempt by the all White government to encourage Indians to live separately. This measure gave the regionally based South African Indian Congress (SAIC), which was formed in 1919, a springboard to launch itself as a national organisation. Amidst the objective of trying to establish the measure of Indian interest in politics, Pahad tried to do three things viz. (1) to discuss the virtual cooptation of the SAIC, and demonstrate how their moderate leadership pursued accommodationist policies with the whites, especially for the interests of the Indian business class; (2) to illustrate how the internal dynamics and contradictions of the moderates in the SAIC led to them being unseated by the radicals; and (3) to show how the radicals' adoption of universalist values of adult suffrage helped to forge closer alliances with African political movements such as the African National Congress.

Julie Frederickse (1990), in attempting to describe 'the unbreakable thread in non-racialism' in South Africa also brings out the inner tensions in the Indian political movements between the accommodationists and the radicals. She attempts to show how various pacts between the NIC and ANC, such as in the formation of the Passive Resistance Council on 13 June 1946, not only drew the disenfranchised 'racial' groups closer together, but also how the organisational skills of the Indian politicians helped to facilitate those of their African counterparts. These measures, however, should be cautiously taken as an axiomatic sign of non-racialism, especially against the publicly declared position of the NIC that collaboration with the African masses was key to

their own emancipation. This more appropriately conjures up images of expediency rather than genuine commitment. Numerous incidents allude to the sectarianism practised by the NIC leadership in the course of the twentieth century. A glaring example in the earlier years comes to the fore in lieu of this claim. In 1936 when an Agent General of India, Sir Syed Raza Ali married Miss Sammy, a Hindu, prominent Hindu leaders of the NIC resigned their official positions, apparently in protest against the marriage (Pahad 1972:141). And more recently Singh and Vawda's (1988) account of the ambiguity in the NIC's political discourse is a demonstration of the persistence of a somewhat hidden ethnic exclusivism. They illustrate how their discourse is more appropriately an articulation of Indian middle class political aspirations, which through closer analysis, contradicts their image either as a custodian of Indian aspirations or as a champion force of non-racialism in a post-apartheid South Africa.

It would be a gross distortion however to tar all of the Indian political leadership with the same brush. Aside from Gandhi, whose politics in his early years in South Africa are not without its controversies, many activists in the SAIC, NIC, TIC and other institutions have earned their reputations as legends and political mavericks in their own time. The likes of Yusuf Dadoo, Monty Naicker, A.I. Kajeer, V.S.C. Pather, amongst others, are well documented and will not be rehearsed here. But suffice to say that they stand out as committed politicians whose dedication to the realisation of political emancipation for all South Africans would stand the tests of rigid scrutiny.

Through sectarianism and universalism, Indians in the struggle against White hegemony continued undeterred until the 1950 Suppression of Communism Act first outlawed the Communist Party of South Africa and subsequently, the SAIC, NIC, ANC and PAC. However diverse the personal political ideologies of Indian political leaders were, their collective contributions were had at least a threefold impact on South Africa's political landscape. Firstly, their organisational skills and articulate command of political issues substantially contributed to the joint mobilisation and resistance campaigns between Indian and African<sup>2</sup>. Secondly, they broadened the terrain of political resistance against White hegemony and kept their oppressors constantly alert to the problems of containment and control in a country of such social diversity. And thirdly, the experiences they acquired through their trials and tribulations served as incentives for future generation politicians who still have to deal with

<sup>2</sup> Within the range of political parties in South Africa, politicians from within the Indian population have found a place in each one of them. Their affiliation to each of the parties is reflective of the ideologies they choose to follow. Those who feel the need to assert minority rights more than non-racialism have affiliated to the National Party, Inkatha Freedom Party or Minority Front. While those more inclined towards the universalist ideal of non-racialism have found a place in the African National Congress, and to a much lesser extent, the Pan African Congress.

African and White opportunism, coerciveness, and subtle forms of exclusion from open economic competition. Whilst much can be written about these aspects, the sections that follow, however, are restricted to the coopted sector in South African politics since the 1960s, leading to emphasis on one particular figure.

### From Tactical Cooption to Total Immersion

Since acquiring permanent citizenship in 1961, the state's dilemma of political representation for Indians was a problematic one. As an easily exploitable and vulnerable minority that was still disenfranchised, the state took it upon itself to decide what forms of political representation Indians may have. Through a process of deliberations that excluded Indians, which went on for several years and which left them leaderless for that period, the state eventually opted for a system of nominated representation. It set up the South African Indian Council in 1972 (hereafter also referred to as the SAIC), a body which produced an abbreviation of 'SAIC', which for a while confused many naive Indians as being the old South African Indian Congress. To the disenfranchised majority, the conditions for open and popular discourse was entrapped in a scenario of political paralysis. At the time the Afrikaner dominated National Party and Whites in general were like the 'impenetrable and invincible chosen few' in Africa. Yet from within the ranks of the nominated SAIC there was one, Amichand Rajbansi, who dared to challenge the exploitative social hierarchy and mutual exclusiveness that white hegemony engendered. Nicknamed 'the Raj' and 'the Bengal Tiger' he has become an unavoidable face in the landscape of South African politics.

The role of Rajbansi in the SAIC was controversial as well as challenging. His public commitment to address the inequities in South Africa, to help resolve the racial impasse, and to expose misuse of state funds as well as exploitation by big business, immediately earned him the reputation of a 'peoples politician'. By December 1974 the state was tired of Rajbansi's challenging rhetoric and responded by an alleged attempt to pseudo-democratise Indian politics by introducing another party. Rajbansi in turn offered to establish the Congress Party and vowed to use the SAIC as a platform for a non-racial society. In defiance of establishment thinking he stated:

The Congress Party would work with the Labour Party and the Natal Indian Congress to achieve its ultimate goal .... Our policies will be the same, but the tactics will differ in certain instances (*Daily News* 30 December 1974).

This position was a source of tremendous annoyance to the White authorities and he was to pay a severe price in several arenas in his private and public life for it. In 1975 he ran a fishmonger's shop in Silverglen (an Indian group area in Durban at the

time), and was deputy chairperson of the Southern Durban Local Affairs Committee. Both of these occupations suffered. By December of that year his application for a butcher's licence was refused by the Livestock and Meat Industry Control Board (*Natal Mercury* 3 December 1975). By March 1976 Rajbansi's financial interests were being probed by a one person Commission of Enquiry, Mr. W.H. Booyesen, who had to act on allegations of him not declaring all of his financial interests as a public servant. Mr. Booyesen recommended suspension of Rajbansi for the rest of the Local Affairs Committee's (LAC)<sup>3</sup> term of office (*Natal Mercury* 17 March 1976). The efforts to frustrate him out of politics continued. In April 1976 the *Post* reported that there were secret moves to oust Rajbansi from the Natal regional executive of the SAIC. After a heated debate with two SAIC executives, whom the newspaper described as 'ultra conservatives', viz. J.B. Patel and A.M. Moola, he stormed out and told the former who was committee chairman: 'Carry on this way and Pretoria will give you your nomination for 1977'.

Rajbansi refused to heed calls for an apology and vowed to continue fighting their conservatism. His attitude continued to be a source of contention for many, which led to a cabinet council colleague Ismail Kathrada once again challenging Rajbansi to resign from the executive committee. Kathrada accused Rajbansi of wanting to wreck the SAIC and launch a new party.

Rajbansi appeared to challenge colleagues in the Cabinet Council and the broader membership of the SAIC. He seems to have tested their popularity, through public rebuffs about their legitimacy, before entering into negotiations for a new constitution with the White government. In one week he was quoted twice on this sentiment. On 10 August 1976 the *Natal Mercury* reported him saying:

I believe that the SAIC is struggling to find public acceptability, and before we involve ourselves in any evolutionary step, we will have to get a mandate from our people.

Eight days later on 18 August 1976 the *Post* reported him saying:

In view of the general conditions in our country at this particular period, it would be unwise to serve on the Cabinet Council, on which every race group in South Africa is not represented.

<sup>3</sup> Under apartheid (legalised and institutionalised system of social discrimination), elections for local political offices took place for Whites only. For Coloureds and Indians, LACs were set up and comprised of co-opted nominated members to represent their interests. But they were hardly capable of influencing policy and implementation. For Africans, Community Councils were likewise established. The first non-racial local government elections only took place in November 1995.

Rajbansi's firmness against the state's apparatuses and their functioning was glaringly critical. He continued to voice concerns about their handling and general abrogation of their responsibilities of Indian education, housing, health and other social services. He accused the state in mid 1977 of spending twenty one million rands on unnecessary shopping complexes for displaced Indian businessmen. This happened while there were twenty five thousand applications for accommodation, of which eighty percent were of sub-economic status in Durban alone.

Whilst Rajbansi's vociferous attacked and undermined the very institutions from which he worked, and continued to annoy the people with whom he worked, his popularity with the constituency appeared to consolidate itself. This was irksome to both his Indian colleagues within the SAIC and LAC and his White political masters. Their concern was expressed by caucusing against him and calling for his suspension for the second time in two years from the Southern Durban Local Affairs Committee (SDLAC), (*Daily News* 15 September 1977). The constituency's and Rajbansi's responses to this were swift and interesting. More than eight hundred people met at the Montford Mosque Hall to protest his suspension, and five thousand people in his constituency of Arena Park, signed a petition asking the Administrator General to reconsider the decision. The appeal met a negative response. But the disqualification gave rise to an historic event in that Rajbansi's wife was nominated unopposed and became the first South African woman on an LAC.

Rajbansi was undeterred by the suspension and returned to politics, but somewhat watered down. In an attempt to broaden the 'non-white' political base, he continued with his old political alliances outside the Indian fold, especially with Chief Mangosutho Buthelezi. As public relations officer for the now defunct exclusively Indian Reform Party, he successfully drew a large crowd of three thousand five hundred people to host a public meeting in Chatsworth with Chief Mangosutho Buthelezi and two hundred of his followers. At the meeting, Rajbansi addressed the issue of Indian disunity and suggested that the various factions get together under Buthelezi's chairmanship (*Post* 26 March 1980). This event also appeared to have marked a shift in Rajbansi's political agenda. At around this period, Indian and Coloured schools were on boycott and they targeted the state-created institutions such as the SAIC, LACs and their allies, and the individuals who made them functional. Maximum public mileage was sought out of the visit and the meal the then Minister of Indian Affairs, Marais Steyn, had at Rajbansi's house (*Sunday Tribune* 11 May 1980), whilst the restlessness at Indian educational institutions continued. Numerous working dinners with White officials followed this event. It reached quite a height in May 1983 when the then Minister of Internal Affairs, F.W. de Klerk (presently Deputy State President), with two hundred other guests from designated racial categories, was invited by Rajbansi for a meal. He defended the event as an exercise in inter-racial socialising. These

events are symptomatic of a persevering survivor in politics. It may be construed as ironical that the very one who ought to have been removed from politics had their hearts and minds won over through their this meal. The culinary skills of his wife and the persuasiveness of spicy Indian cooking to the western tongue had helped to cement a firm bond between himself and powerful political figures in the National Party. The dividends that were paid through this bond interestingly brought Rajbansi to declare some eleven years later that curry is an important negotiating instrument (*Sunday Tribune* 2 December 1994).

But by this time (i.e. mid 1983), Rajbansi's persistent challenging of the legitimacy of the SAIC and LAC systems was astutely absent from his public discourse. Then then State President, P.W. Botha, was anxious to work out a new constitution with nominated persons from the Indian and Coloured populations. Rajbansi was keen to be on this team and prior to a visit to West Germany for a conference on 'South Africa 1983: Latest Developments, Problems and Perspectives', he affirmed his determination to participate despite the anticipated opposition. Herein lay his first sign of capitulation. He said that the SAIC might ask to scrap plans for a referendum among the Indian community if pressure was going to be brought by opposing groups to boycott participation for a new constitution—which excluded Africans. He threatened to resort to asking the government to use the findings of a 'scientific survey' to justify the SAIC's collaboration with P.W. Botha's government. The unpopularity of this decision was clearly noticeable in the broad pathetic community response to the SAIC. In effect, it constituted a reverse of the popular support he once enjoyed.

Evidently, the Natal Indian Congress was virtually silent about Rajbansi's participation in state structures whilst he tried to fight the system from within. But his about-turn against a referendum and his obstinacy about participating in the proposed tricameral parliamentary system ruffled many feathers within the NIC. His trip to Germany was used to vilify him. The 'first' public signs of the NIC's critique of Rajbansi surfaced when they reviled him for travelling to Germany in a nominated rather than elected capacity. They called on the ythen Paris Mayor, Jacques Chirac, to snub him because he conspired with the state to fine people for not registering as voters. The NIC claimed that ninety two percent of the Indian community boycotted the LAC elections in 1982 (*Daily News* 2 October 1983). Rajbansi was further attacked for praising P.W. Botha and for behaving as an apologist for apartheid overseas (*Daily News* 16 October 1983). He weathered the storm of criticisms and went on to participate in the negotiations for the new dispensation, out of which emerged the 1984 elections for the tricameral parliament. Like the 1982 LAC elections the response for this nominated system of politics was clearly far below an acceptable level of participation. In Rajbansi's own constituency there was a fourteen percent voters turn-out. But, on his leaving for parliament in Cape Town, a staged group of three hundred people pitched up to wish him farewell.

In excluding South Africa's majority and creating a system through which to control and contain two minorities—Coloureds and Indians—the tricameral system was a unique constitutional experiment by the dominant Whites. It was composed of the House of Assembly (HOA) for Whites, the House of Representatives (HOR) for Coloureds (people of mixed descent), and the House of Delegates (HOD) for Indians. The entire structure was made-up of a system of proportional representation, with whites enjoying the balance of forces in their favour. Each House had the responsibility of controlling their 'Own Affairs' such as housing, health and welfare, and education. Collectively, the houses had to constitute a task of ensuring that Indians and Coloureds became cohesive administrative units. The House of Delegates was dominated by two parties viz. Solidarity, led by businessman J.N. Reddy, and the National Peoples Party (NPP), led by Rajbansi. Both parties defended their position in parliament as a preferable strategy to boycott-politics. The overall argument was that their constituencies could benefit in the short-term in having immediate community needs met such as housing and welfare.

At the time of these elections Rajbansi was on a political high and rode on that ticket to become the leader of the NPP, which became the controlling party in the HOD. However, as Moodley (1989) noted, racial self-administration had revived long forgotten sectarian cleavages within the Indian group. Moodley's paper on 'Cultural Politics' captures some of the dynamics of the level of politics that dominated the House of Delegates during its term. He demonstrated how Indians who were once considered unworthy of citizenship gave the proclaimed multiculturalism of the apartheid strategists visibility and justification. They were a group without a homeland who fitted into the grand apartheid scheme of a 'nation of minorities'. The extension of state patronage drove wedges into the social heterogeneity of Indians. Whilst Indians share a common geographical origin, political exclusion, and minority status, the class discrepancies and wide social differentiation makes it difficult to arrive at a concept of community that could fall prey to the often misguided notion of homogeneity. This differentiation was especially evident in the ethnic make-up of the two dominant parties. J.N. Reddy's party Solidarity was made-up of individuals from the majority Tamil-speaking community, while Rajbansi's NPP were mainly from the minority Hindi speaking community. The NPP's dominance in the HOD was perceived as disproportionate representation of the two major linguistic groups. Once in parliament, Rajbansi tried to make good his promise of rectifying the misdeeds of apartheid, especially in the areas of education and allocation of land<sup>4</sup>. But an opposition member in the HOD

<sup>4</sup> Education in the years of apartheid meant that Whites got the biggest share of the education budget; and the availability of land for housing, commerce and industry was restricted by an artificially created shortage through the Group Areas Act of 1950. The Act legislatively separated residential and commercial areas by race.

claimed that new forms of nepotism according to linguistic and caste criteria were being used. For instance, he claimed that one hundred and eighty seven people with the surname 'Maharaj' were promoted in the teaching fraternity in one year (Moodley 1989:98).

The fiasco over nepotistic practices filtered into every possible crevice in HOD self administration. The media abounded with claims of corruption and patronage in the HOD. By 1988 the situation had reached a climax with politics stooping down to the level of continuous character assassinations between the leaders of the two parties. The fight was especially between Rajbansi and Pat Poovalingum from Solidarity, whose unbridled attacks of each other reduced their images to less than professional politicians.

A one person Commission of Enquiry, led by Judge Neville James was appointed by the then State President, P.W. Botha to investigate this situation. After the investigation, Judge James described Rajbansi as

an arrogant, unscrupulous ... ruthless mean minded bully who should not be employed in any post which calls for integrity (*Natal Witness* 23 February 1993).

President Botha was left with no choice but to dismiss Rajbansi from three positions viz. from the cabinet, as Chairman of the Minister's Council, and as Minister of Housing in the HOD, with effect from 1 January 1989. People from within and outside widely applauded the decision. But Rajbansi defiantly vowed to continue with his political career. He affirmed: 'My career continues .... I cannot be put down. I have had setbacks in my life before' (*Post* 21 December 1988).

The press was particularly incisive about Rajbansi's future role in politics. Under the caption 'No tears for the Raj', a *Post* reporter said:

Mr. Rajbansi, as must be expected will undoubtedly defend himself against the judge's findings, such is the pugnacious character of the man. The judge's further recommendation that his report be referred to the Attorney General to consider whether criminal prosecutions should be instituted, should be the logical next step .... The recommendations must surely mean Mr. Rajbansi's final exit from a system he so stoutly defended.

The *Daily News* (2 February 1989) reported:

The report will do much to clear the air. It will help to clean up the political and administrative mess in the House of Delegates. It justifies the initial action of the State President, Mr. P.W. Botha, in removing Mr. Rajbansi from the cabinet. And it is to be hoped the government accepts the recommendation that he be excluded from ever holding public office.

In a revolt that occurred within the NPP, Rajbansi was forced to step down. But there was none who could step into the position of this maverick.

Rajbansi's refusal to resign from political life was daunting to his opposition. They found themselves helpless in trying to achieve their desire of permanently removing him from office. It was reported later that month that

Mr. Rajbansi's politically devious mind is probably amused at the decision by the House of Delegates to suspend him for the present sitting of parliament. Members decided they could not strip him of his membership of the House because he would simply stand for re-election in his Arena Park constituency and probably win (*Sunday Tribune Herald Viewpoint* 26 February 1989).

Within two months Rajbansi was reinstated as leader of the NPP. This permitted him re-entry into Parliament. Disappointed that his recommendations were not carried through, Judge James said:

He is an inordinately ambitious man obsessed with the desire to achieve personal power and is ruthless in its pursuit (*Sunday Tribune Herald* 23 April 1989).

The balance of power in the HOD eventually tilted in favour of Solidarity, and P.W. Botha, after having suffered a stroke, was replaced by F.W. de Klerk through a clandestine *coup d'état*. Once again the press abounded with stories of Indian members of parliament continuously crossing the floor to join opposition parties and Rajbansi persistently trying to hold on to power in the HOD. Eventually he lost all of his members to other parties, including the Afrikaner dominated National Party, thereby making him the only member of his party. One of the latter's members, Jaco Maree, once remarked: 'Amichand Rajbansi is the leader of the loneliest party in the world', to which Rajbansi replied 'You are rubbish'—a rare challenge indeed from an Indian to an Afrikaner politician. But a more ominous statement was made by another White politician (whose political career itself was a rather chequered one), Dennis Worrall. He said: 'Mr. Rajbansi will come back into politics as a personality while Mr. Maree will sink like a stone'.

To date, Dennis Worrall's statement remains correct.

#### From Uncertainty to the Minority Front

F.W. de Klerk's presidency was a turning point in South Africa's history. In seeing to the demise of apartheid he also had to see to the dismantling of the tricameral parliamentary system. Since the unbanning of the ANC on 2 February 1990 until early 1994, Rajbansi persevered as a one-person team and as the sole representative of the

NPP in parliament. Undeterred by his status as a minority, he carried himself through various negotiating forums amidst varying responses of annoyance and admiration at his presence. Soon after the unbanning of the African National Congress, other extra-parliamentary movements, and the release of the high profile political detainees including Nelson Mandela, the Conference for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) was set up to negotiate the future of the country. It subsequently entered into a prolonged process that split it into CODESA 1 and CODESA 2. Both initiatives were unable to reach consensus on how to reshape and to redirect South Africa. However, the assassination of the ANC's chief military commander Chris Hani, turned the stalemate around when the South African Communist leader Joe Slovo called for a multi-party conference that will lead to the election of a democratic government. Here again Rajbansi was permitted to participate. But the Indian population was divided amidst calls for either his continued presence or expulsion from the multi-party conference. In one newspaper its editorial page carried a caption: 'Is this the end of the Bengal Tiger?', heading a letter from Rajbansi to the editor. It was a response to a reader who called for his withdrawal from the conference. It read

For the benefit of the writer who belongs to a small clique that has failed to deliver the Indian community to a liberation as promised, and to others, I say that the 'Bengal Tiger's' real political career has just commenced (*Post* 29 September 1993).

Rajbansi sat through this process and played his role strategically in order to redefine his position in that swiftly transforming political terrain. There was eventual agreement that the first non-racial election in South Africa take place on 27 April 1994. The press engaged in random guessing about which side of the political spectrum Rajbansi was likely to swing to, although they undoubtedly reflected upon his own uncertainty. Early in 1993 he reached out to test the ANC's public opinion on him joining them, 'but definitely not the Nats' (de Klerk's National Party). One ANC member responded by laughing while another suggested that he was free to join through the normal channels, but recalled the denigrating words of the James Commission about Rajbansi (*Natal Witness* 23 February 1993). The very next day he was reported in the *Post* as making a plea to his conventional enemies, the NIC and TIC, about strengthening the Indian political movements, despite the fact that they might be ANC inclined. He justified his call by referring to incumbent policies of an impending Black-dominated government which was likely to act in favour of Africans on affirmative action, job reservations, education, housing, and other social services. He believed that in the next five years strong minority movements will emerge in South Africa, although at that point, he did not feel it was appropriate to form a political party to represent Indian interests in the April 1994 elections (*Post* 24 February 1993).

Rajbansi continued to waver from strengthening his ties with other Indian-dominated political movements, to wanting to join the ANC, to wanting to form a united front of minority movements to participate in collective bargaining for minority rights. The latter was attempted through several initiatives, but to no resounding response. In a letter to the editor of the *Post* (29 September 1993) he stated 'I have announced the formation of a non-racial United Minority Front ...', whilst two months later in an invitation to the ANC to join him in a spirit of reconciliation in Chatsworth, he announced the formation of a National Minority Front. One hundred and fifteen attended the meeting, and he drew the loudest applause from them when he attacked the National Party for not ensuring that the interests of the Indian religion were not entrenched in the interim constitution. Rajbansi continued with several meetings in different areas in the KwaZulu-Natal region. Despite a still evidently undefined position, he continued in the fashion of an electioneering campaign.

The answer to Rajbansi's political future appeared to have come to him when he had to fall back on a letter written to him via the press by a University of Durban-Westville academic, Dr. T. Naidoo. Appealing to Rajbansi to represent the Indians in the multi-party negotiations, Dr. Naidoo pleaded:

Our political future is desperately bleak. We have no leader and still less do we have any people of any political worth capable of speaking for us with any political maturity when the talks really get going (*Post* 3 March 1993).

A positive reply to Dr. Naidoo's letter was printed in the *Post* a fortnight later when a reader stated:

It has taken time but I'm glad to note that people are beginning to see that Mr. Rajbansi is the only Indian leader who speaks and means well (*Post* 17 March 1993).

Up to November 1993 there still appeared to have been overtures to join the ANC dominated Patriotic Front, which was made up of at least one hundred organisations. As the year 1994 unfolded and election fever speeded the process towards its due date, the fate of the Minority Front was still undecided. On 23 January 1994 the *Sunday Tribune* reported that Rajbansi was in demand by the ANC and Pan African Congress (PAC). In the same week, the *Daily News* (2 February 1994) reported:

Ever the survivor Mr. Rajbansi had in recent months appeared to be moving closer to different parties at different times.

However, the overtures to lure Rajbansi towards the ANC to capture the Indian vote was put to an abrupt end when Indian ANC members threatened to resign if he was coopted.

Unable to attract other minorities to his fold or to get onto the platform of the Patriotic Front, Rajbansi had to shed the prefixes of 'United' or 'National' and settled for the 'Minority Front'. Under this banner, he proceeded to the first historical non-racial election. In his terms, it was a 'political movement', although in constitution, in goals and in rhetoric it was the realisation of one man's conceptualisation of what an Indian minority party should represent. Realising his limited potential, he put up a list of thirty candidates for the KwaZulu-Natal region, twenty two for the national candidature, and twenty five for the national-regional arena. With these, he aimed to capture at least one hundred and fifty thousand votes from the Indian population in order to acquire two seats on the national legislature and two seats on the regional one. Rajbansi positioned himself as the leader on all the lists, and perhaps found himself in no other position because they were all unknown people with no commendable background of community participation. Indians in the KwaZulu-Natal region make up twelve per cent of the voting population, of which Rajbansi was able to capture 1.3% (or 48 951) votes of the total. This won him only one seat in the KwaZulu-Natal provincial parliament.

In confirming his intention to launch the Minority Front he promised that one of the tasks from this platform

will be to take on Durban's customs officials who are allegedly discriminating against Indian women who arrive with their purchases from the east (*Natal Mercury* 20 October 1993).

Throughout his election campaign and also after the election, Rajbansi continuously singled out issues that are of an historically sensitive nature to Indians in South Africa. Whilst pledging to fight for Indian fishermen who were being victimised by White Natal Parks Board officials—who allegedly excuse White fishermen for similar offences—and pledging to bring Indian movie stars to South Africa, he sees it as his task to reassure Indians of their rights and integrity as a minority group, and of their safety under a black-dominated government. His frequent expression of dissatisfaction about the new government's policy of affirmative action is effectively used as a yardstick to demonstrate his determination to expose the insensitivity towards the historically disadvantaged situation in which Indians found themselves under White domination. Within the ranks of his party, the only woman representative based her campaign on a religious platform and crusaded for 'the separation of the races'. A housewife and mother of five from the working-class Indian township of Phoenix, Mrs. Ban Haripersadh called for an exclusion of Indians and Coloureds from the label, 'Black'. She claimed that through religion she could show how the substantive cultural differences create the conditions and need for exclusive existences of the

various 'racial groups'. In more ways than one, Ban Haripersad's campaign reflects the concerns about which Indians in South Africa are so anxious viz. fears of being overshadowed by a black majority or possible domination by other competing ethnic formations; survival of religion, languages and social institutions; and the maintenance of an identity—whether imagined or not.

### Conclusion

Throughout all the trials and tribulations that Rajbansi has undergone, they served to strengthen his perseverance as a politician and his beliefs about his role among those of Indian origin. While his position is largely one of a cultural entrepreneur, the way in which he goes about articulating the needs of Indians does indeed capture their broader political expectations and aspirations. Through participation in cooptive politics and acceptance of a secondary role in national politics during the apartheid era, Rajbansi and his colleagues have distinctly marked out a path for Indians as a community that can operate only, in Paul Brass's terms, as an 'interest group'. While his claims for democracy shifted between calls for non-racialism and recognition of 'minority rights' his image was bleached as one with a spurious commitment to honest politics. But the path that he chose was essentially a non-violent one that is limited to rhetoric rather than being extended to violent options.

More broadly, group consciousness amongst those of Indian origin in South Africa has heightened significantly through the activities of cultural entrepreneurs such as Rajbansi. The historical events in the Baltic states, Eastern Europe, India and Sri Lanka, and the aggressive and often violent demands by Zulu and Afrikaner nationalists for control and autonomy over large vestiges of territory has no doubt stimulated and strengthened the call by many Indian South Africans for their greater recognition. For instance, when Rajbansi showed pride in being called the 'Bengal Tiger' and 'the Raj', simultaneously sought to gain restitution of land for the victims of the 1950 Group Areas Act, chastised the National Party for not including Indian religions in the new Interim Constitution, and took up the struggle in Indian education on behalf of its teachers, he was making effective political statements through the medium of raising historically contentious issues. However, his more culturally oriented role in his representation of concerns for Indians is vividly captured, in for instance, his declaration that curry is an important negotiating instrument, his promise to fight for Indian women and their overweight baggage at the airports when they return from the near and far eastern countries, his stated intention to bring popular Indian movie stars to South Africa, and his determination to defend the rights of Indian fishermen. His political stature is reassuring when he highlights the plight of the Indian youth's prospects of employment and challenges the present government's policy of affirmative

action in employment, but simultaneously tries to reassure Indian South Africans of their safety under a Black-dominated government. His dubiousness, however, is noted in his visible silence when one of his party's candidates openly propagates policies of segregation.

In reifying these issues, Rajbansi's profile brings to light the dynamism of the culturalisation of politics and demonstrates how the role of the cultural entrepreneur is inseparably linked to the political process. He is simultaneously sending out at least three resounding messages. Firstly, he is conveying to Indians his understanding and appreciation of their concerns and his willingness to fight for them. Secondly, he is actually capturing and articulating the level at which Indians wish to make their demands as an 'interest group'. Through his representation, although not excluding wider calls from the community to the contrary, the state's committee responsible for drawing up the new constitution has called for issues of concern to Indians to be brought to their attention, such as language and religion. Thirdly, fundamental to all that has been discussed here, is the inescapability of the strength of ethnicity as a force in national and global politics. Together, these three factors feed into the process of the culturalisation of politics. It demonstrates the practicality of at least two writers' words of wisdom: (1) in Graham Howe's terms, for a new civil society which reconciles interests and identities at the local and regional levels with a new South Africanism at the national level; and (2) in Mukherji's terms with reference to the Indian sub-continent, for the creation of 'democratic space' in which greater recognition is given to social formations that prefer to define themselves in terms of language, religion, common origin or otherwise within the framework of national politics.

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## South Africa Passes the Posts

Kelwyn Sole

In 1990, shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the un mourned demise of orthodox Communism in Eastern Europe and the U.S.S.R., the Nationalist Party Government in South Africa announced the unbanning of the ANC and PAC, initiating a process of reform which soon outstripped their control. Painstakingly, and not without much conflict, the process of gestation of a 'new South Africa' toward a more inclusive, democratic, polity began: a framework which allows all of its citizens access to voting rights and at least the possibility of economic and social advancement.

It is against this background that one must view the applications of 'colonial discourse' and 'post-coloniality' in the local academy. Their impetus can be seen in the burgeoning intellectual influence of French post-structuralism (initially that of Althusser in the late 1970s and Foucault in the early 1980s, but from the mid-1980s increasingly through its linguistic and psychoanalytic formulations) in the white Afrikaans-, and later English-speaking universities; and also in a growing interest in the work of cultural theorists such as Spivak, Said, and Bhabha. More recently, 'post-colonial' historians of South Africa such as Crais and the Comaroffs have also had their effect. However, more specific attempts to ground these new theories in a 'post-colonial' framework appertaining to local conditions were first apparent in the final chapter of Teresa Dovey's (1988:330-413) Lacanian study of J.M. Coetzee, and in an article published by Annemarie Carusi (1989) in a Canadian journal.

It is nevertheless in the intellectual ambience of new-found freedom and celebration since 1990 that attitudes favourable towards post-modernism, 'post-coloniality' and French post-structuralism have flourished, in various ways which have tended to deeply interweave the effects of these terms<sup>1</sup>. At present a desire to indigenise colonial

<sup>1</sup> Locally, 'postcolonial' critics have been heavily influenced by the philosophies of post-structuralism and the politics of post-modernism as these have developed in the metropole. While these three terms cannot be used interchangeably, Dirlik's point that 'Postcolonial critics readily concede the debt they owe to postmodernist and post-structuralist thinking ... [it] represents a response to a genuine need ... to overcome a crisis of understanding produced by the inability of old categories to account for the world' is a basic assumption underlying this essay (Dirlik 1994:352).

discourse and 'post-colonial' approaches prevails. To David Attwell, the fact that South Africa does not share the 'experience of post-1968 disillusionment' with 'master-narratives' which informs metropolitan post-modernism does not mean that post-modernist techniques and viewpoints do not percolate through local literary culture, 'taking on new forms and acquiring a different animating spirit' (Attwell 1993a:21). He and Leon de Kock in particular have spent considerable time acting as the proponents of a South African 'post-coloniality' informed by the spirit of post-structuralism<sup>2</sup> and post-modernism.

Almost without exception, South African critics eager to use his new orientation were little involved in the nationalist and Marxist paradigms employed (either intellectually or on the ground) during the 'struggle years' of the 1970s and 1980s. As can be expected, one of the first tasks they set themselves was to attack these earlier paradigms, especially in what they saw as their tendency to become narrowly teleological 'master-narratives' deeply complicit in Eurocentric ideologies of modernity and progress. To them, nationalists were 'more vulnerable to dependency on the conceptual apparatus of the west than they know' (Attwell 1995a:2); while Marxism came in for particular scrutiny and disavowal for this, and other, reasons—the attitudes of Marxism's 'post-colonial' critics varying from tones of intellectual transcendence (see Attwell 1993b:4) to selective absorption (in the case of David Bunn) to outright emotional rejection (Cornwell 1994:54).

When local 'colonial discourse'/'post-colonial' applications first surfaced, they seemed to herald a breath of fresh air: promising new ways in which to examine and theorise literary and cultural studies in this country. In terms of scholarship, they appeared to open up untouched areas of enquiry. For instance, Bunn's use of the notion of 'subalternity' allowed him, he believed, to open up an examination of 'the subordinate classes normally ignored by Marxist social historians' (Bunn 1992:38). Others, such as Attwell, saw its promise of a renewed interest in narrativity and textuality as a means to escape the evaluative determinism he believed had quagmired Marxist and nationalist literary critics; while de Kock praised the Comaroffs' ability to focus on the importance of seemingly trivial elements of cultural coding in identity formation

<sup>2</sup> Some critics, such as Bunn and Cornwell, more recently are showing signs of distancing themselves from some of the effects of 'post-colonialism'. Cornwell now remarks that 'this opaque and abstruse mode of analysis tends to reveal more about the self-absorbed cleverness of its practitioners ... than the way the real world works' (Cornwell 1996:7), while Bunn has recently come to concede that colonial discourse theory is 'a narrow hermeneutic tendency already falling out of favour'. He insists, though, on maintaining 'questions of the subject, of textuality, and of agency being advanced by post-structuralist theory'; believing that it is post-structuralism, rather than 'post-coloniality' (see Bunn 1994:24,31) that provides the basis for future theories of discursive production in South Africa.

(see, for example, de Kock 1992b:46; 1994b:282). Critiques of the scientific certainties and appropriation of notions of 'truth' and 'rationality' and the unwavering application of binary conceptualisations by the West, accompanied by efforts to displace the 'autonomous subject of liberalism' (Attwell 1993a:33f) were made.

In their place, attention was paid to the ambivalences and hybrid identities of colonial subjects (as opposed to the inflexible binaries of collaboration/resistance they ascribed to Marxists' and nationalists' understanding of such subjectivity). Notions of the contingency of knowledge, of multiplicity, of social and expressive diversity and difference, of a cultural relativism undermining European authority and its narratives, were foregrounded. 'The problem of theorising South African space', Bunn (1992:34) commented, 'has to do with the fact that different types of subject inhabit the spatial matrix differently'. De Kock in turn condemned the

relatively recent Western practice in which the experience of autochthonous people, and of the various layers in colonial situations, are unwittingly reappropriated ... in reductive forms of reference;

emphasising the 'bewilderingly multilingual, polyglot literary-cultural history' of the country and his determination to challenge the categories through which the colonial past had been appropriated, the better to look for 'insignificant others' (de Kock 1993a:46; 1993b:45; 1994b:285). In nearly all cases, the overt and covert violence accompanying the colonial enterprise in South Africa was highlighted.

It can quickly be seen that this new intellectual and scholastic endeavour has political consequences. Bunn (1994:28) is therefore quite accurate when he speaks of colonial discourse theory as a 'redeployment of poststructuralist methods with a particular political agenda in mind'. 'Post-coloniality', it is insisted, can and must marshal its resources to 'counter imperialistic strategies be they in the political, economic or cultural sphere' (Carusi 1989:81). At the same time, its connections with post-modernism allows it to formulate social criticism by drawing eclectically from appropriate strains of philosophical and political thought (Moffett 1993:12).

Nevertheless there are a number of factors which have cast doubt on the efficacy of local versions of this orientation, at least insofar as these have been applied by literary commentators and critics in South Africa. The general tendencies of this criticism can be isolated, despite denials by some of its users of any possibility of doing this—a convenient means to escape scrutiny of their basic premises<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Witness Bunn's reply (to the historian Megan Vaughan) that orientalism (and presumably, the studies which flow from Said's example) is not a theory but the study of a pre-existing 'discursive matrix' (Bunn 1994:25), thus side stepping his own and others' theoretical proclivities by suggesting they are engaged in descriptive studies of what is 'already there' and incontrovertible; as well as de Kock's suggestion that the heterogeneity of 'post-colonial' approaches make any unitary label (and, one presumes, any general criticism) misleading (de Kock 1993a:45).

A number of objections to these theories have already arisen from South Africanists: but as these issues are not the principal focus in what follows I will mention them only in passing. Current descriptions of 'post-coloniality', it is increasingly conceded, can paradoxically act to strengthen, rather than subvert, the power and visibility of the metropole: through *inter alia* its tendency to universalise and homogenise the structures and experiences of colonialism to a singular and ahistorical abstraction, inscribing all world history as the antecedent to, or the outcome of, a single issue (McClintock 1994:255; see also Chrisman 1995:206f). Among less adept critics there has also been a tendency to ignore the fact that anti-colonial organisations were jointly constitutive of the colonial reality that emerged, through their resistance to colonialism (Chrisman 1995:208). Even more damagingly, the uncertainty of knowing exactly how to periodise South Africa within a 'colonial/post-colonial' framework has been generally bypassed: there is disagreement as to exactly *when* South Africa can be said to have been decolonised (see the discussion in Visser 1997:81-83).

Moreover—and indeed this is also the case locally—there are increasing signs that the theories/descriptions of 'post-coloniality' are becoming a new academic orthodoxy of their own<sup>4</sup>. It is noticeable that the sense of 'newness' it both helped form and responded to often demonstrates a superficial understanding at best of what the local versions (in literary criticism) of the 'master narratives' it has sought to supplant were. It has also tended to stereotype the literary expression produced during the struggle period' as a literature obsessed with politics and oblivious of the quotidian experiences of its characters or its readers—a belief which usually relies on the authority of a handful of critics such as Ndebele, Sachs and Nkosi. Finally, the endorsement of *bricolage* by critics such as Bunn, Morphet and Moffett has allowed certain of them to accrete critical processes of argument, magpie-like, that are in the long run not so much contingent and multifaceted as eclectic and unwieldy<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> In this regard, for one who claims to foster a diversity of opinions and interpretations, Attwell is remarkably insistent in ensuring that a certain reading of his own work endures: chiding other critics for their 'misrepresentations' and lack of 'truly canny readings' (see for example Attwell 1995b:89,96).

<sup>5</sup> Attwell (1990a), de Kock (1993a; 1995), Cornwell (1993) and Moffett (1993) either express, or demonstrate, the kind of *melange* of theoretical inputs that seems to me eventually obfuscates their work. What is remarkable is the fact that most 'post-colonial' dismissals of their nationalist and Marxist forebears undertake no serious or detailed examination of the critical or literary expression of the 1970s and 1980s: a number of them simply refer the reader to the same source, an under-researched and sweeping Masters thesis (see Doherty 1989:171-185).

### The 'Special' Case of South Africa

However, many of these critics have apparently experienced an unease in applying their 'post-colonial' viewpoints in South Africa. In 1993 Attwell noted this, remarking that some felt that their situation was not being properly addressed by the new discourse of 'post-coloniality':

The scepticism is part of a progressive political culture celebrating nonracial unity, in which analyses circulating around ethnic affiliations and notions of irreducible difference seem oddly reminiscent of apartheid's own binaries (Attwell 1993c:100).

Nevertheless it was Annemarie Carusi who, in two thoughtful articles, best expressed the problems local 'post-colonial' critics feel hinder them from wholeheartedly applying conceptualisations borrowed from the metropole. The issues she raises approximate those explored later by others such as de Kock and Attwell, despite minor disagreements between them.

Carusi worries about the contradictions that are generated when post-structuralist theories are applied to a 'politically charged' situation such as South Africa, where vast inequalities in discursive and socio-economic power are still intact. She notes that the emphasis on subjectivity in many post-colonial studies risks becoming trapped in humanist subjectivity: Western epistemic systems are so powerful that they snare the 'colonised body' into identifying 'its difference in terms of the imperialist's binaries', and thus into fruitless myths of origination and programmes of retrieval. The concepts post-structuralists have fed into 'post-coloniality' are useful, she avers, especially as regards their approaches to culture and identity and insistence on 'infinite pluralism or dispersions'; but she believes that an insistence on maintaining the 'self/other' binary at all costs<sup>6</sup> is eventually debilitating: particularly in its refusal to allow any degree of purposeful action or self-determination to the 'other', and its denial of any foundation for political transformation (Carusi 1989:87)<sup>7</sup>.

Finally, while nationalist activists and proponents of 'post-' positions such as herself appear to have little in common, she suggests that a dialogue is necessary for the future development of both approaches. For her, 'post-colonialists' must inter-

<sup>6</sup> Noting the impossibility of breaking with Western systems of thought ('a closure we cannot undo'), Carusi reiterates that, in the paradigms she is using, the 'other' is 'by definition nothing in itself, but simply all that we project onto it, the repository of our desires' (Carusi 1989:89). See footnote 23.

<sup>7</sup> She mentions Spivak's well-known conundrum of 'subaltern agency' in this regard. It should be said in passing that neither Bunn nor de Kock agrees with her interpretation of Spivak.

articulate with nationalism, to counter its reactionary cultural tendencies. In turn, in order to be useful for the political projects of postcoloniality, poststructuralists need to wean themselves from a preoccupation with the 'Unconscious', and involve themselves in the contestation between different discourses. Carusi sees hope in the fact that there is a discourse which 'revalorises the difference of Africa' co-existing with the more problematic affirmation of 'equality *via* sameness' in black South African nationalism. The former is amenable to critics such as herself, and should be engaged with. Rather than endless theorising, her goal is a socially-effective 'reconstructive programme' based on heterogeneity and difference in the country, which might hold the potential for 'real' transformation:

... post-structuralist anti-humanism may find its only possible path of development with a view to transformative effect in post-colonial context, where the colonised body becomes the subject of its own history and turns the table on the imperialism of that humanism by *appropriating* its positivism from the position of its own negativity and heterogeneity (sic.; Carusi 1989:92).

Similarly, in order to assist in changing the power structures and lingering structural inequalities present in South Africa, de Kock and Attwell are wary of 'disabling' themselves by only stressing 'ruptures' and the 'discontinuous' at the expense of the 'continuations' and 'identifications' present in the projects and self-perceptions of the previously colonised. De Kock reiterates Carusi's point:

... if post-structuralist logic were to teach that, regardless of relative agency (sic.) or historical, political and ethical considerations, any assertion of subjectivity in identarian terms was 'logocentric', 'essentialist' and unacceptable because it merely reversed Western binary procedure, then black political mobilisation, or any group mobilisation for that matter, would have to be regarded as inadmissible (de Kock 1993a:53).

Attwell mentions, and de Kock (using Squires) elaborates on, the possibility of making a distinction between what they call 'strong' and 'weak' othering; in order to dilute the incommensurability of 'self/other' positioning in the post-structuralist paradigms they otherwise find useful. Thus, they wish to render agency, and a recognition of the pressing reality of politico-cultural struggles in the country, possible: in his own words, de Kock wishes to

distinguish a critical practice disabled by the inflections of binarity ... from the critical apprehension of colonial practice in which binarity is perceived as a strong feature (de Kock 1993a:47; see also 60f.; Attwell 1993c:100).

### Discourse and History

As part of their wish to enable the intervention and agency of those silenced by the discourses of the West and of apartheid (in some studies conceived of completely interchangeably, rather than examined in their specificities), few if any of the South African advocates of 'post-coloniality' are prepared to accept that human subjects are irretrievably bound by the prevailing (racial) binaries and discourses operative in South Africa. While all of them accept post-structuralism's claim that our understanding of the world is received *via* discourse, they use the term in a qualified manner. This means that they are at pains, at times, to suggest that there is a material world existing outside of human apperceptions of it. Both in his studies of J.M. Coetzee and in his own pronouncements, Attwell shows an interest in the question of the relationship of post-structuralism to history and historical discourse, using the term 'history' to denote 'reality, the Real, the datum of the individual and collective experience of the past'; a term 'always used in the as-if mode' (Attwell 1990a:95,128). He contends that prior critics like Dovey have considerably oversimplified the polarisation between 'those registering the claims of political resistance and historical representation ... and ... those responsive to postmodernism and poststructuralism' (Attwell 1993a:2). Bunn (1993:4,7), in his turn, examines how discourses 'accommodate' the material world of historical agency, and how this world 'enters' discourses.

As one aspect, they stress a preoccupation with the 'limitlessness' of a textuality that will allow 'discourses and life-stories' about the past and the present to proliferate. Attwell aligns himself with Lyotard's suggestion that contemporary knowledge has shifted from 'representation to narrative, with increasingly local and differentiated projects becoming the norm' (Attwell 1990b:79); while Bunn (1993:1) admits favouring discourse analysis' ability to demonstrate how objects change as their discursive context alters, the better to follow 'the dispersion of statements with a common subject across a variety of fields'.

All are particularly concerned with the means and manner in which a colonial discursive regime in South Africa, based on coercive regulation and the 'othering' of indigenous inhabitants, has operated in the field of textuality. All are aware that South Africa was, and continues to be, a site of 'symbolic struggle' and 'historical contestation', and all place considerable emphasis on how black subjects have had to 'negotiate their very identities' and recast colonial discourse in their own terms: a process whereby 'a discursive world was recreated and new loyalties, new laws of the individual subject forged ... accepted and resisted' (de Kock 1992b:47). They thus wish to study South African history via the interactions of colonizer and colonized (see Bunn 1993:5)<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> De Kock makes much the same point, but emphasises the cultural aspect of such contestation 'in terms of multilingual, multicultural contexts of representational convergence in social relationships at large' (de Kock 1994a:34).

South African 'post-colonialists' therefore generally feel an urge to ground their notions of discursive production within historical contexts and ideological struggles. Bunn, who wishes to establish how competing discourses have been 'constitutive of subjects and subject-effects', is the most diligent in attempting to marry notions of hegemonic struggle, contradictory social relations and the articulation of social forces to more conventional aspects of discourse analysis. Characteristically, he cites the existence of 'historical contradiction' as an issue that should prompt cultural and literary analysis to eventually ask questions as to how discursive systems deal with, elide or refashion obtaining material conditions (see Bunn 1994:27,32f; 1993:13).

Yet all too often this results in an indecision as to how, precisely, the relationship between 'the real' and 'discourse' should be understood and dealt with. De Kock, for example, at times distances himself from the view 'that language does not refer at all' (de Kock 1995:70); while at others he collapses the 'distinction between the supposedly "factual" and the "fictional" in all verbal constructions', subscribing wholeheartedly to the 'very thrust of postmodernity, as I see it ... to cast doubt on the supposed objectivities found in the *inevitably* textual source' (de Kock 1992a:7,1; emphasis mine). Attwell (1993a:17; 1990b:79)<sup>9</sup>, in his turn, fluctuates between noting that 'history is not available for direct representation', and making the far stronger claim that paradigmatic shifts in historical enquiry entirely account for new narrativisations—but always eventually, as Visser (1997:89) notes, subsuming his recognition of socio-political and economic considerations into discussions of 'discursive conditions'.

All of these 'post-colonial' critics and their less adept followers appear to subscribe to, and are inhibited in the scope of their analyses by, the post-structuralist 'linguistic fallacy' (the phrase is the critical realist philosopher Bhaskar's) that subsumes ontology immediately to epistemology; presuming, in other words, that all ontological statements must simply be epistemological statements. This collapsing results in a conviction that social being can be analysed solely in terms of our discourses and statements about being<sup>10</sup>. In its most extreme form, it leads to excessive claims such as Driver's, that reality '... is a social construct; we are what we read, we are the language we speak' (Driver 1992:464).

<sup>9</sup> The influence of Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* on Attwell is obvious here (see Attwell 1990a:122).

<sup>10</sup> Bhaskar argues that 'the linguistic fallacy'; is a particular form of the 'epistemic fallacy' (the dogma that statements about being can always be analysed in terms of statements about our knowledge of being) foregrounded by the 'linguistic turn' among a number of twentieth-century Western philosophers, such as Derrida, Rorty and others (for his counter-arguments, see *inter alia* Bhaskar 1994:46-53,47,51).

On the contrary, one may argue that:

The issue is not the possibility/impossibility of a 'pure' or pre-discursive access to objects, but what criteria of 'truthfulness' are suitable for which forms of representation and for what purposes, and how they are related to those forms of *extra*-discursive determinacy which impose themselves upon us practically, as limits, in all our dealings with the world (Osborne 1991:208)<sup>11</sup>.

Notwithstanding the desire of Attwell, Carusi *et al* to allow the 'real' to irrupt into their analyses, it can be seen that they ultimately remain wedded to the linguistic fallacy, and thus cannot but shuttle uncertainly between wishing to ascribe an (African) human agency that can act within history on the one hand, and perceiving such agency to be overdetermined by the hegemonic discursive formulations of Europe and its binaries on the other. The desire to maintain at least some aspect of black subjectivity free from the overweening discourses of colonialism leads often to debatable conclusions. For example, while de Kock has a pertinent point when he suggests that for individuals such as the nineteenth-century African convert Tiyo Soga (faced with stereotyping missionary discourses which made him 'a textually objectified figure') the only way 'to begin escaping crude representations of the self was through the assertion of counter-narrative' (de Kock 1994a:45; 1995:76), there appear to be problems with his conceptualisations of what resources Soga had to deal with his own ambivalence. He eventually constructs Soga as attempting to resist 'this public, textually-constituted persona' with a 'more ambivalent, private sense of self' (de Kock 1994a:45). How far such a presumption about privatised subjectivity aligns itself with, or differs from, Western and/or colonial subjectivity is never addressed. Thus, the notion that a private, authentic selfhood is potentially a means of differentiation and self-articulation to overdetermining colonial discourses seems to refashion black identity in terms familiar to liberal humanism, which sits ill with the post-structuralist cast of the rest of de Kock's argument. However, as we shall see, it is typical for local 'post-colonial' critics to slip back into notions of authenticity when dealing with issues of black agency.

De Kock finally seems to believe that post-structuralist theory is important when it comes to analysing the coloniser, but that more traditional notions of agency will serve the colonised:

<sup>11</sup> Lazarus (1991:123) is also pertinent here: '... it is one thing to suggest that the analytical methods of structural linguistics are relevant to the analysis of human practice in general because human practice is a meaning-bearing practice .... But it is quite another ... to argue that because it can be considered under the rubric of language, human practice is itself linguistic, having no substance or materiality independent of its linguisticity'.

... one is free to take from 'Post' theories as much as one needs to 'liquefy' oppressive representational procedures, and redeploy them in a decidedly *political* context of counter-narrative (de Kock 1995:69)<sup>12</sup>.

This appears to be a standpoint also held by Attwell and (reluctantly) by Carusi, in her suggestion (quoted above) that post-structuralists wishing to become active agents will need to appropriate aspects of humanism and positivism. Theoretically speaking, this is an untenable position<sup>13</sup>.

It must be said that an emphasis on history as the outcome of the contestation of opposing structures of discourse (belonging to coloniser and colonised) can focus on the violence and overweening logic of colonial conquest in a useful way. However, if overplayed, it may result in a tendency to interpret all the nuances of South African history simply and immediately as a reflection of contending discourses. It is striking how quickly this transmogrifies, among 'post-colonial' critics, into an assumption that the 'clash of cultures' (racially conceived) is the single most important motor of this history. Attwell and de Kock's liking for 'transformative moments', 'moments of departure' and the early Cape frontier is indicative of this implicit assumption. The frontier in particular is seen as important due to its 'signifying dimensions' and 'totemic' figures (de Kock 1993b:50; 1994a:35); a locale where black and white may be shown to face each other in their original, historical, and simultaneously symbolic, configurations: a seminal contact zone 'in the history of cultural contestation in South Africa ... where forms of knowledge and identity were contested' (de Kock 1992a:6; 1992b:39; see also 1994a:34). All historical shifts in allegiance, identity and motive simply become subservient to this squaring-up between so-called 'autochthonous' communities on the one hand, and the bearers of the scourge of the European Enlightenment on the other.

The acceptance of the frontier as a trope of historical signification can quickly be taken to an extreme—where historical analyses becomes little more than the tracing of 'coloniser' and 'colonised' in their various mutually antagonistic configurations throughout history. This tendency is manifest in de Kock's 1991 description of con-

<sup>12</sup> Eventually de Kock seems to find resolution in a structure/agency formulation that simply reiterates the concerns of the Althusser-Thompson debates as they were played out in South African academies in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

<sup>13</sup> See Visser's (1997:3-15) critique of de Kock in this regard. De Kock's (1995) attempt to resolve the 'discourse/history' conundrum means that he subscribes to practically all the misconceptions (both of 'discourse' and of the way in which 'history' is understood) that Bhaskar discusses with regard to users of the 'epistemic fallacy' (see the discussion in Collier 1994:76-106).

temporaneous political events as an exhibition of South Africa's 'frontier consciousness to efface the truth' (de Kock 1992c:30). In the process of such generalisations, previous demonstrations that the postulation of a 'frontier tradition' as the basic model for hardening racial polarities and attitudes in South Africa was an ideological construct of liberal historiographers are completely overlooked<sup>14</sup>.

Such an approach to history, where 'otherness' becomes a universal trope suppressing details of cultural facticity, allegorises history (Suleri 1992:13). The delight with which 'post-colonial' studies (influenced by post-structuralism or New Historicism) seize upon a single incident, anecdote or figure as emblematic of wider historical processes, modes of behaviour and cultural codes—while at times instructive—begins to exhibit a recurring slippage from the particular to the general, so that glibly generalised historical claims are put forward merely from the discussion of a single event, example, text, personage, or poem<sup>15</sup>.

Such relative disinterest in painstaking historical research or in trying to contextualise their models is ultimately damaging. This is especially the case in Carusi and more textually-bound critics with 'post-colonial' predilections; but, in my view, only the work of Bunn does not systematically fall prey to this pattern. Attwell's discussions of context, for example, are characteristically hasty and sweeping; and, in his more recent work, display a regrettable trend to build edifices of interpretation on the subjunctive mood and conjecture<sup>16</sup>.

### Culture, Identity and 'Competing Discourses'

The 'post-colonial' framework is perceived as especially useful in the recognition of the desire of a colonised or subjugated people for an identity and for self-determination (Carusi 1989:80). Its advocates evince a desire to allow groups oppressed by colonialism (and, more recently, by the enormous socio-economic and cultural inequalities prevalent in South Africa in the aftermath of 1990), self-expression and

<sup>14</sup> See Legassick 1980. Despite the suggestion by de Kock that the English-speaking missionaries on the Cape frontier were as much to blame for these attitudes as the 'isolated Trekboers' cited by liberal historians, the generalising effect remains the same. In relation to the impetus of 'post-colonial' historians such as the Comaroffs to do much the same thing, see de Bruyn 1994.

<sup>15</sup> See the discussion of this tendency in Loomba (1991:172); and Norris' (1994:121f) critique of the post-structuralist treatment of different discourses—in particular the scientific and the poetic-metaphorical—as relative and equally valid in an epistemological sense.

<sup>16</sup> See, for instance, his discussion of the political and intellectual currents of the 1970s (Attwell 1993a:27-32), and his more recent study of Tiyo Soga.

agency in their own terms. Bunn, for example, shows an admiration for scholarship that is 'scrupulous in deploying ideas of authorship and agency at work within a contested symbolic field'; and places emphasis on 'indigenous meanings' and 'African agency'; moreover believing that colonial discourse theory has significance because it 'marks the point at which radical intellectuals attempted to intervene to change the flow of theory from metropole to periphery' (Bunn 1994:28,29).

It cannot be denied that such approaches can be enormously productive—although it is equally obvious that one need not necessarily only deploy them in terms of the demands of post-structuralist theories. Yet what is immediately apparent is the degree to which local advocates of 'post-coloniality' in the literary sphere tie any examination of a subject's identity to that of their culture. Cultural differences are, without doubt, seen as the basic matrices of 'othering' and 'difference' in the country; and the divide between white and black cultures exercises most of their attention.

While most of the theorists here examined would critique essentialist understandings of culture (see for instance Cornwell 1993:49), they persist in reiterating notions of race and ethnicity as culturally pre-eminent terms in South Africa. This simply mirrors a similar preoccupation with these forms of identity in official pronouncements since 1990. Even as ANC MP Yunus Carrim, for example, argues that racial issues will diminish in importance over time in South Africa, he stresses that ethnic identities will remain resilient (and problematic) in a de-racialised social arena. Furthermore, ethnic identity is encouraged provided that it does not become political (*sic.*) and therefore irreconcilable with national identity (Carrim 1995; see also Edmunds 1996).

The effect is to maintain the binary oppositions of race and culture at the same time as they are being prepared, we are told, for deconstruction. For 'post-colonial' scholars the Eastern Cape Frontier is again a frequently cited model. When de Kock, for instance, wants to make a politically-charged point about the 'myriad determinations' and social configurations on the Eastern Cape Frontier, it returns to being that place where, in simple terms, European 'cultural agents' and 'autochthonous Africans' battled it out over the 'nature of reality, proper forms of social life, and the highest questions of morality, religion and philosophy' (de Kock 1992b:39)<sup>17</sup>. Attwell's generalised statement about contemporary South Africa also evinces this drift:

<sup>17</sup> I do not wish to deny that such oppositions might be more starkly visible on the frontier: merely that it is debilitating to transmit a frontier stereotype to all aspects of subsequent history. A general lack of discussion, ignorance and romanticisation about pre-colonial societies and oral literature by Attwell, de Kock and Carusi is noticeable; they seem disinterested in discerning any of the prior socio-cultural reconceptions Africans might have brought to this encounter; and most focus on the way in which mission-trained literate African subjects are (ambiguously) determined by an overwhelming colonial discourse.

South Africa continues to be seen as a crucible wherein any of the questions being addressed elsewhere burn with unusual intensity. As Homi Bhabha puts it .... 'Both at the political level and in terms of fictional writing, South Africa represents, in ... an acute and tragic and problematic way, the opportunity to actually see transformative elements at work in the construction of a new historic destiny, where the question of race and cultural difference is foregrounded' (Attwell 1993b:2).

At the same time, the assault on Marxism by such critics is an attempt to relativise the notion of class (which is seen as hegemonic in South African literary studies of Marxist orientation in the previous decade and a half) to 'one agency among others' (Visser 1997:88). The effect of this, as one scans Attwell's work in particular, is not simply that of one inflexible emphasis being downgraded so that other matrices of identity and determination might be allowed to emerge into view. On the contrary, as Visser remarks, it is possible to ascertain

what an insistent valorising of race enables adherents of ... postcolonial theory to highlight ... and what leave occluded. As Attwell makes clear throughout his book on Coetzee, an emphasis on race accords with a focus on the relation of literature to intellectual and cultural pursuits and what he calls 'the discursive conditions obtaining in South Africa', rather than, say, the relation of literature to political currents or social relations or material conditions within society (Visser 1997:89).

One of the effects of reducing class to an agency, for instance, is that the linkages of class-identifications to questions of structure disappear. Thus, 'labour' becomes simply another identity (see for example Farred 1992), rather than the basis for the appropriation of surplus value under capitalism that Marxists have always emphasised it—I believe correctly—to be. Cultural identifications and struggles are consequently easily perceived as existing and interacting as 'free-floating events' *outside* of the economy (Dirlik 1994:346; Katz 1995/1996:42).

The refusal of any degree of determinism, especially 'economic determinism', by local 'post-colonial' critics has resulted in an overpowering silence when it comes to an examination of the structural determinants of cultures and identities. There is a noticeable absence of any detailed attempts to link the cultural and experiential aspects of human existence to the economic and political background in which they are implicated. As Sarkar notes, this results in power itself becoming an oddly abstracted and disembodied concept, for all the constant harping on inequalities within South Africa<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> '... any effort to explore connections with socio-economic processes is thought to be tainted with the sins of reductionism and teleology. What began as a legitimate turning-away from the crude determinisms of "official" Marxism has degenerated in academic common-sense into a suspicion-cum-contempt for anything economic—as if reductionism cannot be "cultural" or "political", too' (Sarkar 1994:209).

Literary studies in the 'new South Africa' thus spawn themselves in a cloud-cuckoo world innocent of transnational corporations, global movements of finance and labour, unequal and combined development, transnationalisation of production (simultaneously 'the source of unprecedented global unity and ... fragmentation', Dirlik 1994:349), the exportation of Western technologies and post-Fordist techniques of production (and intermingling of these with existing Fordist techniques in many 'third world' countries), the interpenetration of the local and the global, and so on—the very world which, it has been argued, gave birth to the 'post-colonial intellectual' in the first place (for a fuller discussion, see Dirlik 1994:348-356 and Miyoshi 1993:728-750).

This is particularly debilitating when one considers that (according to a recent study by the South African Labour Development Research Unit) the most pressing constraints on daily experience in South Africa since 1994 have been economic. It is dissatisfaction with their material circumstances—lack of jobs, housing and basic amenities—that are highest on the list of priorities of the vast majority of black South Africans at present (see Bulbring 1995). In this harsh economic climate, with falling domestic investment, reduced inflows of foreign capital, the fall of the rand and a continuing dependency on primary commodities, this trend is unlikely to reverse itself: particularly as the country is still economically hugely delimited by the 'ethnically-delineated, conglomerate-dominated corporate structure' (Mokoena 1996) of its apartheid past.

'Post-colonialists' suppose that, because the racist, falsely universalised ideologies of the European Enlightenment were transported to the rest of the world on the back of capitalist expansion, a critique of Eurocentric 'rationality' and binaries necessarily also infer a critique of capitalism. On the contrary, an ungrounded focusing on discourse in these terms may actually divert attention away from problems of inequality, provided such inequality is carried out by culturally/discursively 'authentic' local elites (Dirlik 1994:347,353).

Moreover, this emphasis on race and culture is typically aligned with assumptions that social 'truth' is culturally-bound and consensualist. To stress that all knowledge-constructions and beliefs are equally valid in their own cultural or experiential lights is dear to the hearts of local 'post-colonial' critics.

In addition, these critics have a characteristic way of linking individuals with larger cultural collectives, and these collectives with society as a whole. Individual agency is expressed by a performative, reiterated constituting of self-identity and compulsions<sup>19</sup>; while social groups become active agents when an amalgamation of indi-

<sup>19</sup> 'Performative acts' is a key term of Attwell's in this regard. For a critique of notions that 'truth' is 'a rhetorical activity ... defined in performative (not constative) terms', see Norris 1995:122.

viduals coalesce around their pressing identities and experiences in order to participate within wider political contestations.

The impress of the 'linguistic turn' of post-structuralism is also evident here. While the recognition that 'our beliefs are socially produced, transient and fallible' is non-contestable, this understanding is elided with the more debatable assumption that 'all beliefs are equally valid in the sense that there are no rational grounds for preferring one to another' (Bhaskar, quoted in Collier 1994:90). Such a relativist notion assimilates truth to the shifting currencies of consensus belief—products of localised knowledge whose origin should be sought in the socio-biological histories, cultural contexts or 'language games' of those who hold them (for a critique, see Norris 1995:109,111,120-122).

In South Africa, where competing discourses and world views are first and foremost identified as racial, such individual or group agency and self-expression is often presumed to be underlaid with cultural/racial knowledge. In other words, identity becomes viewed as a precursor to knowledge. For a white critic like Attwell, it follows that progressive intellectual practice on the part of the individual critic is *inter alia* to stress the racial distinctiveness of the practices and beliefs of African agents and—because it is presumptuous for people such as himself to mount any critique of black agency at all—tracing the paths of the narratives of self-expression replaces any concern with their evaluation<sup>20</sup>. Description replaces interpretation or explanation as the major task of theoretical endeavour by the extra-cultural critic (see the discussion in Katz 1995/1996:40).

While it is obviously valid to say that all people, individually or constituted within groups, have an experiential sense of self and identity, self-held notions of 'experience' and 'identity' do not always contain within themselves the conditions of their own intelligibility. It is precisely these notions which need to be understood and explained, both by intra-cultural and extra-cultural critics. Equally, experiences of oppression by members of any cultural grouping do not necessarily result in a shared identity without forms of ideological work; nor is oppression experienced equally, and in the same form, by such members. This is as true of black and white South Africans as any other social grouping.

In the face of such deficiencies in analytical scope, 'post-colonial' literary studies in South Africa have become trapped in an overweening culturalism. At worst, the reduction of 'material effects' to discourse by more conservative 'post-colonial' crit-

<sup>20</sup> An important part of Attwell's project is a shift away from issues of 'representation' and an insistence on the re-description 'of narrativity and its relationship to other discourses' (Attwell 1993a:13). In line with this, he dislikes symptomatic reading, 'which must literally involve a put-down, a putting-down in history' (Attwell 1995b:90).

ics such as Cornwell simply removes from purview altogether any notion of material inequalities deeper than discourse. Even Bunn and Attwell, who do at least perceive that any understanding of the local cannot be maintained without a consideration of the political and economic implications of global capitalism (see especially Attwell 1993b:2), offer up little or no scrutiny or discussion of the effects of global capitalism, or capitalist expansionism in colonial times. There is little discernible sense of the processes and structures of the political or economic or how these link to, or interact with, the focus of their studies. On Attwell's part, there are merely asides: his references to South African history are brief thumbnail sketches focusing mainly on discursive fluctuations, which use discrete texts as motors for historical explanation (see, for example, Attwell 1990a:121-126; 1993a:20,26-32; 1993b:4; 1995b:92). In de Kock, there is little examination as to how missionary discourses interact with, or are changed by, shifts in colonial State structures or policies; while Bunn (1992:27,28,32f; 1993:11) mentions factors such as 'productive needs' and 'relations of production' in a cursory fashion. Indeed, the latter's mobilisation of the concept of 'material culture' can, on closer study, be seen to bear the anthropological meaning of the term—it appears, in fact, to be referenced to cultural artefacts only—while 'value', to him, is always glossed as cultural or symbolic value (see Bunn 1993:2,9; 1992:7). Thus, on closer scrutiny, the 'extradiscursive connections' he refers to are overwhelmingly contained within the cultural, ideological, and/or textual domains<sup>21</sup>. The fact that he is unable, or disinterested, in tracing or exemplifying the connections of his models of textuality to material conditions results, ironically enough, in the reader being able to presume a mere reflective connection between them which Bunn would certainly want to disown. Here, the project of cultural 're-description' taken on by Attwell *et al* begins to look particularly forlorn, given his and others' inattention to the causes of economic and political inequalities, or how these are to be addressed.

#### **Multiculturalism and Transculturation as National Assets**

As Sitas (1995:18) has noted, it is difficult if not impossible for general theories of race, class, gender or ethnicity to 'capture the processes of identity formation and the structures of feeling that propel (people) to act'. Such an understanding is, indeed, one of the important recognitions of 'post-colonial' thinkers as well, and validates at least

<sup>21</sup> To him, for instance, to study the book 'as a discursive event characterised mainly by certain forms of tropological insistence ... is to miss [its] point ... as an aspect of culture, circulating within a regime of value dependent both on metropolitan class association and core-periphery systems of knowledge transmission' (Bunn 1993:9).

some of the challenge they have mounted against the often routine manner in which nationalist and Marxist epistemologies were applied in South African literary studies before them.

It has already been suggested that the fixation on race by 'post-colonialists' dilutes their simultaneous insistence that there is a near-infinite diversity, difference and dispersal of identities in South Africa, and multiple differences among and within its racial groups. For, while 'post-colonial' theory in South Africa can be said to emphasise culture and race without showing much interest in their material determinations, this does not mean that an emphasis on race as an original and authentic means of self-identification is accepted. Far from it: in the wider context of post-1990 national reconstruction, South Africa is perceived as a multicultural society.

Here, 'post-colonial' critics labour to articulate a project which will allow commensurate and fulfilling freedoms for all its people, especially previously dominated groups and individuals. The goal of democracy, in these terms, is a proliferation of sites of difference and different speaking positions. Consequently, Attwell (1995a:23) critiques ideas of a uniform and stereotyping Africinity, and highlights questions of 'cultural translation, the analysis of relocations, transformations, and appropriations'; and Miki Flockemann (1993:206) suggests that the

articulation of gender, race and class in the South African context points to a discourse in which non-hierarchical accommodation of difference could serve as a point of departure for a restructured society.

Indeed, such emphasis can be taken to extreme levels: where difference, ambivalence and hybridity themselves are seen as more authentic forms of identification. Thus Cornwell's (1993:50) belief that Bhabha's notion of hybridity can:

... provide the native with a voice that speaks authentically for the (culturally hybridised, parodic) self, asserting simultaneously both similarity and difference<sup>22</sup>.

The more radical of these critics stress the subversive potential of difference, even within a post-1990 scenario. Carusi notes that 'otherness' and 'difference' can act as rallying points for resistance to any political *status quo* (Carusi 1993:232); while Grant Farred focuses on cultural politics as a continuing terrain of struggle after 1990. From his position to the left of the ANC, he insists on the diversity of even South Africa's black majority; stressing that

<sup>22</sup> Therefore 'hybridity' solidifies, paradoxically, both as a theoretical term and state of social being, into the signifier of a more authentic position (for a critique, see Ahmad 1995); while identity-through-difference is itself essentialized (Dirlik 1994:346).

difference—cultural, political and ideological—may be all that stands between the masses of exploited black South Africans and the ... unholy triumvirate ... of a newly embourgeois and entrepreneurial black middle class, the white upper and middle classes, and multinational capitalism;

adding that the disparate and disjunctive cultural identities of the country can be utilised by women, community activists and the like 'to give voice to political and ideological differences' (Farred 1992:224)<sup>23</sup>.

However, such an insistence on a continuing 'struggle against positionalities' (the term is Stuart Hall's) is the exception rather than the rule. There is a more benign version of multiculturalism voiced by 'post-colonial' thinkers, who are increasingly drawn towards affirming the political goals of national reconstruction and the building of a new national dispensation. Cornwell believes that an inclusive and egalitarian future will require national unity to be thought of in what he calls 'other' terms (Cornwell 1993:51)<sup>24</sup>. Attwell (1993a:24) addresses issues of legitimacy, authority and positioning through his discussions of agency in order to insist on an agency which interacts with, and critiques, questions of nationhood—of 'finding ... a place for one's own particular story within the framework of the broader, national narrative'. Even critics who see themselves as occupying a more radical and critical position perceive the nation as the broad delimiter of their scope. Farred therefore advocates the articulation of differences within the framework of national identity and reconstruction (Farred 1992:218), and Jean-Philippe Wade delineates the business of literary studies in a future South Africa as:

... a microcosm of the democratic nation seen ... as an 'articulation of differences'. The 'totality' or 'unity' is articulated—constructed, provisional, mutable, indeterminate, resistant to closure—to separate it from any suggestion of an essential unity grounded in some transcendental signified, and it is a 'totality' made up of irreducible 'differences'—that multiplicity of voices which make up our national terrain (Wade 1996:239).

<sup>23</sup> It is this version, I would argue, that tends to emerge from 'post-colonial' intellectuals using deconstructive or rigorously post-structuralist paradigms, such as Carusi: what distinguishes her from other critics under discussion here is her insistence that the 'margin' denotes a negative discourse of limits, rather than a place where 'other' cultures can emerge to enjoy their due degree of respect, recognition and (in Taylor's words) the 'chance to be themselves unimpeded'. For an interesting (if eventually inconclusive) discussion of the similarities and differences between 'orthodox' multiculturalism and 'post-colonial' approaches, see Seshadri-Crooks 1995.

<sup>24</sup> Transculturation will allow black and white in South Africa to struggle towards a 'new national identity ... in the ... recognition of a buried historical mutuality, through an archeology of contagion which displaces the discourse of colonialism' (Cornwell 1993:51).

Attwell is most vocal about this. It is within the context of contemporary South Africa's 'nation-in-waiting', this 'grand anomaly' seeking solutions from 'enlightenment ad hocery' that his enthusiasm for 'transculturation' and 'transformative moments' becomes explicable (Attwell 1993b:4). In a public address in 1994, he used the exemplary ambivalence of placement and self-identification of (once again) Soga to suggest that this gave people such as Soga the potential to marshal the values of Western humanism that the West - due to its colonizing urge - had dishonoured in practice. Such a transforming and reconstruction of Enlightenment ideals contained a seed which, Attwell believes, might still bear fruit in a post-1990 South Africa: with a new South African Constitution that simultaneously allows a universalist discourse of rights and respects the meaning of difference<sup>25</sup>.

For Attwell, clearly, transculturation and the ambivalent and fractured nature of identity are elevated to preferred political status, and this amounts to more than the scholarly observation that we all muddle along as bearers of multiple and shifting identities. Despite the prevalence of group identifications of race and class in South African history, what he in actual fact discerns in South Africa is a history of transculturated, agglomerated and hybrid identities; giving rise to a local version of African nationalism which, through its post-1990 'mission boy constitution' (the phrase is Rian Malan's) allows the space for hope. Like Attwell, de Kock gives voice to a general belief that Enlightenment notions such as 'liberty', 'justice' and 'equality' can be recuperated and articulated by the colonial subject afresh in post-colonial contexts (de Kock 1993a:60). Thus, somewhat oddly, their version of post-structuralism is harnessed to an advocacy of a 'Rainbow Nation' constitutionalism that has been underwritten by the historical accretions of an educated black middle class<sup>26</sup>.

Formulations such as these are more similar than they may at first appear to official Government perceptions of the intercultural and political tasks they face on a national level. In less abstract terms, Attwell's terrain is nothing less than the demo-

<sup>25</sup> These points were made in an inaugural lecture to a Professorship at the University of Natal (Pietermaritzburg) by Attwell on 12 October 1994. Although this address has since been published by the English Department of that University, entitled 'The Exemplary Case of the Rev. Tiyo Soga, African Nationalist', Attwell has refused the author permission to quote from it, citing as his reasons *inter alia* that it 'was written in the months following elections. It does not take much sagacity to see that the political reality has changed' (personal communication, 25 October 1996).

<sup>26</sup> One can add that it is precisely at this point that both these critics part company with their otherwise flaunted use of deconstructive and post-structuralist philosophers. For a pertinent warning as to how an acceptance of formal equality before the law in different versions of constitutionalism can serve to divert attention away from continuing socio-economic exploitation, structural violence and *de facto* exclusions from constitutional purview, see Johnson 1996.

cratic, celebratory realm of the 'Rainbow Nation'—that geographical-cum-spiritual locale where we all struggle for equal freedoms and nobody loses—that the South African media and politicians insist we at present occupy<sup>27</sup>. 'The challenge before our new democracy' remarks Carrim,

is to provide the space for people to express their multiple identities in a way that fosters the evolution of a South African national identity (Carrim 1995).

The country becomes a place where the 'other' is allowed to speak; where a multitude of voices can be heard interacting in a new spirit of democracy.

While it is obvious that a democratic South Africa requires a broadly representative and diverse democracy, it is pertinent to note that there is a burgeoning of interpretations of democracy by the media and the new elite which emphasises the commercial potentialities in this trope of interacting and empathetic cultures. It is significant, for instance, how quickly the traditional African quality of *ubuntu* (humaneness/generosity/respect) has been harnessed as a more benign, culturally sensitive technique of business management. For, as a senior black manager of an insurance company suggests, *ubuntu* in the workplace allows her to interact with every member of her staff and 'acknowledge their being':

... bridging the racial and cultural gaps ... doesn't mean getting into a melting pot and becoming one ... cultural empathy is about acknowledging differences, even if we don't necessarily understand them .... This does not exclude holding them accountable for their productivity and performance at work ... (and knowing) what is happening with them as people, because if I don't get in touch with that I won't know what demotivates them (Maud 1995)<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> It is interesting to note that it is in his cautious acceptance of the 'Rainbow Nation' that Attwell most markedly differs from John Coetzee. For a sharply critical response to 'Rainbow Nation' constructions, see Coetzee 1995.

<sup>28</sup> *Ubuntu*, the values of which is 'something we can all share so that we can all be truly at home ... we can all be *ubuntu* people—people who make generosity of spirit and action a cornerstone of their lives' (Prozesky 1996) is hereby transmuted into a means of 'intercultural communication' to 'make the rainbow nation work' by appropriate management techniques—as in a recent advertisement from the University of the Witwatersrand Business School ('Match your individual management style and the culture of your organisation to the changing society and business environment'). For, as a representative of the Black Management Forum has recently said during a television debate, 'By merely saying hello to your gardener you are practising the principle of *ubuntu*' (TV1 Agenda Programme, 20/8/95). (See also Lovemore Mbigi's book *Ubuntu: the Spirit of African Transformation Management* (Knowledge Resources, Johannesburg, 1995).

Ongoing co-operation between major role-players in the country is continually motivated for as being in the national interest, even as a number of issues now loom which show the irreconcilable interests of some interest groups. As big business and labour increasingly come into conflict due to their wide divergence of opinion on matters such as fiscal policy, job creation strategies, and the privatisation of public assets, clashes between the two are mourned by the media as a 'time warp ... back to the eighties' (Seery 1996; see also Dumisa 1996).

### A Mutual Support of Difference: the Role of Alliances

In line with the redefinition of 'politics' by post-modernists in the metropole, local critics scrutinise the political sphere in South Africa in order to highlight the resistance of the individual subject or dominated groups to modes of domination—especially discursive—perpetuated by the dominant forces in society. Since 'discourse' in post-structuralist studies is perceived as the medium of all social identities and struggles, claiming an identity on the basis of a specific experience of oppression is seen as the ground for a totally new type of politics; where an affirmation and validation of notions of 'difference' is calculated as equally, if not more, important than locating these interests and identities within the socio-economic configurations of society (Osborne 1991:216). 'Democracy' becomes an all-embracing term signifying all emancipatory practices.

The infinite dispersions of identity and affiliation of 'post-colonial' practice therefore renders it (in its own view) not only a way to ensconce democracy, but also a means whereby self-expressive and—articulating groups can be mobilised into shifting sites of resistance to oppressive practices and systems, without coagulating into 'master-narratives' themselves. As Katz notes (1995/1996:48), what is brought into play is

a kind of pluralist politics based upon the self-referentiality of any specific political practice and the contingency of articulations which connect one kind of practice to another.

In terms of both individuals and social groups, meaningful political interventions are seen as possible through the fluid formation and re-formation of contingent alliances. Cultural difference becomes a specific means to found fleeting coalitions. The basis for this idea of politics is that of an affinity which respects the differences among the constituent groups of the alliance (Farred 1992:231); thus, they can never be fully or finally constituted and are open to re-articulation and renegotiation. Specific issues will act as an impetus for individuals and groups to coalesce spontaneously 'out of a sense of urgency' (Moffett 1993:13).

While few local advocates of 'post-coloniality' have thoroughly examined how these interactions will escape the level of (in Coronil's term) disjointed mininarratives, or how they will manage change within the wider body politic, a few have assayed opinions. These range from Helen Moffett's belief that each particular political issue/conflict should be treated *ad hoc* and *sui generis*, to Attwell's sharper sense that there are discursive-historical issues which help form the particular way in which such conflicts articulate themselves; and his awareness that an emphasis on multicultural alliances does not *a priori* offer a radical content or purpose to such struggles<sup>29</sup>.

The problems with such a conceptualisation of politics are multiple. At worst, such a notion of politics blurs the:

... historically produced structurality of the social system, casting the more or less intractable objectivity of its different instances as a fluid arrangement of exchangeable signifiers ... politics becomes a matter of discursive articulation (Lazarus 1991:127).

Even the most ardent disciple of incommensurability cannot, however, deny that there are some socio-political inequalities and cultural demands more pressing than others right now—the claims of Volkstaters do not seem equal to the enormous problems faced by 'Bushmen', for example. So, in practice, South African proponents of 'post-coloniality' do seem to accept implicitly that there are a 'hierarchy of oppressions' to be addressed, at least in some areas. But in this regard, again, the race-ethnicity axis predominates at the expense of other forms of consciousness and interest.

In practice, furthermore, this approach contains a number of problems in the way it conceptualizes the attainment of a democratic society. Firstly, with the broad exception of some critics working in the field of gender studies, there has been little examination (past hasty *caveats*) of the ways in which subordinated communities contain their own divergent viewpoints, divisions of interest or hierarchies of privilege. Secondly, while the stressing of 'small acts of subversion' appears useful in understanding nodes of human agency outside of a binary of passive acceptance or militant revolution, the notion of social change that accompanies this viewpoint tends to be merely ameliorative (see, for instance, Bhabha in conversation with Attwell in Attwell 1993b:112-3). Thirdly, little attention is paid to the ways in which the structural interests and imperatives that impel one dominated group into action may impinge upon or

<sup>29</sup> See also the dismissal, by the Chicago Cultural Studies Group (of which Bunn was a member), of what they call the 'Benetton effect' of 'corporate multiculturalism' (Chicago Cultural Studies Group 1992:532).

force this group into a situation of conflict with others<sup>30</sup>.

Here again, the concerns of 'post-colonial' scholars do not seem to pose a significant challenge to more mainstream Government attitudes; because it seems unreasonable, in a scenario of pressing national reconstruction, for local 'post-colonial' scholars not to bridle their notions of difference and subversion to a regimen of compromise and communication. Differences are articulated and accommodated within a national framework which promises, through its political and educational organs, 'to encourage a critical attitude and ... respect (of) other people's opinions' (Johnson 1994:81); but stops short of describing how such contingent and fleeting alliances can meaningfully confront South Africa's position within the circuit of global capitalism and its commercial and consumerist imperatives.

Post-modern thought seeks to prevent the 'imposition' of one interest group's truths on others; but advocates 'conversation' (the term is Rorty's) between them. Locally, in more conservative 'post-colonial' formulations, a notion of benign, diverse multiculturalism within the nation is affirmed which is always and only renegotiated in terms of respect and mutuality. Conflicts are simply seen as breakdowns in 'communication' between social groupings. In more radical departures, cultural differences are seen as potential sites for intervention and redeployment within a chain of alliances opposing the dominant hegemony. Both these positions, however, allow for a pluralism which can be accommodated within the politics of reform<sup>31</sup>. Inequalities are regarded as open to redistributive mechanisms and negotiated settlements are addressed, but not (for instance) South Africa's commitment to 'the logic of the market', or its position as a sub-imperial power within Southern Africa. Acknowledgements of irresolvable social conflicts, disruptions and contradictions blur into invisibility (Parry 1994:6,12)<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> 'In a world of identity politics, mobilisation by the Other is always a provocation' (Pixin 1995:113).

<sup>31</sup> Rouse points out that such a version of multiculturalism is compelled to exist in a relationship of complementary opposition with 'single culture/identity nationalism': 'Always offering at least the illusion of significant choice, they have seemed to fully exhaust the field of imaginable alternatives and, in doing so, they have endowed their commonalities (their emphases on bourgeois class positions, nationalism, and educational and political reform) with a powerfully constraining force' (quoted in Seshadri-Crooks 1995:52).

<sup>32</sup> Consequently, while demands for epistemological self-criticism and revision (alongside a recognition of the potential validity of other positions and viewpoints) is part of the scholarly process and is crucial to that process, it is simply presumed that such an impulse, based on reciprocity and constant self-scrutiny, can be extended to the sphere of politics. This is both an arrogant and limited perspective and only likely to prevail, it can be argued, in an intellectual elite.

*Negotiation* is seen as the means whereby conflict between interest groups can be managed and alleviated. Faced with the violent confrontations of the past, 'post-colonialists' promise a continuing negotiation within, and between, identities and interests:

In this context, it is hard to conceive of a notion more revolutionary and liberatory than that of negotiation ... not primarily in the sense of a political initiative (although the political is of course never absent), but as rubric for another discursive possibility embedded in the cultural realities of South Africa which is in dire need of recognition and embrace (Cornwell 1993:46).

Stressing contestability rather than contestation, transaction rather than conflict, acquiescence is secured for a slow and managed transformation of society; where everything can be questioned and negotiated except the underlying foundations of South Africa's political institutions and economic orientation.

As Prasad (1992:44) notes in a different context, such a position can at the same time appear to endorse positions that are antagonistic to the dominant order and protect the dominant order by claiming it is simply one position amongst others. Although I am sure that many of the literary critics cited here would deny their involvement in such a politics, their emphasis on culture, self-expression and 'historical contingencies' to the exclusion of 'foundational' issues—such as the connection of cultural identities and forms of expression to material interests and wider ideological struggles in society—render them enormously vulnerable to complicity in such a political scenario: precisely because of what they refuse to examine. The boundaries they have drawn around their perceptions render it impossible for even the most radical of them to critique politico-cultural processes in terms of the roles and relationships these assume within a national political order overdetermined by global capitalism. Instead, they can only be affirmed as expressions of existing subjectivities, or as potential sites for intervention and redeployment within a chain of alliances desirous of slow and careful reformation of the *status quo*, however this is to be imagined.

### The Role and Positioning of Intellectuals

Living as an expatriate in Canada, Jolly (1995:23) avers that, for literary academics dealing with South African culture, 'positioning oneself in opposition to the hegemonic forces ... can be a truly postcolonial act'; and explores how such intellectuals can assist in the redistribution of resources and power inside the country at the same time as they transform institutional forms of racial privilege. This is a subject which, it can be seen, taxes most South African 'post-colonial' thinkers. Most of those I have dis-

cussed are white; and, given that they are faced with reiterated criticism, either that they construct the 'other' in their own image, or that as a group they are only aware of their own political identity through the construction of an 'other', they show a recurring self-consciousness about what they as white critics should be 'legitimately able to do' (de Kock 1993b:45).

They are particularly concerned with clearing a space for the 'other' to speak, free from white social ventriloquism and overweening 'master-narratives'. In clearing the ground where a multitude of voices and life-stories can be heard, 'post-colonial' critics can 'articulate difference' and rehearse 'communal liberation'; paving the way for a 'nonimperialist, genuinely multicultural future' (Jolly 1995:25,26). In this regard, de Kock cites Spivak as saying, '... you don't give the subaltern voice. You work for the bloody subaltern, you work against subalternity' (de Kock 1992c:46).

Yet it is striking that white 'post-colonial' critics are unwilling, to a person, to give up their ability to study, and comment about, black literature and culture. Here again, de Kock's dismissal of 'strong othering' and any absolute occlusion of 'other' to 'self' as regards knowledge and experience pertains (see de Kock 1993a:49). Instead, they believe that a 'refusal to violate the politics of identity' (Jolly 1995:24), to engage in 'intercultural description' (de Kock 1993a:61) or analyse 'aboriginal texts' is unwise. This might result in an eventual ignorance within the academy as to what the demands and concerns of the 'other' are. It is considered important to have representatives of the 'other' in the academy—so that the 'existence and recognition of many kinds of native experience' and 'aboriginal authority' are represented (Jolly 1995:26). Just as in the wider society, in a multicultural academy the 'noncolonising mutual exploration of difference' (*idem.*) can act to affirm and assist the vision of a future South Africa as a true society of equals.

White academics give notice of an awareness of the limitations of their own background, and admit to a lack of organic relationship to 'underclass movements' (*sic.*; Attwell 1990b:83). They embrace the marginality of their own positioning in contemporary South Africa, but are careful to proselytise for a criticism which 'does not simply authorise or silence critics on the basis of the "adequacy" of their experience' (Jolly 1995:24).

In discussing Coetzee's fictional *oeuvre*, Attwell celebrates it as a 'clear-eyed representative of its own historical positioning and limits of power', which allows the author—speaking without authorisation and from a position which cannot be tied to a particular constituency—to be more honest and explicit about his own social placement than 'committed white writers' (read: critics as well) are able to be about theirs (see Attwell 1993a: 25f,119,122). Consequently, the:

... wary, increasingly marginal narrative subject who deftly negotiates the interstices of power, maintaining its ethical integrity but avoiding not only appeals for inclusion but also any overstatement of its own legitimacy and authority (Attwell 1993a:25f).

Attwell praises in Coetzee ceases to be just a favoured fictional device. It also exemplifies the 'post-colonial' academic-at-work-in-the-world<sup>33</sup>.

Drawing attention to Spivak's suggestion that the activities of philosophical and historical study are always, as disciplines, heterogeneous and discontinuous with subaltern social practice, they assume that this stance will as a consequence be relevant to grassroots activity (see Carusi 1989:93f). Indeed, there is a suggestion that their ability to contextualise and relativise their own systems of knowledge allows them to make these even more useful, as they can act in ways that will not overwhelm the integrity of the 'other'<sup>34</sup>. At the same time, their 'subversive' stance allows them, they believe, to critique the disciplinary practices of the academic institutions in which they work. Thus, according to Jolly (1995:24), the 'post-colonial' critic is in the enviable position of having the potential 'to negotiate between peoples in the context of the "knife-edge of change"'.

Looked at closely, however, such versions of 'marginality' eventually aim themselves at re-empowerment rather than self-erasure, once the white academic has learned sufficient humility. This has the very real potential for mutating into 'a gesture of discrete self-affirmation which allows the subject of the gesture a moral high ground' (de Jong 1994:229). In this vein, de Kock's recommendation that white critics should use 'restraint' (*sic.*) when wishing to step outside of 'discourse' and the 'constraints' of the 'European mind' (de Kock 1993a:63), exhibits not so much a concession of space for black critics to operate, as reticence to engage fully or straightforwardly in any exchange of viewpoints. This is deeply condescending.

Their perception of viable political activity for themselves highlights the imperative of ethical choice for the individual scholar. In line with his wish for a criticism which allows for political agency, de Kock argues that even critics who use post-structuralist or deconstructive techniques must open the way for 'an ethical subject who can recognise the tyrannies of identity, but ... work from a basis of identity which is politically defined' (de Kock 1993a:60).

Attwell's interest in ethics is more conservative than this. He believes that those intellectuals who did not claim the political high ground or blur their intellectual pur-

<sup>33</sup> More recently, Attwell has shown an impatience with academics who remain on the 'political high ground' of their 'other status ... of marginality'. Instead, he now stresses the need to 'confront one's own ambiguous positioning' and acknowledge 'that one's formation as an intellectual is itself testimony to the effects of cultural imperialism—and begin working out the most strategically useful ways of pursuing an intellectual life ... as that unhappily designated being, an Africanist' (Attwell 1995a:23).

<sup>34</sup> Bunn's examinations of the positioning and complicity of observers *vis-a-vis* their 'objects' of study is relevant here; and relates to his interest in the work of anthropologists such as Geertz and Clifford.

suits with political imperatives in times of 'ethical confusion' like the 1970s and 1980s (*sic.*), now have a greater freedom to disentangle ('differentiate' is the word he chooses) their scholarly from their political obligations (Attwell 1990b:83). Rejecting the Althusserian notion that there is no ethics outside of ideology, he emphasises that such relative distancing of the critic from intrusive political commitments while in scholarly pursuits is a superior position because it is 'not self-interested' (Attwell 1995b:95).

This reprivileges the seemingly marginal pursuits of those involved in English Departments, against the political 'master-narratives' which have served to devalue their importance. Attwell's, and de Kock's faith in ethical choice as a determinant of social behaviour appears to wish to restore judgement and morality to the public sphere. With this one can have no quarrel. However, it appears to limit its understanding of ethical behaviour to criteria of 'honest' individual behaviour and judgement<sup>35</sup>. The individual emerges as a powerful counterforce to group limitations and subsuming ideologies.

While a compelling argument can be made for such individual space at least as far as academic enquiry is concerned, it is less compelling to perceive political proclivities as explicable by individual ethical choice alone. This loses sight of the ideological and social constraints which delimit the behaviour and concerns of individuals within wider socio-political (rather than simply discursive) structures. 'Restraint' and lack of self-interest cannot be used as concepts to incisively examine intellectuals—or anyone else's—social behaviour or interests; and this mitigates against Attwell's belief that 'post-colonial' writers or critics have a clearer insight into their own historical positioning and limitations than those who have gone before.

### The Racial Determinants of Scholarly Knowledge

By suggesting their own relative unimportance and marginality, it is possible for 'post-colonial' intellectuals in South Africa to be rather coy about their own emergence as a social group with authoritative voices, especially in the academy. Their bedazzlement with discourse and its social manifestations, and their concern with 'subject-positions' rather than the capitalist structuring and restructuring of the world, means that it is all too easy for them to bypass or underplay their own placement and viewpoints as these

<sup>35</sup> Attwell's attempt to differentiate Coetzee's notion of ethics (to be apprehended in 'performative acts of language') from Kant's (conceived as the conscience of the individual) does not, it seems to me, significantly alter this point (Attwell 1995b:95); neither, in my opinion, does Attwell's attempt to discuss subject positioning as 'dependent on systems of signification rather than on autonomous subjectivity of an idealist kind' (de Jong 1994:228) alter the broad confirmation of individualism in his work.

relate to economic determinants and class relationships<sup>36</sup>.

White academics wish to allow the 'other' a place to speak within the academy. The question can then be asked: who, precisely, is in a position to indulge in self-expression in such a context? The 'other', him- or herself, obviously. There is a supposition that the representatives of the 'other' in the academy—in South Africa usually individuals identified along a race-gender axis (rather than, say, with reference to class, urban/rural or regional imbalances)—are *a priori* in touch with, and can represent, an aggregate of 'others'.

Scrutinising the utterances of 'post-colonial' scholars in South Africa, it is fascinating to note how easily some of them slide into the assumption that authority is determined by cultural definition. In evidence is a tendency to react against the prevailing racial disequilibrium of access to power and self-expression with presumptions of a reflexive relationship between black intellectuals and their racial constituency.

In South Africa, where competing discourses and world views are first and foremost perceived as cultural (with an insistence of racial and ethnic identifications), individual or group agency is often presumed to be underlaid with cultural knowledge. Thus, while most of the black scholars who intermittently or fully articulate the language of post-structuralism and 'post-coloniality' sharply critique the over-preponderance of white viewpoints in the contemporary South African academy, they (interestingly enough) rarely follow this through with any thorough-going deconstruction of black nodes of authenticity and authority<sup>37</sup>. In some cases, there is still a desire to recognise a black popular collective agency which can be evaluated as 'authentic'. Mbulelo Mzamane, for example, condemns a fellow black critic's commentary as deficient because it 'gestures towards a people's voice, but the mode of discourse denied the people their authentic voice, in their own terms' (Mzamane 1991:66). In turn, Lewis Nkosi can deny that individual black writers or academics can be guilty of any social ventriloquism *vis-a-vis* their community, by disallowing the relevance of matters of authority and self-authorisation in such cases. Rather, he insists that the issue should be seen simply as 'one of access and self-representation' (Nkosi 1994:57).

Desiree Lewis (1992:21), who insists that she is not arguing for a single authentic interpretation or correct position in feminist literary studies, still does not fol-

<sup>36</sup> See in particular Miyoshi's (1993:746-749) suggestion that 'post-colonial' intellectuals are part of a new class whose ideological preoccupations, worldview and international 'migrancy' are integrally related to the restructuring of the world under transnational capitalism.

<sup>37</sup> The only exceptions to this I have found in my reading are Grant Farred and Sikhumbuzo Mngadi. See Farred 1992 and Mngadi 1996.

low up her critique of the 'inherently self-aggrandising momentum' of the institutional power of white feminists with any discussion of the social fissures limiting the understanding of middle-class black feminists such as herself. Indeed, her vague attempts to problematise the class aspects of authority disappears in a tendency to elide 'black', 'working class' and 'third world' as categories (see Lewis 1993:536,538,541).

The predominant issue among black critics appears to be asserting what can be called 'epistemological franchise'. Considering 'the legacy of factual representation in South Africa', several black *literati* at the University of the Western Cape underline the point that:

Black objects of interpretation—whether coloured, middle-class or 'UWC's disaffected black academics with axes to grind' become probed objects ... by white journalists or academics at faculty meetings who ponder endlessly the strangeness of the other, and, by implication, consolidate their authority ... Whether this knowledge production is liberal, Marxist or feminist, it carries the stamp of approval of a white knowledge-producer. This body of knowledge ... demands to be opened up to the same sort of scrutiny that black objects of interpretation are relentlessly subjected to ... Identity politics is ... high on the agenda everywhere right now. But identity politics concerns not only blacks or Africans, or coloured people, but also the history of interpretative authority that many white academics have for many years lived by (Lewis *et al* 1996).

A great deal of what is here said is salutary and relevant. However, it is noticeable that these critics' confrontation with racial imbalances in knowledge-production does not end in any interrogation of their own authority. Thus, their version of 'post-colonial' criticism seems to hold racial binaries intact, in a move which does not promise a critique of the social power and position of its authors, but rather only a displacement of power and authority towards a previously disadvantaged but (within its own constituency) relatively privileged group. In such a scenario, a little scepticism of the high-sounding ideals of those involved is not out of place<sup>38</sup>. Perhaps, as Dirlik (1994:339) has remarked, postcolonial discourse is an expression not so much of agony over identity, as it often appears, but of new-found power.

In my opinion black 'post-colonial' intellectuals cannot accept tenure as spokespeople for their community without the constant interrogation of their own po-

<sup>38</sup> As Seshadri-Crooks (1995:66) points out, it is only the benign, 'orthodox' deployment of multiculturalism which can accept this. Any radical 'post-colonial' argument for the destabilising of existing relationships of pedagogical power in South Africa must 'rehearse continually the conditions for the production of its own discourse or be doomed to fall into a form of anthropology'.

sition demanded by their own post-structuralist predilections. What is most striking about the approaches of both white and black critics of this ilk, though, is a tendency to use post-structuralist techniques and approaches when scrutinising the 'oppressor', but to slide back into positivism and liberal humanism when faced with the products of the 'oppressed'.

Furthermore, the reliance of these critics on the texts of the colonial masters or relatively privileged and literate representatives of the 'other' is striking; one can perceive (to place Loomba's words in another context) that their interrogation of colonialism is too often shaped primarily by its own discourse (Loomba 1991:180). Little attention is given to pre-colonial South Africa or to past and present oral literature. They demonstrate little conversance with debates about modes of appropriation and social hierarchies in pre-colonial African societies, or in oral forms of expression. These are, surely, crucial to any attempts to understand the foundations and constraints of the 'other' identities they are elsewhere concerned with<sup>39</sup>.

### Conclusion

It is finally true, as a number of overseas critics of 'post-colonial' theories have attested, that there is a tendency for its thinkers to see their own academy-based, class-delimited subjectivity as a model for all humankind<sup>40</sup>. This is most apparent in Attwell. When all is said and done, he wishes to keep literary scholars focussed on what he believes they are 'competent to do' (see Attwell 1990b:80,83). Such an insistence on the relative distance of literary scholarship from political concerns not connected to the academy cannot, in my view, be a means to initiate awareness and participation among students or academics of the nuances of the social world outside of their immediate scope of privilege. In the long run, his emphasis on political participation within the institutions of learning can degenerate into a scenario of disputation and contestation over meaning and reference amongst scholars which can be managed within the academy's intellectual and social boundaries and are, in actual fact, 'more like corporate undertakings than agencies of political struggle' (Prasad 1992:36). In this regard, Attwell's (1996:213) love of 'sophisticated conversations' based on 'collective negotiation' among scholars hints at a possible elitism that throws into question his apparent approval of divergent points of view.

<sup>39</sup> This does not mean (as Bunn attempts to argue in dismissal of this point) that scholars of oral culture/literature necessarily presume that orality as a mode functions outside of the limits of narrativity (see Bunn 1994:31).

<sup>40</sup> For further discussion, see Parry (1994:20); Ahmad (1995:7f); Miyoshi (1993:750f); Dirlik (1994:330,339). For South Africa, see Chrisman (1995:207).

Despite their dislike for traditional liberalism, Visser suggests that critics such as de Kock and Attwell are involved in an appropriation of 'post-colonial' notions, not so much to suit local conditions as certain political agendas. Their strivings to 'look beyond the fixed polarities of some metropolitan versions of postcolonial studies' (see Attwell 1993b:4f) has become:

... a 'centrist' or 'moderate' appropriation which domesticates the theory, stripping it of its more interesting and provocative assertions in order to reinstate it as the latest expression of liberal pluralism (Visser 1997:92).

'Post-colonialists' would, in my opinion, dispute this by pointing to their decentring of the universalised humanist categories and constructs of the autonomous subject of traditional liberalism, and their antipathy towards any form of 'master-narrative'.

In order to understand the manner in which critics such as Attwell can be placed in such a category, a re-examination and redefinition of the province of 'liberalism' in South Africa is in order. In a recent article on the transmutations of the liberal novel, Tony Morphet shows a way this might be possible. Suggesting that J.M. Coetzee's fiction is liberal in 'a new, qualified sense of the word', Morphet notes the persistence throughout Coetzee's work of protagonists who have 'no incorporative and assimilating design' but see the world around themselves as 'dangerous and incomprehensible, their authority dissipated and their sense of meaning crumbling' (Morphet 1996:57). Unlike traditional liberals, who believed they could exercise their authority for the good of others, this 'new liberal' Morphet extrapolates from Coetzee's fiction has no wish to incorporate or assimilate others to his or her beliefs. They can be recognised by an epistemology that works against the closures of authority (be they religious, historical or literary) and which challenges other aesthetic positions and viewpoints by always 'setting up another version, another play which plays itself out in the midst of all the other plays that are taking place' rather than indulging in rational or moral argument and rebuttal (Morphet 1996:57f). Taken to the political arena, such a position demands a rigorous marginalising of authority, including one's own.

In a situation where their ideological and political authority has all but dissipated, this valorisation of criticism from the margins seems increasingly endemic to liberal thought in the 'new South Africa'—be it from literary post-structuralists, the Democratic Party or more conservative liberal ideologues such as Hermann Giliomee<sup>41</sup>.

What is as significant is the partial, but nonetheless odd, convergence between local 'post-colonial' literary critics' use of post-structuralism and 'Rainbow Nation'

<sup>41</sup> In this regard, see Giliomee's (1996) re-invocation of NP van Wyk Louw's concept of *lojale verset* ('rebellious loyalty') first coined to suggest a placement for moderate Afrikaans intellectuals *vis-a-vis* the Nationalist Party during the 1930s.

nationalism: especially as regards the significance attached to racial and ethnic axes of cultural identity, and the way in which the individual is believed to interact and connect to larger groups. If examinations of identity require scrutiny of 'precisely the fissure between the self, social identity and broader structural constraints' (Sitas 1995:83), these critics mostly downplay the last-named. An excessive culturalism and aestheticism results. This has an unfortunate tendency to feed into racial and ethnic stereotypes which are the legacy of apartheid, and which the present Government does not seem able to displace<sup>42</sup>. Combined with their refusal to assess any of the identifications or actions of the 'other', this results in an inability to conceive of any long-term alternatives to the emerging political *status quo* or the prevailing vision of a multiracial capitalism. In this regard, Dirlik's (1994:347) remark that ideological fragmentation may represent not the dissolution of power, but its further concentration, could not be more pertinent.

Local 'post-colonial' scholars' desire for 'other' groups to possess an agency that can challenge the dominant orders of colonialism and neo-colonialism ends by reinstating essentially humanist notions of the manner in which the agency of the 'other' operates. In their endeavours to escape the 'critical disablement, passivity, and self-defeating contradiction' (de Kock 1993a:44) of some variants of 'post-colonial' studies informed by linguistic post-structuralism, critics such as Attwell, de Kock and Carusi appear to end in an ineluctable contradiction themselves.

As far as their critique of 'master-narratives' is concerned, 'post-colonial' literary scholars in this country are involved in merely replacing one set of limits of perception and argument with another. Their stance has come to legitimise a certain type of pluralist reordering of the way in which the country is imagined, rather than enabling a conceptually and politically open arena. While seeming to authorise the margins and enable their move into the centre, areas of structural conflict—such as class—are downplayed, or regarded as solvable through negotiation. In other words, while emphasising contestability, enduring modes of contestation are blurred over.

While 'post-colonial' studies have opened up valuable emphases and insights for South African scholars, the major paradigm shifts consequent on their emergence have been less radical than originally thought. These studies are not value-free and the decisions about what to foreground and what to ignore can, and should be, scrutinised and analysed. It is noticeable that 'post-colonial' theory has, to some extent, simply

<sup>42</sup> In a recent speech Nelson Mandela claimed that the country should be a place where the Coon carnival, Zulu reed dance and *braai* can be equally valued. These cultural events are, surely, neither explanatory nor inclusive of the behaviour and perceptions of all 'Coloureds', Zulus or Afrikaners.

rehearsed old themes and problems of the 'third world'<sup>43</sup>, rephrasing these in the language of post-structuralism (Dirlik 1994:352), at the same time as some categories of analysis and paradigms (Marxism is the obvious example here) have been dismissed. Again, it is not unfair to say that 'post-colonial' scholars' attempts to piece together 'new combinations of elements which have been left unarticulated by dominant institutions and knowledges' (Katz 1995/1996:46) can be seen, eventually, to be circumscribed. In this regard—as in so many others—the triumphant announcement of the amalgamation of postmodern politics, 'post-colonial' studies and linguistic post-structuralism that Attwell proclaimed in a 1993 *Current Writing* as a more cogent and progressive scholarly outlook on the world is already beginning to look somewhat overhasty.

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<sup>43</sup> An interest in the ambivalence of black subjects towards the 'benefits' of colonialism is evident in the work of South African oral historians of the 1980s such as Shula Marks, for example; while de Kock's critique of English Departments adds little to the edition of *Critical Arts* which tackled this subject a decade earlier.

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## Postal Networks

Shane Moran

In South African English literary-theoretical discourse post-modernist and post-structuralist theories have been invoked to support the demotion of Marxian analysis. A spectral Marxism is often equated with an economicist and reductionist model of class. This is then taken to justify a 'post-Marxism' in a post-colonial context attuned to the category of race. In effect a simplification of the category of class is projected onto Marxism—and in particular onto South African Marxist historiography—which is then marginalised because of this reductionism. I will argue that the attempt to establish a 'post-Marxist' critical consensus in South Africa combines a misrepresentation of Marxian theory with a decontextualisation of post-structuralism<sup>1</sup>.

This essay has three parts: a sketch of the general features of South African 'posts' theory, some notes on the work of one South African Marxist historiographer, and suggestions for alternative readings of post-structuralist theory.

### Posts (SA)

In the early eighties post-structuralist theory was seen by some South African English literary academics as an ally in the task of dismantling the hegemonic structures of oppressive ideologies, including liberal-humanism. This was a period in which progressive literary critics were generally more concerned with the empowering potential of literary representation and cultural activism than with the post-structuralist questioning of representation. Still, for some the claims of post-structuralists like Lyotard and Derrida to rethink the nature of the political held out the prospect of finding a middle way, or a new way altogether, out of the cycle of political violence. An introduction to literary theory saw in 'the eyes of the true post-structuralist' a 'radical alternative': 'to question the rule governed approach itself' (Ryan & Van Zyl 1982:14). An important element of this early importation seems to be not so much the desire to transcend politics, but rather to break through the impasse of political deadlock via a

<sup>1</sup> Although post-structuralism, post-modernism, and deconstruction have different genealogies, I treat post-modernism and deconstruction as elements in a more general 'post-structuralism' that interrogates the project of modernity and attempts to acknowledge the contradictory nature of critique.

post-structuralism resistant to self-totalisation and institutionalisation. Rory Ryan (1982a:93) saw in deconstruction a timely awareness of the futility of 'naive radicalism' and the necessity of acknowledging a strategic complicity when one inhabits the system and tradition one aims to criticise. However, perhaps with the American fate of deconstruction in mind, Ryan (1982a:111) worried that the most likely 'misrepresentation of deconstruction appears to be its institutionalisation'; this radical potential may be compromised by 'the easy assimilation of a castrated deconstructionism into the academic mainstream' via the unexamined concepts constitutive of liberalism that shelter in the academy<sup>2</sup>. It seems that this concern was well founded. Ryan (1985; 1987) continued his critique of the literary studies and the institutionalisation of theory, and by the late 1980s had moved to class Marxism as yet another deluded hegemony trans-fixed by the attainability of transcendental 'truth'; now he placed his faith in 'iconoclastic intellectual behaviour' (Ryan 1990:17).

The South African reception of post-structuralism that I want to focus on is the second wave of the late eighties and early nineties, a period both fraught with uncertainty and a 'moment when liberation seems to be around the corner' (Ndebele 1994:3)<sup>3</sup>. This was a context marked by a willingness to rethink the strategy of cultural activism, and is epitomised by Albie Sachs's (1990) call to ban the slogan 'culture as a weapon of struggle' for five years on the grounds that the prospect of freedom called for a change in the subservience of aesthetic production to politics. In a historical situation characterised by an uneasy movement towards a negotiated political settlement and general political representation, claims were made for theory's capacity to fulfil the hopes of its early advocates and to productively contribute to a reanimated sense of South African intellectual political engagement. The institutional ascendancy of 'posts' theory within English literature departments occurred despite the objections raised against the attraction of a quietistic theoreticism by writers whose understanding of the issues ranged from informed and principled scepticism to uncomprehending

<sup>2</sup> Rory Ryan (1982a:95) went on to claim that 'Derrida's contribution to the philosophy of language is paradoxically to distance himself from all previous philosophers of language, who do not recognise that language exists as a self-enclosed system'. Derrida, of course, maintains the opposite: there is never a self-enclosed system.

<sup>3</sup> Ndebele's optimism was expressed in March 1990 at the 'Literature in Another South Africa' conference. See also Dennis Brutus (1993). Others drew reassurance from a bland interpretation of international events: 'It is fascinating to reflect that, at the very moment that the Soviet Union is re-entering international philosophic and cultural debates, Marxism in the West is a waning force; Russian *glasnost* (openness) promises to be a rich, a seminal contributor to the new pluralism that is abroad' (Willoughby 1989:96).

and convenient parochialism<sup>4</sup>.

The philosopher Johan Degenaar (1990:172) saw the post-modern posture of superseding Marxism as merging in South Africa with faith in a '[d]econstruction that helps us to hold off all gods and tyrants'. Post-structuralist deconstruction was seen to encourage an ethics of personal responsibility against Marxism's 'totalisation in the practice of thinking or totalitarianism in the practice of politics' (Degenaar 1990:169). In the name of liberal pluralism Degenaar (1990:172) criticised 'the Marxist search for a foundation which is assumed to be prior to interpretation and which can therefore act as a basis for interpretation', and favoured deconstruction which 'assumes that interpretation is the only ball game in town'<sup>5</sup>. Some theorists were content to advocate a discursive pluralism that left unquestioned the material, institutional forces that clear this utopian space for the free-play of competing interpretations. The danger of this approach becomes apparent when claims for 'ethics' take precedence over historical analysis.

David Attwell's (1990:96) defence of the necessary co-implication of post-modernism and post-colonialism rested on the claim that it is 'possible to see the resources of post-modernism as enabling, rather than undermining, an historical engagement'. He located 'the problem of deconstruction in an historically charged situation like South Africa', an 'academic discursive context' in which agents address contexts of racial oppression from within 'literary-historical and literary-critical cul-

<sup>4</sup> See Liebenberg (1987), De Jong (1989), Chapman (1989; 1990), Visser (1990), Sole (1990), Carusi (1991). These debates pro and contra theory have come into sharp focus around the work of J.M. Coetzee: see the 1989 special issue of *Journal of Literary Studies* (5,2), particularly Michael Vaughan's 'Should Theory be Accountable?'. The role of theory is defended in J.M.Coetzee and David Attwell (ed), *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews* (1992). For assessments of the states of theory in the broader African context see the special edition on critical theory and African literature, *Research in African Literatures* 21,1 (1990). See also Johnson (1994) on the dangers of importing metropolitan theory.

<sup>5</sup> The SAVAL papers collected in 1989, in which Degenaar's essay appeared, signal a general sidelining of Marxism in favour of post-structuralist theory. Contributors range from conceding Marxism's limited usefulness for conscientising and mobilising (Carusi), to demoting Marxism on the grounds of its utopian teleology (MacCallum), its crude understanding of ideology (Tait), its underestimation of the transcendent potential of aesthetic production (Green), and its overestimation of the potential of political action before the intransigence of the commodity form (de la Porte): see *South African Society for General Literary Studies IX* (Potchefstroom). This is a marked shift away from the SAVAL papers of 1988, particularly those by Wilhelm Liebenberg and Reingard Nethersole, which evidence a more cautious welcome to post-structuralism, and register concern about its usefulness in the politicised context of South Africa. But traces of the eager demotion of Marxism in favour of Derrida's undermining of totalising discourses can already be glimpsed in Bert Olivier's paper.

ture' (Attwell 1990:108,119,118). The exigencies of a South Africa where 'interest lies in the way contexts overdetermine conceptual allegiances' (Attwell 1990:129) appear to have sensitised eclectic theorists to the contextual constraints imposed upon academic production. But Attwell (1990:102) cautioned that these constraints can amount to 'an internal, Stalinist policing' of literary-critical culture that must be resisted. Without analysis of the history of historiography literary studies are 'always going to play the role of handmaiden to the more powerful, more coherently marshalled, more politically cogent discourses of history' (Attwell 1990a:84)<sup>6</sup>.

Attwell (1993:97) aimed to 'project a posthumanist, reconstructed ethics' via a reading of Coetzee's post-modernism that foregrounded his post-coloniality and addressed the 'discursive conditions obtaining in South African—what I call its state of 'colonial postcolonialism'; 'this ethically and politically fraught arena of South Africa' (1993:6). Bodies of theory are imported into the 'colonial postcolonialism' of a South African academic discursive context shaped by the 'liberal view [that] apartheid was irrational, and the dynamics of growth in a free market system were bound to undermine steadily the ability of the state to enforce it', and the 'revisionist viewpoint [that] apartheid was intrinsic to the logic of capitalist accumulation because it provided, among other things, for cheap labour' (Attwell 1993:30). In this historical context theories intersect with a politics of agency determined by race:

Although class factors are, of course, in evidence within black intellectual circles as well, race is a crucial determinant, perhaps the final determinant, of the social composition of intellectual life .... The national situation, in other words, in which intellectuals and literary artists work imposes on them a politics of agency (Attwell 1993:24).

Attwell divides 'a politics of agency' into a notion of agency rooted in Marxist hermeneutics that is primarily concerned with revolutionary discipline, and an agency that

has to do with the concept of nationhood ... that is, with questions of inclusion and exclusion, of finding or not finding a place for one's own particular story within the framework of the broader, national narrative .... Coetzee's narrative of colonialism has dramatized this situation implicitly in terms of rivaling nationalisms; in this respect, he has not shared the view of more strictly Marxist revisionists, for whom *class struggle* in the context of the industrial transformation of South Africa has been more significant than questions of *race and nationhood* have been (Attwell 1993:24f; e.a.).

<sup>6</sup> Other theorists invoked post-structuralism to indict a logocentric South African Marxist historiography bedevilled by an economic reductionism and historical determinism that has underestimated the fluidity of identity: see Deacon (1991), Robinson (1991), and Greenstein (1993). A more pugilistic writer even entertained fantasies of a post-structuralism limbering up in a new South Africa where 'the Gullivers of Marxism and modernity will have to be brought down to size' (Devenney 1994:164).

Rather than accepting 'the class-based notion of nation-in-the-making' analysis of Marxists historians, Attwell (1993:99) proposed that the South African context of colonialist postcolonialism is best understood via 'early Derridean deconstruction'<sup>7</sup>. The 'dramatic confluence of post-modern ideas and the history making exigencies of a society in turmoil' (Attwell 1993:125) necessitates a more sophisticated theoretical model than class. There is also a need to go beyond the Marxist's 'strong emphasis on national history and historiography' (Attwell 1993a:105). Clearly, either way, whether emphasising class struggle or emphasising national history, the Marxists are always on the losing side of this analytic dichotomy before a victorious post-Marxist and post-nationalist post-colonial theory. It appears that '[p]ostcoloniality has become a privileged site, for instance, for theorising and examining tensions and links between post-structuralism and historical discourses' (Attwell 1993b:4) in a way that conveniently vindicates claims for 'post-Marxism'.

Leon de Kock's (1993:44) survey of the various states of South African literary theory concluded that a post-structuralist post-colonial theory has the potential to form

a deliberate, politically-motivated focus on a past conceived as 'colonial', in order to contribute to the undoing of a present in which the traces of colonial conditioning are perceived still to survive.

But in the light of confident utopian claims for 'a meeting-place here between post-Marxian and post-structuralist discourses of textuality' (Willoughby 1994:43), De Kock qualified his optimism regarding South African 'posts' theory:

A new class of depoliticised aesthetes have perhaps discovered that the often Baroque terminology of post-structuralism, post-modernism, or postcolonialism offers a revitalised haven of textuality in the shallow sense: a place of refuge from political and contextual constraints in criticism (De Kock 1995:67-8).

But still a perceived affinity between the 'posts' that centres on the notion of difference and concern with discourses of oppression leads De Kock (1995:69) to advocate a pragmatic borrowing or *bricolage* of 'post-' theories and the redeployment of them 'in a decidedly *political* context of counter-narrative'. More recently De Kock (1996:27) has claimed that the 'greater discursive reflexivity' afforded by theory gives the contemporary theorist 'the (unfair) advantage of metacritical awareness'. The new approach proceeds on the basis of 'a relationship between the "textual" and the "material" facets of history which recognises the discursive basis of historical depiction' (De Kock 1996:25). Taking discourse seriously represents an advance over an 'earlier emphasis on capital, class, and official politics' that stressed binary oppositions, and is

<sup>7</sup> Attwell's Derrida is here drawn exclusively from an unreliable secondary source: Gayatri Spivak's 'Translator's Preface' to *Of Grammatology*. See Moran (1996).

thought to be of more use than 'monolithic models such as a theory of class struggle' (De Kock 1996:3,13)<sup>8</sup>.

One step towards assessing these post-mortems of Marxism is to recall some of the arguments of those superseded South African Marxist historiographers. A re-consideration of the 'post-Marxist' credentials of Lyotardian post-modernism and Derridean deconstruction might also be timely.

### Revisions (SA)

The revisionists sought to challenge a South African liberal historiography that constructed a narrative of competing homogeneous ethnic and national groupings, and to analyse how racism was not simply forged on the frontier but was part of the systemic nature of capitalism. Although the revisionists were not one monolithic school, and ferocious divisions arose between structuralists and social historians<sup>9</sup>, one area of agreement was the necessity of viewing political power through the lens of, but not reduced to, economic power. I will look briefly at the work of Martin Legassick, a major figure

<sup>8</sup> See Johnson (1996) and Moran (1996) for criticisms of De Kock's approach. Others have found class analysis useful when interpreting the pre-election period: 'De Klerk wants to negotiate to maximise the probability of preserving the existing class structure and to minimise the probability that improvements in the welfare of blacks would come at the expense of those in the nationalist coalition' (MacDonald & James 1993:397). It is worth noting that theorists working outside, but still preoccupied with, the South African context have generally been more reluctant to relinquish Marxist analysis, and have foreseen problems combining post-structuralism and post-colonial studies. Benita Parry (1987; 1994), Graham Pechey (1986; 1987), Anne McClintock (1992), Neil Lazarus (1993) and Laura Chrisman (1993; 1995) have all stressed the importance of socio-economic factors when addressing the South African context, and post- and neo-colonial contexts in general. On the other hand, for Derek Attridge (1994) an ethics of tolerant pluralism takes precedence over divisive socio-political imperatives.

<sup>9</sup> Dan O'Meara's *Volkcapitalisme* (1983) drew on Nicos Poulantzas's *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism* (1975) to stress the role of the State and the mobility of class relations. The structuralist Marxists were criticised by the Thompsonian revisionist social historians associated with the Wits History Workshop. The social historians levelled the charge of structuralist functionalism against the revisionists, and in turn the structuralists charged the social historians with idealising the experiential data of those from 'below' at the cost of locating such experiences in the broader systemic picture: see Bundy (1986), Morris (1987), Keegan (1989; 1989a), Murray (1988; 1989). Bozzoli and Delius (1990) provide an overview, Freund (1996) reviews economic history in South Africa, and O'Meara (1996) responds to Posel's (1991) critique of his Poulantzian approach. Perry Anderson's *Arguments Within English Marxism* (1980) presents a useful counterpoint to these debates.

in the revisionist school, to assess the argument of the 'post-Marxists' that the revisionists neglected nation and race, and that they were transfixed by binary oppositions and economic reductionism to the extent that they ignored the subtleties of discourse.

In 'The Dynamics of Modernisation in South Africa' Legassick (1974:288; 1972) saw his revisionist historiography as part of the attempt 'to develop constructively a discussion of the strategies of national liberation and socialist transformation in South Africa'. National struggle and nationhood are seen to be shaped by the peculiar historical circumstances obtaining in South Africa, a determinate structure of power against which determinant forms of struggle may be possible. In 'South Africa: Capital Accumulation and Violence' Legassick (1974:282) critiqued the economic reductionism of the SACP and the programme of achieving a classless socialist society via the stage of a populist 'national' social democracy:

such a nationalist ideology, devoid of explicit class analysis, could become the instrument of different classes among the African population.

Legassick's 'The Frontier Tradition in South African Historiography' offered a nuanced discussion of the interrelationship of race and class. Legassick (1980:48) questioned the prospect of national liberation leading to non-racial national democracy within the confines of capitalism, and acknowledged that '[r]acist attitudes became a racist ideology': racism is not reduced to class but rather racist attitudes preceded class stratification, and racism is not merely functional to capital but an independent variable. 'Race' is conceptualised as an overdetermination by different interactions and causations among the different levels in the social formation (economic, political, ideological) in a historic context where 'race' is elaborated in terms of material and discursive contradictions that can serve to blur racial distinctions<sup>10</sup>.

One reason that the revisionists treated the promise of a unifying nationhood with caution might be that it has often been accompanied by the liberal idea that the

<sup>10</sup> In the 'Critique of the Gotha Programme' (1875) Marx disassociated himself from 'Marxists' who oversimplified class antagonisms within the national context of class struggle. Marx saw the racism of the English working class towards the Irish as the source of their impotence and the secret which enabled the capitalist class to maintain its power. The national emancipation of Ireland was seen as the first condition for the emancipation of the English working class. Legassick's Doctoral Thesis, 'The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana, and the Missionaries, 1780-1840' (University of California, 1969) focuses on the entanglement of material and discursive elements in colonialism, and is a part of the critical Marxist tradition that eschews monolithic models such as a theory of class struggle. Legassick foregrounds the dichotomous discourse of the missionaries that the colonised subjects had to negotiate. For more on race and class see Greenberg (1980:385) and Bozzoli (1980; 1981).

forces of economic growth would in and of themselves break down apartheid, 'a view which accords well with those who call for increased overseas investment in South Africa' (Marks 1986:169)<sup>11</sup>. Revisionists have not taken the saga of rivalling nationalisms and the poetics of nationhood at face value because

the struggle for national liberation (in the sense of struggle against the structures of racial domination) may become part of the programme of sections of capital attempting to shed racism in the interests of guaranteeing the continuation of capitalism (Wolpe 1988:60).

### 'Post-Marxists' (RSVP)

What aspects of post-structuralist theories can help South African academics facing the imperative of critical engagement in a historically specific context scarred by racialised capitalism? Without underestimating the confusion of the so-called debate around post-modernism and post-structuralism, or the amenability of these theories to an intellectualist depoliticisation, some responses to the appeal of 'post-Marxism' can be read.

The post-modern disenchantment with Marxism's goal of the disalienation of humanity is perhaps best explained by Jean-Francois Lyotard (1989:28), the diagnostician of the 'post-modern condition':

Marx detects the hidden functioning of capitalism. At the heart of the process of emancipation and the coming to consciousness he places the disalienation of labour-power. In this way he believes he has identified and denounced the original crime from which is born the unhappiness of modernity: the exploitation of the workers. And like a detective, he imagines that by revealing 'reality'—i.e. liberal society and economics—as a fraud, he is allowing humanity to escape its great plague. Today we know that the October Revolution only succeeded, under the aegis of Marxism, and that any revolution only does and will succeed, in opening the same wound again. The localization and the diagnosis may change, but the same illness re-emerges in this rewriting. Marxists believed that they worked to disalienate humanity, but the alienation of man has been repeated in a barely displaced form.

<sup>11</sup> The issue of 'constructive engagement' with capitalism was the subject of an acrimonious exchange between Lipton (1976), and Legassick and Innes (1977). For background to this dispute see Hughes (1977), Lipton (1979), Johnstone (1982), Giliomee (1983), Posel (1983), Minkley (1986), and Natrass (1991). See also the argument of Giliomee & Schlemmer (1989:241) for a 'transcendent South African Nation' that would unify Afrikaner and African nationalism. Freund (1986), Morris (1987), and Hirson (1993) articulate reservations regarding nationalist discourses.

Lyotard's verdict shows signs of a disillusionment with the utopian promise inherent in Marx coupled with an impatience with institutionalised Marxist theory (see his irreverent *Economie libidinale*, and *Instructions paiennes*). But such claims need to be seen in the light of Lyotard's long and continuing engagement with the thought of Marx. Even the more recent concentration on Kant, particularly the third *Critique*, can be seen as part of an effort to rethink the notions of production and culture. Lyotard (1993:10, 276) has always worked within Marxian analytic categories, attending to the 'logic of *Capital*, the aspect of Marxism that remains alive', even if by 1982 he has grown more sceptical of the 'revolutionary project' he advocated at the time of the Algerian anti-colonial struggle. Still, in 1983 he could write that '[c]apitalism, which has no philosophy of history, disguises its "realism" under the Idea of an emancipation from poverty' (Lyotard 1988:155). The bourgeois discourse of emancipation is firmly located within systemic capitalism:

The economic genre's hegemony over the others can certainly put on the garb of an emancipatory philosophy of history. More wealth, more security, more adventure, etc. (Lyotard 1988:178).

In 1990 Lyotard (1993:115) argued that 'Marxist criticism has something obsolete, even tedious, about it' because the metaphysical force or subject of the narrative of Marxism, the proletariat, has now 'dissipated into local institutions'; there is no longer any universal subject of history, the

bourgeois discourse of emancipation and communal organization connected with it, that is, liberal 'late' capitalism, now look like the only survivors and winners after two centuries of struggle.

While this certainly undermines the practical and theoretical critical power of Marxism, what is retained is the Marxian perception that '[c]apital gives political hegemony to the economic genre' (Lyotard 1988:141). Like Marx, Lyotard (1993:115) wishes to contest this hegemony and the 'mechanistic economy, whose principle is the search for an optimal relation between expenditure and production':

'economic' society is a machine and ought to obey the rule of the best possible cost/benefit ratio, for all types of results and investments.

What Lyotard (1993:115) questions is the ability of Marxist criticism to provide a way out when 'the ghost has now vanished, dragging the last critical grand narrative with it off the historical stage'. Perhaps Lyotard (1993:60,114) remains within 'the impasse

between "militant" delirium and skepticism', but he accepts the Marxian *description* of material forces even if he has lost faith in the *prescriptive* solution of collective action enacted by a narrative subject, the proletariat.

Lyotard has been smoothly appropriated to a triumphalist, imperialistic, pragmatist, American cultural politics that, in the absence of any legitimating narrative, declares that what is right is what works. Richard Rorty (1982, 1991) popularised a post-modernist bourgeois liberal Lyotard resigned to the *laissez faire* of competing interpretations of the world, and appropriated post-structuralism to American pragmatism with the claim that liberalism stands on the pragmatic tolerance of difference. Stanley Fish (1985) saw a pragmatist Lyotard who is not only anti-foundational but also comfortably communitarian. These texts reflect the intersection of libertarian free marketeers and neo-conservative American thinkers characteristic of Reaganism<sup>12</sup>.

The performative criteria of functional efficiency and normative legitimation are, of course, precisely what Lyotard criticises as the hegemonic technological criterion of capitalism. Rather than sharing the American free-market euphoria or indulging outright defeatism before the globalisation of capitalism, Lyotard (1988:180) registers a 'disillusioned feeling (*ressentiment?*)' produced by 'a reformism [that] cannot make anybody happy':

Reformism accepts the stakes of the economic genre (capitalism) even while priding itself on redistributing the result of the exchange more equitably .... But just as the hope surrounding its birth was not vigorous, so the disillusionment linked to its decline is not a sublime feeling either. Sulking, we go back to exchange<sup>13</sup>.

For Lyotard it is reformist accommodationism that must be resisted. It is simply wrong to attribute to Lyotard the claim that the modernist grand narrative of emancipation

<sup>12</sup> See Geras (1987), and Bernstein's (1991) powerful critique of Rorty's liberal utopianism. For a debate between Rorty and Derrida on the relationship between deconstruction and pragmatism see Chantal Mouffe (ed), *Deconstruction and Pragmatism* (1996).

<sup>13</sup> According to Lyotard's (1988) translator, what is doomed to failure is the 'liberalist gesture of introducing reforms *within* a system in an attempt to assuage the threat or necessity of full-scale revolution'. But for Lyotard (1988:181) nationalist revolution that tries to 'stand in the way of capital's hegemony' is also 'a mistake' because 'this resistance fosters this hegemony as much as it counters it .... Proud struggles for independence end in young, reactionary States'. Perhaps Lyotard is too pessimistic. In *The Class Struggles in France: 1848-1850* Marx notes the virtues of failure: the reactionary elements both outside and inside the liberation movement reveal themselves as they manoeuvre to contain transformations of the status quo. Political transformation without social transformation entails a lack of criticism of the component parts of civil life.

associated with Marx has been superseded by a post-modernist, 'late capitalist', bourgeois emancipatory pluralism that negates class analysis. Furthermore, the identification of post-modernism and 'post-industrial society' is, as *The Post-modern Condition* (Lyotard 1979) puts it, a 'working hypothesis'. Lyotard complicates any linear, teleological reading of the 'post-' in post-modernism, and appears to want to draw out a sense of the post-modern as an affirmative rather than a nostalgic modality of the modern. As he remarks, referring to the 'responsibility to thought' that his own work affirms: '[t]his is the way in which Marxism has not come to an end' (Lyotard 1988:171).

The post-structuralist deconstruction associated with the work of Jacques Derrida also bears a complex and sustained relationship to the Marxian corpus. One can read an appeal for an 'open' Marxism in the 1971 interviews collected in *Positions*, not to mention the reference to Marx on commodity fetishism and on Stirner's confusion of propriety and property in the 1971 'White Mythology' (in *Margins of Philosophy*), as well as the sustained examination of the notion of *exappropriation* as a Derridean transformation of Heidegger's *Ereignis* that foregrounds property and appropriation. Marx haunts the discussion of Hegel and Bataille in the 1967 'From a Restricted to a General Economy' (in *Writing and Difference*), and these texts make nonsense of the claim that deconstruction is a response by the French left to the failure of May '68. Indeed, post-1968 (or more precisely post-1972 according to Michael Ryan 1982:45) Derrida has stressed his relationship to Marx with greater frequency. Derrida's (1980:14) account of this shift throws light on the notion of strategy in deconstruction:

I insist upon the *open marxism*. As you probably know, the situation has changed completely in France since *Positions*. At that time, as marxism was the dominant ideology among French intellectuals I was anxious to mark the distance between marxism and what I was interested in so as to maintain the specificity of my own work. In the space of four or five years, however, marxism has ceased to be the dominant ideology. I don't want to exaggerate but I would say that marxists are now almost ashamed to call themselves marxists. Though I am not and have never been an orthodox marxist, I am very disturbed by the antimarxism dominant now in France so that, as a reaction, through political reaction and personal preference, I am inclined to consider myself more marxist than I would have done at a time when Marxism was a sort of fortress<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> In the spirit of open Marxism, Jameson (1991:406) has pointed to 'the distinctions that have to be respected between an examination of historical events, an evocation of larger class and ideological conflicts and traditions, and an attention to impersonal socioeconomic patterning systems (of which the well-known thematics of reification and commodification are examples). The question of agency ... has to be mapped across these levels'. For discussions of Marx's treatment of cross-class identification see Spivak (1988), Amuta's (1989:71-75) discussion of the 'crisis of Marxism', and Jameson (1990). In chapter 5 of *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (1993) Spivak argues that Derrida's commitment to an open Marxism is accompanied by an insufficient knowledge of the Marxian project.

It is only, as Derrida (1982:329) remarked in 1971, on

this condition that deconstruction will provide itself the means with which to *intervene* in the field of oppositions that it criticizes, which is also the field of nondiscursive forces.

In 'Onto-Theology of National-Humanism' Derrida (1992:7,10,7) asks 'what is the history of the concept or of national identity as such', 'the structure of national consciousness', and draws attention to the international academic marketplace, the institutional phenomena and 'all the political stakes that meet up here'. Derrida (1992:18) focuses on the differences between philosophical discourses within geopolitical and national borders, 'among other things the place today of the Anglo-American idiom in the socially and economically most powerful legitimating discourse'. Even within the same linguistic milieu different contexts reshape theoretico-philosophical speculation to serve specific ends. For Derrida (1992:17) *The German Ideology* shows that 'Marx was no doubt one of the first, perhaps *the* first, to suspect lucidly' the connection between nationalism and philosophy.

In 'Spectres of Marx' Derrida (1994:58) defends the emancipatory spirit of Marxism against the neo-liberal euphoria of the market economy. The worldwide market that 'holds a mass of humanity under its yolk ... in a new form of slavery

... will not be treated without at least the spirit of the Marxist critique, the critique of the market, of the multiple logics of capital, and of that which links the state and international law to this market.

Derrida (1994:58) points out that the sense of 'post-Marxism' felt by his generation was a reaction to the events of the 1950s and before, roughly the Moscow trials and the repression in Hungary, that these factors undoubtedly influenced the development of deconstruction, but this was not 'out of conservative or reactionary motivations' or any affinity with those 'who find the means to puff out their chests with the good conscience of capitalism, liberalism, and the virtues of parliamentary democracy'. Against the 'gospel of politico-economic liberalism', '[t]his neo-liberal rhetoric, both jubilant and worried, manic and bereaved, often obscene in its euphoria', Derrida (1994:45,50,56) recalls that

[d]econstruction has never had any sense or interest, in my view at least, except as a radicalization, which is to say *in the tradition* of a certain Marxism, in a certain *spirit*

of Marxism<sup>15</sup>.

Deconstruction certainly seeks to question the hegemony of the 'political' as a determinant, transcendental referent, usually in the form of history, that must contain all enquiry. But the deconstruction of history should not be confused with its dematerialisation. Like Lyotardian post-modernism, deconstruction also acknowledges a responsibility and obligation to the political which takes the form of a local, strategic intervention, an intervention attuned to historical changes within specific generative contexts. The reevaluation of Marxism by French theorists occurred in a specific institutional and political context in which they sought to challenge what they saw as an entrenched Marxist orthodoxy. But in the wake of the events of 1989, the collapse of communism and the decline of the left in its principal variations, Derrida warns against a complacent neo-liberal jubilation, a new dogmatism that is setting in today. The ideal remains to go beyond the paraphrastic distribution of the old social roles.

### Conclusion

Marxism has never been the dominant ideology in South African English literature departments, and the situation has changed dramatically since the Marxist revisionist hey-day of the 1970s and early 1980s. Contemporary arguments for 'post-Marxism' have presented themselves as reactions to a hegemonic revisionist left historiographical discourse intent on political supervision of literary-critical culture. But these arguments appear reactive in a way that discloses ideological affinities with other self-serving readings of the signs of the times. Although there are problems with Marxist historiography and with post-modernism and deconstruction that I have not explored here, their misrepresentation by South African literary theorists reveals more than dubious scholarship. I believe that the use of post-structuralist theory to further marginalise rather than critically engage with Marxian analysis serves only to ensure that a more circumspect version of a revindicated and opportunistic liberal-humanism remains the resilient ethos. Gestures to historical positionality by South African liter-

<sup>15</sup> Samuel Weber (1983) has warned against the universalisation of post-structuralism in the U.S. that ignores the strategic elements in the work of imported theorists, and Giles Gunn (1987:57) has remarked on the need for 'a sharp reminder of what in America we have too quickly forgotten, if ever we learned it at all ... namely, that post-structuralism developed in Europe out of a political and not just an epistemological and metaphysical critique of Western culture'. See *Whither Marxism? Global Crises in International Perspectives* (1995), edited by Bernd Magnus and Stephen Cullenberg; in this companion volume to Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* contributors discuss the relevance of Marxism without any examination of Africa.

ary theorists need to be scrutinised to determine what version of history, and what possible future, is being endorsed.

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## Thoughts About Discourse Comprehension

Nils Erik Enkvist

### What is Involved in Understanding Discourse?

There are two very basic problems buried under my question. The first has to do with understanding and comprehension. The second problem is the meaning of 'discourse'. It has often been convenient to make a distinction between *text* and *discourse*. One of the common ways of doing so is to define *discourse* as *text plus situational context*, and conversely *text* as *discourse minus situational context*. To cite once again a classic example: if there is a sign saying 'No Smoking' on the wall of a lecture room, the sign qualifies as discourse. But if a linguist takes down the sign and puts it on his desk in order to analyse its syntax, it turns into text. Those fond of rigorous definitions might object that even on the linguist's desk, 'No Smoking' has the context of a syntactic example. We can satisfy the practical linguist, though not necessarily the philosopher, if we define *situational context* as a *context of basic function*, that is, the context in which the utterance was originally used in real-life communication. 'Was originally used', here, may be modified into 'was or could be used' to allow for invented, imaginary examples. But we might add that discourse linguists generally try to avoid inventing examples. They prefer authentic materials to inventions of armchair data where the linguist fancies weird sentences and passes subjective judgements on their linguistic status.

My 'basic function' also turns out to be an oversimplification if we start thinking, for instance, about people who quote texts such as the Bible or classic poems to support an argument. Problems of allusion and quotation have been studied at great length, but I must here withstand the temptation of discussing such multiple contexts and contextual transfers.

There are other basic terms that may need explication. One of them is *communication*. Communication can be broadly defined as the transfer of information from one individual or group to another. A *natural language*—a spoken, and perhaps also written, language which can be learned by children through exposure in their immediate environment—is not the only code of communication. Non-linguistic semiotic systems such as traffic signs also communicate. The same is true of artificial languages patterned on natural ones, such as Esperanto. They supposed to be easy to learn for international communication. Symbolic languages such as formulae in chemistry or mathematics or formal logic try to maintain a one-to-one relationship between

symbol and meaning, and to avoid polysemy and figurative use. Substitute languages such as sign languages for the deaf, comprise of concepts which are to some extent patterned on those of natural languages but their different expressive machinery has given them a life of their own. Ideographic writing systems such as Chinese, again, functions in such a way that the same set of written symbols can represent different forms of speech. None of these semiotic systems or languages need remain absolutely constant. True, there is frozen, ritual language, in prayers for instance. And Dr. Zamenhof, who developed Esperanto, decreed (in vain) that nobody was to change the basic rules he had stipulated for his language. Still, the relentless development of society and language tend to compel changes even in frozen texts: the Lord's Prayer for instance has been given different forms, and even in its shape of 1611, its meaning will not be quite the same for us as it was for, say, Shakespeare.

But natural languages in the narrow sense—here, human codes for communication exposed through speech and perhaps also by writing or electronic media, or through a combination of all three—are actually only one type of the natural codes through which meanings are transferred. To begin with, we might distinguish between language and paralinguage. Language is structured in ways amenable to description in terms of today's linguistics, whereas paralinguage so far defies simple structural description. Among today's paralinguistic features we often include matters such as tempo, speed, pausing patterns, voice colour (husky, strident, strained, etc.), loudness, and the like. The history of linguistics teaches us that features once regarded as paralinguistic, such as intonation, may be amenable to descriptions in linguistics proper, once their systematic and structured use for the conveyance of meanings has been discovered and described.

Beyond paralinguage are inarticulate noises, such as cries expressing pain or chuckles expressing happiness. Still, their meanings are often situationally describable. If we make a noise when our dentist drills into a nerve he will know what we are trying to signal. Meanings of inarticulate noises can be shared by groups speaking different languages. Still, we should beware of calling all of them universal.

So, there is a vast number of codes of behaviour which carry meaning. In some cultures you are expected to remain standing when you enter somebody's dwelling, in others you must sit down at once to avoid offence. In some cultures, bad news, even of the death of one's dearest, should be told with a smile. Doing the wrong thing signals, at best, ignorance. In many cultures, ignorant foreigners, identifiable for instance by accent or dress, are more readily excused than natives. If no excuses exist, such aberrant behaviour turns into bad manners or even wilful offence. When cultural codes change with time, there may arise conflicts between generations, the old conservatives and the young innovators. In some cultures you take your shoes off when visiting, in others you keep them on; I know of one particular society (namely my own)

where older people accuse the younger generation of bad manners when the young move around in stockinged feet. Those who wish to rationalise this particular generation gap will say that the young are used to children with muddy boots. Generally, traditions and fashions of clothing are a constant source of discussion and protest. In many countries of Western Europe you can guess a person's age, or at least solidarity with a given generation and perhaps political views, from whether that person takes part in a TV discussion in T-shirt and jeans or in a chalk-stripe business suit, shirt and tie. Such features, and countless more, all carry specific meanings for those who are familiar with the traditions of the society in question. And those who move between cultures and between traditions have excellent opportunities for causing offence, even unwittingly, if they do the wrong thing.

This presents us with another troublesome basic concept, namely *meaning*. Here I must cut an endless discussion very short by simply suggesting, with the structuralists, that meanings presuppose potential contrasts between alternatives from among which a speaker or writer may choose. If there is no choice and no alternative, meanings cannot arise. If there is a society where everybody always drapes herself in the same way in similar animal furs, contrasts in clothing cannot be used to express meanings such as social status. What is completely predictable cannot carry meaning. In Modern English spelling, as information theorists like to note, the letter *q* is always followed by *u*. Hence the *u* has no meaning and could be left out. If we stop worrying about traditions we might just as well spell *qeen* and *qote* instead of *queen* and *quote* without losing anything essential. Note that one highly meaningful contrast is that between speech and silence. Some cultures tolerate and even value silence, in situations where other cultures regard it as an insult.

There is, however, another consideration involved. If we reduce linguistic signals to the minimum needed to express contrasts and thus meanings, we at the same time increase the risks of mistakes. When working with accounts for instance, we cannot afford errors: every number must be absolutely right. In natural-language discourse, however, there is a certain amount of redundancy, of 'unnecessary' information, as well as a set of devices to express hesitation and to correct what went wrong. Therefore we should beware of too readily defining what may seem like unnecessary, redundant repetition as needless and communicatively irrelevant. Some linguists have cited structures such as the Latin *omnium bonorum virorum* with a genitive ending attached to every word as an example of needless bother. But in fact this is not necessarily so. Repeating a case ending shows that the words belong together, and makes it possible to separate them from each other for instance in poetry, as the Romans indeed used to do. And the Finnish *suuressa vanhassa valkoisessa talossa* ('in the large old white house') the repetition of the inessive *-ssa* not only cements the words into a phrase, but also signals that the whole phrase has the function of an adverbial in its

sentence.

Concerning communication, again, most messages should presumably be interpreted in their literal sense. But many are figurative; yet others ironical and carry underlying meanings opposite to those on the surface. Ironical utterances should be provided with irony signals, either linguistic or situational-cum-pragmatic: if I say 'what a lovely day' when it is raining cats and dogs, people who know me will realise that my statement can hardly be literally true. I shall not here concern myself with the fine line distinguishing irony from a lie, however interesting this problem may be, not least in contrasting communicative traditions in different cultures.

All this implies what one might call an optimistic teleological stance. Societies, their conventions and their languages have been a long time developing. What is feasible and what works is at a premium, what is awkward and risks communication failures has often been lost by erosion in the self-therapy of language. Note for instance that the principles of economy are different in natural languages from what they are in symbolic systems of, say, logic or mathematics or bank accounts. Messages could be shortened if they were expressed in a language with less built-in redundancy and if speakers and writers avoided all needless constructions and all repetition. But as we have already noted, the cost of such apparent economies would be a vastly increased risk of misunderstanding, comparable to making errors in a bank account. Therefore, simplistic attempts at applying criteria of economy to natural languages and to natural-language communication are bound to be unrealistic. Relating the efficacy of a grammar to the number of rules (the fewer the rules we need, the better the description) is also hazardous. The outcome depends on the form of rules. And then if we simplify our description of a language at one point, it is apt to expand at another. No description has been achieved of any language with the completeness needed for a total overview of descriptive economy.

It is yet another matter that the economies of models of language may well be construed on principles that differ from those of the actual neurophysiological processes of the human brain. There was a classic debate between behaviourists, who claimed that we learn language by imitation and reinforcement of success, and linguists of the generative-transformational persuasion, who claimed that utterances arise through grammatical rules made possible by an innate human linguistic capacity. A sceptic might still ask to what extent people actually learn certain common utterances (say, greetings, sentences occurring frequently in weather reports, and the like) by direct imitation. A person who uses certain utterances very often may well insert them into his discourse as ready-made prefabs, instead of going through the bother of generating them anew every time from scratch. Phrase-books for tourists for example try to collect utterances potentially useful as prefabs.

Underlying all such considerations is the obvious fact that man is an animal in

constant quest for meanings. Whatever result of a potential choice we hear or see or feel we tend to interpret it as meaningful. If we cannot assign factual, referential meanings to a piece of discourse, we try to interpret it figuratively. This is what makes metaphor possible. If all attempts at finding referential meanings fail, we go on to establish the pragmatic meaning that piece of discourse has to us in its own specific situational context. In fact, we analyse all utterances as symptoms of a person's character, state, and behaviour. After such a multiple search for meanings it is hard to imagine that any linguistic, or indeed social, behaviour could be completely meaningless. How we respond to interpretative success and failure is an interesting question in itself. Such responses vary with individual and situation. For instance, if I fail to understand an article on physics, I blame my own incompetence. But if I fail to understand a text expressly written for readers like me, such as instructions for my new outboard motor or a paper on the linguistics of discourse, I blame the author. My guess is that those who hate modern poetry are unable or unwilling to adjust to the kind of mental exercise required of the reader, and transfer their feelings of inadequacy on the poet. Many rhetoricians have made a distinction between writer-friendly and reader-friendly discourse, and indeed, composition teaching might well concentrate on showing what is required for a text to be reader-friendly in its particular communicative situation. I shall return to this question in connection with information structure and shared knowledge.

### Success Concepts

We have already seen that it is expedient to distinguish various levels of linguistic and communicative success. Partly, these levels presuppose different kinds of competence, partly the greater or less mastery of them will define and colour the linguistic and communicative prowess of a speaker or a writer.

The first prerequisite of understanding discourse is an ability to assign sounds to phonemes within the relevant phoneme inventory. Every student knows that foreign languages make use of strange sounds—noises we are tempted to call them—which may need long periods of intense ear-training to be properly appreciated. Again, an example. In native Finnish there is only one sibilant phoneme, /s/, which is, very roughly, a sound halfway between an English /s/ and /sh/. I say 'native Finnish' because educated Finns know for instance English can distinguish between /sh/ and /s/ and use their non-native /sh/ in recent loan-words and foreign placenames. Native Finnish lacks voiced sibilant phonemes. When a Finn is beginning to learn English one of his first problems is to learn to hear the difference between four sibilants where his native Finnish only has one. (Some Finns in fact voice their /s/ between vowels, but as such voicing fails to carry meaning it passes unnoticed.) The Finns' sibilant problem may

stay with them for life, even through highly successful careers in an English-speaking environment.

So, one requirement for learning a foreign language is to make the necessary distinctions between sounds. A Finn cannot make a difference between *lies* and *lice* or *seat* and *sheet* without laborious ear-training and pronouncing drill. We might call this level of competence *phonological competence*. It is predominantly a matter of perception, at least at the initial stages of language learning where the learner cannot as yet predict sounds from his knowledge of the vocabulary (for instance by knowing that *mice* is an everyday English word whereas *mize* is not). And one can improve one's perception by practice, just as a few days in Kruger Park will teach a visitor to spot animals hidden to the untrained eye. The difficulties increase when the foreign language and the mother tongue make use of very different phonological devices. For a European, the tones of Chinese and Vietnamese are hard to hear and make, as are the clicks of several South-African languages. Note that the presence of word tone in, say, Chinese is part of the total economy pattern of the language: using tone makes it possible to use fewer phoneme sequences and a more restricted phonotaxis, and instead increase the repertoire of available words and structures by adding tone.

The next level is, broadly speaking, *syntactic competence*. I say 'broadly speaking' because I am here including lexis as part of syntax: what goes into a grammar and what into a dictionary is a choice made by the linguist rather than by the language. Phonological competence also merges into syntactic competence: many languages distinguish questions from statements through intonation, that is, by phonological means. Syntactic competence involves the ability of distinguishing between words and word forms (the latter a crucial point in synthetic languages with a rich morphology) and between different syntactic patterns.

The highest and most comprehensive level might be called *pragmatic competence*, the ability of using syntactic structures in a communicatively successful manner. By this time the reader may have asked whether there is a specific 'semantic competence', an ability to operate with meanings. The answer is that all levels of competence, phonological, syntactic and pragmatic, are involved with meanings: phonological competence with meaningful distinctions between sounds and sound patterns, syntactic competence with meaningful distinctions between words and syntactic structures, and pragmatic competence with meaningful distinctions arising from the use of different syntactic structures. I already mentioned the need for understanding irony as different from straight non-ironical language. Another area where we need pragmatic competence is the distinction of levels of politeness, most basically in simple overt matters such as modes of address, and more subtly in anticipating what will be understood as good manners and what as shocking, discourteous or indecent by a specific set of communication partners.

In applied linguistics, *communicative competence* has been used as a package term encapsulating all the different kinds of competence that go into successful communication. And many linguists have studied *communication strategies* in the sense of approaches adopted by speakers whose command of the relevant language is inadequate for normal expression. One might for instance try gesturing or even speaking in one's own language and thus transferring the onus of understanding on one's hearer (adopting the anecdotal imperialist attitude embodied in 'everybody understands English if I speak it loud enough'). And then, success in communication is not a matter of linguistic skills alone. Despite many years of language study at school, some speakers fail to manage even simple speaking situations. But there are others who do very well by supplementing a minimal vocabulary and next to no grammar with a splendid talent for uninhibited gesture and mime.

A practical question that arises in such situations is the level of tolerance of shortcomings in the speech and writing of others. I already touched upon this very subtle business in connection with behaviour, and the same principles apply to communication through language. People of the same social class and group will expect their communication partners to follow their own traditional patterns, including taboos: a young man may tell bawdy stories to his peers but not to a prim elderly aunt. Those who indulge their linguistic habits outside their own class run the risk of being branded as rude or uneducated or offensive, or as over-refined and supercilious. It is risky to break the pragmatolinguistic conventions (which here include syntactic and, in speech, phonological ones) of one's hearers and readers. However, a foreign accent may often serve as an excuse. If somebody is obviously a foreigner, he or she cannot be expected to grasp all the niceties of civilised behaviour. To language teachers and learners this poses a problem. What should be the optimal level of ambition when we learn a foreign language? In each specific situation, where is the point of diminishing returns, beyond which the hearer's expectations, and requirements, rise without any benefit to communication? Often, we learn a language for some specific purpose which enables us to define the desired competence level. But often, as in the study of foreign languages at school, we aim at a loosely-defined general competence where reading comprehension and tourist phraseology is readily weighted at the expense of more creative spoken communication. Many of us have been embarrassed because our fluent command of a few foreign language phrases and a reasonable pronunciation have caused an overestimation of our skills. In tests at school and university, skills are measured on a pre-set scale reflecting the testers' opinions of the relevant language. In authentic communication, skills are related to the receptor's expectations in a specific situation.

Problems of this kind also raise the question of hierarchisation of levels such as comprehensibility, syntactic competence, and pragmatic competence. In interpreting

actual discourse, do we first segment it into phonemes, next analyse its syntax and syntactic meaning, and finally place it in a situational context to get at pragmatic meaning supported by paralinguistic features? Even common sense tells us that this cannot be so. Actual discourse comprehension must be based on a highly complex interplay of the different levels and their concomitant types of competence. With a computer analogue we might speak of parallel processing of discourse within a number of linguistic subsystems. Understanding discourse is largely a matter of anticipation. We hear the initial phonemes of an utterance, and at once set about to predict what is most likely to follow, not only in phonology but also in syntax and in pragmatics. Indeed, simple experiments show that pragmatics and syntax can override phonology: try looking at your watch and asking, 'whappimeisit?', and your communication partner is more likely to say something like 'five past ten' than 'what is pime?'. Note that such pragmatic competence, anticipating who is likely to say what in a given situation, is based on what we might call cultural competence. We must have some experience of how people behave, verbally and otherwise, in relevant situations within the relevant culture.

#### **Grammaticality, Acceptability, Appropriateness**

Three areas of competence used for judgements of communicative success are Grammaticality, Acceptability, and Appropriateness. In another paper (Enkvist 1990) I have called them 'success concepts'.

First, grammaticality. Traditionally, linguists have made a distinction between what is 'correct' and what is 'wrong'—most of us will remember applications of such clear dichotomies from our schooldays. Indeed, in culturally homogeneous and stable societies there readily arises a consensus of 'right' and 'wrong' in language. An interesting problem is on what authority, on what grounds, such distinctions are made. Though the schoolteacher's judgements are usually conservative, nobody can claim that correctness equals age: Chaucer for instance used multiple negatives of a kind modern schoolteachers equate with sin. Appeals to authority are also common: the Fowlers recommend *x* and stigmatise *y*, and the Fowlers cannot be wrong. But where did the Fowlers and their colleagues get their authority, their feeling for correctness in English? Though people like to appeal to so-called authorities, the ultimate authority is social approval—what a social group believes about its language is 'correct' for that group and expressed by trustees such as the Fowlers. What is 'wrong' is what foreigners say before they have learned the language, or what other social groups say 'because nobody has succeeded in teaching them to speak correctly'. Note that in situations dominated by an educated elite, educated usage becomes the norm. But there are situations where social groups get mixed, in armies for instance, and then using an elite norm may be to invite trouble.

In another perspective, linguists too must worry about correctness. When a grammarian writes a grammar he or she must decide what to approve of and include, or what to exclude, leave out, and perhaps warn against if he or she is of the normative persuasion. Most grammarians in the history of linguistics have relied on their own socially conditioned intuitions, on the views of other grammarians, and on examples out of a body of approved, often literary, texts. Decisions concerning grammaticality became even more pressing with the advent of generative-transformational grammar. Now the grammarian's job was to set up formalised rules generating sentences. And the only way of deciding whether a rule was good or not was to see what it did. If it generated good sentences only, the rule was all right; if it generated garbage, it had to be revised. But the problem is how to distinguish good sentences from garbage before the rules are there. This is another chicken-or-egg-type of problem.

That such a simplistic view of right and wrong could persist in a science as sophisticated as linguistics owed largely to Saussure's (1955[1915]:36-39) distinction between *langue* and *parole* and Chomsky's (1965:3-15) related distinction between *competence* and *performance*. *Langue* and competence were norms, predominantly social and predominantly mental respectively, which steered people's linguistic behaviour. *Parole* and performance were what people actually did when communicating. By defining linguistics as being mainly concerned with *langue* and competence, and by usurping the privilege of deciding what was part of this *langue* and competence, a linguist could side-step the issue and himself decide on what was proper and what was not. Of course, this was a crude way of cutting a Gordian knot, ignoring the well-known fact that linguistic competence consists not of a single norm but of many, the choice depending for instance on the situation. To return to my old example: a sergeant uses one norm when addressing a squad of recruits, and (one would hope) a very different norm when talking to his family over breakfast. Nor would we long tolerate a person who speaks precisely the way he or she writes, and vice versa.

There have actually been two contrary opinions about such matters. One breed of linguists and grammarians pretend that the basic system of the language they are describing is homogeneous enough to be squeezed into one single description. In practice, they restrict themselves to one of the many existing norms, often the general norm of educated writing which is tacitly assumed to be closest to the *langue*. Another breed of linguists are prepared to accept the fact that what we call a language is in fact a vast collection of different sublanguages, situational styles, historical variants, regional dialects, socially conditioned variants, and individual idiosyncrasies. If so, a grammar of one single norm obviously cannot cover all these sublanguages. Therefore the best grammarians are prepared to recognise that they are dealing with a restricted spectrum of language, which they define and limit so as best to serve the future users of their grammars. Or, worse, to satisfy their own prejudices. One some-

times hears linguists trying to end arguments with a categoric 'In my language such a construction is impossible, so forget it'. But in reality, one of the most basic characteristics of a natural language is that it allows of variation in many dimensions, while still working well as a medium of communication. Ignoring variation means ignoring the essence of language.

So, grammaticality, in terms of yes or no, may be a practical aid to grammarians restricting themselves to one variant of language. In linguistics, however, it needs much refinement. One classic supplementary concept is *acceptability*. To study acceptability we must ask a suitably selected group of informants how they respond to certain test samples of language. Would they approve of them and use them, or not? And are they natural enough to be modified in certain specific ways, so that the informant can, for instance, turn an affirmative sentence into a negative or a question? Acceptability experiments were performed in the 1960s at University College London by Lord Quirk and his collaborators (see Quirk 1966; Greenbaum & Quirk 1970). What they showed was that sentences can be placed on a scale of acceptability: there are sentences that are approved or rejected by practically all informants, and there are sentences where the opinions remain divided.

How do people in fact judge the acceptability of a certain sentence? Presumably, one of the tacit criteria is contextualisation. The informants try to think of a situation in which it would seem natural for them to use that particular sentence. If they succeed, the sentence is all right; if not, it is no good; and between these two extremes there is a twilight zone of hesitation.

If so, the relationship between acceptability and situation is crucial enough to require further scrutiny. Some people have wide ranges of linguistic experience helping them to contextualise sentences. Others may lack such experience. Uncontrolled factors also readily seep into work with informants. One might imagine that informants (in actual fact students) who spent the morning reading modern poetry would respond differently from students who spent the morning studying Gibbon or Macaulay, or, why not, physical chemistry. Such arguments suggest the need for yet a third success concept, a 'contextualised acceptability' that we might call *appropriateness*. In setting up such a concept we are assuming that utterances have different acceptability ratings in different situations: what the sergeant says when drilling recruits is appropriate for the barracks but not for his family, and the other way round. What has been called 'style' is in fact a special type of appropriateness: a sonnet style involves language appropriate to sonnets, a scientific style to papers in science, a legal style to laws and statutes, and so forth. A full communicative competence will involve the mastery of appropriateness conventions across the entire spectrum of language a speaker is likely to need. In addition to the general norms of appropriateness within a family and everyday activities, professional people will thus have to master the language

appropriate to their professions. And to appreciate modern poetry, a reader must cope with its appropriate linguistic conventions which may differ greatly from those in other kinds of communication.

### Comprehension in toto

To understand our fellows, we need not necessarily rely on utterances that satisfy strict requirements of grammaticality, acceptability and appropriateness. On the contrary: as any close look at unwashed transcripts of actual speech shows, we use lots of ill-formed sentences and ill-formed chunks of discourse. But still we can be perfectly understood. Even sceptics are easy to convince by simple experiments: play a bit of videotape of a fluent speaker, and then give your audience a literal transcript of the text. It is an everyday experience that speech which sounds perfectly well-formed and even elegant on video may contain large numbers of false starts, repetitions, corrections, structure shifts, anacolutha, sentence fragments, stutters and the like. They look bad on paper but often pass unnoticed in an actual communication situation. Some of them even contribute to the impression of fluency.

Such observations show that linguistic well-formedness, at whatever level we define it, is not a good criterion, or necessary condition, of comprehensibility in discourse. One reason is context. The situational context of discourse often contributes decisively to discourse understanding. Important contextual features are often signalled through deixis, that is, by anchoring the text to time, place and scenario through the use of specific pointers. What such deictics point at may be irrecoverable when the situational context is removed. For instance, if I show my spectacles to a live audience and say 'without these I could not manage' those hearing my text from tape have no chance of knowing what I am talking about. And if my son and I are mounting an outboard motor onto our boat, he will know precisely what 'two more inches' will mean. The context of situation is enough, and 'will you please move the motor two more inches to the left', in the midst of the action, would seem odd at least. Deixis is the most obvious, but by no means the only, way through which context enters into discourse. All kinds of allusion, intertextual references to other texts, agreement with or protest against conditions of politeness in the particular communication situation, and the like enter into the total meaning of discourse.

Texts also have both a referential meaning and a pragmatic meaning. If, in the midst of a lecture given in English, I insert three minutes of Finnish, only those who know Finnish will capture the referential meaning of my Finnish passage. That is, of the way in which my Finnish contributes to my argument and to its description of something outside the communication situation. But my Finnish still carries pragmatic meaning. My non-Finnish hearers might suspect that I have lost my mind, that I

have forgotten where I am and who I am talking to, or, more charitably, that I wish to illustrate a point in my argument. In such instances my non-Finnish listeners must resort to pragmatic meaning. If we include paralanguage—gesture, voice colour, loudness, tempo and the like—among factors affecting pragmatic meaning, there may arise conflicts between reference and pragmatics. We may be nasty to our conversation partner but use the paralanguage of the sweetest friendship, or we may praise him with the paralanguage of hatred. Paralanguage then becomes an irony signal, a warning that the utterance should not be taken literally.

But if a linguistic description of a piece of discourse cannot tell us whether that piece of discourse is comprehensible or not, what criteria can we use instead? The best we can do is to look at the main purpose of communication, which is to transfer information from one person to others.

Meanings, we have noted, can only arise through choice between alternatives. If there is no choice, there is no information. We can postulate that the purpose of information transfer is to lead the receptor of a message to a scenario, or world of discourse, which resembles the world the speaker or writer wishes to convey. I say 'resembles', or is isomorphic with, rather than 'is identical with' because we cannot take for granted that the hearer or reader will build up a world quite the same as that of the speaker/writer. For communicative success it suffices that the worlds are similar enough in their relevant features to make people respond in the same way. In fact, as we have noted, people with different backgrounds may respond very differently to one and the same text: what is polite to some may be rude to others. And think of a non-physicist reading physics, or a non-linguist reading linguistics. They will understand something of the text but not reconstruct fully the world the writer was trying to describe. They do not have the background needed for complete scenario-building around the message.

Such considerations also explain our need for terminologies and of formal languages in science and scholarship. The purpose of terminology and of formulae, for instance in mathematics, physics, chemistry and logic is to maximise isomorphies between the scenarios of a speaker/writer and his information partners. Scientific and scholarly terms can be defined with a minimum of fuzz and potential discrepancy between the sender's and the receiver's scenarios as long as they are trained to use the same terminology. Fuzz is apt to enter into everyday, non-terminological language.

If we were to sum up these principles we might say: A text is comprehensible to those who can build around it a scenario in which it makes sense. A text can make sense in two ways. Those believing in a truth-functional semantics might say that a text makes sense if its scenario might be true ('might be' rather than 'is' to allow for fiction and fantasy). And those wishing to base their semantics on pragmatics might say that a text makes sense if the scenario it has created conforms to views of human

behaviour which the receptor can accept and understand.

In these terms, when we hear or read a text, it restricts its scenario. When a text begins, we do not know what it wants to say and what its scenario will be. But as the text goes on, it successively narrows down its scenario and makes it increasingly specific. And it does so by eliminating alternatives. Hearing or reading a simple sentence such as *Susie flew to Paris*, we begin by noting that the scenario is concerned with Susie, thus eliminating all the world's billions of non-Susies, and perhaps also all the Susies known to the conversation partners who seem contextually irrelevant. *Flew* eliminates all other verbs or phrases, including those related to travel such as *walked* and *drove* and *cycled* and *went by train*. *To* eliminates prepositions such as *from* and *through* and *over*, and *Paris* eliminates all other possible expressions of place. At the same time, in English, the syntactic pattern expresses functions: we know for instance that *Susie* is the syntactic subject, and also the semantic agent, of the sentence. From all possible worlds we have been led to one specific world or scenario: the successive eliminations of alternatives have built up a scenario, a world, in which Susie flew to Paris.

I mentioned parallel processing, and to get a full picture of the communication process we should reconstruct the complex elimination process at all levels: phonology, syntax, pragmatics. We should also note that discourse comprehension often involves a reconstruction of the elements eliminated, that is, of the elements missing from the text itself but potentially present as features of the background. To understand the full implication of Susie's *flying* to Paris, we should know that, in other scenarios, she might have taken a car or a bicycle or even walked.

### Information Structure and Text Strategy

Such considerations also bring up the question of information structure in discourse and in sentences. Indeed, under labels such as theme-and-rheme, topic-and-comment or presupposition-and-focus, information structure has become one of the central concerns of linguistics over the past quarter-century. One of the fundamental distinctions students of these matters like to make is between information a speaker/writer thinks the receptor already knows and has present in his mind, and information supposedly new to the receptor. A speaker or writer assumes that the receptor knows what everybody knows because of the human condition and life under the same stars; what people of the same cultural group know because of their group membership; what has been mentioned in the discourse; and what is present in the situational context. In English and in many other languages, unmarked sentence-initial elements usually refer to shared, old information, and new information is placed later in the sentence, the most important new information often going last. If new information is placed early in

the sentence, it must be marked. A structure such as *It was by plane that Nils came to Durban*, is used in situations where a speaker assumes his hearer knows that Nils came to Durban; the new information is that he came by plane. And to warn the hearer that new information is placed early in the sentence there must be a special marker, namely cleft.

As the sentences of a coherent piece of discourse are not independent, but are linked to each other in a way steered by a uniform principle of discourse organisation, we need a concept such as *text strategy*. By 'text strategy' I mean the overall pattern of text organisation which governs the treatment of old and of new information. Before linguists learned to acknowledge that sentences are not autonomous but owe their form to their environment in text and situation, the difference between, say, *Charlie ate the apples*. and *The apples were eaten by Charlie*. was dismissed as a matter of 'emphasis', 'style' and the like. Though such sentence pairs are equivalent in the sense that if one of them is true, so is the other, they cannot freely replace each other in actual discourse. If you ask *What did Charlie do?*. *The apples were eaten by Charlie*. would be a weird answer; *the apples were eaten by Charlie*, on the contrary, or *the apples Charlie ate* (and the peaches Mary put into the refrigerator) would be acceptable as answers to *What happened to the apples and the peaches?*. As I am citing a passive in my example I should anticipate a usual question and add at once that another reason for the use of passives is agent repression: in their reports, scientists are used to saying *2 cc sulphuric acid were added to the solution* rather than *on Monday morning my assistant Susie Brown then added 2 cc sulphuric acid to the solution*. Because who did the adding, and when, is presumably irrelevant to the result. Agent repression occurs in many types of texts, laws and statutes for example.

The important lesson taught us by studies of information structure and text strategy is that the sentence is not autonomous. It is subject to forces in text and situation (discoursal parameters you might call them). Text strategies govern the linearisation of texts and sentences because they regulate the order in which alternatives are eliminated to lead the receptor to the desired scenario. Text strategies are exposed not only through element order and the syntax governing element order, but also through lexical choice. Compare *Nils is Elizabeth's father*. when talking about Nils, and *Elizabeth is Nils's daughter*. when talking about Elizabeth; or other converses such as *Betty is older than Susie/Susie is younger than Betty*, and countless other such converses. In fact, one might suggest that such lexical converses exist precisely to make possible different linearisations manifesting different text strategies. Instances such as *the post office is closed on Sundays/the post office is open on weekdays* both place the same old information, *the post office*, first. The former sentence answers the question *when is the post office closed?*, the latter *when is the post office open?*. But in such instances there is more text-strategic tolerance: both answers might

be acceptable for either question, though one might be regarded as more appropriate to a specific context than the other.

For the composition teacher, all these matters should be of vital interest. Unfortunately they have been neglected for simpler matters of correctness. The point is that to produce receptor-friendly text, a speaker/writer does wisely in being aware of the distinction between old (shared) and new information. Generally, she does well in choosing her words and structures so as to place old information first. There are strategies permitting or even favouring placing new information early, or giving nothing but new information in sentence fragments. But they should be used with skill and, when need be, due marking. For a writer, the difficulty is to guess what of her message is already known to the reader, who lacks chances of protesting the way one could in face-to-face communication. This is why it is easier to write a letter to somebody we know well than, say, a letter to the editor of a paper with a very varied circle of readers. It is instructive to compare, for instance, editorials of different types of newspapers and try to figure out what knowledge they expect of their readers. And one may suspect that one reason why schoolchildren, and even adults, who are good at storytelling may produce very poor written versions of their stories. They may lack the ability and experience of correctly estimating amounts of shared knowledge. In face-to-face situations estimates are easier: people's faces show when we go wrong, and the floor may be open for direct questions. Perhaps explicit training in the use of text-strategic, lexical and syntactic devices handling distinctions between knowledge old and new should be included in the school syllabus.

### Style

One of the concepts we should briefly discuss is *Style*. Ever since the ancients, much of rhetoric has been preoccupied with style, and countless literary scholars and critics have spoken and written about style, usually, however, basing their dicta on intuition rather than on precise, verifiable (or falsifiable to speak with Karl Popper) analyses. Indeed, literary scholars have often been hostile to attempts at linguistic analyses of style. In brief, style is an area where hermeneutics and positivism meet and readily clash. One of the problems in stylistics is to what extent such clashes could be turned into a merger.

To approach style, we might ask how our impressions of what we call the 'style' of a text actually arise. One useful answer is, through comparison with our memories of texts we regard as comparable (cf. Enkvist 1964; 1973a; 1973b). When we hear a new text, for instance a sermon, we compare the emerging text with our memories of other sermons. If we decide the language of the emerging text is similar to that of other sermons, the preacher is producing his discourse in the traditional style of sermons. If

not, he is original; he might even be shocking if he uses the barracks language of a sergeant. What decides our choice of background texts for comparison is, obviously, our personal experience, our culture (are sermons a traditional type of discourse in our culture?), and, in the last instance, the situation (a clergyman delivering a sermon in a church). So, when we hear or read, we instinctively, or sometimes deliberately and consciously, compare the language with that of previous experiences of comparable texts. Our impression of the style arises out of this process of comparison. I already used the term 'frozen discourse' for ritual texts which must conform, even literally, to tradition. There are situations where conformity is at a premium and where good manners require a reproduction of patterns traditional within the culture and social group. And there are other situations where we praise originality and departures from tradition, as in certain types of poetry, in advertising, and so on. Those literary scholars who like to speak about intertextuality might define style as one of the results of intertextual comparison. Those interested in historical styles may define stylistic appropriateness in relation to patterns existing during a certain historical period.

In a wider semiotic sense, styles can exist in any area of human activity in which there is a choice affected by situation. The line between function and style is also often writ in water. If a basic function can be satisfied by various designs, their differences may count as styles. An airport for instance has a set of basic functions, such as moving and inspecting aeroplanes, passengers and luggage. But these requirements can be satisfied by various kinds of architectural solutions, which might then count as styles. Similarly, we might say that various types of text and discourse—weather reports, laundry lists, laws, statutes, operating instructions, and so forth—can be written with various degrees of stylistic latitude, as long as they satisfy their primary purpose. And the potential variation of styles will grow when the function of the discourse gets increasingly less stringently definable. A novel for instance usually contains different text types—dialogue, description, collage and so forth—which may all have distinctive styles, as may their manner of fitting into and contributing to the total design. Also the border between context and style may vary with the beholder's perspective. If one poet praises his monarch with a sonnet and another poet with an ode, the same function, praise of monarch, can be said to appear in two styles, sonnet and ode.

The linguist who wishes to base his work on falsifiable data must first define the body of text with which he wants to compare the text he is examining. (We might call this body of text a 'norm' as long as we strip 'norm' of all value judgements: here a 'norm' is not necessarily good or bad, beautiful or ugly.) He or she must then opt for a definite model for describing the texts. This model must be adequate to bring out the potential similarities and differences that define the style. And the linguist may then have to devise statistical methods for showing the significance of the similarities and

differences between text and norm. Such an approach cannot do justice to the processual aspect of style, because it does not imitate the receptor's ongoing comparison between the emerging text and the possible interplay of competing norms or norms that supplement each other. So, it remains impossible, at least at our present stage of knowledge, to imitate hermeneutics by positivist analyses. But stylistic and stylo-statistical analysis are valid as methods of linguistic description, as well as valuable supplements to subjective impressions of styles.

There is yet another point that arises in connection with style. If we define style as a choice of expression affected by situational context, we should also regard the different codes that occur in code-switching situations as styles. If a person speaks standard High German in certain situations but switches into another kind of German—such as dialect or Swiss German—in other situations, these variants of German satisfy our definition of styles. The same applies to languages. If a person speaks English in one range of situations, Afrikaans in another, and Zulu in a third range of situations, these three different languages then take over the function of styles. In this sense all studies of code-switching turn out to be studies of style.

So, style is part of meaning, not merely meaningless surface decoration. For an appreciation of styles we must know the relevant set of norms. This in turn argues for the maintenance of canons, that is, exemplified sets of norms, as fundamental to all studies of language and literature. What should go into the canons is, however, a matter of culture and society, rather than of linguistic science as such.

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## Why We Need Contrastive Rhetoric

Nils Erik Enkvist

### What is Contrastive Rhetoric?

One of the hot subjects in today's linguistics is the field variously known as contrastive (or cross-cultural or inter-cultural) rhetoric (or, with varying emphases, text linguistics, discourse linguistics, discourse analysis, or pragmalinguistics). The Cartesian product of these two sets of terms could be developed into a very delicate typology of approaches and methods. Here I shall resist the temptation to indulge in such terminological niceties. My overall subject can be simply defined as the study of patterns of text and discourse in different languages that vary in structure and in cultural background.

It might be interesting to trace the history of contrastive rhetoric to the ancients. There was for instance the contrast between the Attic and Asianic styles. During the Middle Ages much of rhetoric was preoccupied with style. And the rise of the vernaculars prompted discussions of the merits of different languages, presumably tacitly including their traditional discourse patterns, as media for different types of communication. If we restrict ourselves to the past several decades, however, history turns more transparent. One powerful impetus for the study of contrastive rhetoric came from teachers of foreign languages and notably composition. They thought they could detect awkward organisational principles brought from alien cultures in the writing of their foreign students. Such observations showed that those comparing languages should not restrict themselves to phonology, synlexis, but also observe the traditional ways in which sentences join in discourse and in which the argument or story proceeds. The universality of textual and discursive patterns had been too readily assumed, just as mechanisms of textual cohesion and coherence were thought to be universal enough to need no attention from language teachers.

The study of the cultural dimension of discourse came to seem increasingly natural in a period when both contrastive linguistics and the study of text and discourse were emerging on a broad front. Many more or less accurate observations on contrasts had been made by linguists working in wartime language-teaching programmes. This led to the setting-up of contrastive linguistics as a powerful sub-branch of applied linguistics. It was assumed that problems of language learners were caused

by transfer, or interference, of patterns from their mother tongue. Quite logically this led to error analysis and to the theories of interlanguage. By studying the errors language-learners made, one could detect interference; indeed a contrastive analysis was expected to predict what kinds of errors speakers of language X would make when learning language Y. It was also understood that all language learners must make mistakes. Their errors are not consequences of original sin but of their living with an interlanguage somewhere between the mother tongue and the foreign language. As learning proceeds, the interlanguage develops, mainly in the direction away from the mother tongue and towards the foreign language.

These problems soon provoked intensive study in contrastive linguistics in various countries. Paradoxically such studies resulted in a widespread scepticism and even reaction against contrastive linguistics. Overoptimism led to disappointment. The simple and straightforward predictions of the contrastivists proved not to cover all the errors students actually made. There were linguists who threw out the baby with the bathwater and gave up contrastive work altogether. But there were others who began wondering why results of actual error analysis so rarely matched contrastive predictions. One reason was sought in oversimplified views of the mechanisms of human memory and learning, and an overreliance on the simple stimulus-response models of behaviourism. Nor were individual factors and influences from third languages sufficiently reckoned with. Another, even more interesting reason was the observation made by teachers of composition: learning a foreign language does not only involve learning sounds, words and syntax, but also its characteristic patterns of building up discourse, telling a story or presenting and attacking an argument. In contrastive linguistics too, we must venture beyond the sentence and the mechanisms of syntax, into text and discourse.

Such a venture seemed increasingly natural as it coincided with the rise of text and discourse linguistics in the late 1960s and in the 1970s. Text and discourse no longer seemed too complex for linguistic study and thus out of bounds for linguists. On the contrary, the mechanisms that link sentences and make a text cohesive and coherent were included among the most topical problems of linguistic study. And it soon appeared that the coherence of a piece of discourse was not simply a matter of tracing linguistic links between sentences. A shared knowledge of the world and a shared culture proved to hold many texts together through subtle mechanisms such as inference. In addition to syntax and semantics, pragmatics perforce entered into the study of discourse. And hordes of teachers of foreign languages and of composition were eager to receive what new help their more theory-minded colleagues could offer.

Yet another of the sources leading to contrastive rhetoric was contrastive pragmatics, whether we call it thus or prefer another, more or less closely related name such as ethnology of speech, conversation analysis or something else (cf. Blum-Kulka

& Kasper 1993). This area covered matters such as politeness in communication. Requirements and signals of politeness are known to differ greatly between cultures and also between social groups. They are reflected for instance in modes of address, linguistic taboos, turn-taking patterns, kinesics, dress and the like. Many of the linguistic politeness signals are particularly conspicuous in speech, which reflects face-to-face behaviour. But they may also carry over into writing and composition. The pragmatics sector of contrastive rhetoric might be defined as the study of the communicative use of rhetorical discourse patterns in different cultures and languages.

### Kaplan's 'Doodles'

If you ask an American composition teacher where contrastive rhetoric begins, you are likely to get the answer 'in Kaplan's Doodles Paper of 1966'. In that year, Robert B. Kaplan published a provocative and seminal article based on his empirical observations of foreign-student composition in English (Kaplan 1966). Kaplan claimed that the rhetorical patterns in his materials fell into five different culture-specific groups. Anglo-American discourse was said to be clear and orderly and to proceed in a straight line. Oriental discourse was circular, looking at its topic from different points of view joined by association rather than by strict logic. In Romance cultures, discourse was characterised by digressions from the central topic and could be likened to a winding road. Semitic discourse was full of parallel constructions repeating what had been said and adding new information bit by bit, which makes it seem inefficient to an Anglo-American. Russian discourse is also loosely constructed with long digressions and abrupt changes which readily makes it seem incoherent. Kaplan bravely illustrated these patterns with a set of figures. Hence the title 'doodles paper'.

Kaplan was careful to point out that his discourse patterns were idealised stereotypes rarely found in pure form. Still the paper led to a lively discussion which goes on even today. Its critics pointed out that Kaplan's approach was highly ethnocentric: what would Anglo-American discourse look like to Semitic or Russian speakers and writers? Kaplan had obviously lumped together many traditions under dubious blanket labels such as 'Semitic' and 'Romance'. He had not allowed for differences between different discourse types and styles, different categories of speakers/writers, and so on. In the face of such criticisms, Kaplan has to some extent modified his views, admitting more diversity and emphasising culture rather than patterns of thought as formatives of rhetorical patterns. In today's perspective we may still have different opinions of Kaplan's paper as such. But whether we approve of its specific points or not, its general approach did have a beneficial impact. It compelled students and teachers of rhetoric to look at discursal macro-patterns in the light of underlying cultural traditions and not only in terms of syntactic features on the linguistic surface.

### Degrees of Empathy

The job of a composition teacher is to make students write texts which serve certain definite types of communication with maximal efficiency. And in most instances this means that a text should look native and idiomatic, and conform to established patterns. A student in a composition course is not likely to need skills in writing, say, modern poetic prose where departures from tradition are a virtue. He is more likely to attend a composition course to learn to write, say, reports, articles and business letters which seem clear and straightforward to their receptor. They are not supposed to distract or delight the reader by the use of strange or weird patterns. Therefore it is natural that composition teachers readily regard alien discourse structures as undesirable. They are foreign growths that should be excised in favour of the normal tissue of discourse.

In terms of discourse comprehension, we might also suggest that a text that follows established discursal macropatterns will be easier on the receptor than a text full of surprising departures from tradition. Information is surprise. Therefore a text full of surprises will also be crowded with information. But in utilitarian texts we do not wish to add to the information content through unnecessary deviance from the structures our receptor is used to. For instance in a business letter or weather report or minutes from an annual general meeting, the reader's job is easier if she knows precisely where in the text she is likely to find the specific kinds of information she is looking for. Surprises and witty rhetorical figures will be more appropriate in another range of texts, such as poems and advertisements. But they are awkward in many types of utilitarian discourse. Even Bishop Sprat told us how the members of the Royal Society in its founding days in the 1660s were consciously opting for a new kind of straightforward, unadorned prose in their scientific reports.

I was suggesting that many composition teachers see their job as making their students abandon their native rhetoric for a target-language, for instance Anglo-American, type of discourse. There are, however, composition teachers who try to do this with empathy and respect. They are often scholars who have lived with foreign languages and cultures. They realise that their students cannot but transfer their own native patterns into, say, English. The learners' funny oddities do not necessarily owe to low intelligence or faulty logic or a special type of sin revealed in composition. Undesirable patterns on the contrary owe to the transfer of respectable, even venerable, cultural patterns into an alien context where they do not comfortably fit.

We can now see why the teaching of languages in general, and composition in particular, is a touchy process. Teaching rhetoric and argumentation compels the teacher to tamper with the student's way of expressing herself, and thus with the student's personality. Dirt has sometimes been defined as matter in the wrong place. Similarly the use of alien rhetoric can sully a nice clean argument. How, then, should a teacher maintain optimal motivation through tact? Presumably the students should be shown

how different cultures have developed different patterns of expression. If the student wants to live happily and even prosperously in, say, an English-language environment, she will best avoid offence by learning its rhetorical habits, just like any other habits. Alien rhetoric may cause a negative response without bringing benefit to its user. Compare rhetoric with table manners if you like. Eating one's peas with a knife does not make them less nourishing. But it is likely to cause a negative response and even bar a person from a whole range of occupations.

A couple of quotations will illustrate the point. The first comes from Edward A. Fagan and Peggy Cheong (1987), both teachers of English as a Second Language in Singapore. They contrast English and Chinese compositional patterns as follows:

... English composition tends to be more direct and to the point. Conciseness, brevity, and simplicity are encouraged. Generally, although not all, Chinese compositions are characterized by long-windedness, digression, and indirectness .... English paragraphs are arranged in hierarchical order, with each paragraph stating a sub-topic that is subordinate to the main topic. All the paragraphs are therefore related to the main subject. Chinese paragraphs, on the other hand, may sometimes wander off the main topic .... English paragraphs are generally free of sentimental expressions, exaggerations, and reference to the past. Writers use forthright, straightforward, simple expressions. Chinese paragraphs are generally marked by poetry, flowery and florid styles, exaggeration, use of quotations, and reference to the past ... (Edward A. Fagan & Peggy Cheong 1987:25.)

Though Carolyn Matalene presumably faced much the same problems when teaching English composition to Chinese students, the tone of her reports is different. Having explained the role of rhetoric and memorising of traditional texts in Chinese education, she gave a number of examples of Chinese students' compositions in English, and summed up:

Those who have done their years of memorizing and have mastered this (Chinese) tradition have done more than become literate. They have learned how to behave, what to say, and how to say it. They have gained entrance to the beauty, of the tragic beauty, of a centuries-old literary tradition and the right and the privilege to contribute to it. Our responsibility is surely to try to understand and appreciate, to admit the relativity of our own rhetoric, and to realize that logics different from our own are not necessarily illogical (Matalene 1985:807.)

Those faced with teaching composition across cultures might profit from a moment's thought around these two quotations.

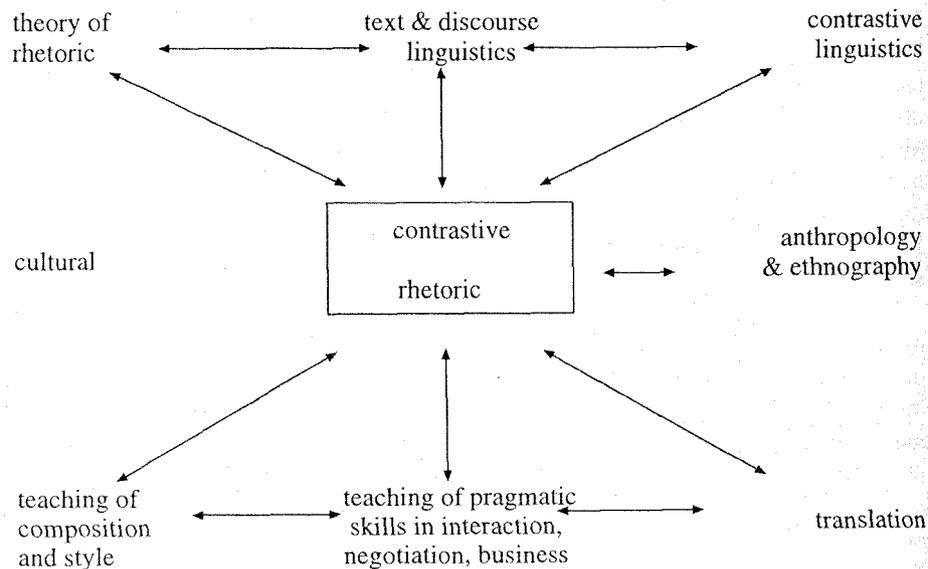
### Institutional Aspects

Contrastive rhetoric is a branch of applied linguistics with very close ties to specific teaching situations. And teaching goals and strategies must needs vary from one society and country and language group to another. It would be interesting to review the history of applied linguistics to see to what extent educational strategies come first and lead to the development of theories and methods, or whether, the other way round, theories and methods come first and are later translated into educational strategies. But I shall leave this question and illustrate the institutionalisation of contrastive rhetoric with a skeleton example from one particular society, my own native Finland.

Finland's 5 million inhabitants belong to two major language groups, speakers of Finnish (some 94 per cent) and of Swedish (some 6 per cent). Some are bilingual in different ways, many are not. Neither language, Finnish or Swedish, is sufficient for inter-national communication. Of the major world languages, English supplanted German after World War II, though today, not least since Finland joined the European Union in 1995, there is a keenly felt need for more French and German.

Over the past few decades, there has grown a well-established institutional system to cater for the necessary training in foreign-language skills. At the tertiary level, foreign languages are taught in four types of organisation. First, universities have language departments which teach language, literature, linguistic and literary theory, and applied linguistics. One of their acknowledged aims is to train future language teachers. All the same, at many universities, until fairly recently the linguistic side of the syllabus used to be biased in favour of philology and historical linguistics rather than, say, applied linguistics and didactics. Secondly, for the past quarter century or so, universities have also had Language Centres serving the linguistic needs of their establishments, for instance by teaching languages for specific purposes to non-language students, and by providing their universities with various services such as translation and the vetting of translations. The third type of language-teaching establishment is the university School of International Communication. These schools began as separate colleges granting diplomas in translation and interpretation, but their staff was from the start encouraged to do research into relevant areas of applied linguistics. In the past few years these diploma colleges have been merged with universities and their syllabus was expanded so as to give the graduates ordinary university degrees. Finally, a fourth type of institution interested in contrastive rhetoric is the School of Economics. There are three independent schools of this kind, and a few more within the administrative structure of universities.

To the student of contrastive rhetoric, such a bird's-eye view shows how one small country has tried to build an infrastructure for the teaching of internationally viable languages. Very roughly one might illustrate the field of contrastive rhetoric in relation to its neighbouring disciplines as follows:



As the figure shows, studies of contrastive rhetoric can be sought under various headings. One area containing relevant materials is composition and rhetoric. Another is the study of oral interaction, which is a central topic in pragmatics and in conversation analysis. There is a growing body of data on interaction in business negotiations (e.g. Graham et al. 1987 & 1992). And yet another is translation and interpretation, with its enormous and rapidly growing bibliography.

This dispersal of relevant stuff across a range of different subjects might at first blush suggest that contrastive rhetoric is a cross-disciplinary or interdisciplinary area. Generally, however, we ought to be wary of using such terms. For what we call a 'discipline' in the academic, bureaucratic sense, is often a result of historical or local accident. There is in fact no a priori reason why contrastive rhetoric could not be studied in departments and academic institutions with different labels, such as the four types found on the Finnish scene. To what extent it is meaningful to speak about interdisciplinarity must therefore be decided case by case and instance by instance. When speaking about intercultural rhetoric, one might well argue for regarding it as a discipline in its own right. It can all the same be pursued with varying aims and methods within different types of institutions. The traditional name of a department should not prevent progress.

I have touched upon these matters because experience shows that in academic bureaucracies, labels can sometimes prevent departments as well as individual researchers from doing what they feel they ought to do. Which can be a pity.

### Cultural Contrasts

It is easy to understand why teaching across widely differing cultures has stimulated the study of cross-cultural rhetoric (cf. Hinds 1990). The quotations from scholars teaching composition in English to Chinese students may serve as a case in point. With the development of economic and cultural traffic between the West and Eastern Asia, studies of rhetorical traditions in English and other European languages in comparison with composition in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean for instance, have multiplied. There is already a very large bibliography of relevant studies, of which only a few could be included among the references of the present paper.

It is of course a truism that cultures with different discourse types and genres raise contrastive problems, as do cultures with widely differing politeness patterns and ways of expressing them through behaviour, including linguistic behaviour. But such a truism leads to some interesting questions, for instance about the links between communicative needs and the study of intercultural rhetoric. In what kinds of environment do questions of intercultural rhetoric become of interest in applied linguistics, and not only in folklore, social anthropology and other more purely academic pursuits?

### Problems in the Study of Intercultural Rhetoric

For a linguist, especially a linguist trained in the traditions that concentrate on the structure of individual sentences, intercultural rhetoric brings with it a body of new problems beyond the reach of syntactic methodology. These problems are caused by the fact that rhetoric deals, not with individual sentences but with culture-bound discursal macropatterns. Venturing into intercultural rhetoric will therefore involve the linguist's raising her eyes not only from sentence to discourse, but also from discourse to pragmatics, that is, to the use and function of specific modes of discourse in a specific society or social group.

This discovery process poses its own peculiar problems that must be solved, either ad hoc for each specific project, or more generally by building up a theory and a concomitant methodology. Here the main difficulty lies in the heterogeneity of the materials covered. We must obviously classify text types and genres to correlate such a classification with patterns of discourse. But in different societies—literate and illiterate, industrialised and agrarian, national and tribal, and so on—text types and their functions will vary greatly. Any classification with claims on generality will therefore become highly abstract (cf. Wierzbicka 1991), in fact so abstract that it may lose its usefulness for application to concrete details for instance in teaching composition. Assuming that there is some use in a very general discussion of such problems, a few of the relevant points will be listed in the following.

The main obstacles in the way of the contrastive rhetorician might be listed under three major headings. First there is the problem of observation. Contrastive rhetoric implies a contrastive study of cultures and of cultural backgrounds. Each investigator is, however, bound by his own culture and its categories. He is therefore not likely to notice at once the relevant meaningful features of an alien culture. One might say that there is a parallel here between cultural structure and phonological structure. When analysing a language the linguist does not know, he must first learn to perceive the phonetic distinctions that are capable of distinguishing meanings. Only after training his ear to catch such distinctions, many of which at first seem bewildering and subtle, can the linguist go on to work on syntax, lexis and discourse. Similarly the analyst of cultures must first learn to observe the meaningful distinctions and features of social behaviour in the alien culture. Only then can he go on to correlate discourse with cultural patterning. This we might call the problem of observation.

When we have learned to observe and define relevant cultural features we must next try to categorise them, to systematise them in a way relevant to our purpose. This is the second major problem, which might be labelled as the problem of categorisation. Should we be ambitious enough to try a categorisation which is not only tailored ad hoc for one specific problem, but which is supposed to have more general validity across many cultures and linguistic groups, we might call our problem a question of finding a *tertium comparationis*. In some situations it may suffice to say that John is taller than Peter. But if we want to relate John and Peter to a larger population, or compare one hundred people, we will find it convenient to operate with feet and inches. In this sense, a *tertium comparationis* is a concept, or set of concepts, that can be used as a basis for comparison. When we measure length or distance we do so in terms of kilometres, metres, centimetres and millimetres, or miles, yards, feet and inches. When we measure weight we use, among other measures, kilograms or pounds, and so forth. Each of these systems is a system of *tertium comparationis*: if we wish to compare things, we use a *tertium comparationis* such as a measure of distance or weight. And then we compare the measurement.

Similarly, if we wish to set up a general system for the comparison of cultures and of their concomitant discourse types, we shall need a *tertium comparationis* capable of bringing out the features relevant for our comparison. The ideal *tertium comparationis* would be universal in the sense of offering an apparatus for comparing any and all cultural features that can be found in human society. A priori one might assume that all cultures make use of some kind of politeness patterns: some types of behaviour, including linguistic behaviour, are more appropriate than others in a given type of situation. Who is supposed to be polite to whom and under what circumstances is likely to be a more culture-specific problem: age, rank, wealth, education, occupation, gender, family relationship, status, and situation-bound role are likely to affect

choices of politeness levels. How such levels are exposed is usually a matter both of rhetorical macropatterns and of langue-specific syntactic and lexical structures. Similarly one might assume that certain economic transactions are culturally widespread and that functions such as buying/selling, lending/borrowing and the like have their own culture-and-language-specific exponents. One might then go on to compile a list of universal social functions—getting food, eating, drinking, sex, child-bearing, finding shelter and dwellings, and so on—and once again look for their expressions in discourse and in linguistic resources. When comparing more closely related cultures one can of course make lots of shortcuts in areas where patterns have been found to be more or less identical and their differences more or less irrelevant to contrastive rhetoric.

There is all the same a risk of overlooking differences that exist between such related cultures. It came as a surprise to many students of language that certain text types, such as scholarly articles, tend to have different macro structures in different European languages. Medical articles for instance may follow somewhat different patterns. And comprehensive studies of scholarly papers in English and in Finnish suggest conspicuous differences in rhetorical approach (Mauranen 1993). Newspaper editorials too differ between Finnish, English and German. Even schoolchildren's essays are differently constructed. Data of these kinds have given rise to widespread speculation of why such differences exist. Though Finnish, a non-Indo-European language, has a structure very different from that of most European languages, its semantic apparatus makes it perfectly capable of expressing what one might call standard European patterns of thought and culture. It is therefore more plausible to believe that these differences owe to tradition. Members of a given nation have learned to express themselves in certain ways and have been exposed to discourse that follows the preferred national pattern. Such patterns are then unwittingly transferred into a foreign language as well. Perhaps one of the features that mark a text as near-native rather than as native is a subtle disregard of idiomatic rhetorical patterning: a near-native text is, by definition, one that succeeds in avoiding major syntactic and lexical errors but which nevertheless strikes a native reader as somehow not quite right.

For the practical teacher and translator, such observations are, of course, highly valuable. One of the translator's problems is to decide when to produce discourse which follows the rhetorical macropatterns of the relevant target culture, bravely jettisoning those of the source text. In practice this may even mean giving up the paragraph and sentence structures and even the overall disposition of the source text. And such apparent disrespect for the source text may well lead to clashes of opinion between author and translator, or translator and the person editing text for publication. To avoid such altercation we need increasingly sophisticated information and education in the cultural and linguistic relativity of rhetoric.

### The Tertium Comparationis

Many lists of linguistic and cultural features have been set up to cover the whole spectrum of factors affecting contrastive rhetoric. I shall present yet another such list, organising and grouping the factors by categories well known in modern linguistics.

First come *syntactic and lexical factors*. They comprise the mechanisms of cohesion and coherence within and between sentences and text units. To the text-and-discourse linguist, the sentence is not autonomous: the job of a sentence is to contribute to the flow of information through the text. Therefore the sentence must be linked to what went before, and provide links to what comes after. In English, the general trend is to begin sentences with so-called old information which is supposed to be familiar to the receptor. It can be familiar for various reasons: it can be known to everybody thanks to the human condition and life under the same stars (like *nose, foot, water, sun*); it can be known to a particular group such as a nation or family (*Bill Clinton, Hummelvik, Annette*); it can be known because it is present in the situational context (*this window needs washing*); and it can be known because it has been mentioned in the previous discourse (*Charlie came home. He was tired.*). Various mechanisms are available to place old information early in the sentence: choice of words (*Susie bought the car from Peter/Peter sold the car to Susie*) fronting by syntactic structure such as the passive (*Peter sold this car to Susie / This car was sold to Susie by Peter*), fronting without further syntactic change (*I have read this book / This book I have read*). If we place new information early in the sentence, we must warn our receptor, by cleft (*It was to Potchefstroom that Nils went*, said to somebody who already knows that Nils went somewhere but does not know where), or by stress-cum-intonation (*Nils went to POTchefstroom*, with stress and a high falling tone on POT (Enkvist 1979)). These phenomena have become increasingly well known through studies making use of terms such as theme and rheme, topic and comment, focus and presupposition, functional sentence perspective, information structure, and end weight.

Instead of the old-information-first strategy, a speaker, and sometimes writer, can opt for a crucial-information-first strategy. While in South Africa, one of my hosts came to me with a tray and asked, 'What would you like to drink?', and I answered, 'A glass of white wine I would like very much'. The choice of wine was the crucial information, the rest in the nature of a polite afterthought. In dialogue, a crucial-information-only strategy is extremely common. If somebody asks me, 'Where are you going next?', the answer, 'To Potchefstroom', would be more natural than 'Next I am going to Potchefstroom'. We economise by omitting what can be readily inferred, and an admonition such as 'you must always answer with a complete sentence' reminds us of pedantic language teachers rather than of authentic dialogue.

The mechanisms of marking old and new information are, however, language-specific. One reason for this is the difference in the function of word order in different

languages. English has relatively rigid word order patterns because word order signals, among other things, the difference between subject and object (*the lion bit the tiger* does not mean the same as *the tiger bit the lion*). Latin or Russian or Finnish, however, mark the difference between subject and object with a case ending (*Nero interfecit Agrippinam* is cognitively equivalent to *Agrippinam Nero interfecit* and *Agrippinam interfecit Nero*), and use word order to indicate meanings for which English needs other means (*Agrippinam interfecit Nero* would thus translate into 'It was Nero who killed Agrippina' or 'Agrippina was killed by Nero' because *Agrippina killed Nero* would play havoc with the meaning). Articles and demonstratives are another factor to reckon with in such studies.

Finnish has no articles in the English sense. So, *Auto on talon takana* translates as 'the car is behind the house', whereas *Talon takana on auto* should be rendered as 'there is a car behind the house', or 'behind the house there is a car'. Existential constructions, such as the English *there is*, have their function in starting a structure when there is no suitable old information or other starter available.

Such mechanisms, then, regulate the form of sentences to adapt them to serve the text strategy, that is, the overall governing principle which regulates the information flow through the text. To students and teachers of rhetoric a mastery of these mechanisms is crucially important. They are what makes a text flow smoothly, if that is desired, or in a broken and seemingly incoherent manner if such effects are indicated, in fiction for instance to reveal that a character is upset. The important point is to realize that the text is the father of the sentence, and that text strategies come before the syntactic formation of individual sentences. Giving a sentence its textual fit, its conformity with the text strategy, is not a cosmetic surface operation polishing the sentence after it is already there. Textual fit is a far more basic requirement, determining the choice of words as well as the syntactic structure of a sentence. To modern text and discourse linguists this is so obvious that it seems curious that grammarians and teachers of composition have, through the centuries, spent so much time and effort on syntactic phenomena within individual sentences, while overlooking the fundamental questions of text strategies and information flow. It is the text strategy and the information flow that actually determine which of the available syntactic and lexical structures a speaker or writer will choose in each particular instance.

Similar problems arise when we look at the ways in which text units are linked into text and discourse. In my terminology, a paragraph is a typographical unit, a chunk of writing whose beginning and end are marked, for instance by indentation. A text unit on the contrary is a chunk of text which coheres by some linguistic device such as a cohesive chain or, less obviously, by mechanisms of inference which link its elements such as sentences to each other. Such a distinction between text units and paragraphs makes it possible to discuss paragraphing strategies more precisely. One

strategy is to make paragraph borders coincide with borders between major text units. Another is to chop up paragraphing to coincide with borders between minor text units. And yet another, usually awkward, paragraphing strategy is to paragraph a text without harmonising it with text units. To explain precisely what marks a text unit would at once explode the present paper. One type of device that enters into such explanations is the use of metatext, that is, of portions of text whose job is, not to give information about the subject proper but rather to clarify the structure of the text.

These were matters we have learned to handle, or are learning to handle, by the by now well developed methodologies of text and discourse linguistics. And they are, or can at least be suspected of being, language-specific. Even in otherwise syntactically similar languages, such as Swedish and English, there are differences: in Swedish we can say for instance *Sparven tog katten*, whereas in English, 'The sparrow caught the cat', would be weird, though the English, as well as the Swedes, know that sparrows do not catch cats but cats do catch sparrows. English requires the passive: 'The sparrow was caught by the cat'. Swedish newspaper headlines such as *Bovarna jagade polisen i tre timmar* will normally be understood as 'the police hunted the criminals for three hours', despite its syntactic ambiguity: Swedes find it more likely that police pursue criminals than vice versa, and interpret their headlines accordingly. In spoken Swedish, fronted objects will be marked as such by prosodic means.

### Processual Considerations

One of the interesting developments in linguistics over the past few decades is the increasing interest in processual (or procedural, as some linguists prefer to say) rather than strictly structural approaches. It is, however, worth noting that processual considerations have been with us for a long time. Recall for instance Humboldt's *ergon* and *energeia*, the way in which American structuralists arrived at their phoneme and morpheme inventories through explicit discovery procedures, and the transformation processes of early generative-transformational grammars. One might therefore suggest that a structuralist linguist may use processes to arrive at structures, and, conversely, that a process linguist must use structures to explain processes (which in syntax can be defined as transformations of one element or structure into another).

So far we have no way of directly observing in detail how individual syntactic and rhetorical patterns are processed in the human brain. Nobody has as yet written a neurological grammar of a specific language. Therefore the best we can do is to speculate and to try to test our hypotheses by psycholinguistic experimentation. As realistic experiments tend to bring with them a welter of uncontrollable variables, such experimentation is, at best, difficult, and has often led to controversial and even contradictory results.

All the same, speculation is often interesting. We might for instance start from a stance of teleological optimism. We may assume that the constant wear and tear that languages are subjected to over long periods of time has led to an optimisation of linguistic structures and processes.

Can we, then, think of a reason why the early placing of old information and the late placing of new information would be advantageous for discourse comprehension? We might start out by noting that when we begin a sentence, our choice of structures is relatively unconstrained. But the further we proceed, the fewer are the ways in which we can continue if we are to observe the constraints of syntax, semantics and pragmatics. Therefore our conversation partner has the greatest difficulties in guessing what we are going to say before we have started our discourse, text unit, or sentence. The more she has heard, the easier it will be for her to anticipate what comes next. (This is of course an oversimplification: probabilities vary, at some points guessing is easy and at other points difficult or impossible; but we may assume that, by and large and on the whole, anticipation gets easier the more we have heard or read of the sentence.) Therefore it would make sense to try to ease the processing load at the beginning of the sentence or text unit or even discourse. And this could be done by placing old, and thus more readily anticipated, information early, and leave new information until later. The principle of end weight (placing long and heavy elements late in the sentence) is a corollary of the old-information-first principle. Weighty constituents are weighty precisely because they contain much new information. Hence they come late.

Such speculation should of course be viewed with due suspicion. Its hypotheses need further testing. One of the relevant questions is to what extent the old-information-first principle is universal, and to what extent it is restricted to a limited set of languages of a specific from-old-to-new-information type. Another question which we already know something about is how a language such as English may depart from the basic unmarked information pattern and place new information early in the sentence, duly warning the receptor of what has been done. Another principle that affects the ordering of elements in a sentence is salience. We tend to begin with human agents close to ourselves or with other animate agents, turning them into syntactic subjects. If no such animate agents are available, other structures must be used. Tourist guides for instance like to infuse life into inanimate objects through sentences such as *This room has witnessed the signing of many important treaties*. As some psycholinguists put it, 'figure' comes before 'ground'. It is easy to say *the rabbit ran past the bush*. But how do you express the same scenario from the point of view of the bush? *\*The bush was run past by the rabbit* would hardly pass muster with a linguistic jury.

Another discursial device that makes processing easier is iconicity, that is, making the discourse isomorphic with, or 'a picture of', the world. One common illus-

tration has to do with isomorphisms between temporal order in the world, and linear-temporal ordering in discourse. Should I say *John and Susie got married and had a baby* you will at once assume that John and Susie got married before they had their baby. And if I say *John and Susie had a baby and got married* you will assume that the baby came before the ceremony. Should you wish the text to state events in an order different of that in the scenario, you have to pay a price: in English, you must say something like *John and Susie had a baby only after they got married*. Iconicities exist at many levels of language, and an interesting question is to what extent they are universal, and to what extent the structures of some languages constrain their use and necessitate specific rhetorical devices to signal isomorphisms.

### Intertextual-Cultural Considerations

So, there are features of discourse structure, both at the micro and the macro levels, which are language-dependent: they are affected by the syntactic constraints and linking mechanisms of individual languages. And there are aspects of discursal structure about which we can speculate in terms of cognitive features such as an optimisation of processing load. At present, much of the study of linguistic universals has been syntax-centred, whether it has been based on generalisations from a few attested patterns, or on an empirical quest for shared features in large numbers of different languages. We could therefore well use cognitive, neurolinguistic and psycholinguistic studies of discourse processing to get at universals in discursal patterns which reflect general principles of information processing. Those who insist that sentences must adapt their form to the discourse might hope that such discursal studies will at the same time tell us more about sentences as well.

Another area for empirical study and theory development is the cultural. With two fashionable terms we could speak about discourse pragmatics, meaning the use of types and patterns of discourse in different communicative situations, and intertextual studies of discourse, meaning the comparison and contrast of types of text within and between cultures and social groups. Relevant work has been done in linguistic pragmatics, where observations for instance of politeness relations offer data for generalisations, on 'face' for instance. And intertextual studies of text types have long been a central concern for instance in the history of literature and of styles, though here a more general categorisation is difficult because of the variation of cultural backgrounds and functions of what we might call 'literature'. Thus the discipline traditionally known as 'comparative literature' has, in the West, mainly been glossed as 'the comparison of literatures in Europe and those parts of the world affected by European literary traditions'. There has, for instance, been an inclination to view the Anglophone and Francophone literatures of Africa within a Europe-inspired and Europe-oriented conceptual frame, though of course with new, fresh elements grafted upon a stock of

familiar roots. Social anthropologists have perhaps been freest to view the texts they have collected in their original social context, for instance in relation to religion, magic and various rituals they have tried to define and describe. But in social anthropology the main trend has been towards a structuralism where texts are viewed as elements within their own specific cultural structure. The bold comparative universalism of scholars such as Frazer or Westermarck has fallen out of fashion, perhaps to reappear at some future date.

This brings up the question to what extent a culture-based comprehensive discourse typology, both extensive enough and specific enough to work as a *tertium comparationis*, is possible at all. There have been many attempts at such universal categorisations (for instance Scollon and Scollon 1995, Wierzbicka 1991) which seem useful enough as a first overview. But we must apply them to a variety of actual studies in contrastive rhetoric to see where they may need supplementing, which seems likely. Part of the question hinges on the delicacy level at which we expect to contrast cultural features in discourse. Culture itself is an elastic term covering a range of features from the most general to the most minutely detailed, and no finite list of cultural features can ever include all about a culture from macropatterns (such as patriarchy versus matriarchy, nomads versus farmers, and the like) to micropatterns (such as types of stitches in embroidery, patterns in knitting and weaving and the like). What the students of relevant problems in anthropology, ethnology, ethnography, rhetoric, stylistics, syntax and other disciplines must decide is what level of delicacy and detail best serves their particular purpose.

The choice between available types of discourse and text, between genres and styles should also be viewed, not only in a social and temporal context but also in an aesthetic one. Many such choices are affected and even determined by fashions which change with time. Such changes can be fast or slow, depending on the stability of social structures and on the ease and speed of their transfer over various media of communication. Cultural influences must also be reckoned with. Some cultures are apt to dominate others and bring with them their own patterns, including those of rhetoric, even to the extinction of earlier, 'native' ones. In today's Europe for instance, not least in the smaller countries, a daily lament concerns the domination of the English language and the American-based 'coca-cola-culture' symbolised by, for instance, brashly intrusive advertising on TV and other media. There is a global conflict between 'internationalisation' in the sense of increasing the scope of cultural homogeneity, and 'maintaining the national heritage' in the sense of keeping alive the distinctive cultural features of individual nations and groups. There is a paradoxical tension in the world between an increasing need for internationally viable languages, and an emphasis and even resuscitation of small and threatened ones (Scots Gaelic, Irish, Welsh, Breton and Basque for instance). In large, racially and socially heterogeneous coun-

tries such as the United States and Canada and the former Soviet Union, there has been considerable discussion of ideals and policies sometimes labelled as 'the melting-pot model' versus 'the salad-bowl model'. It has been moot to mention these very major cultural problems here because they are inevitably, and strongly, mirrored in rhetoric and discourse as well as in other aspects of culture.

### Epilogue

Languages are many-faceted phenomena, and they can, and should, be studied from many different angles. At one extreme are the linguists—'restrictionists' I have called them—who try to isolate specific problems by excluding a maximum number of variables. They work, for instance, with uncontextualized sentences out of one single variant of the language. At the other extreme are those linguists—the 'expansionists'—who claim that linguistic structures must be studied in relation to their authentic cultural, social, psychological and discursive setting. Languages look the way they do in order to tolerate variation and withstand rough handling as in impromptu speech. Analysing artificially homogenised, sterilised samples of language in isolation will give us a limited view at best.

Ideally, the results of restrictionists and expansionists should neatly supplement each other. Sometimes, however, their conceptual worlds are too different to allow translation from one into the other. Without arguing for the supremacy of one approach or the other we can simply note that, by and large, the development of linguistics has been in the direction of increased expansionism. Psycholinguists relate language to psychology, socio linguists to social structures, neurolinguists to human language processing, computer linguists to technology and artificial intelligence, applied linguists to language learning and teaching, historical linguists to changes in culture over time, students of style to intertextual considerations, and so on. And within language description itself we have learned to analyse, not only sounds, phrases, clauses and sentences, but also textual macropatterns and discourse.

These developments bring with them new challenges. One of them has to do with intercultural and contrastive rhetoric. It needs further theory and practical down-to-earth investigation. But it also promises meaningful practical applications, at best improving intercultural communication and understanding.

All in all, one of the major problems in language study is fragmentation, the tendency of many schools of linguistics to look at language from their own restricted, often forbiddingly technical points of view. It is of course true that one must build one's research on precise questions which isolate specific problems. But it is also true that linguists ought to be aware of problems beyond their own preserve, and, ideally, link their own work to that emanating from other schools and to down-to-earth obser-

vations of authentic and unwashed data. I have sometimes ended a talk with the utopian vision of a group of linguists representing different theories walking, hand in hand, into the sunrise. Among linguists, alas, such a rosy view is at best likely to provoke a wry smile, instead of leading to syntheses of so far incompatible theories.

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## Rethinking the Political

Shane Moran

### Review Article

*Derrida and the Political*

by Richard Beardsworth.

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The dramatic political achievements of South Africa are shadowed by the persistence of economic inequalities and a power politics based on group identities permeated with the spoils mentality of colonialism. The reinvention of the political seems a relevant topic in a post-apartheid context concerned with refounding and reinstituting forms of authority and legitimacy. Rethinking the political by academics whose social function grants them a sense of detachment necessary to ponder such things is perhaps already underway here.

The French philosopher Jacques Derrida has been a key figure in Euro-American efforts to rethink the political, and the debates around the subject of Derrida and the political might be of some interest. I hope that the following will contribute to the articulation of a viable South African counter-perspective on these issues.

### Spectres of Derrida

The political implications of Derrida's texts, and the deconstructive 'method' that traces its lineage to those texts, have always been open to question. Derrida has stated:

I try to where I can to act politically while recognizing that such action remains incommensurate with my intellectual project of deconstruction (Derrida 1984:120).

He argues that deconstruction only appears to be opposed to politics or to be at best apolitical

because all of our political codes and terminologies still remain fundamentally metaphysical, regardless of whether they originate from the right or from the left (Derrida 1984:120).

Derrida proposes that deconstruction should acknowledge its subtextual premisses and interrogate its own unspoken interests or traditional values; 'the covert philosophical and political presuppositions of institutionalized critical methods which generally govern our reading of a text' (Derrida 1994:125). Derrida (1990) states that, like Jürgen Habermas, he remains committed to the enlightenment narrative of universal emancipation. Differences arise over how best to achieve this goal.

Apart from Derrida's public allegiances and decisions—his engagement with matters of French educational policy (G.R.E.P.H.) and his (qualified) support for U.S. intervention in Kuwait—it is the political implications of his texts that have attracted attention (see Foley 1984; Siebers 1986). McClintock's and Nixon's (1986) attack on Derrida's (1985) quietism before the violence of *realpolitik* is probably the best known South African episode in the debate around Derrida and the political. Derrida's (1986) bad-tempered correction of McClintock's and Nixon's opportunistic misreading of his text and his politics is given less attention here. Still, Derrida's texts have been generally adjudged not to escape the indictment of post-modernist quietism. When Terry Eagleton (1990:396,398) parodied post-modernist skepticism regarding 'the "metalanguages" of freedom, justice and truth' he chose South Africa as the exemplary site of political struggle that post-modernists fail to address. A general sense of the Anglo-American debates around the subject of Derrida and the political might help to contextualise some of these issues for the South African reader.

One of the most forceful English critiques of deconstruction has been Gillian Rose's *Dialectic of Nihilism: Post-Structuralism and the Law* (1984). Writing from the University of Sussex, Rose marshalled a formidable critique of the dehistoricisation of Heidegger by post-structuralist thinkers, Derrida in particular. Rose criticised the deconstructionist's 'spurious generalization' and argued that Derrida's insistent use of 'violence' for the origin

prevents him from distinguishing between different epochs [and] results in the universal imposition of an historically-specific distinction between the archetypal, the moral and the reflective levels of society (Rose 1984:143-144).

Despite criticising Derrida's reading of Hegel without reference to Derrida's major book on Hegel, *Glas* (1974), Rose posed important questions of historicisation to the deconstructors.

In America John Carlos Rowe (1987) has persuasively critiqued the Derridean quasi-transcendental concepts of *differance*, *trace*, *pharmakon*, *hymen*, etc., from a Marxist perspective. Rowe argued that the deconstructor may be merely uncovering that 'surplus' by which the cultural hierarchy is preserved. By acknowledging 'surplus' to exceed the control of the culture, the deconstructor may be serving the basic

impulse of capitalism: the *naturalisation* of its own contradictions. Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) located post-modernism within the context of ideological struggle in which the liberal rhetoric of the market has been a fundamental and central component. Unlike Rowe, Jameson attempted to salvage the revolutionary potential of the utopian element in post-modernism.

There has been no shortage of writers pointing to the political complacency of the deconstructors. Peter Dews, *Logic of Disintegration* (1987), gave a flawed critique of the political implications of deconstruction, while Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1988), inaccurately charged Derrida with Nietzschean nihilism. Alex Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism* (1989), delivered a traditional Marxist critique of claims for a deconstructive post-Marxism and Juliet Sychrava, *Schiller to Derrida* (1989), located Derrida in the tradition of Romantic ironists who lose the referent in language play. Howard Caygill's doctoral dissertation completed in 1982 at the University of Sussex provided the substance of his *Art of Judgement* (1989) and was utilised as the historical basis of Eagleton's blustering critique of deconstruction in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (1990). Christopher Norris, *The Truth About Postmodernism* (1993), laid down the law of political responsibility, extending the argument of Norman Geras's *Discourses of Extremity: Radical Ethics and Post-Marxist Extravagances* (1990), and John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (1993), made a powerful case against the institutional blindness of the deconstructors.

The philosophical defense of Derrida accomplished by Rodolph Gasche's austere *Tain of the Mirror* (1986) (and continued in his *Inventions of Difference* 1994), and the literary appropriation of Derrida by J. Hillis Miller and Geoffrey Hartman, has provoked impatience in the U.K. where defenders of deconstruction have reacted to the perceived depoliticisation of deconstruction by neo-liberal and pragmatist theorists in the U.S.<sup>1</sup> *The Oxford Literary Review* under the editorship of Anne Wordsworth, Geoffrey Bennington and Robert Young gave voice to a left-leaning post-structuralism. Terrence Hawkes intended the journal *Textual Practice* to serve as a materialist, but theoretically sophisticated, Marxian platform for work that would counter the perceived intellectualism of *The Oxford Literary Review*. The collection of essays edited by Derek Attridge, Geoffrey Bennington, and Robert Young, *Post-Structuralism and the Question of History* (1987), took up the challenge of thinking deconstruction historically and rethinking history deconstructively.

The question of deconstruction and the political has intensified since the 1987

<sup>1</sup> Antony Easthope's contention in his *Post-Structuralism since 1968* (1988) that post-structuralism in England is an American import underestimates the resistance to U.S. theory in the U.K.

publicisation of Heidegger's allegiance to Nazism and De Man's wartime journalism in favour of Germany. Andrew Benjamin and David Wood of the University of Warwick have explored the historical and political consequences of deconstruction in the Warwick Studies in Philosophy and Literature series published by Routledge. Simon Critchley argued for *The Ethics of Deconstruction* (1992), and at Oxford Robert Young employed deconstructive methods to analyse colonial and imperial discourse. At the University of Sussex Laura Chrisman remained skeptical of deconstruction's usefulness for colonial and post-colonial theory while Homi Bhabha's deconstructive post-colonialism claimed political relevance. Also writing from Sussex, Geoffrey Bennington's *Legislations: The Politics of Deconstruction* (1994) argued for the necessity of rethinking the political in the wake of deconstruction, and astutely pointed to the various misunderstandings of Derrida by critics and epigones alike. In the Sussex institutional context the historical materialism of Alan Sinfield who is now editorial *Practice* and Jonathan Dollimore formed the main in-house antagonist for the Sussex Derrideans.

Richard Beardsworth's *Derrida and the Political* (1996) is based on his doctoral dissertation completed at the University of Sussex under the supervision of Bennington in the late 1980s. The research which forms the basis of Beardsworth's book was carried out in the ideological climate of Thatcherism that saw the smashing of organised labour, the glorification of free-market individualism, technological progress and global consumerism. In this period the role of universities shifted from state institutions to public companies. Politics within the institution shed the rhetoric of the collective struggle to make institutions, and ultimately society, more democratic. The model of academic production changed from 'contribution to learning' to the marketing of international commodities of exchange. In short, the role of the engaged English intellectual was modified in the light of the perceived failure of the left before the juggernaut of monetarism and the ineluctable laws of the market.

### Salvaging Derrida<sup>2</sup>

*Derrida and the Political* is part of a Routledge series entitled 'Thinking the Political' under the general editorship of Keith Ansell-Pearson (University of Warwick) and Simon Critchley (University of Essex). Beardsworth, Associate Professor of Philosophy and Literature at the American University of Paris, attempts to draw out the political implications of Derrida's thought in three extensive chapters. He aims to go beyond the American liberal and communitarian debates of the 1970s and 1980s by drawing attention to the aporetic structure of modern political thought: a complete rethinking of the traditional ethico-political values of peace and violence is called for.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, subsequent page numbers refer to *Derrida and the Political*.

Beardsworth returns to Derrida's remarkable 1968 reading of Aristotle and Heidegger on time ('*Ousia and Gramme*'), and argues that the aporia of time is the aporia of the law. This aporetic structure is repressed in 'the political' which, like any other moment of judgement and decision, of legitimation and authorisation, is grounded in a violence that is both conceptual and material. The political is *a priori* implicated in violence. Attempting the rearticulation of time in terms of the irreducibility of the law, and of law in terms of time, claims to acknowledge violence and to work for justice. This justice demands a re-evaluation of Derrida's texts.

Chapter 1, 'From Saussure to Law, an Opening onto Judgement: Saussure, Kafka, Derrida', is an exposition of Derrida's conception of the law of the law as articulated in his readings of Saussure, Levi-Strauss and Kafka. The law of the law is aporetic: the impossibility of the law ever accounting for its own lawfulness. The condition of possibility of the law is that the possibility of the law cannot be accounted for without always already presupposing the law. Thus there can be no history of the law that does not pre-empt the law, and the law of the law is that the law must always be (illegitimately) presupposed. It follows from this that the institution of the law is necessarily violent since it seeks to repress its own groundlessness. This originary violence remains as a trace in the conflict that is the law: at one and the same time the law is universalising and it creates the singular which resists the universal.

Chapter 2, 'The Political Limit of Logic and the Promise of Democracy: Kant, Hegel, Derrida', employs the Derridean conception of the law to rethink the notion of the political. The legitimacy of the political, as the legislation of inclusive and exclusive limits, and its claims to authority are shown to be unstable and aporetic. Authority is only ever instituted and maintained by the violent suppression of the contradictory grounds of its own functioning, the erasure of the play of difference and the obliteration of challenges to legitimacy.

Chapter 3, 'Aporia of Time, Aporia of Law: Heidegger, Levinas, Derrida', attempts to formulate the possibility of the political as the least violent by moving through Heidegger's conception of temporality and Levinas's ethical conception of alterity. The shortcomings of Heidegger's and Levinas's politics are traced to their attempts to justify their politics by grounding it in conceptions of ontology. The 'Conclusion' points the way towards a vision of the political for the next century that will keep alive the promise of the political which is nothing less than the promise of democracy. Beardsworth argues for the political force of deconstruction on the grounds that it is only by experiencing the aporia of time and the law via thinking through Derrida's thought that the political can survive at all.

The abused stakes of Derrida's thinking centre on the relation between deconstruction and 'the political'. Not 'politics' but rather '*the political*': 'politics' concerns 'the domain of human behaviour which normativizes the relations between a

subject and its others' while 'the political' is understood as 'the instance that gathers or founds such a practice as practice' (158). We are, then, here concerned with foundational questions, or rather with the question of foundation and institution, and not with the practice of this or that politics. Although political decisions will impinge as particulars to be accounted for the primary focus is the political itself. The cases of Heidegger's Nazism, Levinas's ethical justification of the politics of Israel, and what Beardsworth sees as 'the concrete political example of Derrida's reading of the American Declaration of Independence' (98), are to be viewed from the vantage point of Derrida's aporetic and inventive philosophy of time and law.

A sense of belatedness pervades *Derrida and the Political*. This is surprising in a book that mobilises the rhetoric of progress and apocalyptic millennialism for the purposes of 'the reinvention of political concepts to measure up to the technicization and globalization of political communities in the next century' (xi). The constant refrain is that Derrida's thought has been underestimated in its complexity: 'severely underestimated by both supporters and detractors of deconstruction. The underestimation has led to many misunderstandings concerning its political pertinence and force' (xiv). Belatedness can be traced to 'the institutional history of deconstruction in the Anglo-Saxon world' where since the late 1980s deconstruction came to be seen 'as constitutively incapable of articulating the historical making and unmaking of subjectivities' (3). The 'understanding of the relations between institutions and their history' (4) involves a rereading of Derrida's works:

The case against the institution of deconstruction is rested; but that of deconstruction's relation to its institution, and to its thinking of the institution in general, needs to be reopened .... A rereading of these works will show that the institutional culture of deconstruction fell into contradiction with the radical insights of this culture's beginnings. If this is the fate of all thinking that inaugurates a culture—following the iterable logic of all marks, Derrida's writings lend themselves apriori to being 'misunderstood'—the complexity and implications of Derrida's thinking have been simplified by its international reception remaining unduly in the field of textual analysis (3f).

The fate of Derrida's thought requires a corrective reiteration of its central tennets, a restitutive salvaging in the form of an intellectual exercise that aims to conserve a maligned resource of transformational thinking 'motivated by a wish to press home the precise intellectual stakes of Derrida's philosophy, stakes which have often been ignored or underestimated' (5). This combative interpretive stance is beyond any simple *apologia* and the accounting will deal with friend and foe alike. If the exegesis is successful—that is, if the reader comes to the realisation of the importance of Derrida's deconstructions for the reflection on the political—then 'it will have enjoined the reader to go back to Derrida's works with the fate of the political in mind' (157). After

the itinerary through the arguments of Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, Heidegger and Levinas *anagnorisis* will return the reader to the Derridean corpus. This is both the way 'to the reinvention of politics for the next century' (48) and a rebuttal of Gillian Rose's criticisms of Derrida which 'fall short since there is no dialogue in her work either between philosophy and the technosciences' (97).

Why is such an investigation necessary? Because

Metaphysical logic reduces the passage of time to presence: its articulations of justice are consequently violent to the experience of that time that constitutes the human condition. The disavowal of time in reflection upon the political has led to much injustice and violence in the field of politics. To reflect upon politics in terms of time is to endure the experience of the aporia of law (and) time. Political judgements which recognize difference according to the lesser violence are those that have endured this experience. This experience informs Derrida's non-horizontal understanding of justice and of democracy. The political resonance of deconstruction is to be located and discussed here (xvi-xvii).

This thesis raises some initial questions. Firstly, what connection links the 'disavowal of time in reflection on the political' to 'injustice and violence in the field of politics'? How can the avowal of the temporality of the political minimise injustice and violence in 'the field of politics'? Some evidence is required to support such a hypothesis. The conceptual foundations of the political are certainly open to philosophical articulation, and the field of politics can be interpreted on the basis of an understanding of 'the political', but 'the field of politics' requires no such understanding to function. Other forces take the field and play their part in opening up the possibility for reflecting on the question of time in the political, a reflection that is accommodated within this field as a necessary part of its functioning. Given time, reflection on time is possible. But what produces the time to reflect, gives some of us (while at the same time denying it to others) the chance to 'endure the aporia of law (and) time'? Secondly, why are 'Political judgements which recognize difference according to the lesser violence ... those that have endured this experience'? What evidence is there to support the genealogical affinity of political judgements according to what Beardsworth will later designate vaguely as 'democratic organizations of power' (146)? To say simply that the most democratic are those judgements that have recognised difference according to the lesser violence homogenises the various experiences of democracy, which are always multiple and conflicting. My tolerant experience of 'lesser violence' may be for another 'most violent'.

The argument of *Derrida and the Political* is constructed on Derrida's reading of Saussure, 'a reading as meticulous as it is vast', in which 'Derrida is recasting the terms in which all institutional violence is to be thought' (10). Derrida's claims 'arche-

writing' as the general possibility of inscription because 'metaphysics constitutes its oppositions by expelling into one term of the opposition the very possibility of condition of such oppositions' (8). For Derrida the 'instituted trace' is the possibility common to all systems of signification, the moment of decision in which boundaries are drawn on the basis of opposition, and it precedes the oppositions between nature and convention, allowing for their possibility. These violent exclusions institute a space that remains haunted by what it excludes. For Beardsworth '[t]he recognition of the condition of these exclusions demands re-cognition and renegotiation of their law, and this recognition is political' (10). Rethinking the political means rethinking the law of the law, the violence of the law and the law of violence. Judgement can only ever try to lessen its complicity with the metaphysical economy it might want to challenge: 'One is always within an economy of violence', 'the inescapability of violence' (91, 95).

Now, it is obvious that the very conditions that curtail freedom have also allowed us to think of ourselves as free, that struggle is inherent to human organisation, and that 'the political community is only possible through struggle and exclusion and that in this sense it is always to be made and unmade' (93). The founding of institutions is part of this violence even when they aim to ameliorate it, and legislations of the law are caught in the aporia of being unable to account for the legitimacy of the law they inaugurate. Claims to authority, to institute a subject (a people, a place, etc.), do cover over the problem of legitimacy by a sleight of hand that blurs the difference between performative and descriptive in order to institute as subject, effectively inventing that which they claim to represent. But is this sleight of hand really, as Beardsworth claims, 'only derivatively a question of ideology or power' (100)? Is it really 'firstly, a question of disavowing time' (100)?

Founding declarations do and this is a temporal difference. Contextual factors facilitate or stage the possibility of some claims for legitimacy being made while excluding others. Delineating the formal structure of instituting gestures is only part of any analysis that claims to work for justice. Factors such as social identity, economics, education—questions of ideology or power—also require examination if particular contexts are to be addressed. Moreover, don't claims by academics to have found a way beyond or through ideology and power have a history that includes the period of Heidegger's early writings and the work of Karl Mannheim and others attempting to preserve the objectivity of intellectual work?<sup>3</sup> '[T]he law of the law is nothing but the

<sup>3</sup> See David Frisby, *The Alienated Mind: The Sociology of Knowledge in Germany, 1918-1933* (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1983). For more recent attempts to dissociate the 'New Class' of intellectuals from the embeddedness of knowledge in capitalist production see the contributions to B. Bruce-Briggs (ed.), *The New Class?* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Press, 1979), and Pierre Bourdieu, "The Corporation of the Universal: The Role of Intellectuals in the Modern World", *Telos* 81 (1989: 99-110).

irreducibility of law to a history of it' (33): perhaps, but there are also histories of when and how the aporetic structure of time and the law has been mobilised within philosophical discourse, accounts of whose interests have been served in particular contexts by this discourse. The demotion of the question of ideology or power is not simply a sign of progress in philosophical discourse, but rather a historicisable repetition that sublimes a critique of society into a philosophical problem. To reflect upon politics and philosophy in terms of time involves historical contextualisation.

I would suggest that the generalisation of violence risks underestimating the locus of centres of violence within the constellation of forces. 'Arche-writing' might well precede the Platonic institution of the opposition between the transcendental and the empirical, and the notion of 'context' might mark the institution of an inside and an outside, but there is also a risk associated with this thesis which is itself a matter of context. As Beardsworth notes

The irreducibility of a decision shows that the most innocent 'theorist' is always also a legislator and policeman. It is in this sense that any statement is a judgement which carries 'political' force (12).

Surely, then, the task is to attend to the context in which one theorises in the hope of minimising violence. The theorist's understanding of historical context is a question of decision regarding the violent returns of the status quo. Within the general economy of violence there are also historically specific economies of violence which serve specific interests, an economy that involves differences of site and differences of force. This raises the issue of

the relation between the aporia of time and material inscription (what is sometimes called, wrongly, I believe, the 'socio-historical'). The supra-national status of the present world economy makes the sovereignty of the nation state an unsophisticated principle of organization (95).

Beardsworth summarises the current historical context as follows:

We live today in a world which is increasingly violent, less and less politicized. It would be foolish not to see in this 'depoliticization' a sign of an end to political ontology, at least. It would also be foolish, however, either to bemoan the end of the modern concept of the state or to affirm its reorganization in the present supra-national status of what modernity called 'civil society', that is, today, the international economic systems. If one therefore wishes to rearticulate this depoliticization, without repeating the fates of modernity, an aporetic invention of politics is called for (95)<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> For a complementary vision of the supra-national global economy see Robert B. Reich, *The Work of Nations* (1991), and for deconstructive readings of international relations see James Der Derian and Michael Shapiro (eds), *International/Intertextual Relations* (1988).

If Beardsworth's readings of philosophical arguments appear persuasive, then the shift to history and to politics reveals a startling tendency for generalisation which throws into question the plausibility of his philosophical rearticulations. This can be seen most clearly in his discussion of colonialism where the generalisation of violence is said

not to deny the violence of European colonialism; it is to include it within a more embracing structure of violence which refuses the logic of opposition (21).

The ghosts of philosophical predecessors haunt this crossing of philosophy, history, and politics.

### Philosophical Exorcism

For Beardsworth Marx

prolongs and simplifies Hegel by making unrecognized violence into an ontological principle of class struggle. The modern period of revolutionary politics which justifies political violence in the name of a social subject ensues (95).

This is not the way to lesser violence. Marx like others '[f]rom the Enlightenment onwards' fails to escape the thinking of humanity as 'present', a thinking that is a feature of 'modernity': "'Modernity' serves as a discursive term of reflection upon a period of history from the beginning of the modern epoch onwards' (49). The sententious legislation of broad historical patterns is a striking feature of *Derrida and the Political*.

What, then, of the material inscription designated by the term 'colonialism'? Beardsworth cites Hegel's description from *The Philosophy of Right* (1821) which he interprets 'as an interesting if evasive comment' (93). Hegel is arguing that poverty is not some dysfunction of the system that might be rectified by technical innovation, rather it is integral to the functioning of civil society and modernisation within the context of a market economy. He points out that the pressures of civil society, the unequal opportunities and the ever expanding market economy, also lead to the establishment of overseas markets and colonisation. The full passage from Hegel reads as follows:

This inner dialectic of civil society thus drives it—or at any rate drives a specific civil society—to push beyond its own limits and seek markets, and so its necessary means of subsistence, in other lands which are either deficient in the goods it has over produced, or else generally backward in industry, &c. (Hegel 1945:151).

For Beardsworth Hegel's observation that colonialism and war are dialectical developments of the inner dialectic of civil society misses the point because he fails to see that the rebellious rabble within civil society are an essential contingency of all states. Hegel shifts the violence of dispossession to the colonial frontier and envisages an internal peace bought at the price of perpetual violence on the outskirts, missing the fact that that exported violence is present at the civil centre too and is produced by the irrational economy at home. Beardsworth argues that

to think of violence as occurring *at the limits* of a state's 'own lands' leads to the misrecognition of violence. For violence is repressed precisely by being *placed* in a site. *Visibility ends up being blind* (94).

Hegel's locating of violence at the colonial margins overlooks the fact that

Colonialism is based on the unrecognized naturalness of empirical need. This need engenders the 'infinity' of injustice, territorial expansion and conquest (94).

Yet Beardsworth's own recognition of the violence of the irrational economy at home gets lost behind 'the unrecognized naturalness of empirical need'<sup>5</sup>, and escapes analysis. Violence is repressed precisely by not being placed in a site.

The levelling-out of violence does not lead to any analysis of the distribution of violence, its haunting presence at the centre, because, as we have been told, any siting of violence amounts to its repression. However, the intellectual pay-off is that in a world of generalised violence the centre suffers as much as the periphery. So to write from the centre is to write from essentially the same conditions as pertain at the neo-colonial periphery, and any delimitation of context risks misrecognising the generality of this violence. This argument culminates in the following 'Conclusion' which is worth quoting at length:

The essential lack of identity to all human organization is more and more 'apparent' in contemporary relations between humanity and the world. Internationalization and the increasing 'spectralization' of human identity which accompanies it are, for example, the political 'givens' of today and tomorrow. Whether one thrives off them (the international Mafia), muddles through them (present democratic organizations), opposes them (today's forms of nationalism, racism and fundamentalist politics) or attempts to articulate them (the task present and future political invention), we all live

<sup>5</sup> Although Beardsworth's demotion of Marx and Hegel follows the lead of Robert Young's *White Mythologies* (1990), the positing of the 'naturalness of empirical need' recalls the anti-Marxist argument of historian Ronald Hyam's *Britain's Imperial Century* (1976) and *Empire and Sexuality* (1990): Hyam sees European expansion in terms of the export of surplus energy.

within this process of spectralization. Spectralization is not just a monopoly of the richer industrialized countries. Any country, any locality determines its understanding of time, place and community *in relation to* this process of 'global' spectralization. This process originates with that of hominization so it would be wrong to see present spectralization as heralding an unprecedented era. That said, it is taking place today at a historically unprecedented speed, one which will become all the more acute, at the level of human reception and negotiation of the 'inhuman', with the exponentially accelerating developments in machine intelligence and in the biotechnical recombination of 'non-human' and 'human' DNA (147).

Where does the author of these imperious sentences position himself in order to observe 'contemporary relations between humanity and the world'? Apparently not within an institutional context that is both inside and outside the overlapping fields of politics, ideology, economics and power that position judgement. Rather he constructs the best of all possible worlds for an academic:

Thus thinking through the aporia of law amounts to a defence of the institutional inscription 'at the same time' as it defends the infinity of singular resistances to this inscription (95).

The deconstructor's favoured 'middle ground' (17) between transcendental and empirical that is supposed to explain 'why all political projects fail' (19) here leads to a familiar socio-historical shelter.

### Conclusion

*Derrida and the Political* contains efficient expository readings of Derrida's readings of Aristotle, Saussure, and Levi-Strauss, and this book will probably attract those in search of yet more useable summaries of Derrida's arguments. Arguments are served up stripped of their historical contexts and well designed to service the needs of an impatient intellectual commodity market.

It seems to me that Beardsworth is wrong to simplify the shortcomings of deconstruction as the 'problem of its institutional *reception* remaining unduly in the field of textual analysis'. His examination of 'deconstruction's relation to its institution' evidences a misrecognition of the institutional site of *production* within the spectralising field of dynamic global technological consumption. Just as there are degrees of violence so too are there degrees of complicity with a universalising discourse that levels out the violence of the non-discursive forces that shape the various contexts of academic production and consumption. This is a question of, among other things, ideology or power and material conditions.

One of the effects of *Derrida and the Political's* levelling-out of violence is the aporetic consolidation of centrality *at the same time* as that centre recognises-declares its own dispersion. A condition of possibility of any violent (de)centring that is also contextualisable as a ruse functioning to minimise sitings of that same (de)centralising and violent economy. *Visibility ends up being blind*. This is a socio-historical phenomenon associated with capitalism.

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# Homo Hermeneuticus: Historical Narrative in the Semiosphere

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## Review Article

*Reading Eco: An Anthology*

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## Introduction

Since ancient times, humanity has relied on induction, deduction or abduction, i.e. ratiocination or conjecture to read signs. Whereas the inductive method of reasoning infers a general principle or rule (not necessarily true) from observed particulars and deductive thought, arguments of which both premises and conclusion must be true, abduction concerns the creative networking of premises and conclusion to arrive at a particular case which may explain both premises and conclusion. Generally speaking, the latter is the method of hermeneutics.

The reading or interpretation of signs has always been one of the most prized of abilities or even occupations. In the context of 'The Book of God', divination, expositions, readings and interpretations of dreams, fortune, fate, oracle or holy writ occupied humanity since antiquity. Humanity's interpretive interest in the 'The Book of Nature' manifested in practices of pathfinding, ancient hunting and tracking techniques, the interpretation of symptoms of illness and cure and alchemy. Humanity developed the art of interpreting signs, the art of conjecture, suspicion, speculation and guess, in order to discover, gain access to or track down the unknown and unseen, the future, the past, the prey, the cause, the secret. Throughout human evolution, this art was constantly enriched and passed on to later generations. Whether in Greek mythology or Bushman tracking, the reading of the stars or the bones, the interlacing of signs or the decision at the cross-roads, *homo hermeneuticus* has not only viewed such interpretation abilities as part of its most valuable and important inheritances of knowledge, but also as one of the most important meaning generating machines. Prehistoric humanity developed it and used it for purposes of survival (cf. Sebeok 1997:281f). Modern man used it to ensure his control and dominance. Confronted with complexity and multiplicity, postmodern humanity uses it to both uncover existing networks of meaning and through creative abduction, to weave new ones. As such, semiotics de-

veloped, is still in progress and will hypothetically never end.

If postmodernity is that human condition where humanity experiences the 'victory of life over art' (Eco 1997b:29), then, primarily, humanity is confronted with the complexity of life, that irreducible multiplicity and entanglements of chance actions and interactions (cutting across cultural, hierarchical and historical divides) which irreversibly escape human control. Semiotically and in analogy to the 'biosphere', Lotman (1990:123-214) coined the notion of the semiosphere<sup>1</sup> to capture the plural world of postmodernity. Comprising of signs, the semiosphere includes all the signs woven into systems and belonging to spaces (whether partially or wholly) but also those which are not accounted for. Different from the old universal-particular exemplar of the forest and trees, the semiosphere can be accounted for in terms of all those simultaneous syntagmatic and paradigmatic, synchronic and diachronic diversity and influences in a forest on a particular tree, a leaf (cf. Eco 1997d:58).

This notion of the semiosphere has moved Semiotics away from its earlier focus on the study of rule-governed systems as well as the semiotic distinction between significance (Barthes 1957) and communication (e.g. distinctions between code and message) (cf. also Eco 1979a). What was earlier perceived as unchangeable systems has been textualised—whether culture generally speaking or art or characters. Similarly, in learning, Lotman asserts, people are not socialised into systems or into obeying rules through 'grammatical learning'. Rather, since culture is a 'set of texts and a non-hereditary collective memory' governed 'by a repertoire of texts imposing models of behaviour .... to be followed and imitated' (Eco 1997d:56), texts are the means of socialisation<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Lotman (1990:123-214) describes the semiosphere under the headings of: 'Semiotic Space'; 'The Notion of Boundary'; 'Dialogue Mechanisms'; 'The Semiosphere and the Problem of Plot' and uses his theory in his analysis of space in 'Geographical space in Russian Medieval Texts'; 'The Journey of Ulysses in Dante's *Divine Comedy*'; 'The "Home" in Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*'; and 'The Symbolism of St. Petersburg'.

<sup>2</sup> This recognition has moved semiotics away from a communication or signification semiotics based on the supposition that there is an equilibrium between sign and system or code and message in equal exchange, to an interpretation semiotics. As such, it moved away from a sign-based postal-package semiotics to a text-based interpretation semiotics. This move is particular to boundary or contact zone culture typified by the 'weakening of centripetal forces in linguistic ... and socio-cultural life' and the 'polylogism, plurilingualism, multiaccentuativity and pluriavailability of signs' in postmodernity. Interpretation semiotics, therefore, centrally accounts for the 'irreducibly other', plurivocality, ambiguity, polysemy, dialogism, as theorised by Bakhtin and Levinas and the difference between the interpreted and interpretant sign as theorised by Peirce (cf. Rossi Landi 1961 in Petrilli 1997:125). The crisis and dissolving of centering systems, meant that 'interest shifted to the engendering of texts, their interpretation, their drift of interpretations, productive pulsions, to the pleasure itself of semiosis' (Eco 1984:xv).

Confronted with complexity and multiplicity, it may seem as if postmodern culture, as determined by the semiosphere, is delivered over to the contradictory, the irrational, the illogical, the lie, the senseless. However, in addition to the repositories of encyclopedic knowledges and interpretative skills and practices of those reading 'The Book of God' or 'The Book of Nature', the science of Semiotics has, since its earliest inception, aimed at expounding the ways and means in terms of which humanity deals with signs as texts, texts as signs, the world as a text and texts as possible worlds (cf. Eco 1992:23). It is the interpretative skills developed within a general semiotics which not only account for how one may deal with chaos but also how one may develop meaningful systems/networks within multiplicity.

Since the early 1980s, Umberto Eco, Professor of Semiotics at the University of Bologna, has set his mind to precisely this problem. Whereas his earlier interests included the interpretative movement away from the focus on authorial intention and new critical text analysis to that of the reader (cf. his *Opera Aperta* 1962; translated in part as *The Open Work* 1989b), a structuralistically oriented general semiotics developing semiotics socially and ideologically (cf. *The Theory of Semiotics* [1976]1979a) and his distinction between popular culture with its closed texts and open works (*The Role of the Reader* 1979b; 'Casablanca or the Clichés are having a Ball' 1985) of late, he turned to historical narrative to both explore and theorise postmodernity and semiotic interpretation. It is in this context that Rocco Capozzi has brought together his *Anthology*.

### The Anthology

The *Anthology* comprises five essays by Eco, twelve exploratory and critical essays on semiotics generally and more particularly on Eco's work and ten review essays of Eco's novels. Eco's (1997a; 1997b, 1997c; 1997d; 1997e) five essays address seven main issues: 1) the institutional positioning of semiotics; 2) the distinction between modernism and post-modernism as a distinction between innovation and repetition; 3) a further development of isotopy and the distinction between use and interpretation as regards the limits of interpretation; 4) Lotman's (and by implication his own) movement away from a structuralist perception of the distinctions between signification and communication and code and message; 5) and finally his authorial response to the model readers of his first novel who turned out to be smarter than himself.

Subtitled 'A Pretext to Literary Semiotics and Interpretation', Capozzi's choice of articles for his second section further explores those points brokered by Eco in the first five essays. The most notable further expositions of Eco's Semiotics concern his interest in 'open works' and popular culture (Seed; Perron & Debbèche), his reading

of Peirce (Petrilli), a further development of his theorising in terms of Bakhtin (Seed; Petrilli), an exposition of intertextuality (Rifaterre), a bolstering of his critique of hermetic reading (Doležel; Rauch; Buczynska-Garewicz; Longoni) and the nature of the limits of interpretation (Capozzi). Critiques of Eco's work primarily comes from Deely on the idealist–realist split in his work and Tejera on seven issues related to semiotics. Kevelson challenges Eco to change his opted aesthetic form, that of the novel, to that of drama. This, she argues, will rid Eco of his 'quest for certainty' exemplified in his opting for the synthetic form of the novel and allow him to engage paradox—more closely aligned to Peirce's own quest.

Of the ten review essays, three deal with Eco's first novel (de Lauretis; Richter; Sebeok), three with his second (Bondanella; Coletti; Hutcheon), three with his third (Bouchar; Miranda; Capozzi) and one with all three to various degrees (Zamora).

Focusing more on Eco's work itself, this review article selectively points to contributions the *Anthology* makes to understanding some of his own concerns and approaches. This may be useful in addressing the issue of 'Historical Narrative in the Semiosphere'.

### The Rationale for the Change in Eco's Oeuvre

There are primarily two reasons for the new direction in Eco's *oeuvre* since the early 1980s. Firstly, Eco's pun on the inside cover of the Italian edition of *The Name of the Rose* (1983a), 'di ciò di cui non si può teorizzare, si deve narrare'—what cannot be theorised must be narrated<sup>3</sup>—captures his commentary on theory's incapacity of ever being able to fully grasp the full complexity of the literary, cultural, historical, sociological, scientific text. Alternatively, it puns on the explanatory power of narrative which reveals 'narrative solutions to venerable theoretical problems' (our natural inclination to tell stories when incapable of rationally explaining something) or the lure not only Eco's but all narratives have for us—our fondness for being seduced by narrative (cf. Capozzi 1997a:227f; Miranda 1997:374).

The second reason arises from Richard Rorty's (1982) grouping of Eco and Peirce together with Derrida and other deconstructionists. As those who believe that everything is language relative and make the production or writing of philosophy a 'genre', for Rorty, it means to be the result of the pragmatic dissolving of truth. Through his second and third narratives, Eco has aimed to expose the ungroundedness of Semi-

<sup>3</sup> In terms of its style, the pun also plays on Wittgenstein's statement in *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* ([1922]1990), 'Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen'—whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.

ology developed from Saussure as alchemism and hermeticism in distinction to his own version of Semiotics arising from Peirce. Derrida's statement that 'the text is all we have, and all we can speak about' without any referential relationship with the world of objective referents, the view that there are no connections, especially that between a text and its historical context, between rationality and the world of objective referents, literary and scientific culture (Rorty 1982; cf. also Miranda 1997:366,368ff) is countered by Eco<sup>4</sup>. Eco's approach in his last two novels (but also present in the first) is to show how emplotted infinite semiosis implodes in an *ad infinitum* vortex (Miranda 1997:366).

Miranda (1997:367-374) shows that Eco uses a genealogical, a theoretical and a narrative argument to define his own theoretical space over and against the others he has been grouped with. On the first, he shows Derrida's fallacious reading of Peirce arises from him not acknowledging Peirce's rules (such as his distinctions between three types of signs and his identification of a 'final interpretant' related to 'Habit' or 'Law') for 'infinite semiosis'. On the second, Eco points out that Peirce's pragmatism is still related to the notion of 'purpose'; that, contrary to Derrida's still being caught up in Jameson's 'prison-house of language', Peirce's Semiotics is contextually related to a 'specific universe of discourse' (developed by Eco's notion of the encyclopedia); and that his own preference for the dialectic between *intentio operis* and *intentio lectoris* in the *intentio auctoris*, *intentio operis* and *intentio lectoris* interdependence, means that the rights of the text have to be respected, especially as it concerns the

<sup>4</sup> This point is made by many of the contributors but none more pointedly than by Hanna Buczynska-Garewicz. She criticises hermeticism for confusing Heidegger's notion that Being cannot be collapsed into something (which means a distortion of Being in being turned into an entity) with Peirce's idea that the sign does refer to something, has the dimension of an entity (and not Being) and focuses on the human activity of interpreting signs. Countering the ontologising of the relativity between signifier and signified she points to the importance of the object of the sign. Even though already involved in semiosis, the sign (and its object) is subject to the rules related to the immediate, dynamic and final interpretants. Furthermore, Peirce's distinction between icon, index and symbol are then each a particular type of referring to an object. Against deconstruction's embracing of the infinite, random and free-play process of differing/deferring, 'écriture', or the writing of new texts which in turn are subject to the same law of écriture, Buczynska-Garewicz points to Peirce's development of the *logic* between interpretants as the 'logic of culture'. From this follows that sign-production is not time-relative (or imprisoned in the present) but facilitates the 'growth of knowledge' both logically and rationally as it develops from earlier (past) signs and with a view to future habits of action. As 'cognitive process' it is a truth-directed process and not 'purposeless immediacy'.

Model Reader inscribed in the text (Eco 1990:6)<sup>5</sup>. While still strongly advocating the rights of the reader, Eco's asking interpreters to respect the rights of texts or to cooperate with the text (i.e. its 'system ruled by an internal coherence') means that, depending on the degree to which the empirical reader matches the Model Reader, s/he will produce interpretations of which it may be difficult to say whether some are better than others, it can be said that some interpretations would be wrong (Eco 1990:21,148). Eco's third strategy is to use the novel form for theoretical purposes thereby subverting 'writing' as philosophising medium. Where all texts become writing and therefore philosophy for Derrida, all texts become theory for Eco (Miranda 1997:373).

The publication of Eco's novels more or less coincided with seminars and the publication of theoretical texts dealing with issues explored in his novels. *The Name of the Rose* (1983a) is related to *The Sign of Three. Holmes, Dupin, Peirce* (1983b), focuses on excessive interpretation and turns on Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Sign of Four*, with William of Baskerville, the 'detective' in *The Name of the Rose*, the fourth in the theoretical text. *Foucault's Pendulum* (1989a) develops the still modernist focus on excessive interpretation in the first novel into interpretation running amuck and relates to Eco's critique of hermetic interpretation as developed by poststructuralism in *The Distorted Idea: Esoteric Interpretations of Dante* (student research for Eco's course on hermetic semiosis in 1986); *The Limits of Interpretation* (1990); *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* (1990). Eco's third novel, *The Island of the Day Before* (1995a) develops similar hermetic thinking and relates to his *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* (1994). In this theoretical work, each of the 'walks' explores the fiction of other authors and can be used as compass by the reader to navigate (as if it were a hyper-text) the narrative (cf. Miranda 1997). Apart from having written three novels which can be enjoyed as historical mystery novels, as detective fiction, a love story, a *Bildungsroman* or a seafaring novel, it is this alternate purpose—to create an 'intricate postmodern metafiction' in which the novel as medium is used for a 'metanarrative discourse' (Richter 1997:256; Miranda 1997:363)—which weighs heaviest with Eco.

<sup>5</sup> In support of Eco's critiques of deconstruction, Doležel (1997) points to Eco's view that even for open texts, limits are set for the Model Reader, especially concerning the text's actual world encyclopedia; Rauch (1997:144-146) points to Eco's (1990:21) view that 'symbols are anchored to their context' and that they are not 'paradigmatically open to infinite meanings'; Longoni (1997:212,216) distinguishes between the 'text of the world' (inviting infinite interpretation) and the 'world of the text' which limits it. Eco (1989c:68) himself has shown that even for the most open of works, limits are set, even if only in the ironic rethinking of the already said.

### Eco's Novels

As investigated, argued and developed in his theoretical works and the articles Rocco Capozzi brought together in his *Anthology*, Eco's main argument in his novels, as it relates to the notion of the 'Historical Narrative in the Semiosphere', is double-edged. On the one hand, against modernist homological consciousness and in line with his earlier work on the distinction between open and closed works, 'high' literature and popular culture, it argues that everything belongs to the semiosphere or that everything can be semiotised or textualised. On the other hand, and against hermeticism, it does not follow from this assertion that everything can be connected to everything else (*tout se tient*).

Even though both these arguments are, to different degrees, present in all three novels, *The Name of the Rose* (1983a) still engages the first and *Foucault's Pendulum* (1989a) and *The Island of the Day Before* (1995a) concern the second more overtly. In terms of the neoplatonic-nominalist or metaphysics-physics, 'transcendental connectedness and nominalist fragmentation' binaries, the first, even though ultimately exposed as error, still works with the idea of a secret or veiled schema behind the welter of reality detail. The second novel implodes the schema throughout and the third is set somewhere in between (cf. Zamora 1997:343). In opposing these extremes, Eco's passion for history in all three novels is tempered to a degree by what Harold Bloom called the 'anxiety of influence' (exemplified in the Romantic compulsion to reject the cultural past in the name of originality). He drains historical epochs of information and then creatively/novelistically employs such information for his own metadiscursive dialogues.

Eco historically positions all three of his novels at time-historical 'weak points', points of cultural chaos, insecurity, transition—where the old has lost its authority and the new has not yet dawned. The debiscence of structures create feelings of looming doom or apocalypse, i.e. in its sense of cataclysm and catastrophe (which may switch to wonder and excitement about the different as in the third novel). Through such positionings he not only draws analogies between time-historical epochs but more importantly creates novelistic machines through which he can comment (or write commentaries) on modern and postmodern culture.

#### *The Name of the Rose* (1983a)

Situated historically in one week of November 1327, the first novel deals with a series of murders in a Franciscan abbey. Politically the murders draw unwanted attention to the Franciscans who aspired to stay neutral in the conflict between Louis the Bavarian (Emperor) and John XXII (Pope). Aiming to solve the murders, William of Baskerville, also a Franciscan, plays detective and in the process teaches Adso, a young priest,

about the interpretation of signs. Through creative abduction he hypothesises that the murders are modelled on the prophecy of the seven angels and seven trumpets in Revelation 8:6–10:10. Ultimately, and by chance, however, he finds out that there was no overt plot. What happened is that the poison the librarian put on the pages of Aristotle's *Poetics of Comedy* to deter other monks from reading it, in fact killed the monks who did.

Positioned at the time-juncture of the collapsing of traditional orders in the High Middle Ages, the first novel treats the politics of Emperor and Pope, Louis the Bavarian and John XXII, as more fatal and contaminating than the 'Black Death' itself (carried by rats and lice). In this, Eco produces a series of mirrors for looming Western apocalypse. Even more than the looming threat of global atomic destruction, the East-West cold war is figured in Louis the Bavarian and John XXII's struggle. Abductively, either may be equated with the old USSR, the Warsaw Pact and socialist movements in the Third World on the one side and the US and NATO, the ideology of capitalism on the other. Threatened by the possibility of losing independence in the conflict between Emperor and Pope, the Franciscan monk's own symptomatic postulating of an apocalyptic schema for solving the murders may figure his desire for divine intervention. Alternatively, it may equally be equated to the unaligned's inclination to join heretic movements: 'simple' people, the landless peasants, (e.g. the Fraticelli, Catharists, Waldensians, Arnoldists, Patarines; 'the communists' in the West and 'the capitalists' in the East). Such people, Eco suggests, do not join these movements because they perceive heretic movements to propound the truth, but because they feel themselves not socially and intellectually protected by systems in society. They find hope in the promise of 'at least violently overthrowing the order that excludes them'. The US and USSR paranoia about the competition between capitalist and communist hegemony was not real for the people. For Eco, it seems, their overall drive was that of a 'hunger for inclusion within the international polity' (Richter 1997:268; Eco 1983:196-207).

Eco's sublime commentaries in his novel also extend to the attraction 'terrorism' has for intellectuals and on clandestine political organisations such as the CIA, MI5 and KGB. Concerning the first, Eco appears to criticise those liberals in Europe (e.g. Ubertino of Casale and in our century, many more) who preach revolution but do not actually join in, i.e. for their 'hypocritical habit of theoretically advocating anarchic violence while remaining noncommittal about terrorism of the Black September type' (Richter 1997:269; Eco 1983:41-64). Secondly. Similar to the inquisition, the East's and West's clandestine operatives twist and turn people's words against them, invariably find them guilty and put them to death for crimes they have not committed. As in his other novels, we do not find Eco indulging in sermonising, moralising or giving history lessons for that matter. Cunningly, he creates systems of mirrors 'by

which the present and the past are allowed to reflect, distort and parody each other' (Richter 1997:270).

If Eco's strategy for generating his analogical commentaries in his first novel is to create an authentically as possible medieval cultural situation resonating with modern/postmodern culture, his narrative technique is not appropriate to the period—different from a strategy employed by Mary Renault and Robert Graves. Eco's detective-protagonist (William of Baskerville) and his pupil in semiotic abduction (Adso) are modelled after Sherlock Holmes (of Irish descent like William) and Watson (whose middle phonemes creates 'Adso'), decidedly modern men placed in a medieval past. Except for points of contact with *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, the novel's plot, however, is not modelled after any of Doyle's novels but rather on the classic mystery novels of the 1930s. Even so, these resonances are superficial. Positioned somewhere between pastiche and serious narrative, the novel's anachronistic and mirroring strategies implode the iterative structure and denouement of (popular, modernist) detective fiction. As such, it is a novel which aims to end all detective as well as mystery fiction (Richter 1997:258,261). When the reader is unable to access relevant information, the incongruities related to the labyrinthine library, a locked room, information contained in maps, cryptograms, clues in a variety of foreign languages and unbreakable alibis turn into jokes—carnivalising semiotic detection and the mystery novel. The iterative structure of popular (detective) serialised fiction (whether of a Sherlock Holmes, a Columbo or James Bond—closed narratives; cf. Eco 1979b) is refracted, preventing the reiteration of the same structure. In analogy to Robbe-Grillet's *The Erasers*, Friedrich Dürrenmatt's *The Pledge* and Jorge Luis Borges's 'Death and the Compass', the plot and denouement, again, employs the three main postmodern detective fiction strategies aiming at deconstructing the form: the detective projects a final murder but cannot foresee that it will be his own; while the detective is made to believe that the victim is dead, he is not, and the detective is ultimately manipulated to become the assassin; the detective lays a trap but it does not work—causing much anguish over years—because the murderer was killed by pure chance before he could be caught in the act. The first is present in the self-destruction of the Abbey; the second in the inadvertent murders; and the third in the apocalyptic plan which propels the plot but which turns out to be wrong-headed (Richter 1997:271-274).

Throughout the novel, William and Adso (and with them the reader) assume that there does exist some occulted (apocalyptic) system or master code which is able to explain all the phenomena encountered by the characters—truths beyond the murder mystery, as is also found in James Joyce's *Ulysses*, William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* and Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*. In terms of his neoplatonic faith, the younger Adso still believed in a level of meaning beyond the objects and events perceived, that there is still a level of transcendental signification, a level of meaning

beyond the name of things: signs may still be read and meaning does still exist, no matter how elusive or tragic (Zamora 1997:329). The novel, however, concludes with William of Baskerville's finding: that there was no 'apocalyptic plan', 'there was no plot ... and I discovered it by mistake'. Acknowledging that, his mistake was not to pursue the issue of the murders in the Abbey with the science of signs but to have succumbed to what amounts to ontological structuralist abduction (whereby he attempted to explain the murders with the construction of an apocalyptic plan of the antichrist). William confesses of having been stubborn and having pursued 'a semblance of order, when I should have known well that there is no order in the universe'. Reflecting on the way in which one constructs a net or ladder to attain order in the universe, he concludes that 'you must throw the ladder away, because you discover that, even if it was useful, it was meaningless' (Eco 1983:487f).

#### ***Foucault's Pendulum* (1989a)**

Historically, Eco's second novel draws on thematics ranging from Torah, the Judaeo-Christian Holy Scriptures, Jesus Christ, the Templars, the Holy Grail, telluric currents, 'The Protocols of the Sages of Zion', Dante, the Free Masons, various esoteric groups, astrology, alchemy and Kabbalah to Hitler, IBM, the Eiffel tower, the art of combination, vanity presses and Self-publishing-authors (SFA's), films such as *Casablanca* and *Indiana Jones* and the pendulum of Jean Bernard Léon Foucault (1819-1868). After the three protagonists chance on the interdependence of alchemy and science during the Renaissance, they decide to make fun of occult, cabalistic and esoteric believers—mystics, members of secret societies—by artificially (with the help of computer generated hermetic semiosis) and on the basis of *tout se tient*, generating a 'secret' plan ultimately believed by the diabolicals indulging and publishing their paranoid overinterpretations. Similar to the growth of cancer cells (in Diotallevi's body), the plot degenerates cancerously: Belbo dies as a result of the hermeticists' fanaticism and Casaubon awaits their arrival to kill him for not providing them with the missing information (which does not exist) in the plot.

Radically opposite to *The Name of the Rose* (and also *The Island of the Day Before*), *Foucault's Pendulum* is not a culturally-situated past-historical narrative analogically commenting on the present. Informed by the post-1968 pluralising cultural revolution through which the West was not only more radically opened to third world struggles for independence but also to French poststructuralist irrationalism, hermetic drift and the occult, it is positioned in the poststructuralist centreless present which does not only not respect either past or future but also withdraws 'from the world of things into a universe of words[/language/texts] in order to reconstruct the form of the world' (Eco 1989c:77,84f). Modelled after the Kabbalists' perception of creation as

that of a 'symbolic textuality' without a centre and their belief in the 'world-generating capacity of language', the novel's 'universe of words' is not connected to 'the realities of lived experience'. If it does make connections, they are not 'credible' (cf. Zamora 1997:335). Similar to Eco's (1995b:68) view that James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* is already postmodern, such texts can be understood only if it is read not as 'the negation of the already said, but [as] its ironic rethinking'.

It is especially in this second novel which Eco picks up on some issues in James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* and develop them for his own postmodern purposes. These include issues such as: the book being representative of 'an epoch in transition' where neither science nor social relations obey the orders and schemas of previous more secure epochs and where the book itself is not capable of providing an alternative. In such a situation, the only thing that the book can do, is

paradoxically to define the new world by assembling a chaotic and dizzy encyclopedia from the old one and filling it with explanations that once seemed mutually exclusive. Through this clash and the Big Bang of these oppositions, something new is born.

As such, it

rebels against the narrow-mindedness of modern methodologies which permit us to define only partial aspects of reality, thus eliminating the possibility of an ultimate and total definition (Eco 1989c:83).

Similar to *Finnegan's Wake*, this may be compensated for by 'an assemblage of partial and provisional definitions that syncretically collide and combine in an enormous "world theatre"', mirroring the cosmos. For this purpose, 'language selects terms from the most disparate cultural heritages and makes possible their coexistence through the connective tissue of a language', 'accumulated materials' offering the entire wisdom of humanity which is not that of an eternal truth or 'the whole of History' but 'a form of the world in language'. The 'encyclopedic totalizing impulse', the 'vision of the world as a vast theatre of ideas, as a non-hierarchical aggregation of texts', here, aims to counter 'narrow-mindedness of modern methodologies which permit us to define only partial aspects of reality' (Eco 1989c:83f). In Eco's novel, rotation 'is the slippery sign of a centering logos', the image Eco 'uses ironically to mirror the lost "directional center" in/of his novel' (Zamora 1997:335). It refers to the mystery in the heavens, where 'the mystery of absolute immobility was celebrated' (Eco 1989c:332). Unabashedly, Casaubon talks about 'some transcendental signified—the unmasking and discrediting of which will drive the plot forward', till it ends up at the end where the pendulum only signifies itself (Zamora 1997:332).

Casaubon, the main character in *Foucault's Pendulum*, is aptly named after Isaac Casaubon (1559-1614), the Swiss philologist and Kabbalist who convincingly showed that the *Corpus Hermeticum* held to be a mystical text dating from the time of Hermes Trismegistus (before 1000 BCE) has nothing Egyptian about it and was composed after the beginning of the Christian era. David Robey's proposal that it is possible that Casaubon also refers to a character composing a book, *A Key to all Mythologies* in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* is outrightly rejected by Eco (cf. Bondanella 1997:288), but does resemble the element of mythological play in the novel (Hutcheon 1997:319; Zamora 1997:333).

Characters and events resonate with Eco's own experiences during WWII as well as of publishing houses in Turin and Milan early on in his academic career. The computer which mechanically generates the (postmodernly) hermetic plot, Abulafia, is named after Samuel ben Samuel Abulafia (1240-c.1292), a thirteenth century Kabbalist and Jewish mystic who studied the infinite combinations in the Torah and developed the number and letter system which influenced Kabbalistic thinking. Following the Kabbalistic interpretation generated by the computer, the book itself is divided into the ten sections of the occult Tree of the Sefirot (Keter, Hokhmah, Binah, Hesed, Gevurah, Tiferet, Nezah, Hod, Yesod, Malkhut) quoting Belbo's locked computer files.

The novel artificially constructs a four-dimensional or virtual reality. Randomly amalgamating all possible esoterically inclined conspiracies (on the basis of 'Suspect, only suspect'—Eco 1989:377f—and exaggerating E.M. Forster's 'Connect only connect' to a point of implosion), the three protagonists fabricate a universal mega-conspiracy plot spanning Western history from the pre-Christian era to the current postmodern condition and involving virtually all major esoteric societies (cf. Pynchon's *Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow* for similar ultra-plotted texts). Being drawn into it not only believing that the plan is true but that they themselves are in reality part of it, that they have been destined to reunite the members of the plot gone astray in time, the diabolicals enfabulate themselves into the artificially created plot to occupy and live its space-time. In the tradition of the 'followers of the veil' (such as Gabriele Rossetti 1783-1854; Eugène Aroux 1773-1859; and Luigi Valla 1878-1931 in their reading of Dante) the diabolicals presuppose that there is a non-literal hidden message under the veil of difficult verse, uncovering intricate conspiracies and secret messages, even linking Dante to Free Masonry, Rosicrucianism and the Knights Templars. Such an interpretation, however, belies the historical facts that the Rosicrucian philosophy dates from the beginning of the seventeenth and Free Masonry from the beginning of the eighteenth centuries (cf. Bondanella 1997:286).

Here, we have Eco creating a virtually real world (by randomly connecting anything with anything) with real people concretely and actually entering into its emplotted excesses, enfabulating themselves as the plan's protagonists, believing to

be destined to occupy and live its space-time. Other than his first novel, it is not the cultural condition of an exhausted epoch in the past which Eco uses to mirror current conditions. It is also not merely a current situation resonating refractedly or specularly with a multiplicity of mirrors from the past. Rather, as virtual reality, the plan is the networked result of the converged focusing of virtually all occulted speculations from the past. Eco (1986b:222) humorously describes its 'illogic' and irrationality, seeing the world only inhabited by symbols or symptoms, as 'cogito interruptus'.

Eco's ironic development of 'overinterpretation' resonates with Harold Bloom's (1975a) 'misreadings' which also related Peirce and Kabbalah in *Kabbalah and Criticism* (1975b). Following a strategy also used in his first novel, Eco's quoting from ancient sources and from ancient languages (including Classical Hebrew) mainly serves as anachronisms seducing the reader (whether able to translate these quotes or not) into an overinterpretation of the novel itself while the plot itself is, like Poe's letter, there for all to see. To set the process of overinterpretation in motion, Eco's quote from Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim's *De occulta philosophia* (which dealt with magic, numerology and the power of sacred names) in the preface provides the initial push. This is taken further by the second quote (which can be read to either push the reader further along the overinterpretation trajectory, or already sounds caution: 'Superstition brings bad luck') and the third in Hebrew which reads:

And here as the infinite light continues in a straight line across the vacuum mentioned above, it does not immediately go downward but continues little by little. That is, at first it begins to emit a line of light and immediately the line expands until it changes into something like a spherical wheel (Zamora 1997:332).

What Harold Bloom (1975a:28) called the suspicion that there is 'an immutable knowledge of a final reality that stands behind our world of appearances', is precisely what Eco attacks and which is the object of derision in both *The Name of the Rose* and *Foucault's Pendulum*. Explicit in the first novel's apocalyptic schema, the Kabbalah in the second is only a foil for Eco's ironising of the process through which such schemas come into being. In following David Lodge's and Malcolm Bradbury's *critifictional* novels, Eco develops this genre by merging the popular detective story with fictionalised academic life (especially the deconstructionists), evolving (growing) a kind of cosmic 'whodunit'. For his Model Reader (whether reading for pleasure or as a second reading reader), Eco posits a reader at ease with literary theorists, diabolical conspirators, occult philosophers as well as detectives. His facetious portrayal of academics in general, universities, publishing houses and especially Self Financing Authors (SFAs) is pointedly ironic because the publisher Garamond and the Manutius

Press (publishing the manuscripts of SFA's for financial gain) signify Claude Garamond (1499-1562) and Aldo Manuzio or Manutius (1450-1515) who invented the elegant type still used by many publishers today, and the famous Venetian Press (with the anchor and dolphin symbol still used by Doubleday Books today) respectively.

Similarly ironic is Eco's choice of the title. Even though he holds that 'Foucault' in *Foucault's Pendulum* solely refers to the inventor of the pendulum which proved the rotation of the earth experimentally, Jean Bernhard Léon Foucault (1819-1868), it also intertextually resonates with some of Michel Foucault's work, either ironising it or extending his ironies *ad absurdum*. These issues include: his idea that: 1) 'resemblance' practices are limited to the Renaissance paradigm before the advent of science; 2) knowledge generated by resemblance (and tabulated in taxonomies and columns) is poverty stricken; 3) resemblance is the inversion of irony; 4) matter (focus on the body), speech and the passive intellect are feminine; 5) something will replace Western man as the generator of power/knowledge; 6) there exist (secret) discursive histories waiting to be uncovered; 7) textualised power/knowledge exists everywhere; 8) and that its 'strategies' position and manipulate.

In tracing the vast history of hermetic semiosis and randomly constructing a plot from it, Eco shows that resemblance is not to be limited to the Renaissance (it spans early Christianity and postmodernity) nor that it is poverty stricken or that science has done away with it. It is rather extremely rich, able to generate master narratives. As such, resemblance is not the inversion of irony but can itself ironically be developed. On Foucault's hope that something will replace Western man as the generator of power/knowledge, Eco shows that the best current candidate, the computer and artificial intelligence, is unable to do so—Casaubon must still use an index card system to assist computerised research. Moreover, it does not ensure the separation of science and alchemy. This links up with Eco showing how Western man, the representative of mind, writing and the active intellect is the one desiring and responsible for the creation of order and cosmic plots. The same is true of Foucault's writing of (secret) discursive histories, still working with the notion of the 'occult parenthood' of some things. In the process of his novel, Eco shows that many more (hermetic interpretive) strategies than those identified by Foucault exist and that there are instances (currently including master narratives of nation, race, ethnicity, religion, capitalism) where people cannot defend them against textualised power/knowledge. As a 'paramount laboratory for semiotic research into textual strategies', *Foucault's Pendulum* (like *Casablanca*) can serve as '... a palimpsest for future students of twentieth-century religiosity' (cf. Hutcheon 1997).

It is, however, the tendency of suspicion, hermetic semiosis and the resultant emplotting/enfabulation, which leads to the death of the protagonists. This follows the dictum, that 'things perceived as real ... are real in their consequences' (Bondanella

1997:297). And as Casaubon waits for his killers and reflects on the fact that there is no 'secret cosmic plot', he summarises the rules of arriving at the plan:

Rule One: Concepts are connected by analogy. There is no way to decide at once whether an analogy is good or bad, because to some degree everything is connected to everything else .... Rule Two says if *tout se tient* in the end, the connecting works .... Rule Three: The connections must not be original. They must have been made before, and the more often the better, by others. Only then do the crossings seem true, because they are obvious .... But if you invent a plan and others carry it out, it's as if the Plan exists. At that point it does exist (Eco 1989a:618f).

As part of this overall strategy in misleading his Model Reader into overinterpreting the novel, Eco, for this novel, exposes the Model Reader who colludes with the Diabolicals (not believing in the plot's artificiality) to be the murderer. The novel, then, is detective fiction exposing the 'totalizing mind' as culprit (Hutcheon 1997:313) showing the need of identifying the limits of interpretation<sup>6</sup>.

#### *The Island of the Day Before (1995a)*

Eco's third novel is historically set between 1614 and 1643. Already having discovered how to calculate latitude, the controlling figure is that of longitude. This piece of information would vitally enhance charting 'the very New World'. After his arrest in Paris, Richelieu's generals offer Roberto de La Griva his freedom on condition that he uncovers the British attempt to find the fixed point through which longitude may be measured. Roberto sets out on the Dutch ship the *Amaryllis* to spy on the Englishman Dr. Byrd. He discovers that he makes his measurements on the basis of the belief that like atoms attract and by applying the 'Weapon Salve' to a sample of a dog's blood whose wound is kept open. After the ship is shipwrecked, Roberto's float takes him to another abandoned ship, the *Daphne*, off a small island in the South Pacific. A few days after his arrival, he finds a German Jesuit Father Caspar Wanderdrossel on board.

<sup>6</sup> Rather than indulging in hermetic semiosis (or authorised readings concerning the authorial intention), Eco's (1990) limits to interpretation are set by the reader's 'active collaboration' or cooperation with the text, respecting a text's own 'semiotic strategies' concerning the text's own possibilities and limits to conjecture (created by its contextuality) as these relate to 'intertextual references', 'inferential walks', 'possible worlds' (Barthes 1980:80; Capozzi 1997a). 'Contextuality' relates to immediate, dynamic and final interpretants as possibilities for linguistic, stylistic, ideological, cultural and historical encyclopedic information. Limits are set by the epoch's historicity.

He tells Roberto that the fixed point has been found and lies between the ship and the Island, dividing yesterday and tomorrow. After Caspar drowns in a primitive submarine in which he tries to reach the island, Roberto starts to write a novel to give order to his chaotic life. Through hermetic semiosis, his delirium about his beloved, his evil brother, the island, the fixed point and the *Wunderkammer* on board (with a collection of all the unfamiliar things and animals found in the New World) he finally sets off to swim along the longitudinal line and disappears into the sea. Through many events, Roberto's novel finally landed in the hands of the modern narrator who writes the novel.

Ending in 1643, Eco's third novel is positioned at the threshold of the Baroque described by both Walter Benjamin and Michel Foucault as 'Western History's most dramatic moments of religious, social, and philosophical decenterment' (Bouchard 1997:352). In this 'period of creative chaos', the shift from 'medieval forms of wonder to modern forms of reason' takes place (Zamora 1997:340). From conflating wonder and empirical science, the time produced (Christian) thinkers who moved culture from the context of medieval superstition to scientific reasoning. Roger Bacon (c. 1214-c. 1292) already advanced the scientific method and is quoted to have asserted, for example, that 'goat's blood was not essential for fracturing diamonds' and to have provided the proof: 'I saw it with my own eyes' (Eco 1986b:64). This overlapped with Aquinas' (c. 1225-1274) integration of Aristotelian categories into Christian theology in the later Medieval period. In 1643, this paradigm shift was still only gaining momentum—1633 saw Galileo (1564-1642) being placed under house arrest (which lasted till his death) by the Inquisition for teaching the Copernican system; 1634 saw Descartes withholding from publication his *Le Monde* which taught the same system; 1642 is not only the year of Galileo's death but also the year of Newton's birth (1642-1727)—aiming at expanding mathematics to all forms of human knowledge, thereby intending to provide scientific certainty to it. By positioning the novel at the threshold of this major change, the time when wonder and science, the transcendental signified and scientific data were still thought to be reconcilable and non-contradictory, Eco positions it somewhere between his first and second novels: between the Neoplatonic belief that there is a transcendental schema behind the welter of physical phenomena and nominalist fragmentation (which through resemblance, can connect virtually everything to everything else, independent of the things they refer to).

As such, the third novel is positioned at that moment when culture in essence and reality 'imperceptibly' deviates 'from empirical orders prescribed for it by its primary codes' and discovers that these codes are not only not 'the best ones' but also not 'the only possible ones' (Foucault 1970:xx). The Reformation, the Edict of Nantes, the discovery of the New World, the Copernican revolution, Galileo's experiments, the clash between pre-Socratic/Lucretian and Aristotelian substantiality/scholastic

metaphysics, caused the crumbling of inherited models of theological representation. The thirty years war with its alternating hegemonies of the French, British and Spanish together with the mercantile mode of economic production which eroded the feudal order decentred accepted political and social codes (Bouchard 1997:352f). In terms of Foucault (1974:xvii), Roberto's story is the story of the breakdown of 'familiar models of classification', of the experience that the 'tabula' or taxonomical grids enabling 'thought to operate upon the entities of our world', is totally inadequate in the face of the 'heterotopia of reality'. Breaches or the severing of connections between the order of words and the order(s) of the world, the crumbling of an ethical and genealogical world, effect Roberto experiencing that the difference between good and bad armies, villains and heroes are not absolute. By way of a materialist philosopher and in the midst of fracturing structures, he learns that the 'earthly paradise' of his youth, is over (Eco 1995a:52).

In the place of this familiar world comes a fluid ambiguous space, where different knowledges mutually relativise one another—'a territory of forked paths' (Eco 1995a:52). In this world, the narrator's emphasis of Roberto's problems with vision, more than an old wound or the plague, foregrounds the problems one has in perceiving 'ordered classifications and crisply defined contours' in a world bereft of order. Like 'an embarrassed Adam' (Eco 1995a:41), Roberto discovers even more troubling examples of difference inhabiting his semantic universe. The result is that the signs which he can draw on in his own European culture, are inadequate not only in describing the evolving European culture itself but also the physical universe with which he is confronted—the fauna and flora of the New World (Bouchard 1997:353). The only thing he can do, is to use analogies from his own linguistic system to describe what he experiences. Evenso, this world seems to be an inverse of his own: whereas frailty characterises plants, strength animals and bright colours edibility in Europe, the inverse is true in the New World (Eco 1995a:101). This makes for an unstable world, exhibiting laws totally at odds. When interpretive grids fail in the face of new and different cultural labyrinths, the semiotic consciousness awakens and signs thought to be exclusionary are shown to be linked and new messages are generated in a process of unlimited semiosis. With this awakening also comes the development of 'aberrant practices of interpretation', a play with the poetic value of words which not only excludes content but also merely results in 'gibberish', 'uncontrolled connotation' (Eco 1995a:102).

Similar to his critique of hermetic semiosis in his second novel, connotative drift or the "nomadism" of semiosis' which Eco does not deny in principle, can become instances of 'epistemological fanaticism' where the 'excess of wonder leads to overestimating the importance of coincidences'. It is for this reason that he has introduced the notion of 'pragmatic semiosis' where not only plausibility (as the plausibility to a world/reality) but also the 'contextual strictures' in sign production and in-

ferential walks must be acknowledged. In this, he articulates the humanist notion of the rational modus with Peirce's three types of sign and his notion of the Final Interpretant, Habit or Law. Miranda's (1997) interpretation of the 'orange dove' is the best example in the *Anthology* of how this is done<sup>7</sup>.

In addition to the many pleasures Eco's works effect, not least through his dry wit and passion for history and semiotics, Eco excels as teacher. The educational value of his novels as the latest examples in the developing of polyphonic criticism is exemplary: his metadiscourses (especially concerning paranoid detection/interpretation also indulged in by policemen, intelligence organisations, secret agents, detectives, medical practitioners and professional readers: students, professors, reviewers and Eco himself as Model Reader of his own works), his novelistic demonstration of how to deal with historical narrative in the semiosphere (especially concerning encyclopedic knowledge), how to develop (many of his own) theoretical concepts narrationally (abduction, the interpretation of signs and structures and the inferential walks taken intertextuality in the novels, unlimited semiosis, 'hermetic drift', possible worlds and the infinite relations of rhizomes, his homage to metaphor), his novels as 'cosmological events', his challenging the reader to become detective, participating in exposing the lie, the apocryphal, the fake, the anachronistic, the pseudo-allegorical, the unwonted analogy through semiotics and his ventriloquist teaching practice in the novels. Due to the creative nature of his work, the novels also invite dialogue<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Holding that the orange dove is the 'key' to Eco's third novel, she traces Eco's inferential walks concerning this metaphor from the names of the characters and the names and types of ships referring to the Dutch composer, Jonkheer Jakob van Eyck (who also composed a piece 'Orange') through Eco's description of the dove as an 'emblem' and his relating it to a Gestalt game on the basket, ladder, sieve, column, network (the dove as musical score, fuga) (Eco 1995a:345f) (cf. also Capozzi 1997b on intertextuality, metaphors and metafiction as cognitive strategies in the novel).

<sup>8</sup> As Petrilli shows, much is to be said for Ponzio's matching of Peirce and Bakhtin. In boundary or contact zone situations, dialogism as well as Peirce's notion of the interpretant as something more than the sign, arise from the recognition that signs are 'not things, but processes, the interlacing of relations which are social relations'. Founded on the idea of *renvoi*, the 'logic of excess, of otherness', deferral from the interpreted to the interpretant sign (Ponzio in Petrilli 1997:127f) means that dialogism (as does dialogue itself) arises because nothing is the same, self-evident or given in the semiosphere. The non-correspondence between two interactors means that the interpretant sign always says something more because it enriches the interpreted sign. As such, Peirce's 'dynamic interpretant' (through which we know something *more* and not something *else* as in hermetic semiosis) is then analogous to Bakhtin's 'responsive understanding': 'Being heard as such is already a dialogic relation. The word wants to be heard, understood, responded to, and again to respond to the response, and so forth *ad infinitum*' (Bakhtin 1986:127). Like Barthes' (1980:75f; cf also Eco 1989:4) theorising of the text, this is a dynamic process and especially present in (the text's) performance (cf. Barthes 1980:80).

One can dialogue with Eco on his own theoretical notions and the way in which he exploits them for narrative and metadiscursive aims, his metadiscursive views (ranging from the breaking points in European history, the mixing of science and culture, international politics and ideological struggles to semiotic processes), his interpretation of hermetic semiosis, his views on the developing of art as life and life as art, his own analogical commentaries on historical epochs, his exploration of the historical worlds he stages in his novels, his interpretations of other thinkers such as Augustine, Bacon and Ockham through Peirce and Wittgenstein to Foucault and Derrida. Alternatively, his work invites readers to dialogue with these epochs and thinkers on their own terms.

Eco's gender representations in the novels, however, is another important area which attracts critical attention in the *Anthology*, most notably because this is the area in which he expounds his own philosophy.

#### Gender in Eco's Novels

De Lauretis criticises Eco's feminisation of philosophy à la Nietzsche, his novelistic ventriloquist teaching practice as patriarchal and his exclusion of the problem of gender from his epochal analogising in his first novel. Coletti, again, focuses on the purposes to which Eco employs the three main female characters in his second novel.

Following Spivak (1983:177), de Lauretis argues that if the idea has become female, then this means that the male deconstructor 'might find its most adequate legend in male homosexuality defined as criminality'. In *The Name of the Rose*, 'the brothers murder one another to secure the father's text' (de Lauretis 1997:249). The only woman in the novel, the nameless young woman with whom Adso experiences his 'igneous ardour' and the clarity the 'vital spurt' brings, ends up on the stake, with him continuing to desire and fantasise about her. Here, we find the relating of woman-mother-church-truth-death. This, however, is not the main object of desire. Rather, it is 'on the surface of the text', in the palimpsest body of the father with its numerous interpretants. The name of the father is not deconstructed in *The Name of the Mother*, de Lauretis (1997:251) suggests. It is continued in William's mediation of knowledge, in the teacher-pupil relationship between him and Adso, in the fact that Adso desires his 'knowledge, vision and power', his 'possession of the code', and William, Adso's desire, 'the writing which inscribes it and the manuscript which ... produces it as meaning'. Even in its palimpsestic mode, as *homo semeioticus*, man still stands in the sphere of male self-creation and in its latest version of the 'truth of non-truth', as males congregated as scholarly groups around father figures (cf. de Lauretis 1997:250-252). The alternative to this genderising of philosophy, de Lauretis suggests, is present in Eco's *A Theory of Semiotics*. The 'question of meaning production' is not here posed

'from within the philosophical brotherhood or in the name of the father', but rather 'from the field of social practices in their materiality and historicity'. Not the answer to the question 'Who Speaks?' or the 'whodunit' but the redressing of 'social practices in their materiality and historicity' is needed.

Concerning Eco's epochal analogies, de Lauretis (1997:255) appreciates his statement that the roots 'of all our contemporary "hot" problems' lie in the Middle Ages and that both the post-modern era and the Middle Ages are periods of political, cultural and technological transformation in which

the whole deck of historical cards are shuffled. All the problems of the Western world come out: modern languages, merchant cities, banks, the prime rate, the rising of modern armies, the national state, as well as the idea of a supranational federation ... the struggle between the poor and the rich, the concept of ideological deviation ... the clash between state and church, worker unions, the technological transformation of labor [through such as windmills, horseshoes, oxen collars, more advanced rudders, compasses and stirrups] ... the rise of modern ways of computing with the acceptance of the Arab mathematics ... even our contemporary notion of love as a devastating unhappy happiness (Eco in de Lauretis 1997:254).

However, she bolsters her argument that Eco's novel is just another continuation of patriarchal discourse by pointing out that in this statement, Eco has again left out that crucible which either did not rise in the Middle Ages or went up in flames—the 'problem' of gender. This, she contrasts with Dorothy Sayers' *Gaudy Night* which, in some respects, has a similar plot to that of *The Name of the Rose*. Here, the woman murdering the man as narrative resolution changes the social reality instituted in the name of the father to that instituted by the name of the mother. Eco's theme of the reader being the murderer, then, is only applicable to the male world of male model authors and readers and not including women.

Focusing on Eco's employing the characters Lorenza, Amparo and Lia in his second novel to represent (true) reason in the face of the male weakness for (Medieval) hermetic thinking, Theresa Coletti explores how these characters represent alternatives: a healthy sense of difference and common sense (Coletti 1997:301).

The nameless woman in the first novel only figures as Adso's 'hermeneutic preoccupation', just figuring signifying processes (like language) in Adso's multiple inscriptions of her. Standing in for the 'forever unattainable transcendent signified' in the presence/absence binary, as body, she is materially put under erasure: unjustified death by the inquisition. As such, gender is erased from the novel and the patriarchal text ('the palimpsest of the symbolic body of the father across the cultural history of Western Europe') posited as object of desire.

Even though the three female characters in Eco's second novel have names and are portrayed in more detail, they do not fare much better than the one in Eco's first (they do not have any agency). In both books, it is men who 'produce books and ponder the meaning of words and things' and efface women with their male-authored plan.

Even though the body itself is not essentialised for the male characters in Foucault's *Pendulum*, for the female characters, it is. Lorenza's muscular playing of the pinball machine, brings Belbo to fall in love with her. Amparo is overcome by *umbanda* rite spirits when they enter her body against her wish. Lia again, provides Casaubon with the vessel in which his 'good primal matter' grows. More particularly the body of each is essentialised to a gendered groin, womb and belly respectively. Lorenza's mastery of the pinball machine is ascribed to her ingenuous use of the groin; Amparo's knowledge of her country and culture is said to emanate from her womb not her mind; and, as expert on the belly, Lia's is the archetype in the natural order of things.

Lorenza finds 'meaning' in four not distinct discourses: as sex object for Ricardo, as the unattainable transcendent 'eroticized idealization of otherness' (the groin) in Belbo's metaphysical quest, as the incarnation of Sophia (identifying woman with matter and wisdom's/women's imprisonment in the world) for Aglie and as dead thing with no further meaning beyond itself for Casaubon (Coletti 1997:304).

As the incarnation of European love of the third world, Amparo is the exotic other: a Marxist, Brazilian, descendent of Dutch settlers with Jamaican face, Parisian culture and Spanish name. Most susceptible to her native culture (that she does not even understand), the mind is unable to control the body (matter; she cannot avert even possession at the *umbanda* rite) as well as negotiating the hybrid discourse of her comrades (ranging from references to Lenin through Amerindian fetishes on the walls, Brazilian cannibalism and African deities) (Coletti 1997:306). Despite her knowledge, Casaubon says, 'she [still] clung to that world with the muscles of her belly, her heart, her head, her nostrils' (Eco 1989a:162f) and is still positioned as slave. With his exposure and critique of Western hermetic semiosis, Eco ventriloquially also rates *candomblé*, *umbanda*, soccer: ecstatic rituals which anaesthetise 'combative energy and [the] sense of revolt' of the 'disinherited'. This, he says and shows, despite appreciating the rites themselves as 'wiser ... truer, bound more to elementary pulsations, to the mysteries of the body and nature' (in 'Whose Side are the Orixá on?'; Eco 1986b). Even though she does not die like Lorenza, she exits the narrative in a similarly insignificant way: she simply walks out on Casaubon 'with a canvas bag, a volume of political economy under her arm' (Eco 1989a:216).

If Lorenza and Amparo were represented as a groin figuring the transcendent

lost metaphysic and a womb, susceptible to the entry of spirits respectively, Lia's is that of the belly. Not worrying whether she sits in a 'housewifely pose', she embraces her body, touching and patting her belly where Casaubon's 'good primal matter' grows. Speaking with 'the wisdom of life and birth', Lia instructs Casaubon that 'the *secretum secretorum* no longer needed to be sought', but that it is rather 'in the bellies of all the Lias of the world'. By implication, alchemical mystery, hermetic systems and even Casaubon's mythologising of Lia in terms of the encoded analogies of life and creation and valorised sexual symbolism, are insignificant (cf. Eco 1989a:361,437f). As countervailing wisdom figure, as 'oracle of corporeality', Lia represents the ultimate natural symbol. 'Archetypes don't exist; the body exists', she says (Eco 1989a:362; Coletti 1997:310). Writing from the body, it is also she who, through common sense, deciphers the scrap of paper which Casaubon interpreted as containing a coded message of a secret group who through a secret plot wished to control the world with a cosmic plan as in fact a laundry list. Lia represents the order of 'common sense', the 'logic of the body', a 'logic of nature' which limits the interpretive excess of the diabolicals (Eco in Coletti 1997:310).

Despite this positive appreciation of Lia—which Eco says also represents his own views—she is nevertheless excised from the novel as not significant, similar to the other female characters. Coletti (1997:311) comments that the problem with Eco's representation of femininity is that, despite his positive appreciation of the body as 'ground of experience' and 'generator and end points of meanings', the fact that he plays out this view on female bodies, that he stereotypes genderised philosophy—'men seek transcendence through mind; women are bodily immanence and nature'—shows his sexism.

Lorenza's free and prostitute body is naturalised in the discourses of the 'virgin and temptress'; Amparo's racial body is that of 'the woman possessed'; Lia's procreative body is that of 'the earth mother'. All these stereotypes, place (wo)man in that position that Foucault (1970:49) described as 'the man of primitive resemblances .... the man who is *alienated in analogy*'.

As a way out of the hermetic vicious circle, these stereotypes or naturalisations, reveal not only Eco's desired escape from semiotics but also his inherently patriarchal, exploitative stance towards women, so much written about, that one wonders how it is possible that it could have escaped such a learned and vigorous reader as Eco. However, if one's stance remains naturalist and neo-neorealist, this may be one of its features—obviously not adequate in the context of the struggle to move away from stereotypes. Far from it. These women escape from hermetic semiosis, but in turn, have no agency and are positioned in stereotypical silence: one into death, the other, to indefiniteness and the last, to housewifely chores (Coletti 1997:311).

### Conclusion

That Eco does not produce 'writerly texts' but cunningly devised 'readerly' ones, coaxing (and often misleading) his reader to play detective in tracking down his intertextual references and inferential walks, or to enter into dialogue with Eco's own interpretation of different times, or to dialogue with cultures from these times is the key to his novelistic *oeuvre*. A firm believer in Peirce's 'growth of knowledge', such an engagement with Eco's work not only informs about other times, analogies between postmodernity and earlier epochs or entice the reader to 'brush up' on Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque encyclopedic knowledge. Most importantly, his novels themselves teach—concerning the ways and means as well as the do's and don'ts of interpreting historical narrative as both author and reader.

One can, however, also ask many further questions about Eco's work and about the importance it has for hermeneutics in Africa. On the first, we may ask: in which senses does Eco continue and further (in the growth of knowledge) colonising, patriarchal, discourses (even in his ironies)?; how does Eco expose his own desire for fixed transcendental systems and fixed points in a postmodern world regardless of his exposure and critique of hermetic semiosis? On the second and returning to the beginning: what constitutes the dangers and excesses in divination, expositions, readings and interpretations of dreams, fortune, fate, oracle or holy writ, pathfinding, ancient hunting and tracking techniques, the interpretation of symptoms of illness and cure and alchemy? Alternatively: what constitutes that which we can affirm and practice? And, finally, how can we use Peircean semiotics especially to explicate our answers on these issues and on our multiplicity of historical narratives in the semiosphere as they concern system, hermetic semiosis and change?

Despite its poor editing quality (blame the scanner?), Rocco Capozzi's *Anthology* provides an important signpost on the way. As branch of philosophy and retaining its general focus, Semiotics as field may not only assist all disciplines in reflecting on 'the problem of semiosis' particular to each<sup>9</sup> (Eco 1997a:4) but also with regard to how each field has developed historically—what was each field's encyclopedia, interpretive strategies and purposes at particular epochs in Africa. This would, amongst many other things, not only show how science has been stifled but also how it can be used to constructively interact with local culture<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> Eco has already in his *A Theory of Semiotics* (1979a:9-14) identified areas of research belonging to the semiotic field: zoosemiotics; olfactory signs; tactile communication; codes of taste; paralinguistics; medical semiotics; kinesics and proxemics; musical codes; formalised languages; written languages, unknown alphabets, secret codes; natural languages; visual communication; systems of objects; plot structure; text theory; cultural codes; aesthetic texts; mass communication; rhetoric.

<sup>10</sup> On this issue, Eco's (1987; 1990) exploration of Semiotics as the science of the lie or fake may prove important.

This, obviously flies in the face of the unfruitful division of natural and human sciences, i.e. due to the fact that the evolution of modern knowledge asks for ever greater specialisation thereby distancing scientists from lived experience; and in producing educated but not 'cultivated' scientists or cultivated but not 'educated' human scientists (Harari & Bell 1982:xii). Departing from the presumption and aimed at precisely exploring the passages between science and human science, i.e. the study of pockets of (local) knowledge, 'multiple times, spaces and cultural formations' and their 'sometimes connected intellection' (Serres in Harari & Bell 1982:xiii) homological useless science may be transformed. In order to redress this situation encyclopedic knowledge must be developed—knowledge which not only focuses on a field but also on the world with its 'multiple dimensions of knowledge'. In addition, since theory on its own 'borders on terror' and science on its own on 'domination', they cannot be studied and developed divorced from moral and political exigency (Harari & Bell 1982:xvif).

Such an encyclopedic approach not divorced from morality and politics, similarly calls for the dehierarchisation of cultural formations, for departing from the presupposition that the world is principally not ordered but complex and disordered and for a readerly or journeying engagement with all forms of knowledge (Harari & Bell 1982:xix,xxvii,xxi). For Serres, this encyclopedic approach is not systemic or taxonomic, evolutionary and progressing towards a pre-established goal, unifying or totalisingly aimed at a unity of knowledge, bent on establishing immediate relations between different domains, mixing fields of knowledge or discovering 'farfetched analogies'; nor does it work with the borrowing, importing or exporting of knowledge between domains (Harari & Bell 1982:xxix,xxxvi). Together with the spatial metaphors of the bridge (connection), well (disconnection), the spa (place of renewal), prison (incarcerated space), the journey or passage full of chance and unforeseen incidents, of interference and requiring translation, of the challenge to find or make ways, of dealing with disorder and complexity, are more apt in describing how one deals with and develops knowledge encyclopedically (Serres 1982:42f; Harari & Bell 1982:xxxvif). All these spatial operators can be drawn together in the emblem of the labyrinth (Serres 1982:43) which for us, means, the network which is Africa.

Semiotic analyses of future and past, whether narrativised or not, may assist to facilitate the dynamic growth of knowledge and related practices, constructively engaging what has been called the African Renaissance. In this, not the aesthetisation of life but the facilitation of aesthetics in life seems to point the way as hermeneutic and not hermetic.

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## Interview

### Interview with Zakes Mda

Venu Naidoo

#### What are the earliest influences on your writings?

There are many things that influenced me. The main one being that I come from a family of readers. From an early age I started reading comics and books which I still read to this day. These are the same comic books I used to enjoy as a child. Also of course my father was a teacher and later he became a lawyer. He was reading all the time and he was writing as well. These were political writings. So, growing up in an environment where everyone was reading, one developed that habit of reading. I strongly believe that to be a good writer you need to read. Actually, reading made me a writer, because when you read stories, you are fascinated by these stories, and you want to create your own stories. I didn't start as a writer as such, obviously, because you need to be literate in order to write. Those were my early influences. I did not start as a writer. I started as a painter, drawing and such, which I still do today. Later when I learnt to read and write I started to write as well. I started with poems and short stories in Xhosa. My earliest published work, which I no longer have now, was a Xhosa short story called 'Igqira lase Mvubase'. I was about thirteen or fourteen at the time when I wrote it.

#### What would you say were the main concerns in that story?

I cannot say exactly, but I do recall that it was about some fake traditional witch-doctors. It was set in a village but I do not remember the details.

#### Was this story influenced by African folklore and orature in any way?

Well, I think that it was influenced by the stories that I read at that time, and included children's stories and prescribed reading at school.

#### Were there any teachers who might have influenced you to write?

No, not really. None of my teachers influenced me in any way.

**From the writing of short stories did you progress to writing musicals?**

I never really wrote short stories, except for the one in Xhosa which was published. Since then I haven't written any other short stories. Well, I don't think so.

**A number of black writers started their careers by writing short stories which were published in magazines such as *Drum* and *Staffrider*.**

I find short stories very difficult. A short story requires special skills, which I don't think I have. So, I won't want to dabble in writing short stories. I can write plays, that's fine, and novels where you can tell the story using sustained prose. I find short stories much too demanding.

**Do you recall the early plays that you wrote while you were a pupil at school?**

Oh yes, I remember all of them. When it comes to the writing of the plays I know exactly who and what influenced them. It was Gibson Kente. I was in High School at Lesotho. I used to read lots of plays. I read Wole Soyinka, Joe Orton, Harold Pinter and a number of other playwrights. But without really thinking of writing my own plays. Then one day I saw a Gibson Kente play called *Sikalo*, which was being performed in Maseru. At that stage I vaguely remembered watching a performance of the very first play by Kente called *Manana the Jazz Prophet*, a few years earlier, and it did not have any impact on me. When I saw *Sikalo*, I was still at high school and I was quite fascinated by the fact that it was quite a terrible play.

**Terrible in terms of its dramatic structure?**

Yes, I thought it was a bad play. I enjoyed the music and the dance and so on. But even then, although I was still in High School, I thought that it was a truly awful play. I felt that I could write something better. So that is how Kente influenced me. He was so terrible that I thought I could do something better.

**What was the first play that you wrote?**

After watching Kente's *Sikalo* I started writing my play. It was called *Zhaigos*. *Zhaigos* being the name of the main character. This is while I was still at Peka High School in Lesotho. I was in grade eight at the time. I wrote this play called *Zhaigos*. It was very much influenced by the same type of township musical theatre that Kente was doing. But I believed that my story line was much stronger. I don't know if it was, but that's what I thought at the time.

**What followed after this?**

After *Zhaigos* I wrote *A Hectic Weekend* which was set in a park. This play took a completely different direction from the first play which was Kenteesque in many re-

spects. But when I wrote plays such as *A Hectic Weekend*, now that I look back, I see many influences of the African playwrights that I was reading at the time. Soyinka and other West African playwrights influenced me because those were the people that we were reading in those days. But also, on the other hand, there was Bernard Shaw, whom we were reading at school. Plays like *Androcoles* and *the Lion* which also had some influence on me. Later there was Athol Fugard, who definitely influenced the kind of plays I was writing at the time.

**I get the impression that when you say 'influenced' you are saying that you created your own space for your particular type of theatre even then.**

Well, I have always created my own type of theatre. But then as a writer who also reads other writers, and becomes highly impressed by a specific writer, you cannot help but have traces of that writer in your work. Only recently someone who saw my play *The Dying Screams of the Moon*, commented that there was a lot of Athol Fugard in it as far the structure is concerned, and so on, and I won't say no to that. In fact I think that I owe a lot of my style to Athol Fugard, by either reading or seeing his work. I created a different type of theatre from Fugard, it was completely different, but still there was a lot of him too in the style that I used then.

**How would you comment on the view expressed by some critics that there are influences of Beckett and Brecht in your work as well?**

When I wrote *We Shall Sing for the Fatherland* I had never even heard of Beckett or Brecht. But when the play was first performed in Johannesburg I was surprised to hear people say that I was closer to Beckett. When I wrote *The Road* much later, when I was in America, I was still compared to Beckett. When I went over to America to study Theatre, it was then that I came across Beckett. Then I thought, well, there was something in that comparison in that there is a lot that is absurd in my work as well. Even though I had not heard of theatre of the absurd when I wrote my early plays. It was very clear that there were many elements which were quite absurd in the type of theatre that I was creating.

**Magic realism is clearly an important element in your writings. Would you agree that magic realism is evident very early in your career as a writer?**

Yes, you are quite correct. The earliest ones starting with *Dead End*, *We Shall Sing for the Fatherland* and *Dark Voices Ring* all have in common elements of magic realism. At the time I did not even know that there was a literary movement such as magic realism.

**How do you see the use of magic realism in your writings?**

As it was with absurdism, the same thing happened with magic realism, in that I had not heard of magic realism when I started writing those plays. It is something that I have always done in my writing. I make things happen the way I want things to happen, however much that might contradict what you might call objective reality. Basically I felt that these were my creations. The world that I was writing about was the world that I created. I am in the God business. I am the God of that world, so I can make things happen the way I want them to happen. Whether in the so-called objective reality things would happen in that way, or not, is not the issue for me.

**Have you used any strands of African Cosmology in the type of magic realism that you have created, particularly in your novels *Ways of Dying* and *She Plays with the Darkness*?**

Not consciously, no. But as Africans we always live with magic. When I wrote the novels I was at the stage where I was familiar with the movement called magic realism. When I wrote the novels I had read people like Marquez. I had read *A Hundred and One Years of Solitude*. I read that and I fell in love with that mode of writing, precisely because I felt that the Latin American writers were doing what I had always been doing myself. When I started with my first novel *Ways of Dying* I was conscious of a movement called magic realism and that I was writing a magic realist novel. But basically I was doing what I had done much earlier. Here in Africa there is magic happening all the time. There are many belief systems and in fact a lot of the things that the western world refers to as superstition. For me such things actually happen and I portray them as such in my writings.

**Perhaps this might explain why magic realism is such a popular mode among postcolonial writers whether they come from Latin America, Africa or India. One need only think of writers such as Borges, Marquez, Okri, Rushdie and Chandra to name just a few of the writers who have used this form of literary representation. The use of magic realism by these writers appears to be anchored in the belief systems of the people that they are writing about.**

Yes definitely, this is so.

**Could you comment on your transition from writing plays to writing novels.**

This transition, if you can call it a transition at all, took place because I have always wanted to write a novel. For the past twenty years or so I have always wanted to write a novel. But I never thought that I would be able to do it. I did not think that it was possible for me to write sustained prose because I am really a dialogue person, more suited, I thought, to the writing of plays. I thought that I needed particularly special skill to write a novel. After I wrote my PhD thesis of more than four hundred pages, a

process which I found difficult and painful, I realised that I could write sustained prose. I had gained the confidence that I needed to write a novel, but shelved the idea of writing a novel thereafter.

**How did you actually commence writing your first novel?**

In 1991 when I was a visiting professor at Yale I decided to buy a computer. All my writing, even *When People Play People* had been done by longhand. I decided that it was time to get modern. After I bought the computer I asked myself what next? What do I do with it? So I said, well I might as well write a novel. Then I started writing *Ways of Dying*. If I had not bought that computer I would not have written *Ways of Dying*. On Christmas Day I wrote the first line 'There are many ways of dying ...' and I continued writing the first few pages. That explains why the incidents on the very first pages of the novel take place on Christmas Day. Even the bells that are mentioned early in the novel were actually ringing while I was writing. The story was actually unfolding while I was writing it on that Christmas Day.

**Writers such as Mphahlele have mentioned the 'tyranny of place' in reference to the inhibiting effects that being separated from South Africa had on their creative work. Did you experience a similar problem when you were at work with your novel?**

With me it was quite the reverse. My distance from South Africa actually helped me to write. This was the situation even during the days of apartheid when I was writing my plays. I am grateful to the fact that I was far away from the situation here.

**How do you explain this?**

Those writers who were living within the situation here could have perhaps created much greater theatre than they ever did. Because they were living within the situation they could get their characters and their stories from what they saw around them. Apartheid itself was so absurd that it created the stories for these writers. Many of the theatre people who became famous during those days were actually reporters who would take a slice of life and put it on a page and thereafter on the stage, and hey presto they had great theatre! With me there was no such advantage. I was far away from the situation itself. I was forced to use my imagination in order to recreate the situation as I remembered it, or as I thought it would be.

**Are you in fact saying that in your case it was a matter of deliberately ensuring that the creative impulse was being put to work?**

Yes. That explains why even today when apartheid is gone I still create, because I had learnt to create from my imagination.

**Perhaps it could be said that with the demise of apartheid many writers find that they are no longer equal to the task of functioning as writers.**

Quite so. Now the author is dead, and the author was apartheid. Apartheid created so many stories and these writers took ready-made stories. When I taught a course on Pan-African literature in America, one of the books I prescribed was a book by André Brink called *A Dry White Season*. When I started reading the novel I realised that it was actually a newspaper report of things that were happening here. Nadine Gordimer did the same thing as well in her novels. I did not have that advantage. I had to imagine things and had to create from my imagination.

**One could say then that in your writings you were actively engaged in constructing a literary landscape that went beyond mere reportage. There is also the sense of a creative impulse that led to your use of literary modes such as absurdism and magic realism, long before you encountered them in the work of other writers.**

Yes. If I had remained in South Africa there would have been no reason not to do what everyone else was doing, be it Barney Simon or Matsemela Manaka or anyone else. Barney Simon would actually tell his actors to go out and find the stories out there. Those were the stories that were already composed by the apartheid system.

**Would you say that Fugard was any different, especially when one considers the fact that he used actors such as Kani and Ntshona in a great deal of experimental theatre in which scripts were created from workshoped sessions?**

He was certainly doing the same type of thing. However, I did not enjoy such a luxury. Being away from South Africa, I couldn't just go off to Park Station or some other such place and eavesdrop on what people were saying, or observe what people were doing. I had to rely solely on the resources of my imagination to create the type of situations that might occur here.

**Some critics have alluded to the sense of prophecy in your plays. In *We Shall Sing for the Fatherland*, and *You Fool Don't Let the Sky Fall Down*, in particular, there is a hint of the kind of situation that might even pertain to this country. How would you respond to that?**

I have just been approached by producers to have *We Shall Sing for the Fatherland* filmed, but they have expressed concerns that the play might be viewed as a statement against the present government. I was certainly not writing about the new government in South Africa in those plays. The present government was not even in existence when I wrote those plays. Although the plays do not attack the present government, some people could choose to read them as such. I have merely made astute observations of politicians and human nature in these plays.

**With regard to your novels, *Ways of Dying* and *She Plays with the Darkness*, would you say that once you started writing, the stories gained a momentum of their own.**

Well, once I started writing *Ways of Dying* it did gain a momentum of its own in that sense, because it is about ways of dying, and I talk about many deaths there. Every one of those deaths happened, those were deaths reported in newspapers. These were deaths that I had read about in the *Sunday Times*, and *City Press*. Those were the two newspapers which were the source of my information on the deaths. There might have been one or two cases from the *Mail and Guardian* but the *Mail and Guardian* was not involved in that kind of journalism. The very first death mentioned in the novel, however, didn't come from a newspaper, but is actually based on fact. It happened to a cousin of mine, and I have reported it exactly as it happened. So, all those deaths actually happened, and all I did was to take these deaths and put them in an imaginary story with a professional mourner.

**Is the concept of the professional mourner your own creation?**

It is my own creation because I had never heard of professional mourners before.

**I suppose the Nurse is someone who actually exists and performs the functions you have described in *Ways of Dying*.**

I only heard recently, long after I had written *Ways of Dying*, that professional mourners existed in Europe, perhaps during the time of the bubonic plague. I find that quite fascinating, because I think the idea of a professional mourner is a ridiculous thing. The concept of the Nurse however is a real one. Among the African people, I think mostly among the Basutho people, the Nurse has an important function at funerals. He is called the Nurse because he is supposed to have nursed the dead person during his or her last moment on earth. The Nurse is also someone who may have not nursed a person, but who might have knowledge of how someone died. The Nurse is therefore a funeral orator who could tell people how a person died.

**Do the characters in your novels have names that are of special significance? I know that Dikosha, for example, means 'one who dances', and as one of the central figures in *She Plays with the Darkness*, she does spend most of her time dancing in the sacred Cave of Barwa.**

The names don't mean anything really. Toloki and Noria, for example, just sounded good to me. There is no special significance to the names that I have chosen for my characters. Dikosha, however is a Tswana name that means one who dances or sings.

**In your novel *She Plays with the Darkness*, there are elements of African Cosmol-**

**ogy. I am thinking here of the mist that is mentioned in the first page of the novel; and then there is the case of the sacred cave in which the spirits come alive; and the communal voices of the people. Have you consciously included these aspects of African Cosmology in the novel?**

No, I don't consciously give attention to that kind of thing. What you see in that novel is actually the way people live in Lesotho. The caves mentioned in the novel are actually there in the mountains in Lesotho. Those are the bushmen caves with the paintings, and unfortunately they are fading away now because people have written all over them. The village that I have mentioned in *She Plays with the Darkness* is actually based on a village that is high up in the mountains in Lesotho, and it can only be reached by plane.

**The voice of the communal narrator you have used in *Ways of Dying* seems to be very much a product of African orature. Or is it a creative device used specifically for the novel?**

It is very much from orature, really, because the story can be told in the plural form. This is how African people tell stories. But this need not be the case all the time.

**In both your novels you have chosen a literary style that is very clear, and precise. There is certainly no evidence of unnecessary details or needless descriptions. At the same time one senses a creative impulse that is rather intense. Is that how you felt when you wrote your novels?**

I have mentioned how difficult it was for me to write my doctoral thesis. I had always imagined that writing a novel would be agonising, as well. But when I got down to writing the first novel and then the next, I really enjoyed myself. It was the easiest writing I had ever done in my life. The stories simply flowed the way that I wanted them to. I did not have to sit and think, what next?

**It would seem that you found the experience of writing your novels enjoyable.**

Yes, I had great fun writing my novels. More fun than I ever had even when I was writing my plays. Writing some of those plays was quite an agony. I wrote many of those plays in a matter of two or three weeks, or even less time than that. Mike Nicols, who is a friend of mine, has told me that it takes him about two to three years to write a novel. Many writers that I have met have told me that the shortest period they require to complete a novel is at least one year. But I have taken three months to complete each of my novels. I started *Ways of Dying* on Christmas Day, 25 December and on 1 April I wrote the last sentence and the last full stop.

**To what would you attribute your ability to achieve such short time frames, espe-**

**cially when one considers the sustained effort required in any creative writing enterprise?**

I can do this because I can actually sit down and have a good time with the characters that I have created.

**Did you find the creation of the characters in your novels more enjoyable than the characters in your plays?**

Yes, definitely.

**I am interested in your use of twins in *She Plays with the Darkness*. Many of the writers who have used the mode of magic realism in their novels have used twins as the protagonists in their novels. One thinks of Marquez, Rushdie, and Chandra as examples, and I am wondering whether you had in mind the idea of a split self constantly in search of itself.**

No, there is no such reason. Actually I cannot really say why I choose to use twins.

**Are the characters in your novels based on people that you knew?**

No, the characters in my novels are not based on people that I knew, except Radisene in his later life in the city. His life at that stage was based on my experiences as an articulated clerk when I worked for a lawyer. The person I worked for was really an ambulance chaser who would send his clerks out in search of accidents. But Radisene's earlier life in the village as a teacher is purely imaginary.

**A very strong feature of your writings is your concern with issues that affect people who are socially and economically disadvantaged. One sees evidence of this in your plays, and in your educational and communication work with peasant communities. Do you see yourself as the voice of the people?**

I don't see myself speaking on behalf of anyone really. I see myself as speaking for myself. Some of the things I say happens to coincide with what many people are saying. Therefore we are saying the same things, but it just so happens that I have a platform to say those things, in a more audible way, than they are able to.

**Where do you see yourself at present. Are you concerned with issues of transformation and transition that affect our country?**

Yes I am quite concerned about such issues. That is why I continue to write occasional pieces for newspapers on what I think is happening.

**Do see your self as a postcolonial writer?**

Well, I am definitely postcolonial, because I am here, now, writing after the colonial era.

**Do you see any commonalities between your work and any of the other postcolonial writers?**

I must admit that most of my time is spent writing and I have not been reading as much as I would like to, but I leave that to you, the critics, to say whether that is so.

**Could you say a little more about your use of magic realism, particularly in your novels. Could you elaborate on this?**

After I discovered magic realism as a literary mode I became quite fascinated by it. As I have said I had been writing in this mode without knowing that it existed as a literary movement, or how it actually worked. When I looked at other works and what other people were saying about it I found that what they were saying was what I was doing as well. I remember writing some notes for myself on magic realism, in order to understand what it was that I was doing and to trace the origins of magic realism itself as a literary concept, as a critical concept rather than as a practice. If I may quote from my notes, 'In magic realism the supernatural is not presented as problematic'. That is what I tried to do in my work. I write about the supernatural, but I don't present it as being problematic, in other words my characters take it for granted. In *She Plays with the Darkness*, for example, the characters are not surprised by the sudden appearance of the mist. Another example: 'An absurd metamorphosis is described as if it did not contradict our laws of reason'. That is also what I do, or what I try to do, depending how the reader sees it. Things that seem to contradict the laws of reason, happen in my novels, even in my plays for that matter. They are put there as a matter of fact, as though they do not contradict empirical reality. I see that in a play like *The Road* for instance. The Farmer who is a white Afrikaner, meets the black Labourer during the day, and they share the shade of a tree, because it is very hot. The Farmer is not wearing sunglasses and he looks directly at the Labourer while they talk, but he does not see that the Labourer is black. In a real life situation that would contradict the 'laws of reason'. In the world that I create this actually happens and it is taken for granted without anyone being surprised at such an occurrence. In my novels as well, this is exactly what I am doing. The unreal happens as part of reality. It is not a matter of conjecture or discussion. It happens and is accepted by the other characters as a normal event. That is what I try to do, and this is in contrast to fantasy, or the fantastic type of writing, where the supernatural or the magical is disconcerting. In science fiction as well there has to be a scientific explanation when something strange happens. The phenomena that I portray are certainly not problematic as it would be the case in fantasy.

**How do you react to the assertion by some critics that the occurrences you have described are in fact surrealist?**

I don't know whether I would call it that. Perhaps one would need to define surrealism first for us to see whether this is what I am doing. One would need to look at the characteristics of surrealism as we have done with magic realism, in order to establish a valid argument that there are elements of surrealism in my work rather than magic realism.

**Would you see yourself as a novelist a year or two from now?**

Yes, I would be writing novels a year from now. I will continue to write novels.

**Will magic realism continue to play an important role in your novels?**

Just as it has played a role in my work the last twenty five years or so. And it will not be influenced by the South Americans or Germans or who ever. I will do it as I was doing it even before I came to know about magic realism as used by writers in those countries. I will continue to use magic realism and I will continue to be as innovative as I have always tried to be. I will attempt to bring other elements of magic realism into my novels as I think of them. Perhaps it might even be a different type of magic realism from the one I am using now in my novels. But the fact is I will still be writing. I will still be creating different types of works, novels mainly, and perhaps even the occasional play. I don't see myself as a playwright anymore, I see myself as a novelist. I will write a play only when I am commissioned to do so. But I won't go out of my way to write a play because I don't find them challenging anymore, especially now that I have started writing novels. With the novels, for the first time, I find that I am actually enjoying what I am writing. The writing of plays on the other hand becomes quite a chore and I am relieved when it is all over. But when I write novels, the process of writing itself is such great fun that when I am finished I find that I miss the characters with whom I have been interacting.

**Your novels in particular signal a radical shift in the type of literature that has come out of this country. There has been a tendency for South African literature to be classified as either black or white. With your novels, however, one senses the emergence of literature that is truly South African in a sense, rather than one that is merely the product of a black or a white writer. At the same time it is also the type of literature that can take its place on the international stage. What would be your response to that?**

Well, I don't really know about that. I just get down to writing. I do not tell myself that I should be writing African literature that should be written as a black or a white. I have a story to tell and I tell my story.

**Are you saying that being black is of no consequence to you, and are you there-**

**fore different from those Black Consciousness writers who stressed their blackness and the fact that they were functioning as the voice of their people?**

For me being black is something I take for granted, because I know that I am black. At the same time I must say very strongly that Black Consciousness was very essential at the time in which it came. It served a very important political function at that time, and I have no problem with Black Consciousness. But I am a Pan-Africanist. I must stress though that when I speak of Pan-Africanism I do not speak of a political party called the PAC. When I speak of being a Pan-Africanist I am talking of my outlook. I believe that in South Africa the ANC is actually more Pan-Africanist than the PAC is. So when I am talking about Pan-Africanism I am talking about the outlook that recognises the common history of the African people in Africa and the diaspora, and this should not be seen as a racial term. Pan-Africanism to me *acknowledges* and *celebrates* the common history of the African people. Also the common interests and common destiny of the African people on the continent and in the diaspora. That common history is manifested very much in the culture of these people. One sees it in their literature, in their customs, in their traditions. In Jamaica and Brazil for example many of the practices such as the oral tradition originated from Africa. This is what Pan-Africanism means to me, and my whole outlook is informed by that kind of Pan-Africanism.

**Bearing in mind the important role your father played in the formation of the PAC, do you think he would agree with you, if he were still alive?**

My father was different in many respects in that he was an African nationalist. He believed in African nationalism, and formulated that philosophy of African nationalism. I am not a nationalist. I see myself as a person of the world and I find nationalism rather inhibiting and destructive. I have just returned from a film project in Europe involving twelve nations, and I have heard what nationalism is doing there. It is a force that I am afraid of, be it Afikaner nationalism or African nationalism. I am not a nationalist in that sense. I do not even believe in man-made borders because I see myself as a person of the world. But that does not contradict the Pan-Africanism to which I subscribe.

**In your novel *She Plays with the Darkness*, the characters are forced to engage with history. Was that a conscious decision on your part?**

Yes, because that story happened within that particular historical context, and the fate of some of those characters was tied in with the political situation in Lesotho then. Those grand historical events had a great effect at a personal level on those little people who had no part in them. But it is crucial to emphasise that the characters themselves are also creators of history and they struggle to create their own histories.

**Do you find the novel as a literary genre particularly suited to the process of retrieving the history of black people in this country, especially when one considers the manner in which apartheid denied black people a place in history?**

It might not be, if one considers the fact that novels are only read by the elite. But I believe that is what I do best. However, I use different types of communications for different people. I cannot hope that a peasant in Lesotho would interact with the messages that I have created in my novels. I would, however, create another form of communication for the peasant out there. A form of communication which he or she has access to. My television programmes are designed to reach a wider audience. Therefore I am a participant in different types of communication.

**How do you see the role of English language here and in Africa as a whole? Do you agree that the language should be 'appropriated' and 'abrogated' as writers see fit?**

English has an important role to play as a means of communication. This is the case even in Europe when people from a number of different nations need to communicate with one another. I think it is now generally accepted, that English is the kind of language that we could use, for effective communication among different people all over the world. We cannot wish it away, whether we like it or not. It is the language we need to communicate with the rest of the world. However, there are also the dangers of cultural imperialism, coming from countries such as America. In that sense English has messed us up. But that does not negate the fact that we need to have our own languages and to promote them. And to create literature in those languages. The fact that those languages are alive today, means that those languages serve an important function and will always be there.

**How do you see the reception of your novels thus far?**

It has been quite overwhelming. They have been very well received, perhaps even better than my plays were. The novels have also been favourably received internationally although they have not had the same exposure that my plays have had. The novels are published by South African publishers, and only now attempts are being made to market the novels outside the country.

**Would you say that there are any common threads that run from Zakes Mda the painter, the poet, the playwright to Zakes Mda the novelist?**

I do not know really. I suppose it is for the observer to make such a comment. When I paint I do not think of poems or any other aspect of literature. I think in terms of the painting that I am doing at that time.

**Your publication *When People Play People* is proving to be a valuable source for the theory of communication theatre. Could you comment on some of the successes that you have had with this aspect of your work?**

I have a play on AIDS awareness, done by the Market Theatre Laboratory, that has been touring the townships now for the last three years. I have just been invited to do a project with mine workers from Secunda. I am quite keen to go there and assist the miners to create their own type of theatre.

**Can you give me some information on your novella *Melville 67* which is due to be released soon?**

It is set in Johannesburg in 1997, and in Ghana, West Africa a thousand years ago in one of the empires there. The actual story develops in a bus, *Melville 67*, as it moves from one town to the next. The characters are passengers in the bus, and they interact with each other, in the present, and some of them feature in the past, a thousand years ago, as well.

**You mentioned earlier that your novel *Ululants* is scheduled for publication early next year. What are the essential features of this novel?**

*Ululants* also deals with two periods in history, 1856 and 1997. In the novel those two periods merge although they are still distinct. The characters move in time and space from one period to the next.

**You are evidently using the mode of magic realism again in this novel. The movement in time and space from one period to the next is very much a characteristic of magic realist novels.**

Yes, I am not using a flashback technique. It is the kind of novel that has no respect for time and space. The characters of the present time interact with characters in the year 1856 on different levels.

**How do you see the representation of women in your novels?**

I write about women the way I write about all my characters. I do not make any conscious effort to portray them any differently. What comes out of that exercise then is not contrived. When I write about women it is as I have observed them, and I write about them naturally.

**Could you comment on the way in which you depict sex in your novels?**

Well if it happens, it will happen. But I have changed from the type of writing in the past where I have enjoyed writing such naughty bits. I like writing about sex as I have done in *Ways of Dying*, for instance.

**Can one expect any explicit descriptions of sex in your novels in the future?**

No, not really. I find that rather cheap in the sense that anyone can write a detailed description of sex. But I think it is far more meaningful as I have done it in *Ways of Dying*. That is the type of sex that I would like to read, the type that is shrouded in some mystery of sorts. Earlier in the novel, for example, I describe the herdboys watching Noria having sex with Napu, rather than actually giving a description of the sexual act itself.

**Thank you for your time. Is there anything else you would like to add?**

No, not really. Everything I want to say, I have said already in my novels.

CSSALL  
University of Durban-Westville

Guidelines for Contributors

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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.

*Maps, diagrams and posters* must be presented in print-ready form. Clear black and white photos (postcard size) may also be submitted.

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