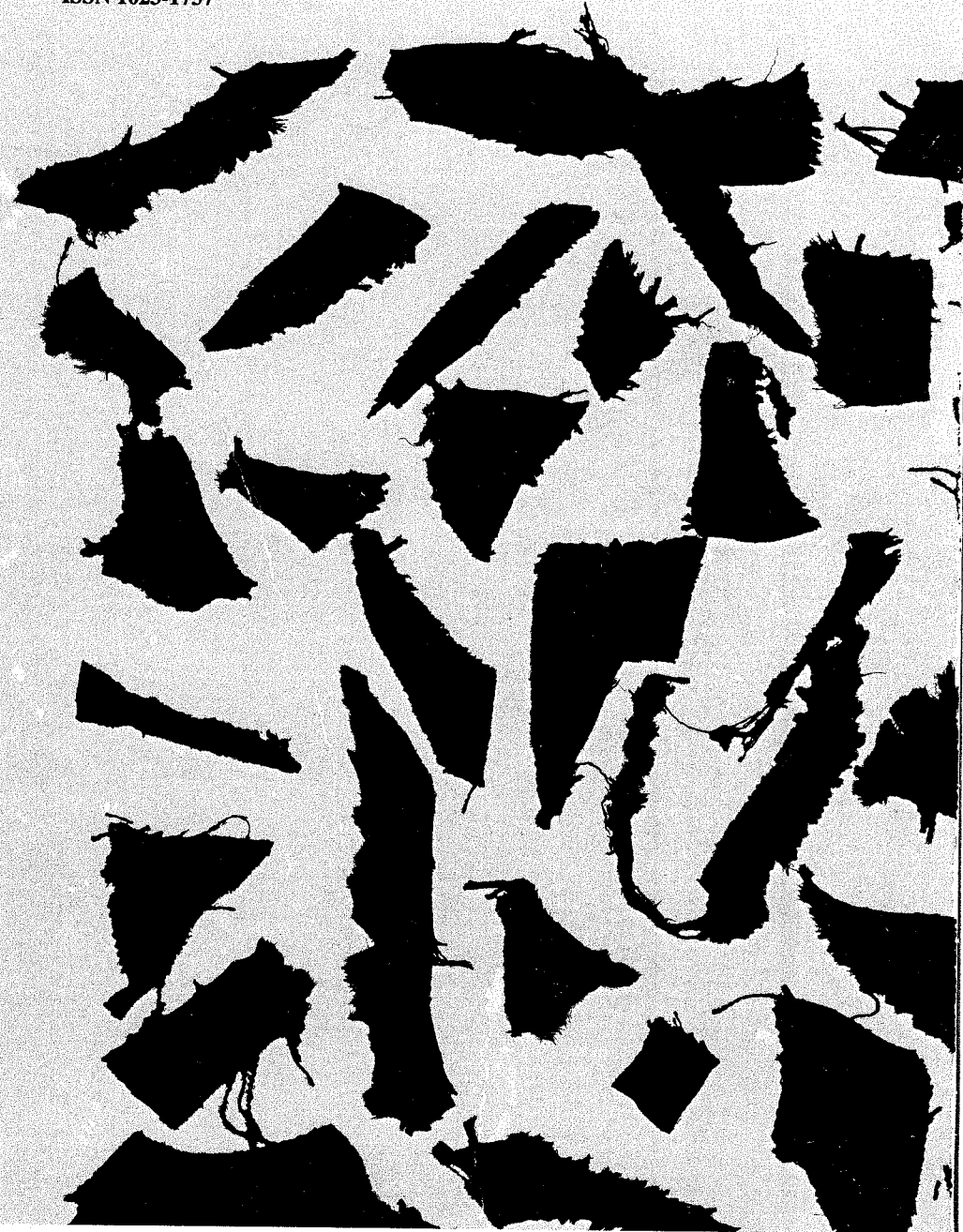


# *ALTERNATION*

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The Editor: *Alternation*, CSSALL, Univ. of Durban-Westville, Priv. Bag X54001, 4000 DURBAN, South Africa; Tel/Fax: 27-(0)31-2044245 e-mail: [cssall@pixie.udw.ac.za](mailto:cssall@pixie.udw.ac.za); CSSALL web-site: <http://www.udw.ac.za:80/~stewartg/>  
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# *Alternation*

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# Speaking Truth to Power: A Challenge to South African Intellectuals<sup>1</sup>

Ptika Ntuli & Johannes A. Smit

The subject of Power/Knowledge and the regime of Truth is always a thorny one. It is the aim of my article to explore this subject in the context of South Africa with particular emphasis on intellectuals and institutions of higher learning.

## I

It was Nietzsche (1968) who showed that 'Knowledge functions as an instrument of power'. Nietzsche's 'Will to Power' was a tour de force that sought to draw philosophy away from theorising about substances and to look at power as a relation; relations of forces that attract and repel, entice and dominate, restrain and subordinate. About seventy years later, the French philosopher Michel Foucault (1994) took up this theme and offered a definitive conceptualisation of power:

Power in the substantive sense, 'le' pouvoir, doesn't exist .... The idea that there is either located at- or emanating from- a given point something which is a 'power' seems to me to be based on a misguided analysis, one which at all events fails to account for a considerable number of phenomena. In reality, power means relations, a more or less organised, hierarchical, coordinated cluster of relations.

He also related this understanding of power to Truth. Truth, for him,

isn't outside power, or lacking in power: Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power (Foucault 1980).

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<sup>1</sup> Sections 1-7 of this article is a reworked version of an address by Ptika Ntuli at the UDW Student Policy Conference, May 28 1999 and a lecture at the University of Durban-Westville Lecture Series in March 1999, titled: 'Lethargic African Intellectuals or Rebels for the African Renaissance?' Section 8 onwards, was written by Jannie Smit.

Foucault identifies five traits of this regime of truth—two of which are

produced and transmitted under the control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatuses (university, army, writing, media); lastly, it is the issue of a whole political debate and social confrontation (ideological struggles). Truth is always contested.

## II

To be able to formulate practical policies in the context of student affairs in an academic institution and indeed in any site, it is important to raise correct questions within the context of Truth, Power and Knowledge.

Schrift (1994) formulates some of these (with very minor modifications from the author)

- \* How does one analyse academic relations of power?
- \* Who makes decisions in a college or university?
- \* Why are the decisions so often wrong, when so often basically good people are in the positions of decision makers?
- \* How do we change power relations in our institutions?
- \* How do we get more women and Africans in decision making positions, and how do we get more multi-cultural and multi-gendered issues included into the curriculum?
- \* Who are the enemies?
- \* Who do we fight?

When one attempts to answer these and related questions, Schrift warns that these relations must not be seen in exclusively personal ways. The reason is that such a focus on individuals tend to obscure any understanding of mechanisms of power.

## III

According to Foucault, wherever and whenever power exists, knowledge will be nearby. This is so 'because power and knowledge directly implicate one another'. Power-knowledge relations are to be analysed, therefore, 'not on the basis of a subject of knowledge who is or is not free in relation to the power system', but, on the contrary, in terms of the subject who knows, the objects that subject identifies as worthy of study or dealing with and the modalities of knowledge, i.e. the many effects historical power-knowledge formations imply.

In short, it is not the activity of the subject of knowledge that produces a corpus of knowledge, useful or resistant to power, but power-knowledge, the

processes and struggles that traverse it and of which it is made up, that determine the forms and possible domains of knowledge.

The shift from persons and power to relations of power get an even clearer analysis from Schrift (citing Bourdieu 1988) when he makes a conceptual distinction between 'empirical individuals' and 'epistemic individuals'. Schrift describes empirical individuals

as real, flesh and blood historical people, and epistemic individuals as human functionaries within an institutional setting that they occupy but do not and cannot control. Empirical individuals are historical agents who act within both the public and private spheres; they fall in love, have children and parents, work, vote feel pain, anger, sympathy, and so on. Epistemic individuals, on the other hand, act in terms of their place in an institutional matrix, making the 'tough decisions' that 'have to be made' whether or not they 'like it'.

A major problem in understanding contemporary power relations is the conflation of these two concepts and the failure to strategically anticipate how an epistemic individual's actions may differ from those expected of the empirical individual with whom we thought we were dealing.

Schrift continues to argue that decision making cannot be seen as a mere question of personalities but of 'institutional connections among various nodes through which pass pedagogical, curricular, financial, libidinal and ideological relations of power'. Power will depend on certain specific local relations and within these relations forces of progress and re-action can be located.

How are these power relations used in academic institutions in which different clubs and societies co-exist? How do university managers on the one hand and student leaders on the other, use these relations, and to whose benefit? Of what value would brilliant policy decisions be if students are divided? The analysis of the power/knowledge connection should assist intellectuals to re-think tactics and strategies.

## IV

But who are the intellectuals and what are their roles, or rather, what should their roles be in this particular context and at this specific historical juncture? Camus said that: 'An intellectual is someone whose mind watches itself'. Certainly one of the canonical definitions of the modern intellectual is provided by sociologist Edward Shils and cited by Edward Said in his 1993 Reith Lectures:



In every society ... there are some person with an unusual sensitivity to the Sacred, an uncommon reflectiveness about the nature of the universe, and the rules which govern their society. There is in society a minority of persons who more than the ordinary run of their fellow-men, are inquiring, and desirous of being in frequent communion with symbols which are more general than the immediate concrete situations of everyday life, and remote in their reference in both time and space. In this minority, there is a need to externalize the quest in oral and written discourse, in poetic or plastic expression, in historical reminiscence or writing, in ritual performance and acts of worship. This interior need to penetrate beyond the screen of immediate concrete experience marks the existence of the intellectuals in every society.

Shil's view is re-enforced by Archie Mafeje (1994) when he writes:

In every society there is a general recognition of certain individuals who have a better understanding of things which concern their society. These 'intellectuals' in modern societies are associated with more than an average level of formal education .... There is some recognition that intellectual status can be achieved through self education, especially in the arts.

Mahmood Mamdani (1994) added his version:

The intelligentsia is a broad and heterogeneous grouping whose origin lies in the split between manual and mental labour in class divided societies. The work of the intelligentsia combines both conception and organisation of social processes and its explanation.

Mafeje's definition centres on education as the main criterion and Mamdani's on class. Both do not seem to include those from 'traditional' societies—the healers—*izinyanga*, *izanus*, *abaloz*i and others. Are their definitions centred in African thought? It appears as if this issue has not by-passed Shils and Said.

In the context of contemporary South Africa who are these 'intellectuals'? What is their role in society? Where are they located? Are they found in the universities and technikons? Are they found among the writers, poets, or artists or in government as policy makers? Are they the advertising or public relations experts? Are they found in the print and electronic media as journalists? I will argue that they are found in all of the above fields, moulding public opinion, 'manufacturing concern' (Noam Chomsky), 'formulating doubt, towing the party line, manoeuvring for positions; toadying to keep their jobs, making money. Are students included in this category. The answer is 'Yes.'

This could be seen as rather cynical. My aim in this article, however, is not to confirm the intellectual's position in their sinecures, but to raise questions, to disrupt our habits of thought and patterns of behaviour. In a word, I wish to be awkward and provocative. As such, I will confine myself mainly to those intellectuals (staff and students) at the universities, technikons, colleges of education and in the Ministry of Education whose task is to mould and shape their communities and the young to be creative citizens of their country and the world.

## V

This raises the question on the production and reproduction of (African) intellectuals. Mafeje (quoted above) referred to intellectuals as associated 'with more than an average level of formal education'. In what kind of institutions are they produced and reproduced? What is the ethos, the ideologies and thrusts of these institutions? In the colonial period, universities in Africa were extended colleges of European universities created to produce civil servants for the colonial regime. Students were educated to be servants of the colonial regime. These universities were outcome-based. The curriculum was European, the language of instruction and the methodologies that underpinned every facet of intellectual production were European. Post-colonial/ post independent universities were also created to produce government policy makers teachers and lecturers. Even these new institutions of higher learning were, in Althusser's word, 'interpelated' into Western discourses and a Western ethos. The major aims of the colonial project was to paralyse the cultures of Africa in order to effect total domination; put differently, the aim was to create docile servants (a task that not long ago was more closely focused not on education but on the brutal extraction of labour from African slaves. Is this continuing Western hegemony not just another manifestation of a different kind of slavery? Is this alien education not continuing to cripple the sense of order and meaning the colonised subject was subjected to? Is it not so that every person draws on that culture that he or she is located in, for their inspiration, imagination? Why should it be different for African people?

African universities as appendages of Oxbridge and the Sorbonne reflected the dependency syndrome that pervaded our political and economic corridors. The slogan of our universities was 'Academic Freedom'. Yet, the truth of the matter is that this avanted freedom to pursue truth in research, the transmission of knowledge in publications, lectures and seminars, transfer of skills in the class room and laboratories without censorship or political dependency, remains elusive.

Ali Mazrui (1994) captures this phenomenon graphically when he writes:

the African university was born as a subsidiary of a cultural transnational corporation—the Western academic establishment .... The African

university was conceived primarily as a transmission belt for Western high culture rather than a workshop for the transfer of Western high skills. African universities became nurseries for a Westernized black intellectual aristocracy.

Mazrui continues to argue that the paradigm of the African university which advocated academic freedom found itself entangled in the practice of intellectual dependency.

He further exposes the stark contradictions between theory and practice, dream and fantasy—he reminds us of our earlier neo-colonial leaders who indicated Left and turned Right—when he argues that the ideology of these institutions was pluralism, however, the impact was global Westernization.

The ideology was diversity—the impact was global uniformity .... the missing factor was a change in the conception of the university itself and what its purposes were (Mazrui 1994).

The consequence of this dichotomy was that the world view of the products of these universities, the values, the attitudes, were alien to the environment in which they were sprung and to the populace they were meant to serve. The decision to carry out OUTREACH programmes by universities in South Africa should also be read within this context. (I will return to this to point out its limitations and possible remedies.) I cannot resist quoting Mazrui again. I have pointed out the levels of African mimicry of Europe, the intellectual dependency etc. Mazrui (1994) captures it more successfully 'It was not the traditional African that resembled the ape; it was more the Western one, fascinated by the West's cultural mirror'.

Where then do we locate South African universities in this labyrinth? Where do we locate South African intellectuals? Are our universities 'African Universities' or are we only 'Universities in Africa'. This is more than a semantic concern. It is an ideological problem. In our numerous policy documents on Transformation and in our responses to them, how much is written or spoken about re-curriculation beyond mere rhetorical knee-jerk responses? Whither Africanism? Aping the west has resulted in African people having a very jaundiced view of themselves. So thorough has been the demonisation of Africa and Africans that we ourselves even hesitate to speak of Africanisation or Re-Africanisation, and when we do, we begin with a litany of disclaimers!

The crop of us, 'intellectuals' in South Africa today, are impotent. We cannot breed 'works that wake the people. Can we speak truth to power? Is it more important to follow the status quo in educational paradigms than remain true to self and culture? Have we internalised the 'native' as incapable of reflective, reflexive

thought? Symptomatic of this general 'silence of the lambs' is, when our institutions are faced with looming crises, we turn a deaf ear to the voices of our student leaders risking their education, risking being 'black listed' in defence of colleagues rightly or wrongly'. We hear university managers defy these student leaders; we witness barricades being built to withstand the onslaught on both sides. We witness managers chaperoned by armed guards, security staff with teargas canisters, surveillance cameras in public halls where students meet. In a word, we experience the Orwellian nightmare with complete silence. The voice of the academics is nowhere to be heard!

This brings back echoes of Kenya and Uganda in the 1970s and 1980s. Perhaps we fear to suffer the fate of the Ngugi wa Thiongo's of this world, the Wamba-dia-Wamba's, the Nabudere's and Wole Soyinka's who spoke truth to power and were forced into exile. They could not stand idly by or be mere witnesses to the erosion of hard-won and fought-for freedoms. We have models to emulate in our immediate history. Nelson Mandela, Mangaliso Sobukwe, Steve Biko, I.B. Tabata, Govan Mbeki, A.P. Mda, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, Urbania Mothuping, Albertina Sisulu and numerous others. Intellectuals who stood firm for their beliefs.

There are those who paid the price of exile with its gruesome uncertainties, reflections and silent agonies. South Africans have won their independence. We must defend it, even at the risk of being imprisoned for it!

In the unfolding struggles on our campuses: Who hold the monopoly of Truth? What is contested? The students argue that 'The doors of learning and culture must be opened'. It was a promise that the ruling party must keep. The university managers argue that subsidy levels are low. They cannot keep university doors open when there is no money coming in. When students cannot pay their fees, where will the bulk of the money come from? University staff calls attention to low levels of pay and demand wage and salary increases.

University managers call for the de-registration of those students who are not achieving. No rational person can defend a student who is in his/her sixth year of a three year degree course! The students counter—why are they not achieving? Is it because they are dull? Is it not because the university alienates them? Is it not because they do not have money for food or travel or residence fees? Is it universities policy to punish the poor by exclusions? Students continue to demand that bridging courses be increased to help the stragglers. The university management counters—where is the money going to come from? One of my students recently told me, looking over her shoulder, 'We have entered into the arena of class struggle now. The rich will be educated and the poor will be relegated to the doldrums of our history'.

There are no easy answers. But this does not mean that intellectuals must swallow stones, be silent like proverbial lambs. They need to enter the fray on whatever side, to contribute to change.

## VI

What role do intellectuals play in other countries—especially in those countries that our South African intellectuals are interpellated from? To begin to understand the possible role that intellectuals can play in bringing about the consolidation of freedom and further change, we must turn to the Italian Marxist political philosopher and activist Antonio Gramsci, imprisoned by Mussolini from 1926 to 1937. Gramsci saw intellectuals divided into two types: (a) the traditional intellectual priests, teachers and administrators; and (b) organic intellectuals, those directly connected to struggles, to classes with organised interests. The latter's aim is to gain more power, or to consolidate it. Gramsci cited capitalist entrepreneurs who create among themselves, industrial technicians and specialists in political economy. They organise new cultures, new legal systems, new industrial relations practices. He believed that organic intellectuals are actively involved in society, that is, they constantly struggle to change minds, mould progressive systems of thought, and expand markets—unlike traditional intellectuals who seem to more or less remain in place, in a repetitive mode and doing the same kind of work all the year round, year in year out. I will argue that the bulk of our intellectuals belong to the first category—that of the traditional.

For Julien Benda (1980), intellectuals are a numerically small group of personages or figures whose public performances do not allow themselves to be compelled into some slogan, orthodox partyline, of fixed dogma. Benda cautions intellectuals against careful silence, uncritical patriotic bluster. He further argues that real intellectuals should not conform, they are supposed to risk censure, risk being burnt at the stake, imprisoned or ostracised, or be crucified.

Edward Said extends Gramsci's point by arguing, saying that late twentieth-century realities suggests to him to insist that

... the intellectual is an individual with a specific public role in society that cannot be reduced simply to being a faceless professional, a competent member of a class just going about his/her business.

He continues to argue that the role of an intellectual must involve a sense of the dramatic and of the insurgent, making a great deal of one's rare opportunities to speak, catching the audiences' attention, being better at wit and debate than one's opponents. And there is something fundamentally unsettling about intellectuals who have neither offices to protect nor territory to consolidate one's guard: self-irony is therefore more frequent than pomposity, directness more than hemming and hawing .... It is a lonely condition, but it is always a better one than gregarious tolerance for the way things are.

Said concludes by stating that:

The intellectual does this on the basis of universal principles; that all human beings are entitled to expect decent standards of behaviour concerning freedom and justice from worldly powers or nations, and that deliberate or inadvertent violation of these standards need to be testified and fought against courageously.

If what Said says above is true, and indeed it is so, where does it place us as intellectuals? What will be the future of our country and its beautiful constitution? We only have to look up to the rest of our continent and despair. But also remember that many of us have been shaped by the ideas of those very few who dared to speak, dared to raise awkward questions—intellectuals like Ngugi wa Thiong'o and to a lesser extent Mazrui and Soyinka.

I have argued above, however briefly, that we are silent in the face of crucial and critical questions raised within our institutions, faculties, departments and circles. If this is the case, then, what is the degree to which our silence can be heard within the broader community, in our region, our country, continent and in the world? In our discourses, we emulate Western experts but fail to inherit their critical stances. We study Noam Chomsky, Derrida, Foucault, Baudrillard, Virilio, Helen Cixous, Simone De Beauvoir, and Virginia Woolf but without the insight and the courage to speak truth to power.

Within this maelstrom of silence, how can we intellectuals mentor our juniors and they in turn mentor their postgraduate students? Further still, what of those young idealistic students who believe vigorously and strongly in justice, prosperity and education for all. For the role of the intellectual is, amongst others, the propagation of the principles and philosophy of Ubuntu. I have quoted Edward Said at length for he best exemplifies a revolutionary intellectual who expresses universal truth to power. Academic, activist, philosopher, critic. Said describes himself as an amateur, for, as an amateur, he has the capacity to raise awkward questions.

The fact that the intellectual ought neither to be so uncontroversial and safe a figure as to be but just a friendly technician nor should the intellectual try to be a full-time Cassandra, who was not only righteously unpleasant but also unheard. Every human being as held in by a society, no matter how free and open the society, no matter how bohemian the individual. In any case, the intellectual is supposed to be heard from, and in practice, ought to be stirring up debate and if possible, controversy. But the alternatives are not total quiescence or total rebelliousness (Said 1994).

The Makgoba Affair is a case in point. Professor Malegapuru Makgoba himself—rightly and wrongly—has raised and continues to raise his voice, stirs debate and

controversy. This keeps the concerns of the public in focus. I will argue, in fact insist, that we be critical, keeping a vigilant eye and ear on the whole spectrum of society—i.e. to safeguard and extend our freedoms. To rely on others for transforming South African society into a just and democratic society will not do. A democracy does not come about by itself. It should be 'work-shopped' regularly and by all. If not, our democracy will end up jaundiced, arthritic and sterile.

## VII

The major task of an educator is to break the vicious circle of ignorance, and liberate the mind into a continuing spiral of knowledge whose power shapes the nature of the universe in which we live. It is the educator who has the task to mould a society in which human relations are governed by principles of love, care, concern and justice—in a word, a society in which *Ubuntu* thrives.

In pre-colonial society the role played by modern intellectuals was in the hands of healers, divine queens and kings, priests, healers in initiation schools and secret societies. These personages still exist and still wield large influence. However, there is a rupture between them and present day intellectuals—a rupture between pre-colonial and colonial/ post-colonial African intellectuals.

In the 1940s, an attempt was made to create a black middle class in South Africa. Based on formal educational qualifications, these Amazemiti—'the Exempted ones'—were allowed to drink whiteman's liquor by license. Subsequent updates were made under Magnus Malan and P.W. Botha. Their total strategy document articulated a programme which had as aim to create a black middle class (with the help of TNC's) which was to serve as a buffer against revolutionary forces. Do South African universities continue this legacy? Do they continue rupturing South African society splitting it ever more into divides of urban/ rural, urban formally educated blacks/ and urban 'uneducated intellectuals'?

Professor Herbert Vilakazi (1996) captures this legacy more clearly when, like Mazrui and Mamdani, he writes:

African education, hence forth, became an appendage of Western civilization. Educated Africans were educated as part of the Western civilization. A hiatus, a discontinuity emerged between African intellectuals, on one hand, and principles and patterns of African culture and civilization became lost in the consciousness and mental sets of African intellectuals.

He describes how knowledge and principles and patterns of African culture and civilization refused to die and remained very much alive among ordinary 'uncertificated' African men and women. He enjoins us to move forward, relentlessly forward, and to design a proper system of education for twenty-first century Africa.

He calls for a cultural revolution that will transform the African intellectual into anthropologists, working among men and women in rural and urban areas for a major re-education of themselves, to acquire familiarly with the principles and patterns of African culture and civilization.

I totally concur with him that, unless such a venture is undertaken, as African intellectuals, we cannot even begin to design a proper system of education relevant to a changing and globalising Africa. The memory of this fissure, this rupture between pre-colonial and colonial/ postcolonial knowledge systems requires us to re-member our community.

Examining the background of the current stand-off positions within our tertiary institutions, bearing in mind the questions from students and university/ technikon managers—how do we move forward? Considering the silence on these issues by academics, what chance do we have of succeeding? It is here where a group of dedicated intellectuals can initiate innovative programmes in the quest for groundwork for the African Renaissance. The project, this cultural revolution, could be a catalyst for revolutionary change and development. It will help us to question and problematise the limits of eurocentric ideas, liberate them from their context and re-present them to Europe with an African freshness. Whereas knowledge industries are made to serve Western thought—even as they draw on African (and Eastern) thought to enrich their own cultures, this has to be done from a new angle—an angle that must mainly benefit African knowledge industries.

What Vilakazi (1994) refers to can be a significant aspect of the African intellectual's outreach programme. 'Outreach' should simultaneously be 'In-reach'. Certified intellectuals must not assume an imperialistic stance and extract knowledge from uncertified intellectuals in the interests of careerism. There need to be an intellectual interaction which must be reciprocal and mutually beneficial. Certified and uncertified should participate in research together and on an equal footing. And research drawn from African knowledge systems must not only bring new insights to the certified. Community intellectuals must also benefit from the university as institution.

The modern African intellectual is a de-centred being, operating in a post-modern environment. Reconnecting with one's alienated culture, re-centres, offers a base, a centre, from which one can speak without the spectre of anti-podality:

... that feeling of being neither here nor there. It is an experience of identity in relation to the other in which the relation always appears more strongly to consciousness than either the identity it founds or the other it projects (Wark 1997).

Most modern African intellectuals define themselves in relation to an elsewhere ... always define themselves in relation to a powerful other.

We are no-one, whoever we are, always oscillating in antipodality with elsewhere (Wark 1997)

As African intellectuals, we are heirs to particular historical moments and historical contexts with their variety of problems, pathologies, peculiarities and triumphs. It behoves us to know ourselves if we are to be found suitable in reaching for fitting answers to the questions our present situation or historical conjuncture poses.

Elsewhere in Africa (West Africa), new histories of the continent are being written. Archaeological excavations reveal layers of evidence of past civilisations that Europe was silent about. Our own South African history is fast emerging under the pick-axes of archaeologists. Hand-axes made over half a million years ago, 27,500 antelopes discovered in the Apollo caves in Namibia, excavations in Sterkfontein, Thulamela and other areas testify to origins of life from within our own context.

The challenge for African intellectuals is to embark on a

relentless [research into] sources of history and knowledge, exhuming buried documents, fossils, reviving forgotten (or abandoned) histories to arm ourselves for the momentous task of designing a relevant and meaningful education system capable of helping uplifting African masses economically, socially and politically (Said 1994)

To achieve this goal, we shall need, as Makgoba (1996) tells us,

a new leadership. It can only come from the students and the youth who will spearhead the new struggle for transformation.

It is these students, currently engaged in protracted struggles with university managers and government, that must be fashioned into a new crop of leaders for our country. But then, we need to ask them to answer some questions. Where do we intellectuals stand in this struggle: Are we 'midwives or assassins'? What then is the role of young intellectuals, the students in terms of this reality? What do they see as their contribution to Africa's regeneration? Those studying commerce, how are they using their skills to help the poor uneducated street vendors to form co-operatives in order to buy products in bulk, thereby saving money? Those who study street law, what are they doing to help the street vendors who are daily charged with trespassing? What are the areas of their research, are they relevant to South Africa in

transition? What creative projects which can help needy students can they propose, other than running to management or even blaming management? Have they organised fund raising projects to help alleviate the plight of needy students or are they still caught in the trap of the culture of entitlement? What resources do they collectively have that can contribute to the reversal of the slide to complete dependency? What was the role of the youth in our past, within our communities, in areas of struggle and leadership? Now, on a different terrain with new challenges, do they continue the resolve and imaginative leadership of the student leaders of the past?

It is imperative for intellectuals to begin a systematic drive to re-visit some of the models that pre-colonial Africa practised to help guide future processes. This is the project that Sankofa Centre for the African Renaissance seeks to achieve. We are concerned with the past because we are very concerned with the present. (I do not expect you to agree with me, in fact I advise against it, for if you do you will not be able to think beyond my thoughts and discover yours!)

Nietzsche (quoted in Schrift 1994) was right when he wrote:

The surest way to corrupt a youth is to instruct him to hold in higher esteem those who think alike than those who think differently

And, like Foucault (quoted in Schrift 1994),

I have a dream of an intellectual who destroys self-evidences and universalities, who locates and points out in the inertias and constraints of the present the weak points, the openings, the lines of stress, who constantly displaces himself (sic), not knowing exactly where he'll be or what he'll think tomorrow, because he is too attentive to the present.

## VIII

'Speaking truth to power' can mean many things. In general, however, this phrase can also indicate the three domains present when one is emphasised and the other not. In the rhetorical domain - which is also the domain of self and o/Other or ethics/morality - truth and power are never absent. In the arena of truth or science, ethics and power are never absent. And the same is true of power. In the arena of power, ethics and science are never absent.

Part of modernity's legacy - which also still determines too much scholarship in South Africa - is that these domains have been kept apart. It is the challenge of the next generation of scholars to analyze and transform these relations among science, politics, and ethics.



On the one hand, what needs to be done is to consciously study the processes which have 'interfered with one another in the formation of a scientific domain, a political structure, a moral practice' (Foucault 1984:386). In the current transformation processes, the challenge, similarly, is to not transform blindly for the sake of transformation but to be knowledgeable collectively and interactively about not only the formation of the new sciences, their objects, but also the de-formation of the existing sciences and the what, how and why of processes which impacted on science, politics and ethics but also their interrelation. To change political structure - to democracy for example - also impacts on changes in the ethical and science domains. The new relations of power in South Africa also impact on the games of truth and the dissolution of truth the scientist plays as well as the forms of relation the researcher has, establishes or develops to self and other (Foucault 1984:387).

On the other hand, because the researcher is always too close to that which is studied consciously, the degree of objectivity will be determined by the degree and the nature of the problematisations one works with. If the domain of objectivity and truth is not separated from power and ethics, it follows that the degree of objectivity is not determined by the degree objectification distances itself from power and ethics. Rather, the degree of objectivity is determined by the degree to which the researcher is able or willing to problematise in such a way that power and ethics are objectified as part of the problematisation. How this is done is not in actual practice first and foremost, but in thought. 'Problematization' is essentially a thought process.

What distinguishes thought is that it is something quite different from behavior; it is also something quite different from the domain of attitudes that can determine this behavior. Thought is not what inhabits a certain conduct and gives it its meaning; rather, it is what allows one to step back from this way of acting or reacting, to present it to oneself as an object of thought and question it as to its meaning, its conditions, and its goals. Thought is freedom in relation to what one does, the motion by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an object, and reflects on it as a problem (Foucault 1984:388).

The question, however, is to identify that which has to be or should be problematised. On the one hand, there is a history of problematisation or we can say a 'history of thought' within the disciplines as they developed, and even before they came into being. Good researchers - especially post-graduate students in Africa - will:

- \* know this history of problematisation within the discipline and between the disciplines;

- \* be conversant with the dialogues and alternative research perspectives which the problematisation and its research-findings lead to;
- \* be adept as to how renewed problematisations arose from older ones, as well as there occurred paradigm-shifts in and between disciplines when some central problematisations in a discipline were debunked as irrelevant (i.e. in terms of power as well as ethics) and radically different problematisations were posed;
- \* be able to understand and analyse the conditions under which a particular discipline problematised particular issues and why - towards which purpose and goal, they occurred;
- \* be knowledgeable of the expectations and future outcomes researchers foresaw or scenarios they created, for their particular problematisations.

In this regard, Foucault (1984:389) said:

... the work of a history of thought would be to rediscover at the root of ... diverse solutions the general form of problematization that has made them possible - even in their very opposition; or what has made possible the transformations of the difficulties and problems of a practice into a general problem for which one proposes diverse practical solutions. It is problematization that responds to these difficulties, but by doing something quite other than expressing them or manifesting them: in connection with them it develops the conditions in which possible responses can be given; it defines the elements that will constitute what the different solutions attempt to respond to. This development of a given into a question, this transformation of a group of obstacles and difficulties into problems to which the diverse solutions will attempt to produce a response, this is what constitutes the point of problematization and the specific work of thought.

We believe that there is a huge challenge for the African scholar to engage this area of the 'history of thought' in research and that it was to Africa's detriment that scholars from within Africa has miserably failed in this area.

On the other hand, in the different conditions post-independent and of late, democratic Africa, has to operate, students and scholars are confronted with the challenge to identify and problematise challenges which have not received adequate scholarly focus. Since these issues are not only to be identified and problematised scientifically but also in terms of the relations of power and ethics they form part of, this poses the challenge to think through each problematisation in terms of the networks of power and ethics its research resolution will form part of and impact upon in the present. Obviously, it should also deal with the points identified above.

In the humanities, one of the main problems of the imperial, colonial and apartheid eras was that problematisation from within African life and experiences were not registered - or not many. Many of the problematisations with which even the current disciplines do battle, are ones of which the conditions were those of these three discourse complexes. Alternatively, these problematisations derived from imperial, colonial and apartheid discourses looking for solutions for the benefit of the European home countries. The challenge now more than ever, is to problematise from within (South) African realities. This means that, ultimately, problematisation must be with, in and for community. If this moral decision - which is a historical one - is taken, it also means that it must be embarked upon with a view to do the hard work of implementing findings - or in Foucault's words above - to not only know,

what has made possible the transformations of the difficulties and problems of a practice into a general problem for which one proposes diverse practical solutions (e.a.).

But to know too, how to create 'conditions in which possible [practical] responses can be given' (e.a.).

In its broadest sense, then, 'speaking truth to power' means that the science we practice must inform our interaction in the public domain. If the public domain is constituted by the whole intricate network of power and knowledge relations, then to interact truthfully with it, means that one's science informs how one acts and interacts here. Further, if science does not inform public interaction, if it is found - from this perspective - to be inadequate to inform public realities, to problematise those realities which have still remained outside the scope of the disciplines, or to bring existing (central) problematisations in the public domain into the centre of research, it is in need of transformation so that it does.

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This issue of *Alternation* was brought together by Ptika Ntuli and Jannie Smit. Within the context of the multiple challenges the 'African Renaissance' pose, it was compiled to reflect some issues and problematisations which have not received adequate attention in scholarship.

Debipersad, Rambilaas and Sookrajh illustrate how oral style elements as proposed by Michael Jousse have been used to accentuate the recital of mantras during the performance of the yajna - mimism, bilateralism and formulism. These mantras and the yajna itself have their roots in the Vedic scriptures which have been orally transmitted from generation to generation. The yajna is practised in most Hindu homes within the ambit of the sixteen sanskaras (sacraments) and is performed during festivals and ceremonies.

S.J. Malungana addresses three problems - that often voiced by the elderly within African culture, namely that they observe the uncultured rules of morals, bad manners, lack of accepted etiquette and lack of respect among youths; the fact that indigenous South African languages and their traditions have not received adequate attention in education, research and study; and that publishers do not publish indigenous cultural materials. All three these elements, he argues, hang together, causing the marginalisation of African indigenous culture in South Africa.

G.V. Mona argues that the new national identity which is enshrined in the new constitution of South Africa is a phase of development of a discourse that has occupied the minds of Xhosa poets as far back as the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The article furthermore argues that the poems that were written during the period 1880-1900 embodied a then marginal position. However with the new dispensation the philosophy that is contained in the poems has assumed a central position of dominance.

Characterising Mazisi Kunene as visionary poet, Sandile C. Ndaba argues that his visionary commitment entails the utilisation of resources from the Zulu cultural matrix and Zulu oral tradition. His poetry draws on Zulu cultural references and allusions while at the same time impacting on contemporary issues. This article examines Kunene's visionary commitment as manifested in his book: *Ancestors and the Sacred Mountain*. It situates Kunene's visionary outlook within the arguments raised by Soyinka in his article: *Cross Currents: The New African after Cultural Encounters* and examines to what extent these arguments are relevant to Kunene's work.

Arguing for the importance of the literatures of particular cultures, Zola Sonkosi gives a cursory overview of a selection of folk- and culturally informed literature in Xhosa. He also proposes ways in which these literatures may be used in education and learning processes but also in cross-cultural research.

M.C. Hoza compares a selection of poems by Jolobe and Mema with regard to their critical analyses, linguistic and literary skills in depicting the African woman. It is the poets' artistic skills and their manipulation of the Xhosa language, he argues, that reveals a striking diversity of opinion in their view of the African woman. Whereas Jolobe's images and metaphors communicate feelings of love and affection for the woman, Mema's imagery serves as a tool for satire, over-dramatisation and contempt. And while Jolobe largely transcends cultural stereotypes and embraces foreign cultural influence, Mema remains faithful to the tribal culture in his vehement rejection of Western cultural influence.

Focusing her article on *Nervous Conditions*, Hershini Bhana speaks of the many nervous conditions people excluded from Western culture suffer. It not only documents the structures that produce these conditions but the different ways in which ill-health manifests. Central to the novel, she argues, is a discussion of food

and the eating disorder of anorexia and bulimia that Nyasha develops. In addition, the article focuses on several of the negotiations that the characters in the novel attempt around various overlapping discourses and the dis-eases they can result in.

In the face of the current crime wave and non-political violence in South Africa, Dumisane Ngcobo addresses the issue that this phenomenon is over-coded by race and class, with the majority of 'offenders' and victims coming from groups previously excluded. He addresses the subjective factors that have an effect on crime - from culture and psychological perspectives - and the conditions from within which nihilism is born.

Focusing on presentations of the Khoisan in South Africa English Poetry, Annie Gagliano addresses the multiple ironies in them but also perspectives and political choices of the periods in which they were composed. Her article is generally chronological and analyses the presentations as interpretations of interpretations. She argues that if each of the cited poems documents political (in other words, *power*) realities, each reference and preference expressed, do the same.

In his reply to an earlier article of Mabogo More, W.J. Ndaba addresses the questionable claim to superiority of Western rationality and what the philosophic challenge is for doing philosophy in and for Africa. Appreciating More's own contributions, he nevertheless argues that accounts of Western denials of African philosophy neither advances debate on issues in African philosophy nor that they illumine the nature of African philosophy itself. As More's paper challenges the positions of Shutte (1993) and Rauche (1996), he also reassesses the contributions of these two South African teachers of philosophy.

M.E.S. van den Berg addresses the communitarians' accounts of human rights in Africa as conceived by scholars writing on the African experience. She explores their understanding of the notion of equality, and their ideas on human rights in terms of a proclaimed African communitarian ethos and proceeds with a critique of these notions. Despite many African thinkers' insistence that African communitarianism does encapsulate a respect for the individual's rights, dignity and liberties, communitarianism (whether it be extreme or moderate), she asserts, does not enfold a paradigm of individual human rights-claims, but instead embraces an authoritarian and sexist paradigm.

M.A. Masoga problematises the transformation potential of the cleansing effect of symbolic ritual in South African context. The death and suffering which befell South Africa during the apartheid era, he argues, have not abated. Pointing to the instability past injustices still effect in society, he addresses the issue of continuing reconciliation in the context of ritual cleansing.

In the two review articles, Rembrandt Klopper reviews two books on Outcomes-based education and Jannie Smit, Wallerstein's *Unthinking Social Science*. Klopper argues that the problems unpacked in Jonathan Jansen's and Pam

Christie's edited volume are to a large extent constructively engaged in Helen van der Horst and Ria McDonald's *Manual*. In his contribution, Smit provides an overview of Wallerstein's process-thought of ten years on the Social Sciences, and makes a few suggestions for the framework within which the social sciences should have operated in post-independent Africa and the research challenges lying ahead.

Sankofa Centre for the African Renaissance  
University of Durban-Westville

Centre of Religious Studies  
University of Durban-Westville

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## A Joussian Oral Engagement with the *Yajna*

H. Debipersad, B. Rambilaas and R. Sookrajh

### Introduction

In this article an attempt is made to present Joussian theory on the psycho-physiology of geste, and thereafter illustrate how this theory has evolved through the performance of the *yajna* as metaphorically depicted in the *Purusa Sukta* of the Vedic oral milieu. This is done by concentrating on the following oral style elements:

- \* the transformation of energy;
- \* humanity's replaying actions of the universe; and
- \* humanity's spontaneity to revivify the past geste voluntarily.

Jousse's oral theories, specifically his anthropological laws of mimism, bilateralism and formulism are examined to determine whether the *yajna* as it is performed by Hindus today, contain elements of such oral style expression. This happens largely from an anthropological standpoint, and a case is presented that suggests that the *yajna* is grounded in humanity or 'human' as '*anthropos*' and its performance, effects through geste at every level of human being, a transformation of human consciousness and divinisation of human energy. Selected aspects of the *yajna* are used to illustrate the presence of the laws of rhythm-mimicry, bilateralism and formulism as a 'western' theory of orality which formed the framework of these practices.

### 1 Michael Jousse and the Theory of Orality

According to Michael Jousse, the laws that govern physiological humanity also govern psychological humanity and Jousse's theory of orality asserts that rhythm-mimicry, bilateralism and formulism are the laws that impel the human compound to replay, balance and stereotype not only physiological actions but the gestes appropriate to every state of consciousness.

### 1.1 Rhythmo-mimicry

Jousse asserts that every level of humanity's existence is structured on rhythmo-mimicry. Every stimulus is received, replayed and retained as an active geste acting on other gestes and ready for revivification in gestes which involve the whole human compound.

### 1.2 Bilateralism

The law of bilateralism, reflecting as it does humanity's physical structure, is equally important and pervasive in the oral style by producing physiological symmetry and balance in movements—right and left, up and down, back and forth (Sienart 1990:96).

### 1.3 Formulism

Formulism in the oral style, the accumulated knowledge of a people is stored in easy to recall formulas, not as rigid unchanging devices, but as flexible aphorisms, thus allowing for a vast number of combinations and juxta positions to enable a people to make a relevant response to an ever-changing concrete world.

In this article, it is argued that Jousse's theory of orality is relevant in describing humanity's ability to replay, balance and stereotype both in the metaphorical performance of the *yajna* during the cosmic age as well as in the ordinary human's attempt at re-enacting such a performance.

## 2 The Performance of the *Yajna* in South Africa

The earliest records of the performance of the *yajna* are to be found in the Vedas which flourished in North India from 2000 BCE in an oral style milieu (Sarma 1948:3). Although by the end of the Vedic age it had become a 'mechanical and soulless activity' (Sarma 1948:5), through the Hindu reformists, greater emphasis was given to the performance of the *yajna*. The *Arya Samaj*, a Hindu Reform Movement which advocated a systematic practice of a uniform set of 'Vedic' principles and rituals had great appeal especially when this reformation coincided with the emigration of indentured labourers to Mauritius, Fiji, Trinidad, Surinam and South Africa (Rambilaas 1996). The practice of this fire sacrifice continues to be a common feature among Indians settled abroad. In South Africa, the performance of the *yajna* is an important feature of Hindu worship (Pillay 1991:113-139).

Seereeram (1994:107) and Selvanayagam (1996:19) argue that the performance of the *yajna* goes beyond the germ-destroying, health-promoting function, to a spiritual engagement where humanity experiences flashlights of powerful eternal truths. Vedalankar (1986:81-83) incorporates an environmental notion by suggesting that the *yajna* helps in the regulation of rainfall and

temperature. The possibility of the *yajna* helping in the causation of rain is also given in the *Gita* (Chapter 3.14) which states: 'From food are beings born, from rain is food produced, from sacrifice does rain arise ...' (Vedalankar 1996:81).

The Manusmriti (Chapter 3.76) endorses this notion in the following way: 'The offerings made through *yajna* break into very tiny particles and rise towards the sun and give cause to rain ...' (Vedalankar 1986:81-83).

The *yajna* is central to the performance of each of the sixteen Vedic Sanskaras (sacraments) which allow for the improvement and refinement of Hindu life as a continuous process. The sixteen sanskaras are therefore performed from the time of intention to conceive a child, during the development of the embryo, after the birth of the baby, during adolescence, adulthood, marriage and death (Vedalankar 1979:91-94). In South Africa, the practice of the sanskaras is advocated by, but most probably largely limited to the Arya Samaj Movement's followers (Debipersad 1995:23-34).

For Hindu followers, the *yajna* is the focal point of any religious festival or ceremony. It is particularly popular at birthday celebrations, anniversaries, entry into a new home as well as the commencement of a business practice.

### 3 The Cosmic *Yajna*

The following *Rgvedic* Hymn (10.90) of the *Purusa Sukta* forms the preface to the performance of the *yajna*. In this hymn, the origin, creation and dissolution of the whole of the cosmos are depicted through the performance of the *yajna*. It also portrays the *yajna* itself. The following selection conveys the imagery of the *yajna*.

- 1 A thousand heads hath Purusa, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet.  
On every side pervading earth he fills a Space ten fingers wide
- 2 This Purusa is all that yet hath been and All that is to be;
- 4 With three-fourths Purusa went up: one Fourth of him again was here.
- 6 When Gods prepared the sacrifice with Purusa as their offering,  
Its oil was spring, the holy gift was autumn;  
Summer was the wood.
- 13 The Moon was gendered from his mind,

- 13 And from his eye the Sun had birth;  
(cont) Indra and Agni from his mouth were  
Born, and Vayu from his breath.
- 14 Forth from his navel came mid-air; the sky was fashioned from his head;  
Earth from his feet, and from his ear the  
Regions. Thus they formed the worlds.
- 15 Seven fencing-sticks had be, thrice seven  
layers of fuel were prepared,  
When the Gods, offering sacrifice, bound,  
As their victim, Purusa.
- 16 Gods, sacrificing, sacrificed the victim:  
These were the earliest holy ordinances.
- The Mighty Ones attained the height of  
Heaven, there where the Sadyas, Gods of old, are dwelling.

The hymn in the Purusa Sukta describes the Cosmic Yajna performed by God as an act of creation by the cosmic sacrifice (yajna). 'Purusa' (verse 4) offers 'a quarter' of himself which results in the creation of the universe. Purusa in the above extract exists as 'hath been' and the 'is to be' from which all things 'become' (verse 2).

Pannikar (1977:354) endorses this by suggesting that:

creation is God's sacrifice, for not only does God bring it into existence, create it, but he also permits it to return to him.

By offering a quarter or a fraction of Himself, as an oblation to the sacred fire, a Cosmic Yajna is performed to allow for the subsequent creation of the solar systems, the moon and air (verse 13).

The yajna as it is performed today, is thus symbolic of the reflection of God's supreme sacrifice in the form of a Cosmic Yajna. Miller (1985:206) believes that:

of this mighty oblation, the human ritual is the microcosmic reflection. The underlying factor of the interlinkedness of all participants in the yajna, their joining forces in a common re-enactment of the universal process of creation –the sacred work par excellence– is a peculiar characteristic of the Vedic perception of the sacrifice.

### 3.1 Humanity Replays the Actions of the Universe

From a Jousian point of view, it can be argued that the performance of the yajna as described in the Purusa Sukta is symbolic of the cosmic universe 'im-pressing' its actions on the micro universe of humanity. It can be suggested that humanity is 'im-pressed upon' by actions of the cosmic universe (Sienaert 1990:94) through the performance of the yajna in the Purusa Sukta. Jousse sees humanity actively receiving and reacting to external and internal impressions, and this phenomenon is marked by varying degrees of complexity:

It can be seen that there is a progression from the macro to the micro, from exterior to interior, from physiological to psychological (Fanning 1994:6).

Jousse's exposition of the anthropology of geste declares that 'in the beginning was rhythmic gesture' (Sienaert & Whitaker 1990:21), and this resonates with the rhythmic and gestural input during the performance of the Cosmic yajna as outlined in the *Rgvedic Hymn of the Purusa Sukta*.

### 3.2 Transmission of Knowledge and Transformer of Energy

In the performance of the yajna, there is a transforming effect of knowledge of humanity by microcosmic reflection of the Cosmic Yajna. Purusa could be considered, in terms of Jousse's oral style a kind of intuitive thought that seeks to extend itself through the whole mental disposition, therefore, all attempts to describe abstract ideas or states of the soul are given in language that describes the body's action that expresses that state. This makes possible the creation of analogies between the concrete reality and abstractions. Jousse states that correlations and affinities form between words '... called into life ... by some analogous thing, it will take the form of an identical semiological gesture' (Sienaert & Whitaker 1990:50). By replaying the gestes of Purusa allows for a transmission of knowledge of humanity by mimism of the Cosmic Yajna. Mnemotechnical devices are used to transmit knowledge during a oral style milieu like the vedic era.

In the performance of the yajna, it can be inferred that psycho-physiological geste is transformed by feeding on and mingling with the energy of God. The performance of the yajna is related to fire (*agni*). Vedalkar (1986: 81) explains that yajna is not a worship of visible fire. *Agni* (fire) is one of the most important epithets of God. It means all pervading, adorable and effulgent. Fire is the source of radiance and heat. The flame of the yajna is a symbolic representation of the victory of light over darkness, knowledge over ignorance, prosperity over poverty.

In the words of Selvanayagan (1996:65), there is no yajna without fire. Fire (*Agni*) purifies and transforms the sacrificer and conveys his oblations to gods. *Agni*, the personification of fire, is the first to be invoked in every sacrifice because he is the heavenly high priest and the mediator. In particular, the *Agnihotra* (yajna)

glorifies *Agni* by giving Him the most prominent place in their rituals. The Rg. Veda also affirms that *Agni* is the sacrificial bond (*yajna bandhu*) with human beings.

### 3.3 Humanity's Spontaneity to Revivify the Past Geste Voluntarily

Jousse (1886-1961) used the word 'geste' to describe a peculiarly human phenomenon by suggesting that the human,

composite receives the actions of the universe and replays, balances and stereotypes then at every level of his being—physiological, affective, intellectual and spiritual. In the performance of the *yajna*, man (sic) as anthropos, is im-pressed by the universe, and replays and revivifies this universe through mimism of the human 'compound': corporeal, ocular, auricular, manual and laryngo-buccal.

Underlying this article is the assumption that participation in the performance of the *yajna* effects a further transformation of consciousness expresses in a greater intensity of life. Jousse believes that the psycho-physiological geste is transformed by interacting with the energy of God. As part of the great natural cycle of energy derived from the sun, God is a unique expression of the rhythm of movement. God is a transformer of energy. This means that God generates physiological and psychological movement actively, affectively or intellectually. The transformation of energy into the multiplicity of creation is the manifestation of that force. Although this synergy is not explored by Jousse, it is inferred that Joussian thinking is in accord with it. It is also the belief of Hinduism that humanity can experience union with God in a unique way by participating in the sacrament. Furthermore, the *yajna* is a reflection of the most powerful resurrection energy, the spirit of God himself. This belief has anthropological origins as correctly perceived by Jousse.

## 4 The Performance of the Yajna

There are largely four processes which underpin the performance of the *yajna*:

- (i) *symbolism*: in the form of objects or human action to symbolise the divine;
- (ii) *consecration*: humanity is able, by the use of mantras, to divinise a reality that is the root of his being,
- (iii) *oblation*: humanity is able to physically share in this reality by active participation toward divinity by pondering over the sense. It also demonstrates the course of contemplation for the purpose of the act and,
- (iv) *divinisation*: humanity is able to awaken the spirit within himself to a higher transcendental state.

In the performance of the *yajna*, humanity discovers the anthropological origins of memory, the mystery of its closed self somehow opening (Ong 1977:337-338) to the movement of life, towards God himself. As Ward (1993:3) suggests of prayer, things need to be seen as pointing beyond themselves, as sacramental of a supreme reality and value, as 'visible images of eternity', which he calls 'iconic' vision.

The performance of the *yajna* is thus a revivification of the,

infinitude of past gestures lying under the threshold of consciousness ... that makes possible [revivification] of past states and the totality of their multiple connections (Sienart & Whitaker 1990:27).

In part, the complex reality of consciousness in gestuel terms, was played out in the performance of the Cosmic *Yajna* as illustrated in the *Purusa Sukta* hymn and re-enacted in humanity's reflection of the ultimate sacrifice.

Table reflecting presence of oral style elements in the performance of the *yajna*

Stages during the Performance	Process	Oral Elements
Invocation	Recitation of <i>Om</i> Recitation of <i>Gayathri</i> Mantra Recitation of <i>Ishwar</i> <i>Upasana</i>	Propositional Gesture Rhythm Repetition
Purification	Sipping of water Touching of different parts of the body	Bilateralism Balancing Repetition Mimism
Oblation	Igniting of fire Kindling of fire Offering of Oblations ( <i>ghi</i> ) Offering of dried grass, sticks, herbs and roots ( <i>samagri</i> )	Mimism Gesture
Conclusion	Final offering of both <i>ghi</i> and <i>samagri</i>	Gesture Mimism

#### 4.1 Oral Style Elements Evidenced in the Performance of Yajna

In the following discussion, mantras have been selected from the various stages of the performance to demonstrate the presence of oral style elements as proposed by Jousse, viz. mimism, bilateralism and formulism.

##### 4.1.1 Invocation

This notion of creation of the universe as discussed in the *Purusa Sukta* hymn discussed earlier, is further explored in the invocation phase of the *yajna* called the *Ishwar Upasana*. Hymn CXXI from the *Rgveda* once again reflects and salutes the creation of the universe.

The focal point of the ritual is the *havan kund*. The *kund* is a rectangular, hollowed receptacle into which pieces of wood are arranged before the commencement of the *yajna* ('seven fencing-sticks had he', 'summer was the wood', 'oil was the spring', 'the holy gift was autumn', 'the grass Purusa'). The priest and the participants sit along the four sides of the *kund* to make their offerings into the fire.

For the *yajna* proper, small goblets containing water with spoons in them, a bowl containing *ghi* (clarified butter - 'the dripping fat was gathered' 'thrice seven layers of fuel were prepared') with three pieces of wood and a ladle, a block of camphor and trays containing *samagri* should be neatly arranged around the *kund*, within easy reach of the participants.

Before the commencement of the *yajna*, the participants compose themselves and focus their attention and thoughts on God. The priest and participants close their eyes, clasp their hands and repeat the word AUM three times. Thereafter the following mantra is chanted:

*Om bhur bhuvah swah.*  
*Tat/sa/vi/tur va/re/ny/am*  
*Bha/rgo de/va/sya dhi/ma/hi*  
*Dhi/yo yo/ na/h pra/co/da/yat.*  
 (3 X 8 constitutes the *gayatri* metre.)

In the first mantra, the devotees glorify creation with the three expressions '*Bhur*, *bhuvah* and *swah*'. These represent the three worlds, namely the earth, intermediate space and the heaven respectively. Rambilaas (1996:1) describes the division of the universe into three worlds: *bhuh*, *bhuvah* and *svah* in the sense that each of these worlds become associated with the elements *agni*, *vayu* and *aditya* (Vedatankar & Chotai, 1980:36) and the vital airs *prana*, *apana* and *vyana* respectively. In the oblation phase, the structure of these three expressions are further discussed to illustrate a precise stratification of the attributes of each sphere that comprise the Vedic cosmos.

The fire, kindled by the devotees symbolises the natural energy that exists in all three worlds. *Bhur* which means 'God, the Giver of life' is the fire that generates the energy which sustains the earth and is likened to the vital energy that gives life to the body. The fire kindled in the *kund* (receptacle) is symbolic of the energy of the sun and its electric forces. The *kund* on the other hand, is symbolic of the vast sacrificial ground, Mother Earth. *Bhuvah* which means 'God, the remover of pains' is the electricity that is in the atmosphere and is likened to the energy that removes impurities from the body. *Swah* means 'God the Giver of happiness' and is the source of energy. The sun in heaven is likened to the energy that pumps and circulates the blood in the body (Pal 1993). Rambilaas (1996:5) cites the *Chandogya Brahmana* 1.6.31 in which Vedic Cosmology divides the universe into three spheres, *bhu-prithivi*, the earth, *bhuvah-antariksa*, the atmosphere and *svah-dyauh*, heaven.

The use of propositional gestures, which is a strong characteristic of oral tradition, is prevalent in the above mantra. The propositional gestures are in the form of short sentences such as:

- i *Om* ..... O God.
- ii *Bhur* ..... (earth) The Giver of life.
- iii *Bhuvah* ..... (atmosphere) Remover of pains and sorrows.
- iv *Swah* ..... (heaven) Bestower of happiness.

The distribution of short and long vowel sounds enhances the steady rhythm during recitation and thus memorisation is facilitated. In the mantra, the vowel [u] in '*Bhur*' and '*Bhuvah*' is repeated. The [a] in '*Bhuvah*' and '*Swah*' is short. This technique is prevalent in most of the mantras which is a characteristic of the Sanskrit language and could be considered formulaic. The formula for the metre in which the verse is written is called the '*gayatri*' (Apte 1982:648-658), and in scanning the verse, the long/ short syllables are written within a 24 metre formula (3 X 8).

The recitation of the *Ishwar Upasana* is central to the invocation phase:

- 1 In the beginning rose *Hiranyagarbaha*,  
 Born Only Lord of all created beings.  
 He fixed and holdeth up this earth and  
 Heaven. What God shall we adore with our oblation?  
 Giver of vital breath, of power and  
 Vigour, he whose commandments all the  
 Gods acknowledge:  
 The Lord of death, whose shade is life immortal. What God shall we adore  
 With our oblation?



The line 'What God shall we adore with our oblation?' is repeated after each recitation in nine out of the ten recitations.

i *Om hiranyagarbhah samavartatagre bhutasya jatah patireka asit. Sa dadhara prthivim dyamutemam kasmai devaya havisa vidhema.*

ii *Om ya atmada balada yasya viswa upasate prasisam yasya devah. Yasyac chaya'mrtam yasya mrtyuh kasmai devaya havisa vidhema.*

iii *Om yah pranato nimisato mahitwaika idraja jagato babhuva. Ya ise asya dwipadascatuspadah kasmai devaya havisa vidhema.*

iv *Om yena dyaurugra prthivi ca drdha yena swah stabhitam yena nakah. Yo antarikse rajaso vimanah kasmai devaya havisa vidhema.*

The presence of a number of automatic rhythmic repetitions creates a schema: i.e. the repetitive use of *kasmai devaya havisa vidhema* creates. This creates parallelism which ensures unity in the rendition of this invocation. The interrogative nature of the repeated question 'What God shall we adore with our oblation?' induces speculation on the nature of the divine and leads the aspirant through a series of questions to a definite conclusion.

Finnegan (1977:128) states that repetition, whether as parallelism or in phrases called 'formulae', has great literary and aesthetic effect. The recurrent familiar ring of the formulae is more than a useful device aiding the Rabbi to compose or the audience to translate a message: 'it is a beautiful and evocative element ... the more so, for its repeated recurrence'.

The words *kas/mai/ de/va/ya ha/vi/sa vi/dhe/ma* (l, l, l, l, s, s, s, l, s, l, s) which mean, 'to which blissful God we pray with faith and devotion?' in mantras ii, iii, iv and v of the Communion Prayer, are repeated. The mantras are structured in such a way that certain words and phrases are repeated to facilitate memorisation in a rhythmic way. The extensive use of repetition of words and phrases typifies the oral tradition established in the Sanskrit language and the situation of the long (l) and short (s) vowels are in keeping with a rhythm that is interrogative (Apte 1982:648).

In describing rhythmic elements in the law of Rhythmo-Mimicry, Jousse makes reference to

a set of two, sometimes three parallel Balancings, each Balancing being given rhythm in accordance with the characteristic rhythm of the propositional gestures of the languages being spoken (Sienart & Whitaker 1990:100).

An analysis of the complex variations in respect of pitch, tone, intensity and duration illustrates the limitations of writing and reaffirms the pre-eminence of the living voice—balancing of propositional geste occurs in the form of short, parallel, stereotyped recitatives.

#### 4.1.2 Purification

i *Om vanma asye'stu.*

With the recital of the mantra devotees touch the right and left ends of the mouth.

ii *Om nasorme prano'stu.*

Devotees touch the right and left nostril.

iii *Om aksnorme caksurastu.*

Devotees touch the ends of the right and left eye.

iv *Om karnayorme srotramastu.*

Devotees touch the right and left ears.

v *Om bahvorme balamastu.*

Devotees touch the right and left arm.

vi *Om urvorma ojo'stu.*

Devotees touch the right and left thigh.

vii *Om aristani me'ngani tanustanva me saha santu.*

Here devotees sprinkle water over the whole body.

Jousse's universal laws of mimism and bilateralism are highlighted during this purification phase. The devotees imitate the priest's manual (hand) gestures by touching their lips, nostrils, eyes, ears, arms and thighs. By performing these gestures, the devotees request God to ensure the healthy functioning of those organs and for the entire body to enjoy sound health throughout their lives.

Marcel Jousse's law of bilateralism is evident when the devotee touches, e.g. right and left nostrils; right and left eyes; right and left ears etc.; thus maintaining a physical balance. A sense of harmony is achieved by the use of bilateralism.

Extensive use of the repetition of words among the mantras is also evident. Each mantra begins with 'OM' and ends with 'astu', thus assisting the devotees in their pronunciation and memorisation. The above six mantras end in a common rhyme, i.e. 'astu'. Rhyme has been used in these mantras to make them phonological-

ly cohesive, created by the interaction of sounds and meanings. The efficient and effective use of the end rhymes complements the meaning during recitation.

In order to facilitate the retention of the mantras in memory, 'key words' such as 'om' and 'astu' are used to trigger the sound-symbolism association.

#### 4.1.3 Oblations

The following mantra is recited five times:

*Om ayanta idhma atma jatavedastenedhyaswa vardhaswa ceddavarddhaya casman prajaya pasubhir brahma varcasenannadyena samedhaya swaha. Idamagnaye jatavedase idanna mama.*

The five requests made in this mantra mark the five human needs the devotees seek. These being good children, useful animals, spiritual knowledge, nourishing food and other necessities of life. This accounts for the five times repetition of the mantra and the five gestures of offering the *ghi*. The *ghi* offered to the fire is symbolically a source of nourishment for the fire.

A common characteristic that is prevalent in this mantra is alliteration. The repetitive use of certain words and syllables emphasises the value of alliteration as a mnemotechnical device. In the above mantra, the labial syllables (pr, pa, br), are used to create an alliterative effect. The use of alliteration as presented in the Sanskrit alphabet is present in this mantra, the 'ta, da, dh, na' consonants are repeatedly used, bringing about a rhythmic flow when this mantra is recited five times.

This phase of the ritual is followed by the igniting of the fire by once again uttering the mantra 'Om bhurbhuvah swah' (Vedalankar 1991:47) as is the case during the invocation phase. *Om bhurbhuvah swadyauriva bhumna prthiviva varimna. Tasyaste prthivi devayajani prsthe'gnimannadamannady ayadadhe* (Vedalankar 1991:47).

The following illustrates the use of mnemonical device used to facilitate the memorisation of the mantras.

- i *Om bhuragnaye pranaya swaha. Idamagnaye pranaya idanna mama.*
  - ii *Om bhuvar vayave'panaya swaha. Idam vayave'panaya idanna mama.*
  - iii *Om swaradityaya vyanaya swaha. Idamadityaya vyanaya idanna mama.*
  - iv *Om bhurbhuvah swaragni vayvadityebhyah panavyanebhyah swaha. Idamagni vayvadiyebhyah pranapanavyanebhyah idan na mama.*
- (Pal 1993:60-62).

Rambilaas (1996:5-9) argues that the structure of the above verses give a very precise stratification of the universe by offering definitions of the attributes of each of

the spheres that comprise the Vedic cosmos. In Vedic cosmology the use of the triads represent specific formulae to facilitate the recitation and memorisation of the verses. In mantras i, ii, and iii, the triads are listed vertically. However, in mantra iv, the triads are listed horizontally. The diagram below illustrates the formula reflecting the triads.

<u>Sphere</u>	<u>Element</u>	<u>Airs</u>
<i>bhu</i>	<i>agni</i>	<i>prana</i>
<i>bhuvah</i>	<i>vayu</i>	<i>apanaya</i>
<i>svah</i>	<i>aditi</i>	<i>vyana</i>

The *padas* of the first three verse are three sets of triads. In the fourth verse, a vertical grouping of the triads emerge. The table lists the triads horizontally in the first three mantras. Vertically, it represents the triads as grouped in the fourth verse.

In the above verses, there is an interweaving of alliteration where the meaning or sounds automatically dovetails the words into each other by stressing the same heavily stressed consonant elements. Assonance is another device which forms the links in balancing. The energetic explosions which occur on the vowel sounds are described by Jousse as 'qualitative alliteration'.

During the offering of the oblations, the priest requests the devotees to recite the word 'swaha'. As they make their offerings into the fire, the devotees imitate the priest's gestures, thus illustrating Jousse's universal law of Mimism.

In the following mantras, which are recited during these offerings, a specific distribution of short and long vowel sounds is evident. This distribution enhances the steady rhythm during recitation and in this manner memorisation is facilitated.

- v *Om apo jyotiraso'mrtam brahma bhurbhuvah swarom swaha.*  
(Pal 1993:62).
- vi *Om yam medham devaganah pitarascopasate, taya mamadya medhyaya'gne medhavinam kuru swaha.*  
(Pal:1993:63).
- vii *Om viswani deva savitar duritani parasuva, yad bhadrantanna asuva swaha.*
- viii *Om agne naya supatha raye asman viswani deva vayunani vidwan.*  
*Yuyo dhyasmajjuhanameno bhuyisthante nama uktim vidhema swaha.*

Once again, during the oblation phase, mnemonical styles facilitate memorisation of the mantra. Although the laryngo-buccal phenomenon of parallelism is universally manifest in all oral style languages, it does sometimes give way to the device of alliteration—the tendency of the organism to repeat its geste 'automatically and rhythmically' is revealed in alliteration.

- i *Om agnaye swaha. Idamagnaye idanna mama.*
- ii *Om somaya swaha. Idam somaya idanna mama.*
- iii *Om prajapataye swaha. Idam prajapataye idanna mama.*
- iv *Om indraya swaha. Idamindraya idanna mama.*

The declaration 'idanna mama' is the act of giving completely. This act of giving without reserve is facilitated by a change of rhythmic heightened pitch and pace which is accelerated, working itself into a climactic tempo. There is psychic energy, automatic play, predominant spontaneity and periods of inertia to link chains of reasoning and judgement in the oral style. Mnemonic faculties come into play of themselves, when the individual has consciously or unconsciously instilled into his organism the collective stereotyped, manual, laryngo-buccal, etc. propositional gestures (in a state of greater or lesser rapidity, abundance, accuracy, stability—Sienaert & Whitaker, 1990:164-165).

In these mantras, the laryngo-buccal geste repeats themselves automatically, not only within the rhythmic schema of the parallelism but from one recitation to the next. By doing this, the rhythmic schemas can demonstrate a variety of linking systems.

#### 4.1.4 Conclusion

*Om Dyauh santirantariksam santih prthivi santirapah santirosadhayah santih. Vanaspatayah santir viswedevah santirbrahma santih sarvam santih santireva santih sa ma santiredhi.*

*Om Santih Santih Santih* (Vedalkar 1991:44).

In the Hymn of Peace, it must be noted that the 'sa' sound is repeated fifteen times and a rhythmic flow is evident when this mantra is recited. The 'sa' syllable emphasises the value of alliteration as a mnemotechnical device and this key sound 'sa' facilitates the memorisation of this mantra.

The repetition of 'Santi, Santi' at the end of the *yajna*, enforces the notion of peace. The repetition of peace, firmly and emphatically stresses on the reciter that s/he is to carry on the various deliberations of his/ her life with full equanimity, evenmindedness and peace inside as well as outside him- or herself. S/he is not to be carried away by momentary reactions, but is invariably guided and led by basic human and moral considerations so that s/he may be a wise person in the real sense.

When reciting the 'Santi Patha', mimism is reflected when the devotees clasp their hands. In Hinduism, the clasping of hands, signify the devotees' salutations to and reverence for God during the prayer. This act of clasping the hands has been handed down from generation to generation and typifies the oral tradition. It

is interesting to note that this gesture is also used as a traditional form of greeting by Hindus.

## 5 Synthesis

The analysis of the *yajna* in this article is based on the Jousian theory of the *anthropos* or propositional geste and the assumption that, as long as we use simple sentence or its mutation (co-ordinate and sub-ordinate clauses), humanity's tendency to replay, balance and stereotype his gestuel expression will manifest itself.

The mnemonical devices give evidence of a conscious subtly observant exercise of the oral composer's will: in order to make the memorisation and re-memorisation of his/ her improvised compositions easier for him- and herself as well as their repeaters. S/he makes use of certain devices, the function of which is to assist in the initial triggering, or the propositional gestures of a recitative and to keep the recitatives of a recitation in the correct order.

By using the anthropological laws that govern human expression, it has been possible to show that mimism, bilateralism and formulism are present in the performance of the *yajna*.

The mantras become formulaic through parallelism between action, emotion and thought together with the acoustic enchantment of balance, and of the repetition of the propositional geste—either identical or slightly different. This has been shown by Jousse and are evidenced in the *yajna*.

Faculty of Education  
University of Durban-Westville

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## The Relevance of Xitsonga Oral Tradition<sup>1</sup>

S.J. Malungana

### 1 Introduction

There are three problems which I address in this article. The *first concern* is that often voiced by the elderly within African culture, namely that they observe the uncultured rules of morals, bad manners, lack of accepted etiquette and lack of respect among youths. The *second concern* is more general. The indigenous South African languages and their traditions have not received adequate attention in education, research and study. This is especially true in schools. The *third concern* relates to the fact that publishers do not publish indigenous cultural materials. All three these elements hang together, causing the marginalisation of African indigenous culture in South Africa.

In order to address these three concerns, I argue in this article for the relevance of taboos using Xitsonga oral tradition as example; for the importance of introducing the teaching and learning of traditional culture in schools on a broader scale; and the publishing of traditional cultural materials.

### 2 The Meaning and Function of Taboos in Xitsonga Oral Tradition

*Xiyila* (taboo) is a Xitsonga word for supernatural injunctions against socially undesirable conduct or behaviour practised by an individual. In oral tradition, a *xiyila*

<sup>1</sup> This article is developed from three papers. 1) 'The Meaning and the Functions of Taboos in Xitsonga Oral Tradition (Folklore)' delivered at the 4th SAFOS Biennial International Conference, 26-28 September 1996; 2) 'Why Teach Oral Tradition in Learning Institutions?' delivered at the National Conference of the Indigenous Languages of South Africa, 4-5 July 1997 at the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein; 3) 'Book Publishers and the Indigenous Languages in South African Oral Tradition' was read at the FILSA Conference, University of Venda, Thohoyandou.

in its broadest and most abstract meaning, could be defined as a rule of prohibition covering what one may call, the community's unwritten oral law. Junod (1927:573) who wrote on *xiyila* in Xitsonga defines the term 'taboo' as:

Any object, act, or person that implies a danger for the individual or for the community, and that must consequently be avoided, this object, act or person being under a kind of ban.

Taboos are forms of cultural beliefs of avoidance which are used constantly in the daily lives of the Vatsonga. From a cultural point of view, 'taboo' functions in oral tradition and is transmitted from generation to generation. It may be understood in terms of essence and/ or process.

In terms of *essence*, the 'taboos' of a culture represent the most basic elements or essence of that culture. In the context of oral tradition, a culture's system of 'taboos' is a system of beliefs and practices of avoidance by means of which a certain group of people struggles for perfection of their daily activities in terms of how they perceive the nature of the supernatural as well as human life as such. These unwritten oral customary laws or rules of conduct should never be broken but be obeyed at all times. If broken, the community perceives the individual or the community itself to come into some form of danger. This danger can be perceived to come from supernatural, natural as well as social sources. This is why 'taboos' can be said to prevent individuals but also the community from danger. As such, the breaking of a *xiyila* (taboo) among Vatsonga, may be of great offence of to both the supernatural and the entire society.

In terms of *process*, 'taboos' regulate the processes of social interaction and community relationship maintenance, continuance and development. The social processes which 'taboos' facilitate, maintain and continue community and ensure that it not be broken up. Since they also regulate the social processes among the individuals and groups within community, the 'taboos' also ensure that community development takes place within socially shared, collectively understood, and historically grounded arrangements<sup>2</sup>.

Taboos perform a wide variety of *functions* in any given society, especially in Vatsonga communities. They reflect a people's life, thinking and daily activities.

<sup>2</sup> Taboos should not be neglected in the study of any oral tradition-based culture. Whether the focus of research is on the *essence* of a culture or cultural *processes*, in both areas of attention, cultural analysis cannot do without dealing with the important function 'taboos' play in traditional culture. This is important especially concerning Vatsonga culture because it is in the culture's taboos, that one may find the mirror of that culture.

In order to understand some of the functions taboos have in Vatsonga culture, I provide a few examples<sup>3</sup>.

## 2.1 Taboos Dealing with Decision-making for Women

The oral laws of taboo are applied to women especially on decision-making.

i It is a *taboo* for a mother to decide on the bride price of her own daughter during a lobola meeting. She is not allowed to speak, even if she may have brilliant ideas. The reason is that she may spoil the smooth running of the discussion or interaction of the relevant parties.

ii During family disputes, it is taboo for a woman to speak before her husband allows her to do so. The man is the head of the woman. Among the Vatsonga a man is in charge of women. But this does not mean that he should look down on his wife for example or treat her badly.

iii It is a serious taboo for females to speak at public meetings. They are only allowed to listen. They are strictly forbidden to speak. Women are to remain silent at meetings. They are not permitted to speak. They must be kept in the background as the oral law taboo itself lays it down. If they have questions to ask, they should ask their husbands at home. According to Vatsonga cultural habits, it is not right for a woman to raise her voice at meetings. Even if a woman may be able to articulate views clearer than men, they may not break this taboo. The rationale is that this taboo prevent or avoid competition between the sexes.

iv It is also a taboo for women to speak in tribal courts. They are also not allowed to even ask for clarifications at public assemblies. They should ask their husbands at home. Women who do not have husbands, must ask their married friends.

Even though these taboos may be perceived as oppressive, they are not. They do not allow men to treat women badly. They are no mere objects which can be handled and ill-treated by men in the name of taboo.

<sup>3</sup> For some of the taboos, I provide the taboo as it is stated in the oral tradition, followed by a rationale or the meaning of the taboo and then with what the taboo serves to prevent. The preventative function also has an element of concealment built into it. As such, the taboo creates a space for someone in terms of which that person or persons have to function but it also conceals spaces or activities for that person who is prevented from participating in the activity.

## 2.2 Taboos Dealing with Decision-making for Men

i Taboo: *Wanuna a nga pfumeleriwi ku nghena endlwini ya ntswedyaana a kunguhata timhaka ta xihlangi ni nsati, swa yila.* (A man is not allowed to get into the bedroom of his wife who has recently given birth and decide matters on the newly born baby, it is a taboo.) The reason is: *A nga fa mahlo.* (He may become blind). This taboo also has a preventative measure built into it: *Ku siveriwa wanuna ku etlela ni nsati wa yena loyi a nga ni n'wana lontsongo hikuva a nga tlhela a tika.* (It prevents a man from being tempted of engaging in sexual intercourse with his wife, who may fall pregnant again). This is a traditional taboo which controls the sexual behaviour of men.

ii A man is prevented from seeing his own new-born child for some specified period of time in his own house however much he may desire it. This oral law prevents a man from interfering with the activities surrounding the child. For example, a child may be deformed or may need immediate medical attention. If this is the case, a man will just be in the way of the goings on around the child.

iii Concerning a new-born child, the man is expected to save up money to buy what the infant may need as well as for any possible medical expenses.

iv A man is also prevented from even talking to his wife and help her plan on the infant. Should he have important messages for his wife, he has to convey them through a female who functions as intermediary between him and his wife.

v Taboo: *Wanuna a nga fanelanga ku kunguhata timhaka ta vukhomba bya n'wana wakwe, swa yila.* (A man is not allowed to plan about initiation matters for his daughter, it is a taboo). The reason is: *A nga penga.* (He will become mad). The preventative measure of this taboo is: *A nga tiva milawu ya vavasati/ Ku siveriwa wanuna ku vona n'wana wakwe endlwini ya vukhomba.* (He may come to know initiation formulae for women. The taboo prevents a man from seeing his daughter in the hut where she is undergoing traditional initiation training).

As in the case for women, these taboos can allow for exploitation of men by women. A woman may demand a lot of money from the man while he may not know how it is spent or have any say whatsoever about the planning and running of the initiation function for girls. Everything is decided upon and planned by his wife in partnership with other women whereas the daughter is his. The question here arises as to how one can allow that a man be kept in the background when he sees things happening in his own family in the name of taboo and not allowed to utter even a single word in the decision making processes?

Further, it is unfair that the very man who should not involve himself in the planning of the function is proscribed by customary oral law to provide every request made to him by his wife without murmur. The smooth running of the function depends upon his involvement financially, but not with the arrangements.

These elements of traditional culture may be perceived as exploitative of men.

## 2.3 Taboos Dealing with the behaviour of Children

Among the Vatsonga, there are many taboos which children must observe. Here are a few examples:

i Taboo: *Loko vana va tlanga hi ku hoxana hi misava, swa yila.* (If children play by means of throwing soil/ sand to one another, it is a taboo). The rationale is that this may prefigure a death in the family: *Swi vula leswaku ku ta va ni rifu emutini.* The preventative measure is: *Ku sivela leswaku va nga tlunyani mahlo hi misava.* (To prevent children from getting soil in their eyes).

ii Taboo: *Ku ba n'wana laha ku nga ni lavakulu, swa yila.* (To beat children in the presence of elders, it is a taboo). The rationale is that elders may claim that it is they who are being hurt: *Lavakulu va ri ku biwa vona.* (Elders claim that it is they who are being beaten). The preventative measure is: *I xikombiso xo eyisa lavakulu.* (It prevents giving signs of disdain to the elders).

iii Taboo: *Mufana a nga dyeli embiteni, swa yila.* (A boy does not eat from an earthenware pot, it is a taboo). The rationale is: *A nga neriwa hi mpfula loko a ya evukweni loko a kurile.* (Rain may coincidentally fall on him when visiting his in-laws when he is a grown up). The preventative measure is: *Ku sivela vafana ku nghenelela timhaka to sweka.* (To prevent boys to get involved in cooking matters).

iv Taboo: *Mufana a nga faneli ku korisela vuswa enkombyeni a dya, swa yila.* (A boy must not clean out a wooden spoon by wiping porridge with his fingers and licking it off, it is a taboo). The rationale is: *A nga pfimba mavele.* (His breasts may swell). The preventative measure is: *Ku sivela vafana ku nghenelela eka timhaka to sweka.* (To prevent boys to get involved in cooking matters).

## 2.4 Taboos Dealing with Death

Among Vatsonga, death is most feared and there are many taboos related to it.

i Taboo: *U nga tshami ehenhla ka sweko, swa yila.* (One should not sit on a hearth-stone, it is a taboo). The rationale is: *U nga ta fela hi nuna kumbe nsati.*

(One's spouse may die). The preventative measure is: *U nga tshwa marhaku*. (One's backside may burn).

ii Taboo: *Manana a nga byeriwi swa le tikhobeni, swa yila*. (One should never talk to a mother about initiation matters for girls, it is a taboo). The rationale is: *A nga fa*. (She may die). The preventative measure is: *A nga tiva to xaniseka ka n'wana wakwe*. (She may know about the ill-treatment of her child).

iii Taboo: *U nga tibohi hi ngoti, swa yila*. (One should never tie himself or herself by means of a string, it is a taboo). The rationale is: *U nga ta fela hi vatswari*. (One's parents may die). The preventative measure is: *U nga tisunga hi ngoti*. (One may commit suicide).

## 2.5 Taboos Related to Fire

Sometimes a woman observes the fire taboo until her child is able to walk, and she is forbidden to cook with others. The rule applies for at least a month after giving birth.

i Taboo: *Ntswedyana a nga sweki hi ndzilo, swa yila*. (Woman recently confined should not cook on fire, it is a taboo). The rationale is: *U kukumuka khwiri*. (Her stomach may swell). The preventative measure is: *N'wana a nga tshwa*. (The child may burn).

ii Taboo: *Ku oka ndzilo emitini, swa yila*. (To fetch fire from a hearth in other villages, it is a taboo). The rationale is: *U nga rhamba valoyi*. (One may invite witches unaware). The preventative measure is: *U nga hisa nhova/ tiyindla*. (One may burn the veld/ houses). This taboo assumes that one may transport evil with the fire. Consequently, the taboo prevents taking it from one village or house to another.

## 2.6 Taboos Related to Marriage and Love Making

Taboos have a bearing on proper Vatsonga marriage and love making. For example, in marriage, Vatsonga prefer exogamy to endogamy. They therefore adhere to the rule prohibiting marriage within the clan or even sexual relations between close kin through the incest prohibition. Fortes (in Firth 1980:186) also maintains that: 'The incest taboo is universally thought of and stated as the prohibition of sexual relations between specified kin.'

i Taboo: *U nga teki makwenu, swa yila*. (Do not get married to sister/ brother, it is a taboo). The rationale is: *Ku hlayisa vuxaka* (One should create healthy relations within the clan). The preventative measure is: *Mi nga tswala swigono*. (One may give birth to a deformed baby).

ii Among Vatsonga it is a taboo for a man to have sexual intercourse with a menstruating woman since menstrual blood is described as dirt. It is said that a woman may harm a man with this kind of blood. Should a woman not observe this taboo, her behaviour may be associated with sorcery. Hence, among Vatsonga, there is an Idiom which says: *U loyiwile* (He is bewitched).

iii If a wife is menstruating or nursing an infant, it is taboo for her husband to sleep with her. If it happens, she may lose her cycle. In addition, Vatsonga men are not allowed to be present at the place of birth and an elaborate postparentum sex taboo exists. That a man may not sleep with his wife after she has given birth may continue until the new-born baby walks. In general, sexual taboos are strictly enforced until the infant walks properly and birth blood has completely stopped.

iv Furthermore, it is said that the blood which comes out during birth and miscarriage is likewise a terrible taboo for a man. Hence, in Xitsonga, there is a taboo which says: *Swa yila, ku ya emasangwini ni wansati wo humeriwa hi khwiri*. (It is a taboo, to have sexual intercourse with a woman who has had a miscarriage). The rationale is: *U nga tshwa*. (One may burn). The preventative measure is: *U nga vabya/ fa* (One may become ill or die).

vi Abortion is also considered a taboo among Vatsonga. There is a strong belief that the blood from a miscarriage is the same as abortion blood. Vatsonga regard the blood shed at an abortion as burning (*ya hisa*). The taboo related to abortion says: *Swa yila, ku etlela ni nsati wo kulula*. (It is a taboo to sleep with a woman who has committed abortion). The rationale is: *U nga tshwa*. (One may burn). The preventative measure is: *U nga vabya/ fa*. (One may die).

vii Some husbands who work very far away from their homes and only come to their permanent homes after a long period, are usually forbidden by their mothers to have sexual intercourse with their wives on arrival. These wives sometimes have miscarriages or abortions during the absence of their husbands. In most cases, some husbands working far away from home are potentially open to have their wives aborting unwanted babies. Hence, some mothers partly act as self-appointed marriage- sexual- or love life- guards. But today, mother-in-laws no longer have full control over their daughter-in-laws since oral tradition is considered, especially on this issue, to be a thing of the past. In general, however, taboos still play an important role as a powerful medium of social control.

## 2.7 The Functions of Taboos: A General Perspective

Grunlan and Mayers (1984:227) summarise the functions of taboos as follows:

Taboos serve at least three functions. First, they keep the faithful in line. For example, the Mormon Church excommunicated a woman for publicly supporting the Equal Rights Amendment, which was opposed by the church. Second, they establish lines of separation to delineate the group and increase group solidarity. We often see this in extreme fundamentalist groups who view all other Christians, including Evangelicals, as apostate and separate from them. Third, taboos are used to help maintain social controls, as for example, the incest taboo ....

Taboos have many functions and they can be used for many purposes. They can be exploited too as I have indicated in the overview on taboos related to men and women. Even so, they order different phases of human behaviour, as well as social and religious processes. They articulate diverse bodies of tradition, all of which are embedded in the sacred but also in the mysteries and myths which maintain community. Generally, taboos constitute a system containing many rules and regulations which all together function as media for social ordering and control. As such, they articulate the essence of a culture. Therefore, research into cultural introspection, cultural identity, oral tradition, nation building, history but also the developing of future scenarios for communities cannot ignore the important roles 'taboos' play in culture. Given this fact, the following two sections deal with the introduction of oral tradition studies in formal education and the role publishing should play in this regard.

### 3 The Introduction of Indigenous Languages and Traditional Culture Studies at School

Modern institutions in Africa consider traditional structures and customs as things of the past. Anything related to custom or cultural habits are often discarded. But such attitudes rarely occur among European people. They rate their languages and their traditions as the best and even the colonised used the languages of the coloniser to express their views. This reflected a racist view because it is certainly not by chance that anything 'black' was and still is perceived by many as negative. Hence, people talked about black languages, the traditional cultures of black people, black workers, black business, black society, black magic, black women, black men but also black consciousness, black power and even black-on-black violence. Even though they are not used in this way, all these concepts relate to their binaries in terms of whiteness, indicating some perception of white superiority.

Colonisation and apartheid are things of the past. The African people do not have to conform to these legacies anymore. We have to look at our own cultures and traditions and study that which forms the essence of who we are and where we want

to go and what we want to achieve. This essence is provided by our oral traditions as articulated in our own languages<sup>4</sup>.

#### 3.1 The Teaching of Oral Tradition in South Africa

The teaching of oral tradition in South Africa's indigenous languages is either totally neglected or only done in haphazard fashion. In general, it is a neglected field of study in our learning institutions and not adequately taught in any given learning programme. Given that this genre is the bedrock of any indigenous culture and language—not to say, one of the richest resources for the study of mother-tongue language or indigenous languages—this is outrageous. Tradition is not everything but if it is not treated as relevant, its marginalised status will continue to reflect prejudice against traditional African cultures and bias for the European.

Oral tradition is an enriching experience for learners. They receive entertainment and sound cultural teaching in the form of folktales, folksongs, riddles, proverbs, idioms and other aspects of oral lore such as cultural habits and taboos. To the coloniser and even modern European—who have their own oral traditions in terms of which they are brought up despite their literacy and even information technology—all these were deemed primitive. Now that South Africa has its own education specialists, this situation must be changed. This genre need to be fully accommodated in curricula. If it does not happen, the indigenous languages and cultures will not flourish as was the case with Afrikaans over the last 50 years or more.

A basic educational principle and sound educational policy is one that includes the cultural aspects of that culture's own language and traditions. These enable pupils and students to understand the culture and environment of their own community before proceeding to learn about other cultures. Akiyaga and Odaga (1983:X) maintain that:

A sound grounding of the student in his (sic) people's culture helps him (sic) to become a useful member of the society. If the student has a systematic understanding of the way his (sic) people look at the world, for instance, in deciding what is right or wrong, or the sense of justice, he or she is better able to get involved in the evaluation of good social institution which upholds the values of justice. Proper education should give the student confidence in the human values of his (sic) people's needs and aspirations so that the student may play a positive role in society.

<sup>4</sup> We no longer have the colonised and coloniser. This country is our home and every language has its own roots. Hence, my book on oral tradition or 'folklore' is titled *Timitsu ta Vatsonga*. This book includes 10 aspects of oral tradition, theory and their functions.



Oral tradition should be introduced in learning areas since, through it, learners gain understanding of the culture of their own people, broaden their knowledge about the world at large in their own language, and in a systematic way enrich their own culture and language.

Oral tradition also has a bearing on nation building. If oral tradition provides a primary determinism; that is, the conditions of human's life as a social animal, then it is basis on which people can develop into respected and dignified citizens. Further, praise poets usually compose praise poems about their countries and leaders. This helps in learning to understand the history of the country. As such, oral tradition is a powerful and dynamic medium of social education. More particularly, oral tradition educate to make a pupil a cultured and respected person in society. For example, if the taboos discussed above are adhered to by a Vatsonga person, he or she is considered mature and dignified. If it is true that it is mature and dignified people from different cultural upbringings who make a nation, then, surely, the people must be firmly grounded in their oral traditions. This means that the oral traditions cannot be ignored in our schooling systems and curricula.

### 3.2 Oral Tradition and the promotion of Indigenous Languages

Each cultural group has its own language. This language is developed in terms of the kind of realities it deals with and the social areas of concern where it is used. This is a structural feature of language-usage. If this is the case, then to see indigenous languages as 'under-developed' or even worse, to see indigenous culture as 'backward', is a category mistake. On the one hand, such perceptions register a serious lack of knowledge of the language, its power and the traditions it conveys. On the other, such perceptions remain blind to the ways in which indigenous languages have been prevented structurally from developing in terms of scientific language, etc. If indigenous languages are introduced into schooling systems, then both these perceptions must be addressed and rectified.

According to Wenburg and Wilmot (1973:93):

People in different cultures have different meanings for words. Imperialism is certainly a different concept for us than for the people in developed countries.

This raises two points in our context. *Firstly*, people from outside South Africa or people unwilling to study indigenous languages or at least indigenous oral traditions, will not be able to understand African people. They will not be able to understand the oral and other cultural traditions of indigenous people on their own terms. In the context where we attempt to foster cross-cultural understanding and the mutual recognition of dignity in the interests of nation building, this will not be

helpful. *Secondly*, if indigenous languages and how they articulate oral tradition are not systematically developed in schooling systems, this situation will continue to marginalise African cultures and identities. The effects of such a situation will be the same as that which we experienced under colonial and apartheid schooling regimes. The dignity and identity of African people will not be recognised and advanced in public. *Thirdly*, the people from within every South African culture—the owners themselves—must take responsibility for how the oral traditions and indigenous languages are to be advanced. It is only the owners of a culture who knows the culture, its idiom and oral traditions the best. They should also develop well-founded learning and education strategies to achieve this purpose. No-one else can do so.

Oral traditions should be taught in learning institutions since it has several functions for a particular indigenous language. It is a unique art because it is mostly attached to the culture of a people. On this point, Dhlomo (1948:86) said:

Art is understanding and expressing the feelings and experiences around you. An artist must come out of himself and enter into the general emotion, thought and experience of the people.

Oral tradition is a very important art form and related to the enhancement of the creativity of people. Through it, *maskanda* music is promoted amongst the isiZulu. Among Vatsonga, *swipendana*, *switende* and *timbila* instruments were mainly used to perform praise music. These instruments were basically used by the walking or running performers. Today, they have been improved considerably and are used by experts like Thomas Hasani Chauke, Maluleke and Juluka.

In education, praise poetry is an important instrument since they facilitate recital but also creativity. In the process, praise poetry also instils a sense of culture and pride. Since this is done in indigenous language, it relates language and tradition. Moreover, where praise poetry is encouraged creatively, it may also add to the expressivity of the language, etc.

Where the main function of oral tradition is that of maintaining and enforcing culture, tradition and good upbringing, it does not merely ensure its own continuance. As corpus of oral law, it ensures good conduct in terms of custom and dignity. Oral law affects human behaviour and determines the basic good pattern of culture and therefore society at large. Oral tradition, therefore, promotes unwritten binding rules which control most aspects of our traditional lifestyle. Oral tradition regulates our personal relations. For example, it is through folktales that children gain all the rules of morals, manner, etiquette, ceremony, cultural habits and good customs. If folktales are told and folksongs are sung in the language of the people, this art will grow and flourish. It is therefore, of paramount importance that we urge our communities to ensure that oral traditions are introduced more comprehensively

in their learning institutions. If that is achieved, love of tradition will prevail among the youths. If tradition is not taught and enjoyed in terms of its true nature, it will only be a lifeless body of laws, regulations, morals and conventions which ought to be obeyed, and in reality only evaded. This is where schooling can play a vital role. For, in actual life, rules are either never entirely conformed to, are used to exploit others in the name of law and custom or are ignored, leading to misconduct and socially irresponsible behaviour.

One of the major reasons of crime in society at present is that the indigenous cultural, oral traditions and languages did not receive their due from colonial and apartheid schooling authorities. This is also true for the European courts of law. If cultural rules are adhered to and children brought up in school in terms of them, we might have been spared the talk of the so-called 'lost generation', the spread of AIDS, the irresponsible behaviour of taxi-drivers as well as all the crime related to car-hijackings and rape.

Beattie (1977:139) says:

To maintain an orderly system or social relations people have to be subjected to some degree of compulsion; they cannot, all the time, do exactly as they like. For often, self-interest may incite behaviour incompatible with the common good, and so it is that in every society rules of kinds of constraint on peoples behaviour, are acknowledged, on the whole, adhered to. The rules and the means by which they are enforced differ greatly from society to society, but always they more or less effectively secure some degree of social order.

That this should happen through the schooling system and include indigenous oral traditions and the teaching of indigenous languages in the curriculum, speak for itself. On the one hand, the African languages cannot be developed successfully if aspects of oral tradition are rejected in learning institutions. Through oral tradition, a language is able to reflect the deepest thought, feelings and aspirations of an individual from that culture. Above all, oral tradition reflects the intellectual ability and the rooted cultural beliefs and actions of a particular people in general.

### 3.3 Attitude

Most Africans prefer to use English rather than their mother-tongue and many are even more fluent in English. This attitude derives from the myth amongst some mother-tongue speakers that if one does not have command of English, such a person is dull, uneducated or even labelled as 'idiot'. This is off-set against the view that

those fluent in English are 'clever' or 'civilized'. This fallacy does not recognise that for the English, their language derives from myths, religious perceptions and other 'uncivilised' or 'uncultured' roots. Moreover, if one considers what has been done to humanity and nature—and is still being done—by people who speak this language, then one cannot see this language as 'civilised' in an unqualified way. Therefore, one's attitude towards one's language and traditions is of paramount importance to one's own dignity and respect. In this sense, one language should never be superseded by and gain preference above another.

## 4 Book Publishers and South Africa's Indigenous Languages/Oral Traditions

In arguing for the relevance of oral tradition in the two sections above, I have firstly addressed the issue of taboos in oral tradition using Xitsonga as example. Secondly, I provided a few perspectives on the importance of the introduction of oral tradition and indigenous language teaching and learning at school. The hopes that I have articulated here, however, cannot be achieved if enough and innovative materials are not published in these areas of concern by our South African publishers. In this section, I address the obstacles to publishing; oral tradition and indigenous language materials; the relationship of African people with their languages; and book publishing and democracy<sup>5</sup>.

### 4.1 Obstacles

Not much has changed concerning the marginalised status of indigenous languages since 1994. Those who value their language will certainly agree with this statement.

Since 1994, society has become more equitable and impartial in some spheres. This happened through the introduction of 'uniform identity cards', a uniform schooling system and of late, the possibility of the introduction of equality with regard to programmes of learning. In terms of book-based oral tradition (folklore) my own research conducted since 1996, however, has shown that there still is a large gap in this area.

<sup>5</sup> Some of the important concepts associated with indigenous populations are their particular relationships to land ownership, oral traditional beliefs and some cultural habits. If oral traditions on all these areas are published, it will enhance the understanding of people about their own traditions but also those of others. This may prevent the marginalising tendencies which characterised the governance structures of the past because they will be better informed about how people themselves think about their land, traditions and languages. This will enhance the quality of democracy in South Africa.

That oral tradition, the literature of indigenous people, is discriminated against by the publishing houses is evident from five responses I had on inquiry.

#### **Publishing house A in Pretoria East**

There are many materials on this genre; they are not good. They are not based on the new curriculum. They are only used in grade 8 by the Department of Education. They have a small market. They are not based on original work. They are not financially viable.

#### **Publishing house B in Johannesburg**

'Many publishers can only concentrate on OBE now'.

#### **Publisher C in Pretoria North**

'Very slow market, provincial departments don't like to buy them'.

#### **Publisher D in Pretoria East**

'They are based on older ideas; the market is very poor and there is no competition'.

#### **Publisher E in the Northern Province**

'No market, no creativity, reduplicating already published work, and only used in one grade'.

These are the perceptions informing the reality. What is needed is a change of perception and practice. Creative materials for use at schools, should be published.

#### **4.2 Indigenous People and Language**

Strictly speaking, 'indigenous people' refers to the original population of a particular region. In general, South Africa is the land of origin of its original populations, i.e. before the arrival of Europeans. The indigenous languages are therefore the languages of the people who populated South Africa at this time<sup>6</sup>. It is the oral

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<sup>6</sup> The meaning of the term 'indigenous' or 'aboriginal' people has been the subject of much heated debate at many conferences. However, in simple terms, it means 'first peoples'. 'Aboriginal' means the 'original occupants of the land' and not illegal settlers. Even though this may be a problematic concept to use given the many African peoples who are perceived to be 'settlers' by other African cultures, it is functional in the sense that it usually indicates those people who occupied the land before the arrival of European settlers who displaced and marginalised the cultures, languages, customs and traditions of indigenous people(s).

traditions of these people which have been marginalised through more than three centuries. Should they not be recognised, South Africa's indigenous people will not benefit from the wind of democracy which is sweeping our country.

This point is also supported by the United Nations which has recognised that indigenous people suffer a particular form of discrimination globally and are custodians to a particular world heritage that must be protected. The United Nations declared 1993 to be the year of indigenous peoples, and in 1995, it launched the decade of indigenous people (Crawhall 1997:11).

Furthermore, it is said that the United Nation recognises approximately 300 million indigenous people world-wide. The number may be more.

Given the international recognition of indigenous people and the changes struggle by indigenous people to be recognised, it is important that South African institutions give full and due recognition to its different people's languages and traditions. We cannot accept that our own new democracy would continue to marginalise the languages of indigenous people(s). Since it is through language that a people draw its own essence but also organise its own social processes (see above), such marginalisation should not continue.

#### **4.3 Book Publishing Influences True Democracy**

Publishers should not discriminate by not being willing to publish the oral literatures of indigenous people. Since the book written in a given language is designed to serve as an instrument of communication both within that culture and with others who can understand the language or who can appreciate translations, the book, may be one of the most important media of fostering a sense of community and nation.

Books are meant to convey meaning. Above all, oral tradition put in print is a sophisticated medium: it transforms orality into literature. On the one hand, this is a medium through which the treasures of oral art can be conserved. On the other, it can be used for moral learning in such a way that indigenous people feel comfortable with their own schooling and learning. If oral knowledge is produced and circulated in the tangible form of book, it may advance literacy, identity formation and respect—especially seeing that there are so few books available in African languages. If this does not happen, it means that this is a privilege which still only belongs to precisely those knowledges and literatures which were instrumental in marginalising the African culture and its people(s).

The advent of democracy in South Africa also means that there should be equality in the availability of cultural knowledge. This can only happen through the publication. Freedom of the press, therefore, also demands the advancement of the writing on oral tradition. If not, democracy will remain tainted and diluted.

Institutions of higher education such as universities need material based on oral tradition for research. If materials of this genre are published, there is no doubt



that there is a market for them or that a market can be developed in this area. This genre should not be neglected. In addition, the publication of indigenous materials may provide the enjoyment of this literature by many. This means that not only the folktales and folksongs of Western traditions should be enjoyed and researched but also those from Africa. If publishers could give more freedom to authors to embark on this genre, new writers would emerge to publish books in the languages of indigenous people(s). We do not want to toyi-toyi anymore. We want to sing new songs. We want to sing praise songs advancing democracy and development.

Freedom is not something to be waited for. We have to take it and practice it. We have to do it together with those with institutional and governance power. As such, it is important to realise:

Many of you advise waiting as a strategy. Freedom and justice are not buses that make the same rounds on the half-hour and stop and open their doors and have plenty of empty seats. You can't wait for freedom and justice unless you are still waiting for yourself to realize freedom comes first from within (Wiley 1993:8).

This freedom from 'within' is a freedom closely related to the injunctions and dignity oral tradition provides. As such all areas, especially that of traditional culture must be included:

Let us expand our expertise in all areas. Let us not be so quick to abandon those areas where we have a foothold already because we are so creative, in the arts and entertainment and politics and sports. Let us not give up on those quite yet merely because people say they are what we do naturally. Let us understand these fields better, so we can manage them instead of the other way around (Wiley 1993:9).

Let us follow the early footsteps of great indigenous writers, such as B.K. Mthombeni and F. Thuketani in Xitsonga, O.K. Matsepe in Sotho and Maumela in Tshivenda who have published powerful books.

We need to run our own publishing companies more and we need to run them the way Heinemann and J.L. van Schaick run theirs.

## Conclusion

Taboos are unwritten rules or laws of conduct which ensure social order in African communities but also govern social processes. The taboos form part of the oral tradition as they are transmitted from generation to generation. Generally, these rules

of conduct govern the African people(s)' daily activities and conduct. They regulate people's habits, manners, customs, and ensure that all in the community meet with conventional standards and good morals. Taboos maintain social control since no one dreams of breaking the social prohibitions. One of the central taboos in this context is the incest taboo. Fortes (in Firth 1989:172) says that the incest taboo is related

to the function of the family as the agency through which the knowledge and sentiments essential for maintaining culture are transmitted from generation to generation.

Taboos make people obey their own customs. The meaning of taboos are often derived from explanations related to the supernatural. This is why many of the preventative measures do not only have common sense explanations but are also related to the bringing of misfortune upon an individual or a community. Through this mechanism, taboos make people respect and adhere to their culture.

If it is true that, despite the interference of western culture over the last four centuries as well as the rise in literacy levels in Africa's post-independent states, oral tradition, traditional culture and especially taboos still have a major influence in African communities, then this fact cannot be ignored by the African schooling systems. As I have indicated in this article, the main function of taboo is that of maintaining and enforcing the unwritten laws which bind a people together in terms of the cultural habits of their own community. This must be acknowledged in our schooling systems and by publishers because the likelihood that this will change in the near future, seems slim. Stated more boldly: For African people(s), traditional culture will never be outdated and will still be central to who they are and how they participate in social processes in future.

There is a whole history of how South Africa's indigenous people(s) have been marginalised and exploited. This has led to many evils. One is that it has led to the creation of the so-called 'lost generation' of rootless youth and people with no respect of the dignity of others. This has happened across the culture groups to various degrees. Given the arrival of the new democratic dispensation, this situation may be changed. It can, however, only happen if all people, their cultures, languages and traditions are treated and valued on an equal basis. For oral tradition, it means that taboos, so central to these traditions, not be neglected<sup>7</sup>; that the role indigenous

<sup>7</sup> In this context, one should add taboos as other part of tradition are always subject to development. Even so, it must be done in community and negotiated by all involved. It should never be enforced on cultures. Even so, one must not turn a blind eye to what is the case on the issue of taboos. They are powerful in society and community and must be respected as such.

languages play in these traditions and their importance for schooling be advanced; and that the publishing houses together with innovative authors participate in this process

Department of Xitsonga  
University of Venda

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## National Identity and Xhosa Poetry (1880 -1900)

G.V. Mona

### Introduction

On 8 May 1996 South Africa reached a milestone when more than the required two thirds majority in the Constitutional Assembly voted in favour of the new constitution of the Republic of South Africa.

The argument of this article is that the new national identity which is enshrined in the new constitution of South Africa is a phase of development of a discourse that has occupied the minds of Xhosa poets as far back as the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The article furthermore argues that the poems that were written during the period 1880-1900 embodied a then marginal position. However with the new dispensation the philosophy that is contained in the poems has assumed a central position of dominance.

The foregoing argument is premised on the notion that the 1996 constitution is one of a number of political and cultural texts that vary in form, i.e. verbal and non-verbal; formal and non-formal (Fender in Hart & Stimson 1993:33-38) which served, and continue to serve as media for the construction, invention or formation of a national identity.

To support its argument the article will employ an interdisciplinary approach to analyse and interpret Xhosa poetry texts (cultural texts) that were published in newspapers during the period 1880-1900. The poetry will be properly contextualised by locating it within the socio-politico-economic reality in South Africa during the period under review

### Theoretical Foundations

Anderson (1983:13) suggests that nationality or nation-ness as well as nationalism are cultural artefacts of a particular kind which may be understood by considering carefully how they have come into historical being. The following is a proposed definition of the nation: '... it is an imagined political community and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign' (Anderson 1983:15).

While he supports the view that nationalism invents nations where they do not exist, he however emphasises that invention is distinct from fabrication and falsity; and can be correctly assimilated with imagining and creation. Anderson (1983:16) elaborates on the inherent characteristics of the nation as follows:

The nation is imagined as limited because even the largest of them. Has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. It is imagined as sovereign nations dream of being free, and, if under God, directly so. The gage and emblem of this freedom is the sovereign state. Finally it is imagined as a community because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.

Smith (1991:4) concurs with Anderson when he states that the self is composed of multiple identities and roles namely: familial, space or territorial, class, religious, ethnic and gender. Analysing the causes and consequences of national identity as a collective cultural phenomenon Smith (1991:14) lists the following fundamental features:

- \* An historic territory, or homeland
- \* Common myths and historical memories
- \* A common mass public culture
- \* Common legal rights and duties for all members and
- \* A common economy with territorial mobility for members.

It is the assumption of this article that the postulations by the foregoing scholars illuminate the relationship between the notion of national identity and Xhosa poetry.

### The Historical Context

The discovery of diamonds in Kimberly in 1866 was followed by the discovery of Gold in Johannesburg in 1885. British interest in South Africa increased, and between the period 1868-1881, despite the formidable resistance by Africans, in particular those in the Eastern Frontier, Britain completed her scramble for colonies in Africa.

In this study of the relationship between national identity and Xhosa poetry during the period 1880-1900, the significance of the discovery of minerals lies in the fact that '... South Africa was transformed from a colonial backwater into a central prop of British imperialism' (Davies et al. 1988:7). The British imperialists also

sought to destroy the independence of the Boer republics, a conflict that culminated in Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902. After the war which was won by the British, the territory which constitutes the present day South Africa was incorporated into four British colonies which finally united in 1910.

The developments, within the foregoing context, of the mining industry, marked a turning point in the socio-politico-economic history of South Africa. A grand scale of capitalist production was introduced. The wage labour system of exploitation was introduced. Large numbers of black workers were absorbed into the wage labour system. According to Davies et al. (1988:8):

Within three years of the opening of the Witwatersrand gold-field in 1886, over 17000 African workers were employed in the mines together with 11 000 Whites. Twenty years later the figure had reached 200 000 black workers and 23 000 whites.

The mining industry contributed significantly towards the development of capitalist production in agriculture and manufacturing. It is in the said industry that, many of the institutions or forms of exploitation and consequent national oppression specific to South Africa were first developed in their modern form—the migrant labour system, pass laws, job colour bars, the racial division of labour, compounds etc. The above -stated forms of oppression were extended to both the agricultural and industrial sector. Conditions for the development of capitalist production were also created throughout the South African community. Thus it may be said that the forms of exploitation and relations which developed in the gold mining industry largely shaped the development of labour practises and social relations in other sectors for a long period (Davies et al. 1988:8).

### New Means of Representation

Anderson cites two forms of imaginings, the novel and the newspaper, which ... provided the novel and the technical means for 'representing' the kind of imagined community that is the nation .

Xhosa poetry which appeared in newspapers during the period 1880-1900, i.e. the first phase of the age of imperialism and the segregation phase of capitalist development (Davies et al. 1988:3) is inextricably bound to the nationalist movement of the time. Opland (in Smit et al. 1996:110) concurs with this view when he says:

Xhosa literacy history participates in a broader history of social and political developments such as the growth of mission education and the emergence of an educated Xhosa elite, the migration to urban centres, the failure of the

military option as a means of resistance to colonial encroachment and the adoption of alternative political strategies.

The poetry that will be analysed and interpreted in this article was published in newspapers. *Isigidimi samaXhosa* (*The Xhosa Express*) was published by Lovedale Press during the period October 1970 to December 1888. Another newspaper, *Imvo zabaNtsundu* (*Native Opinion*), which is still in circulation, saw the light in November 1884.

## Analysis and Interpretation of Texts

### The Emergent Philosophy

It is within the foregoing context that Citashe (I.W.W. Wauchope), one of the African intelligentsia that was produced by the missionary institutions, locates his poem: *Yilwani ngosiba* (Fight with this pen). De Kock (1996:63) captures the second half of the nineteenth century as follows:

Suffice it to say here, in conclusion, that for the African elite in the second half of the nineteenth century, the struggle for selfhood, which their forefathers had initially fought on the battlefields, was taken up at centres of learning such as Lovedale. It was a struggle to be conducted on borrowed terms, in a borrowed discourse.

Citashe, in the first stanza of his poem, avers that the cattle (not mentioned but understood because of the concord *ZI*—of *zimkile*) have been confiscated by the enemy. This was a practise during the wars of dispossession. The victor would forcefully or feloniously dispossess the vanquished, of their wealth. The use of the cattle-symbol in this poem is both literal and figurative. Citashe implores his country men to recover their lost national heritage, material and otherwise. But this time negotiations should be the approach—force should be abandoned. In the second stanza he states that the rights (*amalungelo*) are being lost.

This is reference to both material (i.e. land and the then recently discovered minerals, and political rights). The third stanza requests the countrymen to think in depth or broadly (*zigqale*) and confront reality or truth (*inyaniso*). They should base (*misa*) their argument (i.e. having a starting point or principle on sense, substance, reality or truth). Emotions should give way to reasoning. Citashe advocates the appropriation of the subjugator's weapon, 'literacy', to make it serve the interests of the oppressed. He says:

*Zimkile! Mfo wohlanga,*

Your cattle are plundered, compatriot!

*Phuthuma, phuthuma;  
Yishiy'imfakadolo,  
Phuthuma ngosiba;  
Thabath'iphepha neinki,  
Likhaka lakho elo.*

*Ayemk'amalungelo,  
Qubula usiba,  
Ngxasha, ngxasha, ngeinki,  
Hlala esitulweni;  
Ungangeni kwaHoho;  
Dubula ngosiba.*

*Thambeka umhlathi ke;  
Bambelel'ebunzi;  
Zigqale iinyaniso;  
Umise ngomxholo;  
Bek'izitho ungalwi;  
Umsindo liyilo.*

After them, After them!  
Lay down the musket,  
Take up the pen;  
Seize paper and ink;  
That's your shield.

Your rights are plundered!  
Grab a pen,  
Load, load it with ink,  
Sit in your chair;  
Don't head for Hoho;  
Fire with your pen.

Put pressure on the page  
Engage your mind;  
Focus on facts,  
And speak loud and clear;  
Don't rush into battle;  
Anger stutters.

While incorporating the views of scholars who have analysed the foregoing poem, namely Odendaal (1984:5) and Opland (1995:33), this article moves further, by arguing that the poem introduces a constitutional discourse which would permeate Xhosa poetry (oral and literal), and a broad range of other cultural manifestations. The poem proposes a redefinition of identity. It proposes that the African should move away and move out of the erstwhile protective refuge, the ethnic identity. Hoho (i.e. *Intaba kaHoho* or *iHlathi likaHoho*) is a forested mountain in the Eastern Cape. According to Kropf (1915:506) it is situated '... at the head of the Keiskama River in which the Gwiligwili (river) has its source'. It is said that Rarabe purchased this mountain from the original possessor Hoho, a Khoisan chief.

This venerated mountain became a symbol of Xhosa identity. It was used by warriors as a place of refuge and a fort during the wars with the British colonial armies. Recognising the futility of war, Citashe indicates that the 1880s bring to an end the noble role that was played by the *iNtaba kaHoho* in literal and figurative sense. Citashe proposes a broader identity that transcends ethnic and racial boundaries. To him, a nation is an entity that is broader and richer than the racial and the ethnic.

### An Historical Territory or Homeland

Smith (1991:14) postulates that one of the fundamental features of national identity is attachment to a historic territory or homeland. This explains why loss of land constit-

utes one of the dominant themes of the poetry of the late nineteenth century.

According to Vilakazi (1945:289), before the unification of the four provinces to form the union of South Africa, the main grievance of Africans was the loss of their land through conquest. He says :

... the great factor in successful fighting against the government lay in the unity of clans, not in thinking in terms of blood relationship under rival chiefs, but in creating a national 'united front'.

It is in this spirit that Ntsiko lauds praises at the Sotho, Xhosa and Zulu chiefs. He celebrates the victories of African warriors over the British in the South, and the Boers in the North. These victories were never recorded by the White South African historians.

The significance of this poem is its underlying assumption that the Sotho, (Mshweshwe), the Xhosa (Sandile and Rhili) and the Zulu (Mpande) are or should be one nation. The poet demarcates a territory which he claims is the homeland of Africans and not the White imperialists (*ingcuk' emhlophe*). This is the territory that was occupied by the above-stated ethnic groups. Ntsiko says:

Vukani bantwana bentab'eBosiko.  
Seyikhal' ingcuka, ingcuk' emhlophe  
Ibawel' amathambo  
"Mathambo kaMshweshwe  
Mshweshw' onobuthongo

Phezulu entabeni.Siyarhol' isisu  
Ngamathamb' enkosi  
Ubomv' umlomo kuxhaph' uSandile

Ishiywe ngamendu ngunyana  
kaHintsa. Sisu sikaRhili,  
Simhlophe kukrwelwa;  
Lent' ukubaleka kukufa, kusinda.  
... Inamb' esinqini,  
Eshunquk' umsila,  
Wasal' eSandlwana, Sandlwana,  
Yaginy' okaMpande ozitho zigoso;

Yamkhuph' esahleli  
Ifun' isishuba,,

Arise, ye children of Thaba Bosiu!  
The hyena has howled, the white hyena,  
Ravening for the bones,  
Mshweshwe's bones,  
Mshweshwe who sleeps on the mountain  
top.

Its belly drags heavy with  
the bones of kings,  
Red stained is its mouth with Sandile's  
blood.

By speed 'twas cheated of Hintsa's son.  
Sarilli, whose belly is pale  
with scratches;  
For running in truth, is death and escape  
The stumpy python, its  
broken tail abandoned on

It swallowed Mpande's bendy-legged son  
but spewed him still alive;  
And now it craves for

SikaMkatshane nesikaMshweshwe

Mkhatshane's drawers and Mshweshwe's  
drawers.

The poet refers to the imperialist as '*ingcuk'emhlophe*'. The hyena in African folklore is a usurper of other peoples resources. The python (*inamba*) symbolises the subjugator, which uses its military might to impose itself upon unwilling people. The poet juxtaposes the negative symbols with African tribes which bear common elements that bind them together.

### Common Myths and Historical Memories

Mqhayi's poem *SingamaBritani*, (We are Britons), highlights common and uniting events in the history of South Africa. Jordan (1973:112) says about Mqhayi:

But Mqhayi had a double loyalty. As a Xhosa he was loyal to the Xhosa Chiefs and their ancestors, and as a British subject he had to be loyal to the British king. A poem written during the Boer War in the *Izwi labaNtu* of March 13th, 1900, shows how very sincerely Mqhayi had accepted British guardianship. Each stanza has a refrain, 'SingamaBritani!' (We are Britons!). Nurtured in Christianity and in the policy of the 'Old Cape Liberals', he believed that the conquest of Southern Africa by the British was the working out of a Divine purpose.

Jordan's views might have influenced Kuse (1977:22) who says:

Jabavu was suspected of harbouring sympathies for the Afrikaner Bond at the outbreak of the Boer war. Mqhayi on the other hand, had resoundingly published his profession of loyalty to Britain in *Izwi labaNtu* (3/13/1900).

The foregoing argument is used by Meli (1988:47) to explain that Sol Plaatjie's feeling of loyalty to Britain was not confined to him only. He says:

Plaatjie and his contemporaries saw their approach as a tactic. They had strong views on the oppression of their people, but perhaps the problem was that of correctly identifying the enemy. In those days, Africans thought that the Boers were the only enemy (Meli 1988:48).

While this article, to some extent, supports the views of the above stated scholars, it, nevertheless, approaches the poem from a different perspective. This is possible when one is exposed to the entire text, and also when one locates the text within its context.



*la zinqoza sibona madoda,* We have for some time observed the  
 intermittent shooting, gentlemen,  
*la kufiwa sisiva ngendaba,* We have heard the news that many are  
 dying;  
*ut'inxaxheba ndema ngaku* I seized the opportunity and stood by the  
 Queen,  
*i, Ndimi noBikitsha nento* With Bikitsha and the people of  
 Mshweshwe  
*Ashweshwe. Ndimi nabaTembu impi* I stood with the Tembu people of Aliva.  
 Aliva  
*'Zwi Labantu' likwa seluhlweni.* Together with 'Izwi Labantu' amongst us.  
*o'umlisela mawuy'emfazweni,* We sent our young men to the war,  
*lu malife, singamaBritani.* The Boer must die, we are Britons.  
*to kaBhula kwihlelo lenene,* The son of Bhula mans the right handside  
 battlefront,  
*g'eNatala, ibulal' iBhulu* He extirpated the Boer in Natal, killing  
 them.  
*al'umFrentshi kunye neJamani.* Killing the French and Germans.  
*amani ndini sesini robile,* Germans we have come to understand  
 you  
*l'aninalo niluze ngenzimba;* You do not have peace, you are indifferent  
*ihla nitinina siseMnambiti nje?* What do you say today because we are in  
 Ladysmith?  
*wa ke maFrentshi benisiyapi na?* Tell me French people where were you  
 going?  
*ani ke kambe singamaBritani.* Nonetheless carry on fighting, we are  
 Britons.  
*ana kaBhula nguNtsendo-zimdaka,* The son of Bhula is Ntsendo-zimdaka  
*ok'enenqay'eyabonwa linyange.* He is a bald snake that was seen by the  
 ancestor.  
*Gax'eKeptawun'akwel'eplangeni.* One who arrives in Cape Town and boards  
 a ship.  
*kup'eTekwini abet'enjinini.* Disembarks in Durban and boards an  
 automobile (engine)  
*iGolozel'uTukela umlamb'* One who squats to watch the Tugela  
*naMfengu,* river of the Mfengu,  
*iBhodla ngongadluma kuviw'* He is one who eructates with his thick  
 object to be heard at  
*relazwe.* furthest parts of the globe.

*Yidani nive zizwe zaseYurophu,*  
*'Soze nasiqeda' singamaBritani.*

In the end you have to understand races of  
 Europe,  
 'You will never defeat us' we are Britons.

Mqhayi says that he (Xhosa) has decided to become an ally of Britain (Queen Victoria). He is joined by the Mfengu (Bikitsha), Sotho (Mshweshwe), Tembu (Aliva) and Zulu (Soze nasiqeda) clans. The Boers including their supporters who are of French and German descent are perceived as Europeans (foreigners).

The article would therefore postulate that Mqhayi's poem is living evidence of a consciousness that was emerging amongst intellectuals of the late nineteenth century, that there was a need for a redefinition of identities. Mqhayi is an individual who, while recognising the fact that he was a Xhosa (ethnic identity), saw the need for a broader national-identity that was inclusive.

The goals of the Black intellectuals of the period was freedom and equality of all South African races. But realities of the time forced them to temporarily seek protection from the British Colonial power, or to form a power block with the British who were less oppressive when compared with the Boers. The weakness of the interpretation of the foregoing academics lies in the fact that they seem to focus on the last line of each of Mqhayi's stanzas, at the expense of the entire poem.

Mqhayi, in the first stanza, demarcates the territory or homeland of the members of his community which have common values, ideology and aspirations. The territory covers the area that was occupied by the Mfengu, Sotho, Tembu, Xhosa and British colonials. This power bloc is contesting with the Afrikaners (then called Boers) bloc which is composed of all Dutch, German and French descendants (stanza 2). The question is why Africans chose to be allies of the British.

Davies et al (1988:6-7) explains why Blacks were optimistic about their relationship with Britain:

In the British colony of the Cape, men of property (regardless of colour) had been given a form of local self-government. Nevertheless, social relations in the Cape were also marked by a strong racism and racial patterns of power and privilege. However, under British rule, class position—the ownership or non-ownership of the means of production—rather than direct racial discrimination determined the patterns of economic and political power. A liberal ideology developed which stressed class rather than race in determining social and political relations. It also regarded British imperialism as the great progressive force in the world, and the necessary bulwark against the more brutal exploitation of the colonised by 'primitive' Boers.

In view of this exposition, Blacks, during the period under review, found themselves standing between Scylla and Charybdis (two dangers such that to avoid one increases the risk from the other, names of sea monster and whirlpool in Greek myth). I would therefore gainsay the view that Mqhayi '... believed that the conquest

of Southern Africa by the British was the working out of a Divine purpose' (Jordan 1973:112).

### Common Mass Public Culture

According to Smith (1991:11)

... nations must have a measure of common culture and a civic ideology, a set of common understandings and aspirations, sentiments and ideas, that bind a population together in their homeland. The task for ensuring a common public, mass culture has been handed over to the agencies of popular socialisation, notably the public system of education.

The education clause (29) delayed agreement on the Draft Constitution Bill. This demonstrates clearly the importance of education in the life of a nation. The debate about education rights was first placed on record by Gqoba in his long poem '*Ingxoxo, enkulu ngemfundo*'. The poem registers a protest against discrimination by White Colonialists against Blacks, in the spheres of politics, education, economy, and also socially.

The poets acknowledge the positive aspects of European culture. One of the characters in Gqoba's debate, Qondilizwe, who argues in favour of White colonialists, says :

*Aba bantu bapesheya,  
Bonke, bonke seabephela,  
Bafanelwe kubulelwa  
Siti bantu abamnyama,  
Okunene babefike  
Site tyiki bubudenge;  
Basizama ngale mfundo,*

These people from overseas  
All, just all of them,  
Should be thanked,  
By us Black people,  
The people from overseas  
They found us swimming in stupidity;  
They tried to civilize us with education  
(Rubusana p. 90)

*Mandiqale ngalendawo  
Yelikete lale Mfundo  
Anitsho na kule ngxoxo  
Ukuti, kwangale mfundo,  
Yona, yona iyanikwa;  
Ninonyana, bayatitsha  
Bayabala, bayaqwela,  
Abagqitwa, ngamagwangqa  
Sekusel'ibala lodwa?*

Let me start with this question  
Of discrimination in Education  
Don't you say in this discussion  
That with the very education  
Yes it is offered;  
You have sons who are teachers  
They can count, they excel  
They compare well with White children  
Only the colour makes a difference

*Xa kunjalo yiyipi—na?  
Enekete, nenzani—na?*

If it is like that where is discrimination?  
What are you actually criticising?  
(Rubusana p.99)

Funizulu protests against discrimination in the field of education. He is not satisfied with the quality of education that is offered to Blacks. According to him the curriculum should include classical languages as well. Remuneration for teachers who have equal qualifications and experience should be the same, irrespective of their colour. He says:

*Into apa ezimana  
Zisibiza zimalana,  
Zemihlaba, zozindlela,  
Zomahlali, nokufunda;  
Iyimfundo yantoni na,  
Ngoba mona ukwangaka?  
Sekukade sibabona  
Benekhwele benomona*

Things that always  
Ask for money from us,  
In respect of property and roads,  
Forestry and education;  
What for is this education  
Where there is so much jealousy?  
We have been watching them  
They are envious they are jealous ....

*It'inteto yamagwangqa,  
Yoluhlanga lwapesheya  
Koluhlanga lumunyama,  
Si-Latini, si-Hebere,  
Ezo nteto nesiGrike  
Kwaba ntsundw'azifanele,  
Babebangwa ke lel' kete*

Whites say,  
The race from overseas  
To the Black race,  
Latin, Hebrew and  
Those languages and Greek  
Should not be taught to Blacks  
The cause is discrimination.

*Bengagqitwa ngabe Lungu,  
OTitshala abamnyama  
Yintapane yewangala,  
Bafundiswa ngamagwangqa;  
Ngabafunda iminyaka,  
Bazuziswa mapetshana,  
Bakugqatswa ngamagwangqa  
Kwakungati ngezomini  
Bese kwasezikolweni,  
Bakuvuzwa kanobomi,  
Bakungen' emsebenzini.  
Benikiwe umsebenzi  
Woku tiisha, nokutini,*

Not surpassed by White  
Black teachers  
They are many of them  
Are taught by Whites  
Those who have studied for many years  
They are provided with certificates,  
After examinations by Whites  
Those days we thought  
When they were still at school  
They will earn good remuneration  
When they are employed  
But when they get the jobs  
Of teaching and so on.

*Suke kata elikete,  
Ngalo apa sibambeneyo,  
Kodw'abantu befundile,  
Beggibile beqwebile,  
Suk'umvuz'ube yintshenu.*

Rauk'Emsini argues:

*Sithetha nje kukhw'iBhondo  
Ebuqili buyindogo:  
Ifungele, ibhinqele  
Ukuthi ePalamente,  
Ezi mali zifundisa  
Olu hlanga, lumunyama,  
Mazihluthwe, maziphele.  
Ngamani na law'anjalo?  
Eyona nto soba nayo,  
Imihlaba selinabo,  
Oozigusha, noozinkomo,  
Zonk'izintw'ebesinazo,*

*Sibulele ndawoni na?  
Nale voti ikwanjalo,  
Kukhw'ikhethe kwanakuyo,  
Asivunywa kany'impela  
Thina bantu abamnyama.*

Then jealousy surfaces,  
The issue that we are debating,  
People who are educated  
Who are qualified  
To receive a meagre salary.

There is currently a Bond  
Which is cunning and artful  
It has vowed  
To raise in Parliament  
That the finances that educate  
The Black race,  
Should be withdrawn and stopped.  
What kind of people are these?  
What shall we possess  
The land now belongs to them,  
Sheep, cattle  
All that we used to own, ....

For what should we be thankful?  
The vote is also like that,  
There is discrimination  
We are not allowed  
We Black people.

Jordan (1963:67) summarises the great debate on education as follows:

There is an interesting variety of participants and therefore a variety of opinions, left, centre and right, shading into each other. In this long discussion, no one says that the Blacks are getting a square deal from the Whites. The best defense that the extreme right can put up is that things are not so bad, and that if the ingrates will only exercise patience, the best is yet to be. The last speaker, Ungrateful, who admits that his eyes 'have been opened' to the 'good things' that the white man brought them, and brings he Great Discussion that covers 1800 lines to a close by telling the participants to 'go seek learning' and 'love the White people'.

Hence, the argument of this article, that the early writers seem to be battling to bring the South African races together. The school was therefore identified as one of the

instruments of cultivating a common culture and civic ideology, and common aspirations and ideas.

### Common Economy with Territorial Mobility

Smith (1991:10) points out that one of the fundamental features of national identity is a common economy with territorial mobility for members. He says:

Concurrent with the growth of a sense of legal and political community we may trace a sense of legal equality among the members of that community. Its full expression is the various kinds of citizenship that sociologists have enumerated including civil and legal rights, political rights and duties and socio-economic rights (Smith 1991:10).

The politico-economic scenario in South Africa in the late nineteenth century is vividly captured by Hofmeyer (1994:11) in her discussion of the history of Mokopane in the Transvaal. According to her what had previously been a kingdom was converted into a rural location in 1890. This transformation in the socio-economic order was implemented by the South African Republic Location Commission which travelled through the Transvaal either dispossessing chiefdoms entirely or penning them into absurdly small areas of land.

According to Hofmeyer the outcome of the land dispossession, amongst other things, was that migrancy, which up until the 1890's had been voluntary, became more of a necessity. These socio-political-economic changes affected the entire country in deeply profound ways. The growth of a sense of economic equality among the Africans in the late nineteenth century is discernible in Gqoba's long debate '*Ingxoxo ngemfundo*' (A debate about education).

One of the characters in the debate, Rauk'Emsini angrily argues:

*Ndincamile ndonakele  
Mz'wakowethu okunene  
Ngamadoda athethile  
Abebonga amagwangqa.  
Kanti noko lon'ikhethe*

*Noko sebelikhanyele  
Likho lona okunene  
Kwiinto zonke ngokumhlophe  
Fan'selana sekuphi na  
Umnt'omnyama esebenza*

I have given up, I am devastated  
Truly my countrymen  
Men have spoken  
Praising the Whites.  
Contrary to what they said, discrimination  
prevails  
Though they deny it  
It is true that it prevails  
In all affairs it is noticeable.  
Everywhere  
A black man can work,



*Ekholisa, selegwela  
Won'umvuzo uyintshenu*

*Okunene kuth'we khunu  
Oligwqangqa uyinkosi  
Nakuw'phi na umsebenzi,  
Fan'selana esidenge  
AbaNtsundu bemqwelile.  
Nangengqondo bemdlulile,  
Kuphelile wozuziswa  
Umvuzo owangala  
Kwanegunya lokuphatha  
AbaNtsundu, abamnyama*

*Kwanelizwe xa lifile  
Bomiselwa izidenge,  
'Zingazange ziyibone  
Lento kui'wa iyimfazwe  
Bapatisw'okwabatwana  
Ngezabokwe betyatyushwa,  
Bat'we cintsi ngeqoshana  
Bengo Vula ozindlela,  
Amagwangqa etyetyiswa.*

*Kwi-ofisi kukwanjalo  
Abantsundu tu, nto,nto,nto*

Rank'Emsini protests against racial discrimination. He claims that Black people, in all spheres of life, are ill-treated undermined and exploited by the White authorities.

### Common Legal Rights

According to Smith (1991):

... what we mean by 'national' identity involves some sense of political community, however tenuous. A political community in turn implies at least some common institutions and a single code of rights and duties for all the members of the community.

What emerges from the poetry of late nineteenth century is that Africans were excluded from the political institutions, and that they did not enjoy even the

And satisfy all, and excel  
When it comes to the salary it is meagre

It is true that he is underpaid  
The white man is the chief/head  
In all types of jobs  
Even if he is stupid  
And is outdone by Blacks.  
And surpassed in terms of intelligence,  
In the end he will receive  
A huge salary  
And power to rule/manage  
The Brown, the Black

Even when war erupts  
They will be led by stupid people  
Who have never seen  
The thing that is called war  
They will be treated like children  
And be flogged with whips  
And be given small remuneration  
Though they construct roads  
To enrich the Whites.

In the office it is like that  
Blacks, nothing, nothing  
(Rubusana 1911:103-104).

basic human rights. In 'Esomnt'ofelweyo' Citashe (1888) mourns the loss of voting rights by Blacks in the Cape Province.

*Ndikohlwe nalapho ndizimela khona,  
Kufe nentliziyo, ndiphele amandla  
Ndiswel' imilomo ayab' iliwaka,  
Ixel' elihlazo likhulu kangaka,*

*Kuwe ke ufuna ukuv' isizathu  
Ndililel' icebo loKhaka-ka-mpethu,*

*Elone ivoti yabantw' abaNtsundu.,*

*Babulal' uhlanga; bakwenzile ukwenza.*

I do not know where to hide myself,  
My heart is dead, I have lost all the energy,  
I wish I had one hundred mouths,  
To tell about this disgraceful act.

To you who would like to know the cause;  
I mourn the success of the plan of the  
treacherers  
Which revoked the voting rights of the  
African people.  
They are killing the nation; what they have  
done is extremely detestable.

Vilakazi (1945:289) observed :

About 1900 the Glen Grey Bill, the Transvaal Law 24 of 1895, the Orange Free State Squatters Law and the National Poll Tax, all impressed on the minds of the Africans that *they had lost all their freedom of the past*, and that the *land* no more belonged to them as they had always thought it did .

Writing in *Imvo zabaNtsundu* of 06 June 1895 Govo expressed his anger at the Introduction of the Glen Grey Act :

*Unani lo mthetho sinyanzelwa ngawo?*

*Unafa lini na singalizuzayo?  
Onk'amalungelo singawavinjwayo  
Matatu kuphela esiwaphiweyo  
Kungen'intolongo kuthotyw'imivuzo,  
Kwanobuncekevu, kwinto zolu lawulo*

*Uyintoni lo mthetho, khanitsho  
mawethu?*

*Uyinunu nunu, kulo mzi entsundu?  
Siti simangala ube unyanzelwa?*

*Vukani bantsundu ze nitunge inqu,*

What shall we benefit from this law that is  
imposed upon us?  
What shall we inherit from it?  
We are deprived of all rights?  
We are provided with only three  
The prison, and low remuneration, and  
Marginalisation in all matters pertaining to  
governance.

What is the nature of this piece of  
legislation? Tell us countrymen.  
It is designed to injure/hurt Blacks?  
We protest but the law is imposed upon us.

Wake up Black people stop making jokes

*Kunomcimbi namhla ugqith'inkanunu  
Yon'ine nqubela kwanesihlabane  
Lo mteto lo mteto awunamfesane.*

The matter is more harmful than a canon  
which destroys and shoots dead  
This law this law is merciless.

*Mayibe kanti ikhaya liphi na?  
Kuphela na gxebe oku kukhuselwa  
Zezi zirafu na nale miteto na?  
Ukuba kunjalo, koggita nokufa.*

Where is our home?  
Is this what is meant by this protection?  
Is it these taxes and laws?  
If it is so, it is more than death.

*Vukani bantsundu nime ngazw'inyawo  
Gxothani umshologu usiwe kowawo  
Tina abantsundu asibakowawo.  
Vukani kwangoku ningade nibhilwe.*

Wake up Black People, stand on your feet  
Send the evil spirit back to its home  
We Blacks reject it.  
Wake up now before the bill is piloted.

The upper house poet appeals to his people to close ranks and resist the imposition of the Glen Grey Laws. The law is not acceptable to Blacks who view it as draconian and oppressive. Meli (1988:3) describes this law as follows:

The Glen Grey Act was another instrument in this process of enslavement. It is introduced as tax which, in the words of the mine owner, Cape politician and arch-imperialist, Cecil Rhodes:

... removed Natives from the life of sloth and laziness, and made them contribute to the prosperity of the state and made them give some return for our wise and good government.

The poets seem to reject the pretexts that were put forward by the colonialists. They clamour for a single code of socio-politico-economic rights for all members of the community irrespective of race, colour or creed.

## Conclusion

This article argues that the new constitution is a climax of a discourse, the constitutional discourse, which has permeated the works of Xhosa poets since the introduction of racial capitalism in South Africa, i.e. since the beginning of the process of proletarianisation of the Black people of South Africa. The article argues that the nascent capitalism which saw Black South African's as cheap labour for more profits, destroyed the national identity project.

The socio-politico-economic changes that were brought about by the discovery of gold and diamond during the last quarter of the nineteenth century furthermore, sent clear signals to the black intellectuals of the time that the 'settler's'

stay in the country was permanent, and also that ethnic oriented conflicts had to come to an end. They realised that the approach of fighting the coloniser was futile, and should therefore be substituted with an approach of co-existence and co-operation.

The poems that are analysed and interpreted contain a clear message to all and sundry, that, South Africa, which was clearly demarcated as the area that was occupied by the Sotho, Zulu, Xhosa, 'Afrikaners', British and other smaller ethnic groups, was perceived as belonging to all who live in it. Xhosa poetry reflects that this consciousness, which was elaborated by the freedom Charter of 1955 and the South African Constitution of 1996, was conceived as early as the 1880's.

The idea that South Africa should move towards a common culture, and that of promotion of shared sentiments and aspirations, can also be observed during this period. The desire for equality in the field of education, and the desire by Black parents for their children to be exposed to languages of power of the time, viz. Greek, Hebrew, Latin and so on also shows how Xhosa poets wished to participate not only in national but also in international cultural affairs.

To be South African, according to Xhosa poets of the late eighteenth century meant common legal rights.

To be South African, meant full participation in the economy of the country.

Simultaneous with the programme of creating a national identity, during the period under review, there was a move towards Black identity. This was seen as a necessary step that would enable Blacks to resist both British and Afrikaner racism. The threat by Afrikaner (Boer) nationalism which was ethnic and strongly anti-Black seems to have caused anxiety amongst Blacks, who in turn formed their own Bond.

*Ndev'incwina nemigulo yeBond'eNtsundu  
Lath' ixhwele nesanuse kwakwenyel' imisila.*

I heard groans and sickness of the Black Bond  
And the indigenous doctor and specialist were  
overwhelmed by fear (Mqhayi in Rubusana 1911:499).

Due to the military strength of the Boers, some Xhosa poets seem to be persuading their people to consent to protection by the Colonial power, Britain. In his poem: 'National Anthem' Gqoba says :

*Gcina Thixo wethu  
Thina maAfrika  
Thixo wethu  
Sipe ukuzola  
Ukukonz'okuhle*

God protect us  
We Africans  
Our God  
Give us calm  
To serve diligently

Gcina Thixo wethu  
Ukumkanikazi  
Thixo wethu.

Protect, our God  
the Queen  
Our God (Imvo Jan. 23, 1899).

But Britain, according to other poets, proved to be oppressors instead of protectors. The assumption of this article, therefore, based on issues that are raised by the poets, is that interest in capital which triggered the process of proletarianisation of African people by the colonial power, superseded their interest in human rights and the welfare of Africans, resulting in failure of the national identity project, as its success also depended on its support and acceptance by the colonialists. As Meli (1988:3) points out:

The process of proletarianization of Africans was also conditioned by essentially coercive or extra-economic factors; the continued existence of the pre-capitalist sector, and the institutionalization of migrant labour, low wages and many other disabilities. The Africans' position was determined by the profit motive of the mining capitalists and also by the greed of white miners.

What is significant is the central role that the erstwhile marginalised Xhosa poetry can play in the new South Africa at this crucial period of creation/formation of a new nation with a new national identity. In line with the poets of the late eighteenth century the modern poet can play a significant role in bringing respect and recognition towards customs, traditions and values of the diverse cultural and language groups of South Africa and simultaneously enhance the consciousness about the need for national unity, which supersedes ethnic and racial interests. To the politician, the elected representative of the people, the message from the poetry of the late 19th century is that the stern eye of the poet who has exposed the 'injustices of the past' and struggled to close the racial '... divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights', will never be silent when the people's socio-political-economic rights are violated. To the South African the voice of the poet says 'Ungangeni kwaHoho' (Do not seek refuge in Hoho). Move beyond the narrow ethnic and racial identities and embrace the broader and accommodative national identity.

Directorate of Arts and Culture  
Province of the Eastern Cape

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## Visionary Commitment in Mazisi Kunene's *Ancestors and the Sacred Mountain*

Sandile C. Ndaba

I  
Mazisi Kunene is a visionary poet. His visionary commitment entails the utilisation of resources from the Zulu cultural matrix and Zulu oral tradition as a basis for his work. His poetry draws its deepest meanings from Zulu cultural references and allusions while at the same time concerning itself with contemporary issues. This article sets out to examine Kunene's visionary commitment as manifested in his book: *Ancestors and the Sacred Mountain*. It situates Kunene's visionary outlook within the arguments raised by Soyinka in his article: *Cross Currents: The New African after Cultural Encounters* and examines to what extent these arguments are relevant to Kunene's work.

Kunene has written many short poems. His first published volume was *Zulu Poems* (1970). This volume was banned in South Africa for many years. He has published two epic poems: *Emperor Shaka the Great* (1979) and *Anthem of the Decades* (1981). He has also published *Ancestors and the Sacred Mountain* (1982), which is the subject of this article.

Kunene draws on Zulu culture and oral tradition which inform his writing. The main influences are the praise poem, the dirge and the war song. He uses images and symbols from Zulu myth and culture to convey his message. This assertion is corroborated by various critics. Sesay (1988:61), for instance, observes that Kunene,

... writes poetry that is embedded in Zulu tradition and derives many of its forms and references from Zulu oral tradition.

Goodwin (1982:173) makes a similar observation about Kunene's poetry.

The world of discourse of his poems is a Zulu one, with the philosophy, imagery and the rhetoric relying on the oral tradition of Zulu poetry.

Ogundele (1992:34) echoes the assertions made by both Sesay and Goodwin above:

### *Visionary Commitment in ... Ancestors and the Sacred Mountain*

Mazisi Kunene draws upon African oral traditions in general and Zulu oral tradition in particular and its thought and imaginative systems.

Dathorne (1975:216) argues that Zulu philosophy and cosmology feature prominently in Kunene's work in general and in *Ancestors and the Sacred Mountain* in particular.

Here he is concerned with depicting Zulu concepts of the significance of life and the universe. Through the personification of ideas, Kunene the traditional poet attempts to dramatise the Zulu concept of the force at work in the universe.

The various critics quoted above corroborate the central assumption of this article, that although the poetry in this volume is written poetry, the overarching modes of thought and imagination that shaped it are oral.

## II

Some of the arguments I am advancing about Kunene's poetry are raised by Wole Soyinka in an article entitled 'Cross Currents: The New African after Cultural Encounters'. In this article, Soyinka stresses the importance of oral tradition as a viable resource for the contemporary African artist to draw from. He also stresses the need for the contemporary writer to,

imaginatively transform those elements that render a society unique in its own being, with potential for its progressive social transformation (Soyinka 1982:52).

Originally written in Zulu and later translated into English by Ndaba, the translator felt unable to capture the full resonance of the oral poetic techniques—in alliteration and assonance in particular—apart from the challenge to find conceptual equivalencies in English. This is a particular problem when one attempts to translate poetry. Schopenhauer (in Schulte & Biguenet 1992:4,33) for example said:

Poems cannot be translated, they can only be rewritten, which is always an ambiguous undertaking .... [and] Poems cannot be translated; they can only be transposed, and that is always awkward.

Visionary commitment in Kunene's poetry in *Ancestors and the Sacred Mountain* centres around the utilisation of Zulu culture and oral tradition for self-retrieval. His concerns draw their deepest meanings from Zulu oral tradition and culture. In the introduction to this volume, Kunene (1982:xvi) posits that art,

... must draw its deepest meanings from the high ethical ideals that have guided past generations (the ancestors). Yet it should take into account the goals and directions of present society.

In his poetry, Kunene uses Zulu oral tradition to address present-day problems and to point the way towards transformation of contemporary society. An instance of this can be found in the poem, 'Encounter with the Ancestors'.

Before considering the concerns of this poem, it is essential to understand the significance and symbolism of ancestors in Zulu tradition. Ancestors represent the past. Since, by virtue of their actions the ancestors have approximated the social ideals, they are regarded in Zulu tradition as individuals who are deserving of a higher order of being. This is seen in their association with the mountain, symbolising their heightened social status. Their actions and contributions, in a collective sense, constitute human initiative and social progress. They have established standards of moral excellence which succeeding generations should emulate.

In 'Encounter with the Ancestors', Kunene suggests that the ancestors are embodiments of traditional culture and are a potential source of direction for contemporary society. As leader of thought in society, the poet should utilise the resources of traditional culture as embodied in the ancestors, for social transformation.

We must follow the direction of their little finger  
Where begins the story, the beginning of seeing ...  
(Kunene 1982:37).

These lines suggest that the ancestors are the origin of community, its very foundation—'where begins the story'. Ancestors are, therefore, a source of direction and self-retrieval. The self which is to be retrieved is that self which forms part of this multi-form cultural story of which one is part. Through the ancestors, the community becomes aware of its roots, its direction and its goals—'the beginning of seeing'.

The motivation for this coming-to-see and of retrieving the self, in the process of how the poet utilises the resources of traditional African culture, is for social transformation and social reform. This is explicitly suggested in the following lines:

Our guide through the desert must sing then  
making our minds break the web of light  
To create a new path of wisdom ...  
(Kunene 1982:37).

As leader of thought in society or 'our guide through the desert', the poet must be the catalyst for social enlightenment and cultural consciousness. The poet

must 'break the web of light' through his/ her creative imagination and facilitate social transformation. In this way, the poet fulfils his/ her purpose: 'to create a new path of wisdom'. This poem's concerns include the creation or formulation of a new cultural personality who is to be the product of this visionary outlook which combines the ancestral with the path to be found in the midst of contemporary challenges. This is a personality who is integrated and rooted in his/ her culture—an unalienated personality, a culture-secured personality.

The child who is born from this vision  
shall be the envy of her age  
she must plant the first season of a million years  
(Kunene 1982:37).

This extract emphasises the significance of oral tradition in bringing about social progress for contemporary and future generations. The creation of the 'new African' will lead to the emergence of other such personalities. This poem, therefore, puts forward a case for African culture as a potential catalyst for social transformation.

'Encounter with the Ancestors' is a metaphor for cultural self-retrieval and the birth of a new, enlightened personality. This metaphor is used by Kunene to carry across his message of the integration of the 'new African' personality into his/ her own culture. Soyinka (1982:57) voices a similar concern.

... not only to create a 'new African' but to root him (sic) in his (sic) own culture.

### III

Kunene's vision reveals a unique rootedness in traditional Zulu mythology. He utilises resources from the Zulu cultural matrix for his imaginative creativity. While drawing on the myths as sources for his imagination, Kunene simultaneously renews the myths of the Zulu oral tradition in the service of cultural regeneration and cultural awareness. This is evident in the poem, 'A Vision of Nomkhulwane'. In this poem we see the visionary utilisation of the oral traditional mythic symbolism of Nomkhulwane as a potential force for the rechannelling of the society's psychic energies towards cultural regeneration and social transformation. Kunene (1981:xxvi) explains the symbolic significance of Nomkhulwane. Nomkhulwane is the daughter of God and a manifestation of God's creative purpose. She is also regarded as the goddess of balance between the spiritual and the physical. She manifests herself in a variety of ways, one of which is through the rainbow. The rainbow symbolises the restoration of order after destructive tropical storms.



'A Vision of Nomkhubulwane' is an evocation of the traditional celebratory performance of the festival of Nomkhubulwane. The celebration of this festival leads to people's cultural awareness and this brings the dream of cultural regeneration to fruition.

Voices rise in the horizon, people are shouting  
They bring the beautiful dream to our earth  
(Kunene 1982:18).

Another example of the evocation of the oral traditional mythic symbolism of the goddess Nomkhubulwane in a visionary setting is in the poem, 'A Meeting with Vilakazi, the great Zulu Poet'. In this poem, Vilakazi is portrayed in a dramatic manner, reviving traditional culture, thus leading society towards cultural awareness. Nomkhubulwane is used in this poem in a symbolic redirection of society towards cultural renewal and self-retrieval. Vilakazi, the poet, is portrayed in the poem as a catalyst bringing about this process of cultural consciousness and cultural regeneration. This leads to ecstatic memories of traditional life before the encounter with other cultures. There are intimations of self-discovery and expressions of joy and pride in African culture. As a result of his visionary meeting with Vilakazi, Kunene seems to have been transformed, in a metaphorical sense, into a new personality rooted into a culturally secure society. The symbolic redemption envisioned in this poem, to borrow Soyinka's (1982:59) words, seems

to spring from a cultural matrix of forces which alone can confront the machinery of oppression.

The concerns of this poem, discussed above, are suggested in the following lines:

I heard the drum beat behind your footsteps  
And the children of the south began to sing  
They walked on the ancient path of the goddess Nomkhubulwane  
And the old dance arena was filled with festival crowds  
Your great songs echoed to the accompaniment of the festival horn  
(Kunene 1982:56)

Here, Vilakazi is portrayed as reviving the ancient mythic symbol, Nomkhubulwane. This is suggested in his metaphorical and ritualistic walk 'on the ancient path of the goddess Nomkhubulwane'.

Another example where Kunene uses oral traditional symbols to convey his message is in the poem, 'Phakeni's Farewell'. This poem, written in epic style, is a

tribute to 'one of South Africa's greatest political leaders', Robert Resha. Kunene employs the ritualistic celebratory mode to recreate the heroic deeds of Phakeni (Robert Resha) in a communal ceremony. In the following extract, the crowd is portrayed in a ritualistic posture of reverence.

The round calabash overflows with beer  
Crowds assemble before their circular place  
...  
She kneels and tells others to follow her gesture  
She takes out a barbed spear and points it to the sun  
Others who know her meanings raise their hands.  
...  
Suddenly, she puts a round grain basket before them  
With lips opened in awe and wonderment, they see:  
It's a pumpkin from the garden of Phakeni.  
(Kunene 1982:8f).

The pointing of a barbed spear to the sun is a gesture symbolising Phakeni's strength, courage and creative energy—the sun being a symbol of life and creativity). The 'pumpkin from the garden of Phakeni' symbolises the significant deeds of Phakeni which sustain and nourish the society. Phakeni has demonstrated his intense concern for humanity through his actions. He is also acting as the custodian of the myth.

These are they who sheltered the sacred truths  
Whose kindness made truth round and desirable  
Who laughed for all things in the universe  
(Kunene 1982:9).

Through his actions, Phakeni inspired people to undertake similar actions without fear:

The children of the earth were paralysed with fear  
Yet not Phakeni  
He strode to and fro  
He spoke as if to fire the crowds with courage  
...  
They made the fierce posture of battle  
(Kunene 1982:9)

Phakeni's deeds brought about hope of a new life:

Your young season was to come with green leaves  
(Kunene 1982:10).

People are filled with expectations of a new order. The 'rainbow' is a promise of new order after destructive forces. It is at the same time a creative force in the sense that it heralds another cycle of creation after destruction. The allusion to the African creation myth in the last line of the extract below accentuates the expectations of the rebirth of the human race.

We were to clear the pathway for the new season  
We were to wait for the sign of the rainbow  
You were the promise, you were to lead the festival  
You were to come with ceremonial spears  
To celebrate at the top of the hill,  
To celebrate the birth of the sacred twins  
(Kunene 1982:10).

The 'sacred twins' is an allusion to the twins who originated from the reed and started the human family according to a variation in the Zulu creation myth. Phakeni is, therefore, seen as a catalyst in the rebirth of the human race. The poem ends in a positive, apocalyptic tone giving hope of an end to fragmentation and the beginning of reunion, reintegration and self-retrieval in and of society.

The rediscovery of our clansman  
The long embrace, the tears of joy across the desert  
(Kunene 1982:11).

This poem, therefore, celebrates and promotes a heroic ideology amidst suffering. In Mazisi Kunene we hear the voice of the poet as a sage and a seer creating a vision of a future renewal of society out of the historically significant and heroic deeds of Phakeni (Robert Resha). He focuses, in epic style, on a hero of stature who is held up during the course of his heroic deeds as an inspiring example to the present generation.

#### IV

Kunene sees the role of literature as protesting against the infringement of the social ethos and advocating a preservation and perpetuation of specific social values from oral tradition which he believes, have a potential to transform society. This notion is reiterated by Barnett (1982:105):

Since he sees the role of literature as 'not merely to entertain but to teach social values and serious philosophical concepts', there is no question in Kunene's mind about the right of the poet to make his protest ... or write African resistance poems. Like the oral poet in pre-colonial times, Kunene sees it as his duty to uphold an unchanging set of values and attack those who would destroy it.

Kunene, therefore, taps Zulu oral tradition as a vehicle for expressing contemporary ideas and struggles. He uses elements from the Zulu oral tradition as resource for his visionary outlook. He has borrowed symbols and imagery from Zulu myth and culture to convey his message. It is absolutely necessary for the critic to understand Zulu oral tradition in order to understand how Kunene uses it to carry his message across. More importantly, however, is that Kunene shows that no rebirth can take place without a rootedness in tradition, myth and culture.

Department of English  
Vista University Distance Education Campus

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## Stories and Rhymes in Xhosa: A Selective Overview

Zola Sonkosi

### Introduction

There is virtually no person in the world who has not grown up with the folk or oral literature of his and her own culture. Much of this literature derives from oral tradition and even in our modern world, it is through oral tradition that children first take their steps on the road of continuously learning to live together with others. As such, folk literature fulfils an important function. It provides a cultural, a moral, a social as well as an intellectual base for people. More often than not, when people are confronted with important or difficult decisions or situations in their lives, it is the fact that they draw on a rich resource of their common folk wisdom that saves the day.

In addition to these roles that folk literature plays, it also shares many common themes, attitudes and attributes with the folk literature of other cultures. On this basis, much fruitful comparisons can be made of the folk literature of different cultures. Such comparisons may reveal elements which many cultures hold in common. In brief, these may include elements related to obedience; the sensitivity to the differences between good and evil or right and wrong; adherence to generally accepted norms of society and community; respect for the dignity of others; respect for nature; the instilling of a work ethos and so forth. Where such themes are broached in folk literature as well as encountered in adult life, it is the sensibilities which have been instilled in a child when at his or her most impressionable age which help the person to live both a satisfying and prosperous life. This is so in virtually all cultures.

Given the traditional, conservative and often patriarchal nature of folk literature, however, the child or pupil should also learn to problematise elements from folk literature beyond the mere acceptance of authoritative wisdom. Such problematisation has at least four functions. *Firstly*, it will allow the urban pupil, even when he or she has not been exposed to folk and cultural tradition to the extent that a rural child is, to link up with cultural traditions which are worthy of knowing. Given that many people have become 'rootless' in terms of their traditions and

histories, and are only confronted with issues of everyday survival, such a linking up may prove vital for many youths.

*Secondly*, the many-sided issues which folk traditions treat can be problematised in real life situations beyond mere moralising tendencies. This is true of all literature. Within literature, we find many of the life-situations and debates which also take place in daily life. More often than not, literature also problematises issues in daily life which people are unable or unwilling to articulate. The more one becomes aware of the variety of ways in which one may deal with these life-situations, i.e. through literature, the more one becomes empowered to deal with them in real life.

*Thirdly*, such problematisation in education context, may bring the child to dialogue and debate with peers on issues which are central to human life and society, laying a basis for how the pupil will do so later in life too. Moreover, it may also lay the basis for how grown ups will interact with literature when mature. Through literature, one may continuously become more informed and participate in public debates in an ever more knowledgeable way.

*Finally*, the problematisation of folk- and culturally informed tradition may open possibilities for the pupil's own imagination and creative interaction with regards to the development of literature analogous to or critically analogous to that of traditional literature.

It is against this background that this article provides a cursory overview of a selection of folk- and culturally informed literature in Xhosa. I have at least four aims with this exercise.

*Firstly*, some of the material here, is, or has been prescribed at schools. In the school context, these summaries may be used to fulfil the four functions I have ascribed to folk- and culturally based literature above. (At the end of the summaries, I come back to this point, and provide a few suggestions.)

*Secondly*, since this literature is only available in Xhosa, the brief summaries in English may give some indication as to some of the themes and elements which the literature deals with, to a wider audience. Since similar themes and life issues are dealt with in the folk and culture literature in other languages, this may be used for comparative research.

*Thirdly*, in literature, we have a resource which may be appreciated by both young and old. Whether for leisure or for informed reading and learning, literature expands our horizons. This is especially true cross-culturally. Through cross-cultural reading, the reader becomes acquainted with cultural understandings which differ from those of one's own. The more one can appreciate the cultural understandings of people from other cultures, the more one becomes familiar with the tapestry of culture around one's own. This is important, because then one becomes aware that one's own culture does not stand alone. It forms part of this tapestry.

fourthly, if one is able to read the literatures of other cultures in that own language, then one becomes even more enriched by its literature. This is. However, since everyone cannot become fluent in the languages of all the one meets up with during one's life, you often only have access to that literature through translations or summaries. This overview provides the is hoped that people who are not conversant with Xhosa literature, may from this sample, and maybe, inspire some to attempt reading this literature in

### ***mlomo Oh! (This Mouth) by G.J. Mdledle***

is situated in the rural area near King Williams Town in South Africa. In a of three, i.e. husband Zizwe, wife Lidiya and their only child, Nomveliso, been a quarrel between the husband and his wife the whole night long. The complaint of Lidiya concerns the treatment she gets from Zizwe. As the story is, it appears that Zizwe has been unjustifiably and falsely accused by his wife. Zizwe was deeply touched by what Lidiya has said. He decides to leave the household. He does not know where he could go to. He proceeds in the direction of Komga (Qumra). In the afternoon, he comes to a household of a certain person on the Kei Road. As he was thirsty, he asks for water. However, he was not given water and food, but was also asked to spend the night there, as it was late. This made Zizwe to realise that a black man has the precious gift of singing and entertaining visitors.

In the meantime, when Lidiya noticed that it was late and Zizwe had not yet returned, she became afraid, and thought that he must have been assaulted on his way. This could have been the case, especially if he was drunk. She decided to leave the household too, and went in the direction of East London. Here, she got a new employment, her duty being to look after the child of a white family. She lived as if she had never been married, wearing short dresses, contrary to the tradition. Married Xhosa women wear long dresses. After having looked for some time, Zizwe became employed at Komga as a clerk on a dairy farm. He was offered an increase in salary if he could bring his wife to stay with him. So, he went back home to fetch Lidiya, only to learn that she had disappeared too.

At home, Zizwe's mother (Lidiya's mother in law) was being criticised by the people of the location. They were also continuously chasing away her children. Lidiya had a miserable life. In East London, Lidiya, is not happy either. She decides to return to her maiden home, from where she was taken to her in-laws. An arrangement for a new union with Zizwe was made. Lidiya is now aware of the fact that Zizwe had left because of her talking too much. She decides not to hurt Zizwe's feelings again. Zizwe recognises that Lidiya had quarrelled with him because of her being

pregnant at that time. Women are short-tempered when they are pregnant (according to the author). She gave birth to a baby boy who is named Zinzo Xanti. Zizwe becomes prosperous with his work and he buys a motor car. Later, he asks for a transfer to King Williams Town which is closer to home. He and Lidiya educate their child. Zinzo Xanti, who becomes a medical practitioner. Thereafter, they had a happy life.

### **Comment**

The book itself is interesting to read. Although it was written about 15 years ago, there are educative sentiments which still apply to present-day life, e.g. see the gossip mongers - their aim is to destroy, not to build. General maxims are also mentioned, 'don't talk too much, silence is sometimes golden'; 'from a bad thing, a good thing can spring'. Concerning the basic plot-line, one could argue that Zizwe did the wrong thing when he left home. However, compare this with Mao Tse Tung's assertion, that 'failure is the mother of success'. In conclusion, due to the wealth of knowledge of traditional Xhosa life and culture in the book, it may benefit people who are interested in advancing cross-cultural understanding. Such understanding cut both ways. On the one hand, there are elements of European culture which the Xhosa should not have accepted; on the other, there are traditional elements in Xhosa culture which, similarly, are detrimental to the culture.

### ***Eze Via Africa by M.V. Mabusela***

(21 short stories-for children between 8 and 12 years of age.)

#### **1. 'Ugubevu Nemvulakazi' (Gubevu and the Heavy Rain)**

Gubevu, a young boy, never wanted to listen to the teachings of his father. As a result, his father chased him away. After stealing some money from his father, he went into the wilderness. In the wilderness, he managed to find a huge rock which served as his shelter. He stayed here for some time. However, one day a heavy rain came, which caused the rock to break. This happened while Gubevu was asleep. The rock fell on him, killing him instantly.

#### **2. 'Udakada Nowatoyina' (Dakada and Watoyina)**

Dakada was a boy looking after cattle. Like others, he enjoyed grabbing the tail of one of the beasts and then to cling to it. The boys usually competed in seeing who can cling to the tail of a beast the longest. One day Dakada played this game with Watoyina, a heifer. After having clung onto the tail for some time, he was kicked in the chest by the heifer and became unconscious. From that day onwards, Dakada gave up the game.

**3. 'Unciphileyo Netakane Legusha' (Nciphileyo and the Lamb)**

Every day at milking time, Nciphileyo used to play with one of the lambs. The game was to imitate fighting rams. One day, Unciphileyo had to leave his home for a long period. When he came back, the lamb had grown up. He did not notice this. When he tried the same game with the lamb, he was hit hard on the head by the lamb and fell unconscious.

**4. 'Idlelo Leentaka' (Bird's Field)**

This story is about shepherds catching birds, roasting them, and then having a meal.

**5. 'Udyakalashe Nomyolufu' (The Jackal and the Wolf)**

A hungry jackal met a wolf busy eating bread. In order to get a piece of bread from the wolf, he thought of a plan. He picked up a piece of paper and told the wolf that it was a letter from heaven. The jackal 'read' the contents of the letter to the wolf. The contents, according to the jackal, was the instruction to the wolf to give him (the jackal) a piece of bread. Although there was no such instruction on the piece of paper, the wolf believed what the jackal had said and gave him the piece of bread.

**6. 'Isikhova' (The Owl)**

Although this bird has big eyes, it does not see during the day. Hence, it goes out only in the evenings. It lives from rats. The owl is of particular help to farmers because it eats rats.

**7. 'Udyakalashe Nomqhagi' (The Jackal and the Cock)**

The cock had a flock of sheep which he kept in two different sheepfolds. It became apparent that some sheep were going missing continuously. One day, the cock kept watch in one of the households. The jackal who was stealing the sheep, came, and found the cock there. When asked by the jackal how he managed to keep watch in both sheepfolds, the cock said that he had divided himself into two parts. He then advised the jackal to do the same, if he wants everything to come his way. When he was back home, the jackal asked his wife to divide him into two. The wife did this, and the jackal died.

**8. 'Uzonezile E Tsomo' (Zonezile at Tsomo)**

Zonezile liked to swim. He used to swim in a river called Itsomo. His mistake was that he was so sure of his ability to swim, that he did not heed his father's warnings. One day, while swimming, he was swept away by the water and he drowned.

**9. 'Unomlenzana Neencukuthu' (Nomlenzana and the Bugs)**

Nomlenzana enjoyed killing the insects coming to the light by burning them in the light's heat. If her mother protested, Nomlenzana only stopped for the moment and

continued when her mother was not in sight. When she was doing this one day, the hut's roof caught fire and burnt down.

**10. 'Umlambo' (The River)**

In Africa, there are many rivers, big and small. In these rivers there are places where people can cross. The rivers are dangerous when it rains or snows. The various mysterious creatures in these rivers can also pose a threat to human beings. The children are specifically advised to be aware of the rivers when crossing.

**11. 'Ugqamqikili Namaqanda Enyoka' (Gqamqikili and the Snake's Eggs)**

In Gqamqikilis' mind, every egg is a bird's egg. He would take them whenever he finds them and eat them. One day, he mistakenly took the eggs of a snake and ate them. As a result, he vomited continuously. He realised his mistake the following day when he saw a snake where he had found the eggs.

**12. 'Ixesha Lokubhuqisa' (Time of Harvest)**

This is a happy time for herdboys because they are not expected to look after cattle. The cattle graze wherever they want as there are no crops in the fields. The boys play various games, participate in stick fighting and hunt rats. Others reap from what has been left behind in the fields and sell the crops. This is really a happy time for herdboys.

**13. 'Uthambo Esekisini' (Thambo at the Circus)**

Playing with animals at a Circus was one of Thambo's hobbies. When a circus is in town, he would even play truant. One day, while playing with a lion at a Circus by putting his arm in the lion's den, he was grabbed by the lion. He was taken to a hospital bleeding and his arm was permanently removed.

**14. 'Udyakalashe Nomfuyi' (The Jackal and the Farmer)**

One day, the jackal acted like a sheep by putting on a sheep's hide. The farmer put him in the same kraal with other sheep that night. During the night, the jackal ate some of the sheep. Discovering this the following morning, the farmer beat the jackal. The jackal promised the farmer to tell him where he had hidden the meat. The farmer let him go free, but instead of telling him where he had hidden the meat, the jackal ran away.

**15. 'Ingxangxosi'**

This type of bird has long legs. The boys like to chase it wherever they see it, but they don't eat its flesh. People are fond of this bird because it is useful to them as it feeds on snakes which are the enemies of the humanity.



**16. 'Udyakalashe Nekati' (The Jackal and the Cat)**

In the conversation between a jackal and a cat, the jackal claimed that he was superior to the cat. The reason is that the cat has only one trick when it is threatened: it climbs up the nearest tree. But, according to the jackal, jackals have quite a variety of options when they are threatened. While they were still talking, a pack of dogs approached and the cat immediately ran for the nearest tree. The jackal just ran away but the dogs caught up with him and killed him.

**17. 'Jimbovane' (The Ants)**

Although ants are small, they are much wiser than human beings. For example, people cannot easily kill an elephant, but an ant can kill an elephant with ease. The ants can also prepare for difficult times, such as rainy days, winter, and for droughts, by collecting food and storing it.

**18. 'Uzolile Nendlu Yehobohobo' (Zobile and the Finch's Nest)**

Zobile liked to kill birds, and even used to take away their young ones and the eggs. In order to get to some nests, he one day climbed up a tree which was near a deep well. Unfortunately, the branch of the tree broke and he fell into that deep well. He was saved by nearby people.

**19. 'Unontente Nenkamela' (A Camping Man and The Camel)**

While the camping man was in his tent one-day, there came a camel who requested this man to allow him to let him hide his head in the tent. After some argument, the man agreed. Next, the camel asked to be allowed to let his shoulders in. Ultimately the man allowed the camel to enter into his tent. Then, the camel kicked the man out of the tent.

**20. 'Uthekwane'**

This bird is very proud of itself. There is a belief about this bird viz. that if one kills it and puts its body into a river, it will rain incessantly until one takes the dead body out of the water.

**21. 'Umzingeli Nethole Lengonyama' (This Hunter and The Cub)**

A man who liked to keep young animals, one day got a cub. He fed it until it has grown up. One-day, while soothing it, the animal attacked him and he died.

**Mamfene by L.M. Mbulawa**

It is a general understanding among people that it is difficult for the minister of religion to leave for another circuit when transferred from his traditional one. This is so especially when the new circuit is not as rich as the previous one.

This was the case with Gezulu. When transferred from Mamfene to Stofelton in Natal, he interpreted the action of the Church President as an effort to separate him from his affluent congregation Mamfene. He vowed to do all in his power to ensure that the new and young but otherwise intelligent minister of religion from Cala would not land his foot at Mamfene. To this end, he organised not only the members of the church, but also people from the village, and unduly influenced them against the new minister. There were, of course, members who were not prepared to toe the line. Some openly opposed Gezulu. Others did so secretly, because Gezulu was not only respected by some other cliques, but was also feared. Moreover, both he and his wife (who supported him) had turned to drinking. When drunk, he would not argue for long with another person without delivering blows on him. When the new minister, Kheswa, ultimately arrived, accompanied by the Church President, Gezulu and his supporters decided to kill them.

Many Gezulu supporters were not unfriendly with Kheswa and the Church President in an outright manner. Many, including Gezulu concealed their attitudes and appeared to be ignorant of the plot. Soon, however, Gezulu exchanged some bitter words with the new minister and the Church President and so betrayed his true sympathies.

Just when the preparations for setting alight the hut in which the victims were sleeping, were completed, the faction loyal to the new minister and the President and headed by Bheka, took the initiative. They kept watch throughout the night. When the rival group attempted to execute its plans, Gezulu and others were caught red-handed, and were assaulted. Court trials were conducted against Gezulu, who, at the time of his arrest, was dressed as a woman. He was ultimately charged with arson, and having been found guilty, he was sentenced to two years imprisonment with ten additional cuts. When the prison doors eventually opened and Gezulu emerged, he was a totally new man. He had mended his ways. He decided not to be the same again, and his wife repented with him.

**Comment**

This book is prescribed from grade five and upwards and interesting to read. It contains insights for both adults and school children. However, its weakness is that it portrays Gezulu only negatively and the oppositional faction only in a good light. This is a tendency among many of our authors. If character is portrayed only in negative terms—as is the case with Gezulu—nothing good about him is shown, and if he is at first shown as good, he will remain so throughout the narrative. In my opinion, this approach is too artificial. Everybody, with no exception, has both good and bad sides to his or her character. When presenting characters, a more practical and realistic approach would be to expose both their bad and good sides. Our authors need to grapple more with the real complexities in life.

## Popular Xhosa Rhymes

### 1. 'Unopopi Wham' (My Toy Child)

This rhyme is used when a mother praises her little daughter, referring especially to her beautiful dress, teeth and smile. She hopes, that when she has grown up, she will support her mother.

### 2. 'Umgibe' (A Bird's Trap)

Two birds come to a trap. One interprets it as prepared food; and the other recognises the trap. The first is caught in the trap and the second escapes unhurt. The children, of course, even grown-ups, are warned by the writer that sometimes, danger looks attractive at first sight.

### 3. 'Iziqhamo' (Fruit)

The orchard is a centre of attraction not only to human beings but also to birds. Somebody who eats fruit is generally free from infectious diseases. Hence, the Xhosa traditional medical doctors recommend fruit as the best preventative measure for sickness.

### 4. 'Ukukhuthala' (Industriousness) (To be Industrious)

The author tries to display the industriousness of ants. During harvesting, one finds them carrying loads on their backs. They are hard working, obedient to their leader and always plan and prepare for the future long before. The author here shows the wisdom of making provision for the future.

### 5. Ukutya Okondlayo' (Nourishing a Well Balanced Diet)

This poem shows the importance of vegetables. It is based on the saying, 'vegetables are the best harvest', meaning that the nutrients from vegetables are taken up by the body far more quickly than other food stuffs. The author also appreciates Zenzele (self-help) associations. They have brought to the fore the importance of this knowledge. Earlier, people never bothered to plant vegetables.

### 6. 'Inkunzi Yam Yomdongwe' (My Clay Bull)

It is interesting for herdboys to watch bulls when fighting. The one which has won the fight is praised by the boys. They like this scene to such an extent that they make their own bulls out of clay to imitate the real ones.

### 7. 'Uloliwe' (The Train)

This reminds one about a journey by train. It travels along beautiful valleys, steepy ways and along curves. It also represents the sound the train makes when nearing a station. When it ultimately reaches its destination, all the passengers disembark.

### 8. 'Isileyiti Sam' (My Slate)

An owner praises his slate, saying that it is washed and clean as a plate. The words he writes on the slate are legible and cannot be erased easily. He also praises the pencil with which he writes and the fact that his slate is cleaned with a wet cloth and not with a broad tongue, since that is unhygienic.

### 9. 'Ukuwela Isitalato' (Street Crossing)

This poem teaches young children how to cross a street. One must first look to the right and then to the left. If there is no vehicle coming one should quickly cross the street. When there is an oncoming vehicle, one should stop and wait till it has passed.

### 10. 'Ukucenga Kwentakazana' (The Plea of a Little Bird)

The writer here personifies the bird in order to show his objection to the removal of trees. The trees are not only useful to birds, because it is where they built their nests, but also to humanity. This is so because humanity gets shelter from the tree when it is very hot. In addition, trees contribute in attracting rain.

### 11. 'Ihashe Lam Lomdongwe' (My Clay Horse)

A herdboy makes a horse out of clay to imitate a real horse he likes. He shows how he would treat his horse if he were to have one. He would keep it clean, brush it and feed it well.

### 12. 'Impukwana' (The Little Rat)

A little rat was hungry and wanted to go and search for food. However, it couldn't dare to do so because the cat, its enemy, waited patiently outside the hole. It knew very well that the cat would be praised if it would be caught. The rat then started complaining that its mother had not taught it how to survive in such circumstances.

### 13. 'Inja Yam Yomdongwe' (My Clay Dog)

Among Africans, prestige is achieved through acquiring livestock. Livestock is inherited by sons. That is why the main task of young boys is to look after the stock. They like to do this work and imitate real stock by making their own out of clay. In this instance, an imitation of a dog is made and praised.

### 14. Umkhosi Weencukuthu Neetakumba' (A Battalion of Bugs and Fleas)

Although these insects are a nuisance, they can be killed easily with insecticides.

### 15. 'Isikhalo Somntwana' (A Child's Cry)

A child begs a cow to give him milk and meat. The cow, which is personified by the writer, replies that unless she is given enough food by human beings, she cannot

produce milk and meat. The writer shows how humans depend on cows for sustenance. Therefore, in order to get something from them, humans must care for cows.

#### 16. 'Ihagu Yam Yomdongwe' (My Clay Pig)

The author portrays the pig, its short tail and big snout. He appreciates the pig because it eats all unwanted and rotten food given to it. This makes it very fat so that by the time the owner sells it, he will be able to get a lot of money for it.

#### 17. 'Imbeko' (Obedience)

After asserting that obedience is required of everybody, the writer tabulates the characteristics of an obedient person. Among them are the greeting of people, sympathy towards disabled people and the assistance of the needy.

#### 18. 'Amazinyo' (Teeth)

Teeth are beautiful and snow white when they are well cared for by regular brushing. Apart from beautifying they are also useful.

#### 19. 'Uqothagileqithi'

No sense can be deduced.

#### 20. 'Iinzipho' (The Nails)

Most of the time birds and animals use their nails for various things, but human beings use their fingers. Although people also have nails, they would be wise to keep them as short as possible. Nails are carriers of diseases.

#### 21. 'Isilumkiso' (The Warning)

The author shows a hen teaching her chickens to protect themselves from the enemy, the hawk. However, one of the chickens could not run fast and always forgot to abide by the mother's rule. One day, it went astray, a hawk appeared and caught it. The little chicken cried helplessly as it was being carried high in the air.

#### 22. 'Amafu' (The Clouds)

The clouds look as if they are the clothing of the sky. When they are snow white they are interesting to look at, and when pitch black they instil fear—because thunder and lightning will follow. Snow and dew also come from the clouds. When it is very hot, the clouds neutralise the heat.

#### 23. 'Isele Nebuzi' (The Frog and the Rat)

One day the frog sought to establish a friendship with the rat by requesting it (the rat) to invite it (the frog) to a meal. As reason, the frog argued that although socially they

were different, they were nevertheless neighbours. The rat agreed. The following day, when the rat came to the frog, it drowned. The frog refused to rescue the rat. The moral is that one should make friendship with somebody one knows.

#### 24. 'Ucoleke' (Cleanliness)

This poem teaches cleanliness. It says that one should be clean from head to toe. One should also have clean clothes and that this includes one's underwear. It continues to also point to the importance of a clean or pure heart and mind and not even think of doing evil. The old saying that 'cleanliness is next to Godliness' is also re-iterated.

#### 25. 'Umnumzana Umpukane' (Mr. Fly)

Here, the fly is referred to as a gentleman who always likes to sit at table although he is an uninvited and dirty guest. You'll always find him in toilets or at any other untidy place. Thereafter, however, he comes and vomits all the dirt he had eaten on one's food. The author appeals to not leave food uncovered because that would give Mr. Fly enough chance to spread diseases.

#### 26. 'Inqwelo Yomoya' (The Aeroplane)

One sees the aeroplane in the sky. When it is above the clouds, the mountains look as small as ant-hills, and the rivers as furrows. The aeroplane shortens long journeys. The writer likens the aeroplane to a bird.

#### 27. 'Amazim' (The Man-Eaters)

This poem tells about two man-eaters or cannibals who went out to hunt for food. One caught hold of a woman who was picking up some wood and wild plants for the family. He cooked her and devoured her. The second one found some children who were left alone and ate them up. The writer reprimands people who behave in the same way as cannibals, especially concerning animals. Many people hunt for wild animals and birds and kill them. These might have been in search for food for their young ones. When they are killed, their young one's may die too. Ultimately, one should be sympathetic towards animals because they have feelings just like human beings.

#### 28. 'Umnumzanauntwala' (Mr. Louse)

The louse is referred to as a dangerous creature. It lives on dirty bodies and clothes. It can be found even on long ladies hair if it is not cared for. This would make such a person a disgrace. The louse is also a carrier of typhus, a very dangerous and fatal disease. Here people are advised to be neat and clean and to wash and comb their hair thoroughly. This is so that they may avoid the spread of diseases caused by this creature.

**29. 'Ukonakala Komhlaba' (The Erosion of Soil)**

The author describes eroded land. It is full of gullies and the soil for grass has been washed away. He further appeals to people to prevent the destruction of trees and veldt fires as well as to avoid the wrong methods of ploughing and the overgrazing of pastures. This is needed because these are the causes of soil erosion. People should replenish the eroded lands by planting grass and trees.

**30. 'Inyaniso' (Truth)**

The poem tells about a group of boys who were shepherds. One day, on their way to the veldt, they decided to steal fruit from a farmer's orchard. While busy feasting, the owner came and beat them severely. One elder boy denied that they were responsible for the theft and another boy shouted while he was beaten and admitted that they had really done the damage.

**31. 'Umkhombe' (The Ship)**

The writer likens the ship to a sea-bird. It looks like a moving house which crosses deep waters with ease. The ship helps people to go from one continent to another. It also helps people fighting wars.

**32. 'Umkhwenkwe' (The Young Boy)**

The poem deals with a young boy, Makhwenkwe. He was five years old but he considered himself to be a grown-up person. One day when he was alone in the house, a visitor knocked at the door. He thought of what his father usually said to visitors and said 'where do you come from?' The visitor was surprised and she took the little boy and kissed him. Makhwenkwe felt that he was being undermined and cried with anger. By this time, his mother and his sister who had gone to the river, entered.

**33. 'Intyatyambo' (The Flowers)**

The beauty of flowers causes one to compose. The flowers have different colours. They are also of different shapes and sizes.

**34. 'Ukuthembeka' (Faithfulness)**

A certain poor old woman went to the shop to buy a few goods she could afford to buy with the little money she had. On her way home, she picked up a R10 note. The faithful woman decided not to use the money, but to hand it over to the owner.

**35. 'Iinkwenekwezi' (The Stars)**

In African society, the different kinds of stars are given different names according to when they appear and what they mean to the Africans. For example, the star *knounas Canzibe* appears at the end of May or beginning of June, and is therefore known as

indicating the start of the winter. The star *Silnuela* shows the start of the ploughing season. The writer is here praising these various stars. The reason is that, because these stars are admired by the Africans, they are always observed.

**36. 'Inkomo Zakowethu' (My Family's Herd)**

The author tells about the white cow which always leads the herd of cattle when coming from the veldt. He further describes the herd of cattle one by one according to their colours and their physique. At the back of the herd is the bull which always bellows angrily.

**Apha Naphaya by D.M. Tongilanga  
(Here and There)****1. 'Uyise Kadengana' (Dengana's father)**

Solani and his wife Novayithi were staying in the Nxaruni administration area. They had numerous children. That Novayithi was the mother of so many children was evident from her very thin legs. In a family of so many children, the condition of poverty and hunger is the order of the day. This family was not an exception.

What increased hunger rather than decreasing it, was the fact that Solani didn't want to work. He spent his days beer-drinking. When he came home, normally at dusk, he would demand food from his wife who was not working either. If no food was available, they would quarrel, and Solani would beat his wife. Each time this happened, Novayithi would go out and beg the neighbours to give her something to eat. The neighbours were sick and tired of this behaviour. One day, Novayithi asked for advice from one of her neighbours. The advice was not to give her husband any food. She accepted this advice and practised it. The advice was more effective than Novayithi had thought, because her husband decided to go and look for work in East London. In East London, he worked for an African woman, Mamtob. Although he was neither satisfied with the work he was doing nor with his salary, he stayed for nine months. He was then dismissed from work because of quarrelling with his employer. The quarrel was sparked off by his coming late to work because he had been drinking beer before work. The incident which immediately followed, forced him to return to his wife. He assaulted one of three men who had asked him for tobacco and matches. Solani interpreted this as only a preparation for attacking him. Hence, he decided to strike first and deliver a blow on the other with a stick. Fearing the wrath of the police, he quickly left for home.

When he arrived home, he began to practice agriculture on a wide scale. He ploughed, planted, harvesting and start selling the crops. Seeing that Solani was now prospering, the people in his area decided to follow suit. By this, Solani did not only help himself and his family, but also the nation.

## 2. 'Uvimba ka Bhelezabhube'

It was a hot Sunday morning and crowds of people moved up and down the dirty Meken Street of Mdantsane location in East London. A young boy of about 12 years of age walked slowly, stopping now and then to disturb the swarm of flies which helped themselves on the heap of rotten and odorous rubbish which was always thrown away by the inhabitants of the location. Ultimately, this boy got into one of those shabby houses made of zinc. On entering the house, he asked for something to eat from his mother. He was told where to get bread, but there was none, as the mice had helped themselves to it. He was then instructed to go and borrow 10 cents from a neighbour so that he could buy himself bread. After having eaten the bread, he joined his friends who were playing a robbery game. From there, they were disturbed by a loud quarrel between Nonlantsani, Nte's mother and Selisa. Since Nte was living a miserable life and his mother, Nonlantsani, couldn't afford every meal for them, he decided to join a group of boys who worked for Hlophe. Their main duty was to make dagga rolls. This job came to an end when their boss was arrested, and they also had to run for their lives.

Hereafter Nte's mother told him to look for work in town. The work Nte got was difficult for him and he decided to leave the place soon after starting.

Christmas day was a bad experience for Nte and Nomsa because their mother couldn't afford to buy them new clothes.

One night, the boys assembled at a certain spot and burnt tyres in the middle of the street to detain cars from passing. At midnight, a strong wind came and revived the fire. The people tried their best to extinguish it, but in vain. Fire fighters were phoned and informed, but they couldn't help either. The main reason was that broken glasses prevented them from going near the fire. Many people who were victims of the fire and broken glasses, were taken to hospital. No-one ever mentioned the people responsible for the fire, though all knew very well who it was.

When Nte arrived home, he suggested to his mother that she should buy fruit from the market so that he and his sister could sell it in the location. Nonlantsani experimented with this suggestion, and it really worked. She tried to get a hawker's license and everything went well. They all started a new life. When Nte and his sister have grown up, they were both prosperous and enjoyed their work.

## 3. 'Indlala Inamanyala'

One of the plagues that have remained imprinted on the minds of many people is that of 1935. During that year, everything, grass, trees and even the crops on the fields were ravished by ants. No one knew where the ants came from. Agricultural experts tried their best to fight the ants and ultimately managed to overcome them. Although everything had started to regenerate, people were left poor and starving. People like Nozenza who never bothered to plough her fields, severely suffered in this situation.

She had to beg for food from her neighbours. And they became upset because of the continuous begging.

One day, while approaching the house of her neighbour, they saw her coming and Nongaliphi, who was cooking meat at the time, quickly hid the pot in a suitcase. After conversing for a long period with her visitor, the pot in the suitcase burnt and Nongaliphi pretended not to know the cause. As Nozenza went from house to house asking for food, the people became sick and tired of her.

She now adopted a new plan of stealing goats from people's kraals. This she and her children did at night. They had to cook the meat at night too. People suspected this and she decided to stop. At last decided to go and look for work in East London where her elder daughter worked. On arrival, her daughter tried to get her a job. She fortunately got one in Berea Road.

Her duty was to wash clothes. Nozenza, who had never been in any town before, did not know how to wash clothes using the washing board. For this reason, she did not use the washing board she was given. Instead, she trampled the clothes with her feet. The girl who worked in the kitchen was shocked to see this and tried to teach the older woman. However, Nozenza did not want to listen to her. The girl then phoned and informed their employer who was at work. She came immediately and burst into tears when she saw the way her clothes were washed.

They tried to show Nozenza her mistake, but she did not want to listen. Instead, she insulted them as she was convinced she was doing the right thing. She was dismissed and told that if she wouldn't leave at once, they would call the police. Knowing what would happen when the police come, she decided to leave at once.

On arrival at her daughter's residence, she told them all that took place at Berea. As she had nothing to do now, she was asked to assist her daughter in washing and ironing clothes. Eventually, she was also employed by a white woman nearby. From that day till now, she works in East London and visits her family weekly.

## 4. 'Alitshoni Lingenandaba'

About six months had gone by since Dolakhe Olala, an old man, got ill. His family had taken him to various doctors and even witchdoctors but without any improvement. At last, he passed away early one morning in July. Immediately after the news broke, crowds of people gathered at his home. His neighbour, Diza, who worked in King Williams Town, arrived on the very same day.

It is a common practice among African people that when a neighbour dies, people gather at that particular home and assist in the preparations for the funeral.

At this home, it was the same. Young women worked from morning till night cooking, fetching water and baking. It is also a custom among Africans that, during the days leading up to the funeral, people assemble at the deceased's home and attend a short sermon every night.



The day of the funeral was Sunday. On Saturday evening, young and old people assembled at this home. A service was held throughout the night. This is usually conducted in the presence of the corpse and everyone is free to participate, either by saying a short prayer, by preaching or by leading a hymn.

On this day, everything happened as is normal. However, a few young men who had drunk beer, tried to cause disorder. This came to an end when one of the elders disciplined a young man called Zola with a hot clap and dragged him outside. The sermon carried on until the next day.

At 11h00 on the Sunday morning, the funeral service was conducted by one of the Wesleyan Church priests, Diza. Various hymns were sung and a prayer was said. At the end, courageous and sympathetic words were said to console the mourners.

Thereafter, wreaths were laid and telegrams read. Donations from friends and relatives were given to the bereaved. A procession to the graveyard was led by Diza who was the officiating minister, followed by the hearse and the congregation. After Dolakhe Olala was laid to rest, everybody returned to the Olala home for lunch.

Plates of food and glasses of drinks were served. All visitors were satisfactorily served with food, and only those who never get satisfied, could find fault or talk of things which they criticised.

#### 'Unqaba'

Nqaba, the eldest son of Nqatha, stayed at Hala location. He attended his primary education there and never had the opportunity to visit another town. His school had old dilapidated buildings which nobody, not even the principal, seemed interested in renovating.

Moreover, the principal seldom came to the school. On Mondays and Fridays especially, he did not come to school. This left the children without anyone to teach them. It was a surprise for Nqaba, though a pleasant one, when he passed standard six at this school. He was the only one who managed to pass.

He made preparations of going to Shawville school in the district of King Williams Town where he would be trained as a teacher. His problem, as one would imagine, was that he had never been to any other town before. This is the reason why he nearly ran away when he saw the train at the station.

In the compartment, he met some other students who were also travelling to Shawville. These students were drinking alcohol. They did not succeed to persuade Nqaba to do the same. For this, they despised him. In most secondary schools in Africa, it is normal for older students to bully, ill-treat and even beat new students. Nqaba was also subjected to the same treatment at Shawville.

After two years of training, Nqaba qualified as a teacher. He got a post at Lunra location. The school here was in the same condition as the one he had attended

at Hala. He devoted himself in improving this school, being assisted by the principal. The arrival of Nqaba also improved the results of this school, but the teachers in the nearby schools were jealous of him.

They plotted to teach him to become a drinker of liquor, so that he should not spend most of his time preparing school lessons. All this, however, was in vain. Nqaba studied privately, and today he is holding a university degree.

#### 6. 'Isiko Lisiko' (Custom Is Custom)

Circumcision is an ancient custom among some African tribes. However, of late, some western practices have permeated this custom. One of those western encroachments is the fact that there are quite a number of Africans who take the boys to the doctors for circumcision. A number of Africans object to such practices, as this is against custom. Those who support the practice of having medical practitioners do the circumcising operation, argue that western culture has influenced the Africans to such an extent that it is almost impossible to separate oneself from it—even from the long-standing customs of the Africans. The argument is that those customs should be brought in line with other western influences.

Sizakele Mahlahla belonged to the former group which advanced arguments for the maintenance of traditional practices. Despite the objections of his wife, Nosisa, and his younger brother, Zolani, Sizakele insisted on taking his son, Andile (a high school student and used to a western mode of life), to the veldt and not to the doctor for circumcision. He succeeded.

Although the circumcision and his stay in the veldt did not present problems, Andile became sick sometime after he had returned to school. He was taken to a SANTA (South African national Tuberculosis Association) hospital where he was treated for TB. He had to miss the examinations that year, but later his health improved.

#### 7. 'Isiporo Sasavayneki' (The Ghost of Vayineki)

Mgubasi owned a farm not far from East London. This farm was so well looked after, that one would thought that it did not belong to an African. (Many people think that there is a difference between the farms owned by whites and those owned by blacks.) This was not the case with Mgubasi. This was due to his hard working. Because Mgubasi was also strict with the people working for him, he fell into disfavour with most people. He was given the name Isiporo Sasavayineki (Isiporo is a ghost).

He expected of both his wife and children to work as hard as he did himself. Because she got tired of all the hard work, Nanase, his wife, decided to leave the common household, taking the children with her.

Mgubasi did not trouble himself by tracing her. He remained working on his farm for some years. One day, Nanase came back. She had been to her mother's

home at Idutywe. They stayed together with Mgubasi for some years. Then Mgubasi died. From then onwards, everything changed. All the wealth Mgubasi had been accumulating for some years, was squandered by Nanase within a few months. She even sold the farm.

#### 8. 'Utobana Umolokazana Kadyonase'

Sobantu lived at a location called Isolo not far from East London. He was married to Dyonase, a woman from Kentawe in the Transkei. They had one child, a boy, whom they named Siganeke. Siganeke. He grew up as the only child.

Siganeke did not proceed far with his schooling. He did not even finish the junior certificate. It was not that Siganeke had no ability. Rather, he saw no point in studying, as his father was wealthy. When his father died, he got employment as a clerk in a certain law firm. Here, he was working with a beautiful girl called Jobana. They fell in love. When he told his mother that he wanted to marry Jobana, his mother opposed the idea on the grounds that Jobana came from a poor family.

However, Siganeke married Jobana against the wishes of his mother. Siganeke, his mother, Dyonase, and Jobana stayed together. Jobana and Dyonase did not stay together peacefully. This, of course could have been expected.

Jobana saw that the only solution in the quarrel with her mother-in-law was to go back to her maiden home. But she could not tell this to Siganeke. She then made a plan. She suddenly fell ill. When taken to a doctor, she would look better in the presence of the doctor, but when she went back to the common household, she would be serious again.

Eventually, she was taken in by her mother. The same would happen again. At her maiden home she would be well, but when at Siganeke's, she would be seriously ill. In this way, her marriage with Siganeke came to an end.

#### 9. 'Izinongo Zobomi'

It is a habit amongst Africans to name a child after a certain incident. Some children are given names of famous people who lived long ago. Nontibiko was the eldest daughter of Nohani and Jongura. Namalanga was her sister and Xakekile her younger brother. One day while the two, Namalanga and Xakekile, were playing, their sister called them and instructed them to assist her with the cooking. They never bothered themselves about what their sister had told them to do. Instead, they kept on playing and teasing her. She became very angry. She chased them, but in vain. By the time she returned, the mealies in the pot had burnt.

Later, she managed to catch her brother and beat him. He threatened to reveal everything to his mother. When their mother arrived, she noticed that none of the work had been done and she thrashed them all. At sunset, the elder sister had to go and fetch water not very far from their home. Xakekile decided to hide somewhere

and frighten her. On her way home, somebody was throwing stones at her. She was convinced that it was a ghost.

She ran away as fast as she could, leaving the bucket there. At home, she had to be treated as she was very shocked. After some years, Nontibiko got married to Mahwedina. She gave birth to a baby boy. This child used to cry the whole night. The mother could not stand this. One night, her husband was waken because of the noise made by the child. He scolded his wife. This made them to quarrel.

#### 10. 'Ukusweleka Kuka Velile Sandile' (The Death of V. Sandile)

Velile Sandile was born in the Ciskei but grew up at Kentane in the Transkei. He received his education at Lovedale Training College in the Ciskei.

Velile was installed as king at the time the Prince of Wales visited the country. During his rule, Velile visited Johannesburg in order to appoint his representatives there. When Velile visited Johannesburg again in 1968, he fell ill. His son, Mxolisi was in Cape Town at the time. Velile was quickly taken to Baragwanath hospital. Mxolisi was phoned to come and see his father before he dies. However, when Mxolisi arrived in hospital, his father was unconscious and could not speak. Velile died later that evening.

Arrangements were made for his corpse to be transported to King Williams town where he was to be buried. The government undertook to pay all the transport costs. What seems to be unforgettable for the people who were there, is the day of the funeral. The funeral of a king was not conducted the same way the funeral of an ordinary citizen is conducted. The people had come from all corners of the earth. Among the dignitaries who were present were Poto of Pondoland.

After the funeral, Mxolisi Sandile was installed as his father's successor.

### Literature and Educational Skills Development

The brief overviews of the literature above, can be fruitfully used for developing educational and learning skills. Below, I provide a few suggestions.

1. One can discuss the different plotlines in the various narratives. These can then be developed differently, with different events and different endings.
2. One can identify the different moral and cultural issues raised in the books and organise debates on them. This can be done with the character of people represented in the narratives too. As stated earlier, since moral and cultural norms as well as character are not either good or bad but complex, one needs to debate for and against the worst but also the best kinds of moralities, cultural norms and characters.

3. The short stories and rhymes can be dealt with by identifying issues which can be written on or debated. For instance, on the relationship of a child with his or her parents, pupils may write essays of brief stories analogous to ones overviewed here. The main requirements should be that they identify a particular kind of issue on which children and parents disagree and then to write a story about what happens if certain actions are taken by either the parents or the children. These must deal with both male and female roles and not only from a male perspective.

4. Let the pupils talk or write about the unsafe games children play and what can happen in the process; on an experience which they had where they were not observant or attentive enough to facts of detail in particular situations; on what particular people do in their particular careers in making a living; the situations in which the gullibility of people are exploited—as in the animal stories; on dangerous animals/ insects/ bacteria, etc.;

(If pupils have television available in their area, the teacher should be informed about educational programmes, especially on nature—and usually on Sundays—and encourage the pupils to watch it and talk or write on these.)

5. Given the level of children's educational or scientific knowledge, they can be encouraged to write educational short stories similar to the one on the owl, engendering an appreciation of the interdependence of humanity and the eco-system.

6. Make a list of different kinds of warnings older people warn children about and then let the children discuss these as to whether these warnings are helpful or not. It is important that children understand the nature of obedience in terms of traditional wisdom. However, it is just as important that pupils learn from an early age how to analyse situations for themselves and to think for themselves and for the benefit of society and community.

7. Similar to the rhymes and stories which make statements about health, pupils can be encouraged to identify the health hazards in society and then to write stories or poems on these issues.

8. Many of the stories and rhymes can be used to develop the observation and description skills of pupils. This will not only raise awareness but also lead to a greater appreciation of the actual environments people live and operate in.

9. One can discuss or let pupils write or debate on the importance but also the pit-falls of 'learning through experience'. This is a common feature of much oral and

culture literature. It is especially in rural areas where pupils are cut off from wider society, that this could be of much help in preparing pupils for adapting to changing circumstances—which they might encounter later in life. For children in the cities, this will be important too because they are exposed to many different kinds of dangers and threats rural children are not. In this context, it is important to instil a sense of purpose and how one can systematically work towards realising one's goals irrespective of what the circumstances are in which one has to do so.

10. All these stories and rhymes have elements common to other cultures. One can explore how people have similar festivals - harvest festivals for example - and then get the pupils to research in a library or encyclopaedia on these similar elements. When they celebrate the festivals in their own culture, they can then appreciate that others are doing the same but in different ways.

11. If the resources are available, the teacher can set tasks for the pupils to research the detrimental impact and effects pesticides have had on nature. In addition, pupils may research how people in power can misuse their positions of power.

12. Pupils may debate the importance of culture and tradition. But they may also debate the detrimental effects custom have on people. Whether positive or negative, custom and tradition, or their absence, have effects on people's dignity, their quality of life as well as how they interact in society and with the environment. Such debates on 'modern living' may be facilitated too.

13. In more advanced classes, one may debate or write on the way in which beasts, the environment or people are represented in literature but also in ordinary life. This may be done in conjunction with the development of skills of description. It may include themes from nature like snow, heat, drought, but also prosperity, etc. In art classes, it may link up with the way in which the clay dog, horse or bull are represented in the rhymes above. This may then also be used for the creation of images and sculptures which represent real-life objects to various degrees.

14. In multi-cultural classrooms, socialising practices which conflict can be unravelled and problematised. Students can either problematise these to work out a system which would be accommodating but also be asked about how they can accommodate other cultures in ways that suit each culture. This would include elements related to the respect of tradition, parents but also other's own ideals.

15. In even more advanced classes, one can ask students to write essays which use certain metaphors in the literature above. A good example is that of 'man eating

man'. Some life situations can be described in terms of which these essays can be developed.

16. On the advancement of creativity and synchrony, students can be asked to go out into nature or culturally-defined architecture, built and constructed objects such as furniture, crockery and cutlery but also, if available, web-pages and describe their harmony, dissonance, interaction with their elements, etc. This would link up with the rhyme on flowers, etc.

17. Linking with the rhyme on astronomy, this whole area can be explored too. This can be done in terms of the history of astronomy but also in terms of contemporary astronomical discoveries and theories for the even more advanced classes.

18. One of the latent elements in many of the stories and rhymes above is the fact of honesty. When they experience things to be wrong or not conducive to what they expect as right and true, many people do not speak out but rather keep silent. Just as worse is when they attempt to change their own circumstances or those of others through manipulation. Pupils should be taught the importance and liberating power of honesty in all areas of living. Even when one's own feelings and perspectives are not accepted, or even when they are later found to have been wrong, the fact that one speaks and voices one's views and not remain silent will be liberatory or at least advance and contribute to the perceptions in culture and tradition.

19. Central to many of the stories is also the element of interventionism. This is an area where pupils can be taught a lot from historical events where the intervention of certain individuals either had detrimental or positive effects on others.

Where there are not many resources for some of these exercises, it is incumbent on the teacher to develop his or her own resources—from newspapers and magazines for example. The teacher can also encourage pupils to do the same. They may even develop their own portfolios or scrapbooks throughout their lives on themes touched on in this literature.

## Conclusion

The educational nature of narrative is a universal phenomenon. So too is the fact that oral tradition, folk- and culture traditions play a role at some point in every person's upbringing. The importance of this phenomenon must never be diminished. On the

one hand, it always provides the basis for the identity of every human being. Where people have lost this important resource, it can be instilled again. On the other hand, it is from the literary and rhetorical devices in these traditions as well as their wisdom impacting on diverse themes, that others can be developed. If children develop their thinking, observation, describing and other skills as indicated in this article, they may also fruitfully contribute towards a literature which remains relevant.

From deconstructive perspective, one may add much to these suggestions. The few mentioned, may make some contribution towards the enskilling of people as regards their own traditions but also assist in opening possibilities for the appreciation of the traditions and cultures of others.

Department of Political Science  
University of Durban-Westville

# The African Woman in Jolobe and Mema's Poems: A Critical Comparison

M.C. Hoza

## Introduction

One of the functions of poetry is to ensure the survival of art in man (sic), to say the most probable things in the least number of words, and to make it as fresh in tone as the poet can (Jones 1973:138).

Jones could not have said it better, for what has inspired me to make this analysis of the two writers' selected poems is the artistic qualities observed in them that suggest both aesthetic sensitivity and the ability to integrate previous imaginative experience into the process of composition. Both poets use language which is packed with emotion and feeling. They each evoke vivid images in a manner that enriches their poetry and gives it a peculiar freshness. The three poems selected for this study—Jolobe's '*Unomhi*' and Mema's '*Ubuhle benene*' and *Wabulaw'apho Lawundini*—are undoubtedly among the finest Xhosa poems. I feel that their literariness can only be fully appreciated when they are placed side by side.

This paper intends to give a critical analysis of the linguistic and literary aspects employed by each poet so as to reveal the differences as well as similarities in their approaches and in their objectives.

## Differences

What makes this analysis a stimulating and provocative intellectual exercise is the striking diversity of opinion between the two poets in their appreciation of the African woman. By merely looking at the titles, one is bound to realise that Jolobe's '*Unomhi*' implies feelings of love, affection, attachment, delicacy and purity for the woman whereas the same cannot be said of Mema's '*Ubuhle benene*' and '*Wabulaw'apho*

*Lawundini*'. The titles to Mema's two poems do not convey any feelings of attachment to this Gcaleka girl and one would be inclined to think that the poet is referring to just a piece of dead wood or any other object. Mema distances himself from this woman and there is no indication that the poet attaches any significance to her. Moreover, '*Wabulaw'apho Lawundini*' also suggests a sadness and despair which some sensitive readers may not associate with a woman's beauty.

Jolobe and Mema are both talented poets who have a way with words and their images are skilfully selected to effectively stir a reader's imagination. Conversely, it is precisely through these images that the two poets' diverse and contrasting viewpoints are highlighted.

In '*Unomhi*', Jolobe—who is generally known for writing poems on subjects that especially appeal to tender feelings—sticks true to form. He uses a very soft and touching tone of voice when describing the beauty of the woman. In the opening lines of the first verse, for example, the poet evokes images of the most beautiful, solemn and moving times of the day: sunrise and sunset. He writes:

*Ubukeya njengentsasa,  
Ekwazole njengorhatya  
Enobuhle benyibiba,  
UNomhi.*

She is as lovely as the rising sun,  
As humble as sunset,  
And as beautiful as the daffodils,  
Unomhi.

The metaphor *inyibiba* appeals to most of our senses—the movement and sound of bursting buds (hearing), the sweetness of nectar (taste), the brightly coloured petals (sight) and the fresh scent of pollen (smell). The images of nature he has carefully picked are elemental and close to the beauty he is describing: tenderness, innocence and love. We are inclined to think that the poet fully commits himself to delicacy in the poem and the lyrical quality of his verse conveys deep feeling.

In contrast, when you look at Mema's two poems in this study, the tone changes dramatically to a contemptuous one. In Mema's view, the sight of a beautiful woman evokes feelings of contempt, and his thoughts penetrate through external appearances to the deceitful and artificial beauty of the modern woman, emptied of all her Africanness through imbibing Western ways. Mema thus employs poetic forms that produce a pungent work of satire. Satire is defined by Abrahams (1975:167) as 'the literary art of diminishing a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking towards it attitudes of amusement, contempt, indignation or scorn'.



This definition thoroughly befits Mema's intentions as illustrated by the following lines taken from his '*Ubuhle benene*':

*Ndajong'eso sifuba sithetha sithule  
Sithuthumbis'isoka sibethe ligule  
Mn'andithethi ngofononontiso lwebele lelaphu  
Oluqum'ubumbaxambaxa bebele lehagu-  
Ndithetha ngebele lentombi ingelolahule.*

I watched her breasts with their silent language,  
Which pains the lover's heart and makes him sick,  
Not the fraud of the deceiving cloth  
Which covers the pig's long flapping udders,  
But the virgin's breasts, not those of a whore.

The positive connotation in praise of the woman in the first two lines is overshadowed by the negative, diminishing and dehumanising image of the pig that follows in the next three lines. There is nothing appealing about this imagery, for it conjures up the derogatory attributes that we associate with pigs and the pigs' sty: wild behaviour, wallowing in dirt, insatiable greed and the obnoxious stench of garbage. Like Jolobe—who uses them in a more romantic context—Mema is capable of exploiting all the senses at his disposal: sight, smell, taste, hearing, and touch.

Mema's two poems reveal a rejection of romanticism and modernity in favour of traditionalism.

One could argue that Mema finds the sight of the educated African woman repulsive. Such a vision appears to rouse in him memories of social immorality resulting in the degradation of traditional attributes of beauty. However, this prompts one to wonder if the poet feels the same way towards educated men. If not, then it would appear that he uses double standards in castigating educated women while sparing educated men for embracing Western values. This is evident in Mema's opting for tradition as seen in his '*Ubuhle benene*' in which he writes as follows:

*Ibisuka emlanjeni ithwele ingqayi yamanzi;  
Uluthi lwayo lwabetha ndangumkhanzi.  
Yayikhetha-khethiwe lichule lokubumba;  
Yaqaqamb'intloko yam yafun'ukudumba.*

The woman was from the pond carrying a bucket  
of water on her head.

Her beautiful physical appearance struck me  
Motionless like a tick,  
Her features exhibited the skill of an architect,  
My head throbbed with excitement bursting with emotion.

In this context, the poet finds the sight of a Gcaleka girl engaged in her traditional chores to be pleasing. Thus the symbol of the bucket of water on the girl's head is idealised and such other metaphors are exploited to articulate the poet's emotional fulfilment and attraction towards her. It should be realised that in most African societies '... culture has been used to justify the continued oppression and marginalisation of women, and as the rationale for perpetuating negative attitudes and behaviour towards women' (Njoki Wainama 1993:8).

Most people would readily agree that, to meet the needs of a society at a given time, culture is dynamic and socially constructed. But surprisingly, some of the cultural traditions can be done away with in some sectors of society while being strictly adhered to in others. For example, among the Xhosa people, changes can be made in the duration of the initiation ceremony with regard to men whereas, when it comes to women, tradition remains tradition and culture, culture—it never changes! Hence, to Mema, women have to remain eternally locked in stereotyped female roles. While men may change their own traditions to suit their purposes, the fact that women's traditions remain the same, may be ascribed to men wishing to keep them in their traditional roles. To keep this barrier in place, the educated woman in Mema's '*Wabulaw'apho Lawundini*' is presented as follows:

*Yayihlis'isitalato kwidolophu yaseKapa,  
Inzwakazi ingahambi izibhij'okwequngequ.  
Zazimnyama khac'iinwele eqhamile namashiya,  
Yayileshez'imisebe kuloo mehlw'ang'ayozela.*

She was walking down the street of Cape Town,  
Twisting her body like a gecko lizard,  
With pitch black hair with bushy eyebrows,  
Artificial eye lashes moving about on the enticing eyes.

*Yayingentl'iyiguzu ngomlomo iyingqanga.*

She was as pretty as a gooseberry,  
with the mouth coloured in red lipstick.

While the metaphors employed by Mema may be inferences of emotional feelings towards the woman, any sensitive reader would be sceptical of any such claim

due to the subtle linguistic implications conveyed by some of the Xhosa words the poet uses. For example, it is commonly known that if one is descending a steep road, in Xhosa we use the verb—'hla'. And yet, in this context, the poet has decided to attach a causative verbal extension—'is-' to the verb. This immediately changes the meaning, making it negative. The verb implies an undesirable and unacceptable action that is frequently done without any valid reason. Hence, the action may be associated with anything—including immorality!

In this context, even the use of the noun 'inzwakazi', which is commonly known to be used to refer to a woman one admires, is ironic, i.e. if one considers the simile she is compared with: 'izibhij'okwequngequ', which is a hideous and despised species of reptile.

Not only do such expressions as 'Izibhij'okwequngequ' and 'Yayileshez-imisebe ...' carry negative connotations. The images they deliberately evoke appear to make a mockery of beauty compounded with make-up and cosmetics. Thus, in commenting on the Gcaleka girl in his 'Ubuhle benene', the poet writes:

Yayintle nangozwane loo nzwakazi yamandulo ...  
Yayicwayiz'okwembabala ifanelwe lidombo  
Ingazani namajikazi indalo kuyo iyihombo (e.a.).

She was pretty from toe, that traditional beauty  
Tiptoeing like a wild animal in its natural habitat,  
Without earrings but in her natural beauty.

The phrases underlined are typical of Mema's perception of the African woman. The poet thus adopts a conservative outlook that allows for no compromise between tradition and modernity implying Western influence.

Jolobe's positive portrayal of women, on the other hand, would appear to ridicule Mema's negative depiction. This is magnified by Jolobe's employment of metaphors that seem to elevate women to a status higher than that of men. In his 'Unomhi', Jolobe writes:

Inkwenkwez'icocekile  
kwanombethe. Nobu bomi  
abumathwa nobunyulu  
KuNomhi.

The star is pure,  
As well as the dew. But this purity  
can never be equalled with the innocence of  
Unomhi.

The metaphor 'inkwenkwezi', which is a symbol of light, stimulates the reader's imagination into visualising a woman shining with a divine brightness. This

image is then reinforced by the metaphor 'mbethe' which symbolises purity and freshness. At the level of the senses, this makes the woman glow with life. Both metaphors appeal to the senses of sight, triggering feelings of love and kindness.

By contrast, Mema's criticism of women in 'Wabulaw'apho Lawundini' gathers momentum and builds up to a crescendo as we get one horrible image after another, systematically transforming and disfiguring this beautiful woman until she is no longer an attractive human being but a veritable pig! This gradual transfiguration takes place as follows:

Entangeni umnumzana waziphosa ebhedini,  
Yaqueza intokazi ilungiselel'ukuphumla;  
Ncothu zemk'iinwele kwavel'amaqathalala!  
Yalandela imisebe, washiywa luval'umfana.

Kanti ezi nwele zintle zambathise lo mqwebedu!  
Kanti le misebe mihle bubuqili bakwamLungu!  
Bhuncu aphum'onke amazinyo afakw'ekomityini,  
Washwabana loo mlomo obuncumeza emini.

Endaweni yezo mpondo ezidala undileko  
Kwabhaxaz'iminxebe, amabel'emaz'ehagu.  
Satyhwephezela isisu kwakusuka iziminxi,  
Yalukuzel'imilenze yakuphum'ekukhonxweni.

In the bedroom the respected gentleman threw  
himself onto the bed,  
She went about preparing to rest  
Plucked off her artificial hair, leaving her  
natural hair unattended,  
Followed by the removal of artificial eyelashes  
And the young man got frightened.

Is it possible that this beautiful hair is covering  
this hard dry ground!  
And these beautiful eyelashes the deception of the  
white man!  
The artificial teeth were removed and put in a cup,  
And shrank the mouth that has been attractive  
during the day.

Instead of the dignified virgin's breasts,  
 Flapped the strings of the pig's udders,  
 Flapped the stomach after the girdle has been removed,  
 And flapped the legs when relieved from  
 the stockings.

Apart from the derisive images Mema employs in these lines, his powerful imagination, his mastery of language, his well developed sense of humour and his capacity for dramatisation are artistic qualities that cannot be overlooked. Mema's satiric approach, ornamented by the two ideophones, 'ncothu' and 'bhuncu', add a dramatic touch to the deceitful beauty he is trying to ridicule and provides a distinct emotional appeal to the reader. Ngcongwana (1988:142) says of the power of the ideophone that it '... cannot be readily equalled by a simile, a metaphor or any other conventional figure of speech'.

Mema's genius is seen in his ability to effectively manipulate his material for the purposes of satire. The removing of artificial hair and teeth by the woman is so dramatically expressed that one cannot help laughing at the humour of it. The idea is then complemented by the employment of another powerful oral technique in which the satirist uses rhetorical questions to articulate his dismay. He writes:

*Kanti ezi nwele zintle zambathise lo mqwebedu.*

Is it possible that this beautiful hair is covering  
 this hard dry ground!

The metaphor 'umqwebedu' provides images that would not be associated with beauty, for they suggest a barren, neglected and arid piece of land—thus negating the woman's beauty. Similarly, the expression 'Washwabana loo mlomo ...' evokes images that transform the woman from a beautiful and elegant lady into an old granny with a shapeless mouth.

Mema's capacity for dramatisation is magnified by his employment of another powerful oral technique, onomatopoeia, which is closely related to the ideophone. The definition that Doke (1927:255) gives to the ideophone supports this relationship thus: '... [the ideophone] is a word, often onomatopoeic, which describes a predicate in respect of manner, colour, sound or action'. Cole (1955:370) takes this view further when he distinguishes between the two forms as follows:

Although comparable to a certain extent with the onomatopoeia of European Languages, there is this important distinction: ideophones are descriptive of sound, colour, smell, manner, appearance, state, action or intensity, whereas onomatopoeia are descriptive of sound only.

From the above quotations we can infer that both ideophones and onomatopoeia help to depict or imitate, thus dramatising what is being conveyed. Being acutely aware of this, Mema exploits both devices and use them as powerful tools to wield his satire, using onomatopoeic expressions like:

<i>Kwabhaxazel'iminxeba ...</i>	Flapped the strings ...
<i>Satyhwephezal'isisu ...</i>	Flapped the stomach ....
<i>Yalukuzel'imilenze ...</i>	And flapped the legs ...

Although these appeal to our sense of hearing, the sensation is channelled to the visual, nauseating sight of a pig: wild, dirty, stinking, soulless and out of shape. Derogatory as these images may be, one cannot avoid noting the dramatic excellence with which satire has been conveyed in these lines—with the images working in relay to reinforce meaning. The poet's sense of humour is also evident—especially in the way the woman's beautiful breasts are reduced to unattractive and insignificant strings. There is no doubt that all the onomatopoeic expressions cited above excite the readers with a sense of humour.

Contrary to Mema's attitude towards the educated woman, Jolobe's images are indicative of his deep feelings for the African woman in general—educated or traditional. Compare the following line from Jolobe's poem with Mema's lines above:

<i>Abubus 'mazwi akhe.</i>	Her speech is as sweet as honey.
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Instead of nauseating images, Jolobe presents us with a honey-like sweetness, thus exploiting the vivifying and appetising element that elicits salivation from the reader. The image appeals to the sense of taste and the reader may imagine the woman glowing with beauty, warmth, purity and innocence. The reader feels that Jolobe does not only sympathise with the woman but empathise with her as well.

Mema sounds like an educated man who has suddenly become highly aware of the necessity for his race to preserve its own culture and identity. Although the wisdom of this cannot be disputed, one wonders why he deliberately picks on women as being solely responsible for the preservation of African tradition. Are men exempt from this exercise simply because they are innocent by virtue of being men?

### Similarities

Although the tones as well as structure of the poems differ, they share certain qualities. The first similarity is that both poets are highly selective in their use of words. Suffice it to say that they both draw on the same materials and sources and utilise similar techniques in their use of images. For example, both poets develop their insights

through series of unmistakable correlations and their images display a link between the human being and the environment. In this, they are in agreement with Jones (1973) who holds the view that '... a good poet does observe the surrounding world and ultimately finds instances in it reflecting a personal interpretation of experienced reality'. Compare the following lines from Mema's poem with those of Jolobe:

*Yanele kundikrwaqula yavumela phantsi,  
Ndibethwe ngumbane umzimba wanenkantsi;  
Loo mehl'atshawuzayo anga zizabhokhwe,  
Umzimba wathuthumela uzele ziintlantsi (Mema).*

She just glanced at me and responded quietly,  
I was struck by lightning and my body cramped,  
The flashing of the eyes were like cracking whips,  
My body shook, sending out crackles.

*Ubuheka njengentsasa,  
Ekwazole njengorhatya,  
Enobuhle benyibiba,  
Unomhi (Jolobe).*

She is as lovely as the rising sun,  
As humble as sunset,  
And as beautiful as the daffodils,  
Unomhi.

Both poems exhibit similarity in the way the presentation takes advantage of varied African as well as European influences. Jolobe, as described by Sirayi (1985) '... is a country poet for whom rural images are not only pleasures or sources of symbol, but part of a necessary way of living'. This description fits Mema very well too. Despite the diversity of opinion, one readily notices an element of similarity in the two poets' view that an African woman has to impress a man by overt obedience. This idea is embedded in the African traditional mode of life. The following lines portray this idea:

*Yajonga phambili le nzwakazi ngenzolo;  
Lwang'uthabatheko lwam lolomhla nezolo (Mema).*

The beautiful lady looked ahead with dignity,  
My love madness was something she was used to.

Mema further writes as follows:

*Yandiphendula ngembeko ngelizwi elikuphola.*

She replied respectfully with a soft voice

Compare this to:

*Unohloni njengocwethe,  
Uhlonel'ikhaya lakhe (Jolobe).*

She is as shy as a small mouse,  
She respects her home.

One can clearly see that a woman in this society is regarded as a second class member. Maleness is the norm, while femaleness is a deviation from the norm. It is unfortunate that this kind of injustice is also propagated by Christianity. This explains why Mema is so critical of the woman who confidently walks down the street, thus exhibiting character traits of those women who refuse to be limited by conventional expectations.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it is evident that the two poets' viewpoints and attitudes towards the African woman differ remarkably. This is evident from especially the linguistic implications of the words they use. Notwithstanding Mema's derogatory representation of women, his satirical excellence is cause for admiration.

The role of a poet in society is '... to help us discover ourselves, teach us who we are, where we come from and help us redefine our culture from time to time' (Mphahlele 1986). Mema, like most artists, seems to be totally committed to fulfilling this role. Unfortunately, he does this by refusing to reconcile himself to the inevitable disintegration of cultures that used to be self-sufficient before the advent of alien forces in South Africa. Culture and tradition as defined by Malange (1993), '... is the preservation of one's right, identity, self respect, place in society, one's belief etc.'. However, no culture is ever static and closed to influence and change. All culture is thus open and dynamic, seeking to preserve that which is good in it, and to challenge that which is not fundamental or essential to its needs. As a dynamic entity then, any particular culture influences and in turn is influenced by other cultures it comes in contact with. And in our day and age, it is nearly impossible to always distinguish what is exclusively African culture from, say, European culture in every aspect and mode of life.

Mema is himself a victim of the effect of these alien influences on our cultures. This is evident in the structure of his poems in which the elements of the European satiric tradition are fused with his oral legacy. Unfortunately, he does not allow women the same license to borrow what they like from the Western way of life. Instead, he appears to be entertaining the cosy idea that male experience is the standard of human experience.

To get a clearer perspective of the kind of comparison this article dealt with, Ngugi wa Thiong'o's (1981) words may be most appropriate: 'How we see a thing—even with our eyes—is very much dependent on where we stand in relation to it'.

University of Transkei Branch  
Butterworth

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## 'The Condition of the Native': Autodestruction in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*

Hershini Bhana

[She] lived the backbreaking life of all black people in South Africa. It was like living with permanent nervous tension, because you did not know why white people ... had to go out of their way to hate you or loathe you (Head 1974:19).

[A]utodestruction in a very concrete form is one of the ways in which the native's muscular tension is set free (Fanon 1967:54).

A friend of mine was reading at a gallery in an upscale neighbourhood, that specialised in African-American art. She looked beautiful in an orange, flowing dress as she read to a group of friends and family, all of them different shades of brown, black and red. Her slow stream of words was suddenly interrupted by a passing car as it back-fired and then back-fired again. Everyone in the room ducked, bodies stiff and bent over, eyes blinked shut, breath held. As if in a photograph, we were frozen in the moment, as bodies overlapped and faces blurred in terror. A micro-second later, we all inhaled and laughed at our absurd short circuiting, at that single collective moment when our nerves, raw from centuries of attempted extinguishing, sparked out of our nervous conditions.

Sartre, in the Preface to *The Wretched of the Earth* summarises Fanon's argument that the native manifests a nervous condition, introduced and maintained by the settler colonial with the native's consent. This statement follows a discussion of horizontal violence in which Fanon argues that violence against one's fellow colonised (i.e. horizontal violence) precedes the vertical violence against the coloniser that predominates during eras of independence wars. Dangarembga read Fanon only after she had written *Nervous Conditions*. But her post-novel choice of title was brilliant in that her work takes up where Fanon leaves off to elaborate on



how colonial structures enforce horizontal violence. She thereby crucially adds nuance to the idea of the consensual domination which was and is often (mis)appropriated to justify further colonial aggression. Furthermore, Dangarembga's overt linking of her novel through its title with Fanon's texts makes her work a site of noisy conversation, not only 'between individual psychology and colonial politics' but between women's politics and the masculinist politics of nationalism (Sugnet 1997:35). She reads her feminist narrative, in which the national liberation struggle is only briefly mentioned once, alongside one of the most articulate and passionate discussions of colonialism, thereby not allowing a reading where painfully gendered somatic experiences are separated from colonial/national politics.

The Fanonian claim that all natives demonstrate a nervous condition functions in several discursive terrains that contradictorily make up the racialised body. The claim, on one level, replicates the stereotypic association of blackness with (psycho)pathology. This coupling of blackness and pathology that appears all over the African diaspora is integral to the very definition of blackness for the crazy, diseased black functions as Other to the sane, rational, universal, white Subject. The emotional black can only operate outside of modernity due to the inability of her mind to function within the parameters of rationality, the most fundamental requirement for civilization.

Fanon shows throughout his work how the categories of (psycho)pathology are used increasingly not just to define the Other, but to enable the sequestration and marginalisation of the threat of difference/resistance embodied in the Other. J.F. Miller in 1896, for example, to explain the increase of blacks in insane asylums after 'emancipation', talks of blacks living comfortably

under less favorable circumstances than the white man, having a *nervous organisation* less sensitive to his environments; ... that he has less mental equipoise, and may suffer mental alienation from influences and agencies which would not affect a race mentally stronger (Gilman 1985:140, e.a.).

Miller's scientific definition of the native as mentally weaker than the white man, justifies the imprisonment of a newly released population who posed tremendous threats both to the segregated structure of society based on white supremacy and to white understanding of blackness as necessarily linked to servitude. This discussion of black 'natural' predisposition toward mental dis-ease was translated into the language of eugenics by William F. Drewry in 1908, who linked blackness with genetic propensities towards insanity, thereby providing white communities with the rationale for relegating blacks to manual and not mental labour.

This use of medical categories of pathology to manage the Other's unassimilability is old news to those of us familiar with drapetomania, for example,

the dis-ease causing slaves to run away, or dysaesthesia aethiopis, "hebetude of mind and obtuse sensibility of [the slave's] body" (Gilman 1985:138).

Fanon undercuts these racist narratives by also talking about the processes whereby the unspeakable violence of modernity writes itself onto the black body, resulting in very real consequences of ill-health. *As if in a photograph, we were frozen in the moment, as bodies overlapped and faces blurred in terror.* These 'bad nerves' are in no way inherent to the native, but produced by the traumatic deracinations and erasures of colonialism. Thus Fanon shows 'bad nerves' to be threefold: part of the stereotypic creation of a dis-eased Other against whom the universal, rational healthy Subject of modernity defines himself; the hegemonic re-writing of difference and resistance into scripts that support the continuation of racist narratives of containment/control of the Other; and the real consequences that the violence of biopower has on us. (Psycho)pathology for the native is thus overdetermined, ambivalently shifting between different narratives, all of which speak to the constitution and consequences of blackness.

*Nervous Conditions* speaks of the many nervous conditions we suffer. It not only documents the structures that produce these conditions but the different ways in which we manifest our ill-health. Central to the novel is a discussion of food and the eating disorder of anorexia and bulimia that Nyasha develops. I discuss the dynamics around this particular nervous condition in a longer version of this paper. The rest of this article will focus on several of the negotiations that the characters in the novel attempt around various overlapping discourses and the dis-eases they can result in.

## 1 Black with Dirt

[O]ur mission is to bring them up to the same developmental level as us, to help them learn the European way. If we could just teach them to wash every day and to make sure that they're clean, then we've done something good—even if they don't know that one and one equals two (Mariana Potgieter in Gevisser 1997:34).

It was late afternoon. I had just got done with the compulsory hockey practice, and I was wearily waiting for the school bus, standing a little apart from the other girls who were making plans for 'jolling' this weekend. A group of black women and men, whom I knew to be the grounds and cleaning crew passed by, also on their way home. I turned my head so as not to meet their eyes. The girls' chatter dulled and then resumed when the men and women moved out of ear-shot. 'Dirty kaffirs', one of them said. 'They all smell so bad'. They glanced my way. I turned my

head again so as not to meet their eyes. But as those words echoed throughout my body, I noticed how often I had heard them before, how natural the coupling of dirt and blackness was in the imperial landscape of South Africa. The black body was always described as inherently filthy, **black with dirt**. Dangarembga carefully navigates this disciplinary overdetermination, denaturalising the poetics of dirt and hygiene so central to the British colonial imaginings of the African.

Anne McClintock (1995:226) talks of how

[p]urification rituals prepare the body as a terrain of meaning, organizing flows of value across the self and the community and demarcating boundaries between one community and another.

Culturally specific practices of hygiene become a way of defining the body, with the blackness of dirt demarcating the African from the clean whiteness of the imperial self. Evidence of the African's 'filth' is the blackness of her skin as, with an imperial slight of hand, the 'blackness' of dirt blurs into the racialised blackness of Otherness. Blackness becomes 'a world of universal dirt and filth, and indigenous practices of bodily preparation and sanitation ... the inverse of "civilized" hygiene' (Burke 1996:193). Racial blackness is firmly coupled with dirt. The racialisation of dirt enabled the racialisation of the lower classes in Victorian England whose physical labour and subsequent coarse appearance was attributed to their genetic proximity to the African savage. Manual labour thus is further racialised; to work with one's hands is to get dirty which is to be black which is to be dirty. To clean functions synonymously with to whiten/to civilise/ to be of a higher class. Such popular (mis)imaginings lead local colonial powers and Rhodesian missionaries, as Burke develops, to stress hygienic training in the violent creation of the 'good native'.

Nhamo, Tambu's brother illustrates a native who seems to have internalised the collapsing of the 'blackness' of dirt with the 'blackness' of race. After being at the Mission where western practices of hygiene are stressed, he finds himself unwilling to take the bus to the homestead due to the stench and dirt of its other occupants. He wishes to avoid

travelling by bus because ... the women smelt of unhealthy reproductive odours, the children were inclined to relieve their upset bowels on the floor, and the men gave off strong aromas of productive labor ... [Further more the bus terminus was made up of] pale dirty tuckshops, dark and dingy inside (Dangarembga 1988:1f).

His ostensible disdain for dirt translates into a disdain for the black peasant. Nhamo's body, on the other hand, has been transformed/whitened by imperial body rituals; he

returns home often with little other than a plastic bag containing soap, a toothbrush and toothpaste (Dangarembga 1988:9). His appearance is a physical marker of his class privilege, of his greater proximity to the ideal of the modern white man.

Tambu hopes for a similar bodily transformation when she finds out she is going to be educated at the Mission after her brother's death. She desires to leave behind her thick-skinned feet that

had hardened and cracked so that the dirt ground its way in but could not be washed out ... the corrugated black callouses on [her] knees, the scales on [her] skin that were due to lack of oil, the short, dull tufts of malnourished hair (Dangarembga 1988:58).

She expects to 'find another self, a *clean*, well-groomed, genteel self ...' (Dangarembga 1988:58f, e.a.). One of the first acts she thus undertakes upon her arrival at the mission is a hot bath, in which she soaps herself three times.

Yet Tambu, unlike Nhamo, questions the blurring of blackness as dirt into race. Her shifting narrative perspectives provide an interesting commentary on dirt. She continually links the physical appearance of her family with their poverty and not with their lack of hygiene. Her skin is scaly due to the lack of oil, her hair is not neglected as much as malnourished. Her parents do not bathe every night as they lack indoor plumbing and all water has to be laboriously fetched from the river in heavy tin drums.

Tambu further counters colonial claims of the inherent filthiness of indigenous peoples by shattering open the mythic connections of whiteness/white-like and cleanliness. She states:

The absence of dirt was proof of the other-worldly nature of my new home. I knew, had known all my life, that living was dirty and I had been disappointed by the fact ... Yet at a glance it was difficult to perceive dirt in Maiguru's house. After a while, as the novelty wore off, you began to see that the antiseptic sterility that my aunt and uncle strove for could not be attained beyond an illusory level ... (Dangarembga 1988:70f).

Dirt, Tambu says, is everywhere. No amount of white 'civilization' can eliminate its presence.

I find it significant that the western instruments of hygiene, such as the toilet and toothbrush, which function at beginning of the novel as symbols of affluence, civilization and progress, later come to be described as instruments of Nyasha's destruction. The toilet in which Tambu is initially afraid to wash her menstrual rags for fear of dirtying it, becomes parasitic (Sugnet 1997:43). It leaves Nyasha

'grotesquely unhealthy' as it sucks her 'the vital juices' (Dangarembga 1988:199). The toothbrush, which Nhamo brandished as a weapon of civilization on his trips home, is used by Nyasha to help her vomit (Dangarembga 1988:190). Nyasha thus uses the hegemonic discourse of hygiene which attempts to erase the black body, to literally erase herself.

Tambu goes on to depict indigenous rituals of hygiene that help define community, thereby countering claims that natives never washed before whites arrived. She describes with detail the ritualistic bathing and laundry that occurred in the Nyamarira, where children 'could play where [they] pleased. But the women had their own spot for bathing and the men their own too' (Dangarembga 1988:3). *Nervous Conditions* does not stop at showing the continuation of indigenous rituals of body preparation but the text also narrates the Shona's multiple negotiations around western prescriptions of cleanliness. Imperial practices of hygiene were closely linked to the creation of markets for commodities such as toothpaste and soap. McClintock and Burke dwell extensively on the formation of this African market, on the creation and manipulation of 'subterranean flows of desire and taboo' by 'manipulating the semiotic space around the commodity' (McClintock 1995:213).

*Nervous Conditions* goes further to point at the existence of diverse practices around western hygiene products. The Shona practice of smearing the body with fat, a practice vilified by colonial authorities as uncivilised and dirty, constitutes a perfect example. Vaseline, ever-present in all southern African stores, enabled a continuation of this practice under the guise of the sanctioned consumption of goods. Tambu, after washing for church in the Nyamarira, describes how she 'rubbed a lot of Vaseline on to [her] legs, [her] arms, [her] face and into [her] hair' (Dangarembga 1988:22). She continues and adapts the Shona aesthetic of the beautiful gleaming oiled body, appropriating a western commodity whose consumption was linked to imperial rituals of hygiene. This kind of adaptation and re-appropriation of products was so wide spread in Rhodesia, according to Burke (1996:205), that companies like Lever Brothers even took 'steps to protect products like margarine from being misinterpreted as hygienic substances ...'.

Such reinterpretations demonstrate a crucial method of resistance to the racialised assignment of meaning to rituals of bodily cleaning predicated on the consumption of toiletries. Thus, though Nhamo's nervous condition is his belief in the filth of the black body, the continuation and adaptation of indigenous purification practices, as well as Tambu's linking of dirt to class and impoverishment, resist these racist narratives.

## 2 A Cleansing or a Wedding: The Better Cure

*Nervous Conditions* develops on numerous other fronts, indigenous negotiations/reappropriations of colonial prescriptions around behaviour. A crucial

example is the Christian wedding ceremony that Babamukuru insists on for Tambu's parents, Mainini and Jeremiah. The incident of the wedding proves pivotal in Tambu's development for it catalyses her overt politicisation. In this incident, Tambu struggles to articulate the contradictions of colonisation that she feels in her body as two signifying systems collide.

Babamukuru first suggests the wedding at the *dare* when they are discussing the family's recent misfortunes. Jeremiah suggests a 'traditional' solution to the problems; calling in a medium to perform a 'cleansing' ceremony complete with beer and sacrificial ox. The christianised Babamukuru, the patriarch of the family, violently vetoes this suggestion of calling in a 'witchdoctor' (Dangarembga 1988:146). Instead, he states, 'rather than say [these problems] are the result of an evil spirit that someone has sent among us, I have been thinking they are the result of something that we are doing that we should not be doing, or the result of something that we are not doing that we should be doing. That is how we are judged, and blessed accordingly ...' (Dangarembga 1988:146-7). In this scene we see two systems of belief set in opposition to one another, with one having the structural authority to suppress and erase the other.

Babamukuru echoes the colonial assault on our traditional ways of knowing the world in his attempt to superimpose Christian morality on the Shona beliefs of evil spirits. His reaction to a traditional healer is typical of the responses promoted at the missions and at the schools. Indigenous healers were reduced to uncivilised vestiges of another age, ignorant and superstitious. They, along with the entire realm of spirits and the living dead, are contained under the sign of the primitive. Spirits become a fictional product of the rationally unschooled savage mind. An alternate Christian version of the world is proposed, predicated on the punitive notion of sin.

The concept of sin, central in the mission's attempt at disciplining the African, dominates the discussions in *Nervous Conditions* around the wedding ceremony. The wedding ceremony is supposed to cleanse Tambu's parents of sin. As Tambu states:

Sin had become a powerful concept for me ... I could see it. *It was definitely black, we were taught.* It had well-defined edges, and it ... worked like a predatory vacuum, drawing the incautious into itself and never letting them out. And now Babamukuru was saying that this was where my parents were, which meant myself and my sisters too. I could not associate myself or mine with sin so I smothered my misgivings in literal interpretations ... (Dangarembga 1988:150-1, e.a.).

Tambu finds the lack of ambiguities and nuance comforting in this Manichean ordering of her world where the missionaries prescribe certain behaviour and all she

has to do is follow rules to avoid sin. But her inability to ignore the direct devaluation of her parents and her family implied by the idea that their non-Christian union is sinful, forces her to confront the painful contradictions of colonial rule. She finds the definition of sin as 'black', of sin as her family's 'natural' state unless saved by white Christian morality, hard to accept. Tambu struggles to think through the contradictions of a system whose proponents, like Babamukuru, insist that her family are inherently bad/sinful due to their blackness and who try to 'save' them through acts that actually erase them and deny their reality. These cognitive splittings, and her attempt to synchronise the two systems, one of which refuses to find value in the other, cause Tambu to short-circuit, to experience her own nervous condition. She cannot reconcile the ambiguities: 'I had thought that ambiguities no longer existed. I had thought that issues would clearly continue to be clearly delimited ...' (Dangarembga 1988:164).

Her nervous condition expresses itself through a split between her mind and body. Unable to articulate her confusion and the rupture in the racist narrative of progress, she uses her body as a sign of resistance, of unwillingness to accept the proposition that to be Shona is sinful and without worth.

... I was slipping further and further away from [Nyasha], until in the end I appeared to have slipped out of my body and was standing somewhere near the foot of the bed, watching her efforts to persuade me to get up and myself ignoring her (Dangarembga 1988:166).

Her body, left behind on the bed, enacts a resistance in its passivity, in its refusal to participate in a ritual that would negate it. Not only does her mind split from her body but her mind fragments. Her mind

had raced and spun and ended up splitting into two disconnected entities that had long, frightening arguments with each other, very vocally, there in [her] head, about what ought to be done, the one half maniacally insisting on going, the other half equally maniacally refusing to consider it (Dangarembga 1988:167).

Thus Tambu suffers from nervous tension, a crippling mind/body split and fragmentation of her mind due to her inability to reconcile the two opposing world views she encounters. This reconciliation proves especially difficult for her as the western progressive lens she has put her faith in, attempts to relegate her family's beliefs, customs and existence to spectres of primitivism.

Tambu is not alone in her reaction to the Christian wedding ceremony as something that 'made a mockery of the people [she] belonged to and placed doubt on

[her] legitimate existence in this world' (Dangarembga 1988:163). Lucia, Tambu's aunt, seems unenthusiastic. She insists only that they carry off the wedding ceremony well or else people will laugh. Maiguru keeps 'forgetting' to take care of the wedding dress and bride's maids' dresses, until Nyasha has to take over for fear that the dresses would not be ready in time. Tambu's mother, the bride to be, appears so resigned to being denied voice and legitimacy that she states that the whole affair does not matter one way or the other. She remains apathetic, this wedding ceremony is one more thing she has to endure. Only later, just before the most serious onset of her nervous condition when she does not eat or do anything, does she admit her feelings of shame, anger and resentment. She,

[Babamukuru] says this and we jump. To wear a veil, at my age, to wear a veil! Just imagine—to wear a veil. If I were a witch I could enfeeble his mind, truly I would do it, and then we would see how his education and his money helped him (Dangarembga 1988:184).

So who wants this wedding and why? The colonial conversations around marriage were numerous in Rhodesia. Colonial powers, obsessed with control over potentially dangerous black bodies who outnumbered them, and prompted by a recession, turned in the 1920s to advocate 'reconstituted "traditionalism" and "tribalism" ... promoting policies that "bolstered the waning authority of African chiefs and headmen"' (Schmidt 1990:623). These patriarchs constituted the crucial link in the system of indirect rule, simultaneously being coerced by British authorities to help them govern unruly black bodies and being rewarded for the positions of limited (intermediary) power that they occupied. Dangarembga depicts Babamukuru as one of these patriarchs. Nyasha angrily articulates his position, as powerful and ultimately powerless by mimicking a white colonial. 'Her voice took on a Rhodesian accent. "He's a good boy, a good munt. A bloody good kaffir", she informed in sneering sarcastic tones' (Dangarembga 1988:200).

In the 1930s, Schmidt argues, the colonial state, trying to appease these African patriarchs, whose authority they had previously undermined, collaborated with them to control the mobility and sexuality of African women. Hence, numerous laws around marriage were passed, that gave husbands and guardians power over women. These laws crucially bolstered imperial hegemony in the region. The 1901 Native Marriages Ordinance, amended in 1917, declared all African marriages invalid unless registered. It was the husband's responsibility to register the marriage before cohabitation and if he failed to do this, he could be fined ten pounds or imprisoned with or without hard labor for up to three months. If the husband failed to do this, furthermore, guardians were responsible and could also be punished. In addition, men married under Christian rites could be prosecuted for bigamy. The



Jesuit and Wesleyan Methodist missionaries were also involved, requiring that all those at the mission marry according to Christian practice, monogamously and without premarital sex, or else they were expelled from the missions for sinning.

Babamukuru, as part of the black elite used to prop up imperial power, thus has pressure from the colonisers who 'educated' him to ensure that his family are all married in western ceremonies. He also has tremendous pressure from the missionaries whose acceptance of him as headmaster is contingent on his adoption and promotion of 'Christian' living. Babamukuru's internalisation of the delegitimisation of indigenous customs and beliefs leave him with little choice but to prescribe this Christian wedding ceremony that no one seems to really want. The Christian wedding also enables him to ensure that Jeremiah does not have sexual relations with Lucia since Jeremiah, after the ceremony, can be prosecuted for polygamy. In this way he can control not just the behaviour of his brother, but of Lucia who eventually leaves the homestead to work where Babamukuru finds her a job.

But to read the wedding as merely an abandonment of indigenous beliefs and as an adoption of Christian ones would be simplistic. Babamukuru, perhaps in spite of himself, also uses the wedding as a cleansing—'he as anxious that his brother be *cleansed* of sin as soon as possible' (Dangarembga 1988:160, e.a.). The notion of cleansing oneself is firmly embedded in Shona cosmology where one cleanses oneself of evil spirits using ceremonies prescribed by the medium. The ceremony being used in this cleansing, in an interesting blurring of Shona and Christian beliefs and practices, is the Christian wedding ceremony. When Tete asks, '[a]nd now shall we have a cleansing or a wedding? ... which is the better cure' (Dangarembga 1988:148) I would answer both. In an attempt to theorise the small, tight spaces that resistance can hide in, I would argue that the wedding is being used as a cleansing. This subtle appropriation of the 'modern' western practice, this adaptation of the Christian as it converses with Shona beliefs, disrupts progress as a linear narrative beginning with the primitive. The 'modern' and 'traditional' are seen to exist simultaneously, interrupting each other in a cruel diaspora conversation.

### 3 Me as the Sublimate—Education

Dangarembga problematises colonial models such as education, 'relativizing their dominance as she places them within a network of conflicting ideologies ...' (Bosman 1990:95). Her elaboration on colonial education's exilic function constitutes one of the central axes of the novel. *Nervous Conditions* places us in the midst of a storm about what kind of education African children should obtain. The benefits of selecting a handful of children who rise through the (post)colonial system to become one of the ruling elite, thereby benefiting indigenous communities, are weighed against the education's alienating effects, against the nervous conditions it engenders.

Ketu Ketrak (1995:70) talks of this alienation in his article 'This Englishness will Kill You':

... [t]he entire process of schooling from girlhood into adolescence, the inculcation of British values, leads to the experience of multiple marginalities—from the colonizer's culture, from one's own people, even from one's own voice as it articulates English and other 'forgotten' and consciously re-memoried tongues.

This British-educated child becomes what Ngugi Wa Thiong'o calls a 'black hermit', marginalised from and caught between contradictory, fragmenting wor(l)ds (Gurr 1981:28). This marginalisation is part of a complex process whereby the child is both centred due to the power and prestige of an English education and contradictorily marginalised due to this centring. Thus Tambu, for example, is centred as the star pupil who is going to be with the whites at Sacred Heart, and simultaneously ignored.

... I ran over to the pitch. They all saw me coming ... I saw [Maidei] stop with the ball in her hands to point me out to the others, but as I ran on to the field they were cool and silent. They ignored me (Dangarembga 1988:187).

At Sacred Heart, she is one of six exceptional black students who despite the importance of their distinction, get relegated to overcrowded segregated quarters. Thus both the indigenous and white settler communities centre these children (albeit for different reasons) and simultaneously marginalise and ostracise them.

Dangarembga is careful not to overlook the gender dynamics involved in the selection of the children to receive a British education. Males need to be educated first, primarily due to the southern-African colonial state's desire to create a tier of African patriarchal elites who would make up the backbone of the imperial system of indirect rule. Thus Nhamo, as Jeremiah's son, is sent to school at the Mission, while Tambu is directed to stay at home and stay away from the books. Nhamo goads Tambu with his gender privilege: 'Did you ever hear of a girl being taken away to school? You are lucky you even managed to go back to Rutivi. With me it's different. I was meant to be educated' (Dangarembga 1988:49). In his gloating, Nhamo overlooks that it is the gendered labor of his mother who sells food at the local bus terminus that enables him to go to the Mission for school. The 'fundamental principles of [her] brother's budding elitism' infuriate Tambu who actively resists, throughout the novel, the collusion of indigenous patriarchy and Victorian beliefs of educating women only to be good mothers and wives (Dangarembga 1988:49).

Maiguru proves an interesting exception in a generation where very few, if any, women were educated by the missionaries and the colonial state. She has



surprisingly received the same level of western education as Babamukuru. She however, unlike Babamukuru, keeps silent about her academic achievements, enabling the community to continually de-emphasise and overlook them while aggrandising her husband's achievements. Tambu, on learning that Maiguru has a Master's Degree states in astonishment, 'I thought you went to look after Babamukuru ... That's all people ever say' (Dangarembga 1988:101). When she tells this to Maiguru, she sees Maiguru's bitterness for the first time. "That's what they like to think I did", she continued sourly. The lower half of her face, and only the lower half, because it did not quite reach the eyes, set itself into sullen lines of discontent' (Dangarembga 1988:101). Maiguru's bitterness indicates her difficulty accepting her gendered role—she, like Tambu's mother and Lucia, senses many of its contradictions and injustices. Maiguru attributes her ability to see the contradictions of her situation to her stay in England which gives her a vantage point from which to analyse and critique patriarchy: 'What it is ... to have to choose between self and security. When I was in England I glimpsed for a little while the things I could have been, the things I could have done if-if-if things were-different-But ...' (Dangarembga 1988:101). Maiguru can be said to occupy a location similar to that of what Abdul JanMohamed (1992:97) calls the specular border intellectual, the exile whose 'interstitial cultural space' provides her with a position from which to scrutinise her cultures in order to formulate other utopian possibilities of societal structuring. Maiguru however, proves unable to articulate and follow through on these utopian possibilities. She quickly reverts back to a narrative of feminised self-sacrifice, telling Tambu that 'a good man and lovely children ... make it all worth while' (Dangarembga 1988:102). One sees here the collusion between the 'colonial ideology of separate racial "development" in Rhodesia [that] guarantees minimal interference with [Babamukuru's] power as Shona patriarch' and discourses of 'masculine sexuality ... affirmed by his ability to capitalise his family within a white Rhodesian economy' (Thomas 1992:28). This combination subsume Maiguru's vision of her potentiality as a Shona woman, straining her nerves.

Maiguru eventually snaps under the pressure, leaving Babamukuru to temporarily stay with her brother and his family. Nyasha contextualises Maiguru's departure:

But it's not that simple, you know, really it isn't. It's not really him, you know. I mean not really the person. It's everything, it's everywhere. So where do you break out to? You're just one person and it's everywhere. So where do you break out to? ... (Dangarembga 1988:174).

Nyasha, in a moment of acute identification with her mother, articulates not only the plight of the native woman under a colonial rule that reinforces Shona patriarchy, but

the condition of 'otherness' that affects women everywhere. Nyasha's statement illustrates her own growing sense of helplessness and ineffectuality—she cannot help her mother or herself 'break out'. Nyasha recognises and is damaged by the pattern of daily self-erasure and infantilisation that constitutes her mother's condition. Later in the novel, Nyasha physically re-enacts this erasure and infantilisation by disappearing her body's female curves. After five days, Babamukuru brings 'home' a slightly changed Maiguru. This Maiguru does not use baby-talk as frequently and fusses over her family less. To a limited extent, she reverses the process whereby she sublimates herself, voicing her opinion more often. Yet her nervous condition, though alleviated, remains fundamentally unaltered.

Babamukuru, as the first male child in the family to receive a British education, becomes the patriarch who makes the final decisions concerning the family, as demonstrated in the wedding incident. Tambu's grandmother mythologises Babamukuru's entry into the ranks of the educated colonial elite in a stylised retelling of history (while Maiguru's entry is forgotten). Babamukuru's mother speaks of how she 'walked ... with Babamukuru, who was nine years old and wearing a loin cloth, to the mission, where the holy wizards took him in' (Dangarembga 1988:19). The importance of the grandmother's oral history lies in its multiple meanings. It shows the faith that many people put in colonial education as a way of circumventing imperial racialisation and its accompanying oppression. Education, for many, offered the promise of escape from the Fanonian superstructure of whiteness with wealth and blackness with poverty. The grandmother's faith resonates poignantly as I hear echoes of my own illiterate grandmother talking to me in a language I no longer understand about how important it was that I did well at school.

But Tambu's grandmother's romanticised re-telling of her decision is also a masking of the strategic decision she is forced to make in a world with few options. The history she cloaks in the language of the 'fairy-tale' (Dangarembga 1988:19), of 'the princess and the prince' (Dangarembga 1988:18) is one of enforced black male labor on the farm and in the mines, while children and women were relegated to barren rural homesteads to eke out an impoverished living which grew even more deprived in order to sustain the 'wizards' ... riches and luxury' (Dangarembga 1988:18). It is a story of treachery and black magic, peopled by the ghosts of the Shona, Tonga, the Ndebele displaced from their lands, by spectres of children and dried-up women relegated to barren outposts where nothing ever grows, and by the phantoms of men killed in the gold-mines and white farms. Her oral history is no fairy-tale, but rather an attempt to live with her choices within this haunted social landscape of colonialism.

The grandmother's story offers us a glimpse of the traditional ways of educating children, of passing on agricultural skills and historical memory. It enacts an alternative model of learning that breaks with the stereotypes of Shona life as one

concerned only with physical survival. It demonstrates that education does not have to be accompanied by a painful sublimation of the indigenous/black self. The grandmother's story is a history lesson:

History that could not be found in the textbooks; a stint in the field and a rest, the beginning of the story, a pause. 'What happened after, Mbuya, what happened?' 'More work, my child, before you hear more story'. Slowly, methodically, throughout the day the field would be cultivated, the episodes of my grandmother's own portion of history strung together from beginning to end (Dangarembga 1988:17f).

The grandmother thoroughly integrates the passing on of tribal and personal memory with the physical labor of cultivating food. This is unlike colonial education that teaches a virulent disdain for racialised manual labor, while valorising intellectual labor that is deemed inherently white. Nhamo demonstrates these effects when he returns from the Mission by not helping at all around the home and with the cultivation of food. He would rather spend his time reading. 'He would drink sweet black tea while he read his books and we went about our chores' (Dangarembga 1988:9). The educated elite leave manual labor to others for it is deemed beneath them. In the history lesson with the grandmother, the rhythm of learning echoes the rhythm of cultivation as the grandmother integrates physical and mental learning. The consequences of divorcing the physical from the mental are made clear, for example, in Nyasha's obsession to only teach and nourish her mind while her body starves.

Dangarembga juxtaposes the orality of Tambu's grandmother's history lessons with the textuality of British education. The production of an imperial body of knowledge cannot be separated from its production of written texts. References to these texts such as *Wind in the Willows*, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, *Little Women* and romance novels demonstrate the centrality of the written. Tambu's narrative, that makes overt the power relations embodied in and perpetuated by these texts, opposes the predominant position that such texts occupy. She eloquently states:

I read everything from Enid Blyton to the Bronte sisters, and responded to them all. Plunging into these books I knew I was being educated and I was filled with gratitude to the authors for introducing me to places where reason and inclination were not at odds. It was a centripetal time, with me at the center, everything gravitating towards me. It was a time of sublimation with me as the sublimate (Dangarembga 1988:93).

Dangarembga places the voice of the unaware young Tambu alongside the older, more politically astute Tambu, thereby exposing both the pleasure involved in read-

ing these rich, literary texts and their function of silencing and sublimating her voice. The older Tambu demonstrates how these books, while evocative, function to define the Subject as only white by a cognitive mapping of normative experience. These British texts, replete with snow-flakes, apple trees and the savage 'blackness' of the mad-woman in Rochester's attic, symbolically produce a hegemonic Real, where 'reason and inclination [are] not at odds', where the painful contradictions of colonialism recede into the background (Dangarembga 1988:93). Tambu does not respond to this sublimation by advocating an abandonment of the written and a romanticised 'return' to the oral. Instead *Nervous Conditions* is her attempt to 'tell' the story of the four women she loves and their men—she positions herself to write the oral, to put flesh on the textual body of Othered experiences. She attempts to 'insert herself' into a colonial 'cognitive map' overdetermined by 'all the things ... read ... [by] everything that you're taught' (Dangarembga in George & Scott 1993:312).

*Nervous Conditions* continues this discussion of British colonial education, documenting several different aspects. Crucially, it requires some sort of physical separation from the indigenous Shona world whose influences are thought of as corruptive. Thus Babamukuru's journey takes him first to the white mission, then to South Africa and eventually to England—always in a direction away from his ancestral 'home' into exile. This physical journey traces Babamukuru's inner path towards greater and greater assimilation. Babamukuru cannot, however, assimilate fully into whiteness as the 'epidermalization ... of [his] inferiority', the inscription of race on his body continually reasserts itself (Fanon 1967:11). As a black man he must ultimately confronts the 'barrier' of race that no amount of assimilation or education can erase. He returns to his 'place' in the colonial scheme of indirect rule as one of the western educated black elite, thereby perpetuating colonial material and cultural hierarchies. His role as headmaster and Academic Director of the Church's Manicaland Region provides him with a site firmly entrenched in colonial discourses, to be the 'good kaffir' (Dangarembga 1988:194).

But Tambu deconstructs the stereotype of an unreflective, passive and easily manipulated patriarch by carefully narrating Babamukuru's ambivalence at playing the role:

Babamukuru did not want to leave the mission ... [but] to decline would have been a form of suicide ... he had no alternative but to uproot himself for a period of five years in order to retain the position that would enable him, in due course, to remove himself and both his families from the mercy of nature and charitable missionaries. My grandmother thought the children would be better off at home ... But Babamukuru, remembering how difficult life was on the homestead, did not want his children to experience the want and hardship that he had experienced as a young child. In addition, he pre-

ferred to have his children with him so he could supervise essential things such as their education and their development (Dangarembga 1988:14).

This passage shows him to be riddled with contradictions, wanting the material benefits that accompany the position of the colonial elite, yet not wanting to experience the accompanying alienation. One sees him wanting to be free of the missionaries' manipulation, while believing in the colonial discourses of 'progress', Christianity and a western education that removes him from the homestead. Babamukuru thus suffers from nerves stretched tight as he attempts to negotiate the different colonial discourses and spaces that provide him with a limited power and that always relegate him to the object of fear, desire and subjugation.

We hardly even laughed when Babamukuru was within earshot, because, Maiguru said, his nerves were bad. His nerves were so bad because he was so busy. For the same reason we did not talk much when he was around either (Dangarembga 1988:102).

The physical distancing required of 'black hermits' mirror an internal distancing from one's indigenous community, what Dangarembga throughout *Nervous Conditions* calls 'forgetting'. The idea of 'forgetting' is a complex one since to forget assumes the existence of an authentic, cultural body of memory. Access to this body of memory often is naturalised, giving rise to stereotypic definitions of what black people know or can do. Dangarembga subtly intervenes by recirculating the trope of forgetting and remembering one's identity, showing its different resonances with different characters.

We are introduced to 'forgetting' as a consequence of British education early on in the novel. Nhamo, on his first visit 'home' from the Mission, has 'forgotten' how to speak Shona. His amnesia makes sense given colonialism's systematic devaluation of the cultural memory of black peoples. Nhamo's forgetting how to speak Shona reflects his physical distancing from the rural community as well as his attempt to distance himself from the painful processes of racialisation. As Fanon (1967:38) states, '[t]o speak a language is to take on a world, a culture' and by strategically forgetting the language, Nhamo is trying to forget the devalued world of the homestead.

He had forgotten how to speak Shona. A few words escaped haltingly, ungrammatically and strangely accented when he spoke to my mother, but he did not speak to her very often any more .... The more time Nhamo spent at Babamukuru's, the more aphasic he became ... (Dangarembga 1988:52f).

Tambu is careful to expose Nhamo's aphasia as cultivated, as a ploy to consolidate

an elitism based on his proximity to whiteness/Britishness—and not as an actual forgetting. She is unable to conceive of an actual forgetting.

Thus when her friends at the Mission entreat her not to forget them when at Sacred Heart, she thinks,

Don't forget, don't forget, don't forget. Nyasha, my mother, my friends. Always the same message. But why? If I forgot them, my cousin, my mother, my friends, I might as well forget myself. And that, off course, could not happen. So why was everybody so particular to urge me to remember? (Dangarembga 1988:188).

But as Dangarembga develops throughout the novel, it is possible to forget oneself, to sublimate one's identity so thoroughly that the self only erupts episodically as nerves. Indeed, a few pages later, Tambu talks about being so busy with exotic languages, games like hockey, nuns and reading that she rarely remembers her family and her friends (Dangarembga 1988:195f). Only upon the deterioration of Nyasha's condition, and her mother's warning of the danger of Englishness does Tambu start to realise that her collective identity is not natural, but can be forgotten.

Was I being careful enough? I wondered. For I was beginning to have a suspicion ... that I had been too eager to leave the homestead and embrace the 'Englishness' of the mission; and after that the more concentrated 'Englishness' of Sacred Heart (Dangarembga 1988:203).

Tambu's idea of her community and identity begins to move away from a naturalised one which exists no matter what, towards more of an 'imagined community', where relations are sustained by active acts of identification and coalition around historical, political, and cultural circumstances. This conception of community and identity is closer to the one held by Nyasha. Nyasha, as a second generation black colonial elite, schooled in Britain, cannot assume a naturalised relation to any community. While in England, she forgets how to speak Shona and struggles to re-learn it. Her Shona classmates ostracise her, "She thinks she is white", they used to sneer, and that was as bad as a curse' (Dangarembga 1988:94). They do not like her English, 'because it is authentic and [her] Shona, because it is not' (Dangarembga 1988:196).

Nyasha does not want to forget. She reads not to sublimate herself but to situate and re-member herself within a larger context of modernity and its terrors.

She read a lot of books that were about ... real peoples and their sufferings: the condition in South Africa, which she asked Maiguru to compare with our

own situation and ended up arguing with her when Maiguru said we were better off. She read about Arabs on the east coast and the British on the west; about Nazis and Japanese and Hiroshima and Nagasaki. She had nightmares about these things ... but she carried on reading just the same ... She wanted to know many things: ... the nature of life and relations before colonisation, exactly why UDI was declared and what it meant (Dangarembga 1988:93).

Nyasha, as Dangarembga states, 'does not have anything to forget: she simply does not know' (Wilkerson 1990:191). Her relationship to a black, African identity has to be painstakingly forged and negotiated; she implodes the myths of natural, authentic communities that cannot be forgotten. Rather, she re-members blackness, one phantom limb at a time, redefining 'blackness' as the painful inscription of meaning onto resistant bodies.

Nyasha points towards the impossibility of a single, authentic black community for the post-colonial subject. Trinh Minh-ha defines authenticity '... as a need to rely on an "undisputed origin", [that] is prey to an obsessive fear: that of losing a connection. Everything must hold together ... a clear origin will give me a connection back through time ...' (Bosman 1990:95). Nyasha does not have this undisputed origin and her attempts to find such an origin, such as the making of clay water-pots long abandoned by the Shona in favour of tin drums, are romantic and dismissed by Tambu as a way to pass the time (Dangarembga 1988:150). Dangarembga is showing here 'the impossible archaeology of recovering/reinventing what colonialism destroyed' (Sugnet 1997:41). Nyasha's head is described, in terminology strangely akin to Trinh's quote, as 'full of loose connections that are always sparking' (Dangarembga 1988:74). It is this productive messiness, this inability to contain history within a single, developmental narrative, that disrupts essentialist notions of identity. The sparking, loose connections deconstruct a naturalised identity, conceptualised as opposite to Englishness and waiting in the wings to be simply remembered and retrieved. Rather black, female identity becomes something that has to be created, out of the fragments of a rapidly changing Shona culture impacted tremendously by the structures of modernity and colonisation.

#### 4 A Cure for Autodestruction: Somewhere where it's Safe

*Nervous Conditions*' politicisation of the 'bad nerves' of the native disrupts dominant psychological models of neuroses based on the individual. All the characters' diseases of the nerves, whether it be Nyasha's eating disorder, Babamukuru's violent temper, Maiguru's self-effacement or Tambu's sublimation of the self can be read as another example of '[a]utodestruction ... one of the ways in which the native's

muscular tension is set free' (Fanon 1967:54). The terror of racial and gendered imaginings combine to form a lethal combination that traps the native, making him/her feel silenced, disempowered and ineffectual. But this is such a hopeless and painful discursive place for me to end with; we need healing.

Tambu's mother indirectly provides us with path towards a cure for the native's nervous conditions. Upon hearing of Nyasha's self-starvation and purging, she insists that "It's the Englishness" .... "It'll kill them all if they aren't careful" (Dangarembga 1988:202). She asserts that one cannot expect anyone, not even the ancestors to stomach so much Englishness—that the Englishness that is making Nyasha sick is the Englishness that contaminates and adversely effects all of Shona society, from the ancestors to the children. Tambu's mother's diagnosis finds resonance with Paulo Medeiros (1992:12) when he says that '[i]mplied in the notion of [the native's] dis-order ... is the possibility of a rupture of established order, initially at the individual level but ... increasingly more so at the societal level'. Thus English colonialism, buttressed by certain Shona patriarchs, is seen as the real disorder and society's illness must be cured before the native can be healthy. The only cure therefore has to be independence. As Hill (1995:79) succinctly puts it:

[i]f physical and psychological illness can be read as symptomatic of colonialism, it can be cured only by independence ... And since Nyasha's rebellion against the silencing of her voice and body is a gendered rebellion against patriarchal authority, her personal experience of rebellion figures the guerilla war taking place in Southern Rhodesia during the 1960s and 70s when the novel is set.

*Nervous Conditions* thus deconstructs the artificial binary of private and public, depicting a world where the native body is racked with dis-eases that are inextricable from the larger dis-ease of colonialism. This space is a garden 'where seeds do grow', the seeds of independence from the hegemony of imperial discourses and its resultant dis-eases/nervous conditions (Dangarembga 1988:203).

Department of Ethnic Studies (African Diasporic Studies)  
University of California, Berkeley

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## **Nihilism in Black South Africa: The New South Africa and the Destruction of the Black Domestic Periphery<sup>1</sup>**

**Dumisane Negobo**

### **Introduction**

Surely the most lamented and, possibly, the most unexpected feature of the 'new' South Africa is the exploding rate of crime and non-political violence. This phenomenon is over-coded by issues of race and class, with the majority of 'offenders' and victims coming from groups previously excluded. For some this has led to a strengthening of stereotypical views of Blacks as being prone to crime. I don't think I will be faulted for neglecting to address the 'merits' of arguments such as these. Others have focused primarily on the economic causes of crime, pointing out that in a country with huge income inequalities, high unemployment and where delivery to the poor is, to put it mildly, very slow—crime and violence can be expected.

What the latter already well-documented level of analysis leaves out, are the subjective factors that have an effect on crime. While acknowledging the explanatory force of economics, it is in the arena of culture and psychology that this article will attempt to come to a fuller understanding of crime than mere statistics can provide.

In attempting to provide answers at this level it is necessary to distinguish my approach from that of certain politicians, religious leaders and government officials who have been lamenting the 'moral decline' in South Africa of late. From the refusal to pay rates, to poor school attendance, to land invasion and violent crime has all been blamed on a 'moral degeneration' amongst, particularly, the disadvantaged in South Africa who are purportedly guilty of these 'crimes'. The solution to these problems are that communities and individuals once again climb the ladder of social

<sup>1</sup> 'Black South Africa' refers to the residential areas of the African peoples of South Africa, i.e. African townships and reserves. The term 'Black Domestic Periphery' is used interchangeably with 'Black South Africa'. The concepts 'Black' and 'African' are used interchangeably and refer to the African people of South Africa as 'ethnically' defined.

and individual responsibility to reach former high standards of lawfulness and obedience to authority. The obvious problem with such an approach is that it ignores a simple fact. Most black people in South Africa have tried, legitimately, for years to be as ungovernable as possible. Apartheid, separate development, capitalism, exploitation were all seen as systems which deserved only grudging support and, when the opportunity presented itself, actual undermining. This attitude stemmed from a moral framework, which envisioned an egalitarian and just future.

The reason for the lack of support for law and order in South Africa is not because of a moral degeneration along one axis, but because an entirely different and opposing axis along which the co-ordinates of right and wrong used to be plotted, has been ripped down. There has therefore been the destruction, through various means and for various reasons I will touch upon, of an entire moral framework, not the simple descent downward along an always-existing one. The task of the new leaders of society has been to attempt to get black people to accept this new moral framework and to urge them to begin evaluating their behaviour according to its terms. As I will argue below these are the values of individualism, consumerism, materialism, delegation of authority, objectification, a deification of technicism and violence.

But I would go further. A major part of the problem resides in the fact that many black people are unwittingly reluctant to embrace the new moral framework. The old framework of communalism, service, sacrifice, struggle, opposition, independence persists against the new values. For poor people, excluded from the fruits of the new society, this is an obvious choice. To make matters even worse, the institutions that would have guided these values, (SDU's, civics, People's courts, street committees) have been dismantled. And thus there is neither the form nor the content of the morality that once existed in townships on the one hand, and on the other a new alien, impossible to achieve morality that is being urged. It is out of the loins of this situation that nihilism is born.

### **Black Psychologists on Psycho-cultural Dimensions of Black Personality**

Since this work is primarily an inquisition into the causes of mass psychological depression, personal worthlessness and social despair so rampant in black South Africa, the field of Black Psychology, will be traversed. Psychology is defined as the science that systematically studies behaviour in its relationship to the complexity of mental, emotional, physical and environmental factors, which shape it (Karenga 1993:439). Black psychology developed out of a need to restore the sanity and personality of the African which was (and still is) threatened by white racism, cultural oppression and degrading exploitation. The primary objective of Black Psychologists

has been to 'transform Africans into self conscious agents of their own mental and political liberation' (Karenga 1993:439f).

There are three schools within Black Psychology: the Traditional, Reformist and Radical Schools. For the purposes of the study, it is one constituent of the Radical School that is briefly examined. This particular strand is associated with Joseph Baldwin (1992; 1980; & 1976), who focuses on the function of definitional systems of liberation and oppression. He asserts that definitional systems are central in explaining human behaviour since 'they determine how we experience the various phenomena that characterise the ongoing process of everyday life' (Baldwin 1980:96). Furthermore, 'the definitional system or worldview represents the ideological or philosophical base of a social system or a people and thus determines the meanings or values a people attach to their experience including their experience of themselves and how they will react' (Karenga 1993:453).

The fundamental problem that arises out of this argues Baldwin, is when an alien worldview is imposed on and/or accepted by people, leaving them at the mercy of definitions negative and detrimental to their image and interests. For instance, Africans' acceptance of the Eurocentric worldview has resulted in their decentering, dislocation on to the fringes of European society (Asante 1993). This dehumanisation of blacks is carried out through a denial of their history and thus a denial of their humanity (because only humans have history, dogs and other animals have pedigrees). If blacks are less than human, they become things to be used and abused with the sanction of society. This European definitional system is not only diametrically opposed to black interests, but reinforces a distorted reality in the image and interest for the Europeans (Asante 1993:453). This system is easy to perpetuate, since 'Europeans control the formal process of social reinforcement' (Baldwin 1980:101), which are economic and political power. This is not the same as saying that blacks cannot fight against this system.

Radical Black Psychologists, who include Baldwin (1992), Linda Myers (1992) and Wade Nobles (1980) have developed an Afrocentric theory of African personality. Their major argument is that a healthy functioning African personality has a bio-genetic tendency to affirm rather than deny African life, makes group a priority, including survival of culture and institutions, and engages in activities that promote this survival as well as the dignity and mental health of African people (Karenga 1993:454). Drawing on an Afrocentric theory, Baldwin has identified two major components of the core African personality, which are: African Self-Extension Orientation (ASEO) and African Self-Consciousness (ASC) which derives from the former and engages in mutually interactive process. These psychological components are rooted in and reflective of African culture or an Africa-centred worldview which is characterised by three basic concepts: 1) holistic spiritual unity; 2) communalism; and 3) proper consciousness or self-knowledge (Karenga 1993:455).

In this article an attempt is made to demonstrate that the 'definitional system' of the new South Africa has engendered nihilism in Black South Africa. This definitional system or structure is market culture—which can be defined through its values: individualism, consumerism, materialism, accumulation, objectification and self-aggrandisement. This definitional system has shaped a new political culture and cultural lifestyle in its own image. This (structural) market culture is capable of reinforcing its worldview through its,

corporate market institutions [which are a] complex set of interlocking enterprises that have a disproportionate amount of capital, power, and exercise a disproportionate influence on how society is run and how culture is shaped (West 1993:25f).

Nihilism here refers to the 'monumental eclipse of hope, the unprecedented collapse of meaning, the incredible disregard for human and especially black life and property' in much of Black South Africa (West 1993:19).

### Historical Roots of Nihilism: Land Dispossession, Exploitation, Racism and a Legacy of Terrorising the Black Domestic Periphery

The roots of nihilism in Black South Africa are directly traceable to white conquest. Land dispossession, racial oppression and super-exploitation of cheap black labour culminated in national humiliation. Land dispossession alienated Africans from their subsistence resources. They consequently lost control of their labour to the white economy. The transformation of African labour into mere commodity—commodity owed by whites—not only undermined the complex role labour played in pre-colonial Africa, but alienated the African from self. The African population was devastated by the cheap labour system. The sights of unprotected, helpless, poor and exploited African labourers who work and live in in-human conditions created an increase in feelings about the worthlessness of African life. While successive white regimes passed numerous policies to protect and privilege white labour, the opposite has been the experience of black labour (Lipton 1985). The wretchedness of the African labourer and devastation of African life have been in sharp contrast to the affluence of white society—a reality which tends to reinforce the inferiority of one group and the superiority of another.

The inferiority complex of Africans was systematically reinforced by institutionalised racism that permeated every aspect of South Africa life. Institutionalised racism, though a feature of South Africa since its inception, found substantial expression in the Apartheid policy which was enacted in 1948. The philosophical underpinnings of Apartheid are white superiority and black inferiority.

Politically, Apartheid has translated into the denial of civil and political rights for Africans. The denial of political space through the criminalisation of political activity hindered the capacity to create responsive cultural, social and political institutions. The perpetrators of apartheid legalised and consolidated the dispossession and subjugation of Africans. As an economic doctrine, Apartheid has ensured that Africans remain 'hewers of wood' and whites 'captains of industry'. This has resulted in South Africa becoming one of the most unequal societies in terms of the distribution of power and wealth. The major problem posed by this definitional system is that Africans have accepted the negative meaning, values, image and interests about themselves imposed by this alien worldview (Biko 1987; Karenga 1993).

It is true that the African has always lived in an environment that is not only hostile to the dignity of self, but also open targets of brutality, experienced on a daily basis through constant police and army savagery—not to mention the inhumaneness and harassment at the hands of ordinary white South Africans'. This enforced the perception that African life is cheap. For instance, the white farmers have frequently taken African life with impunity. That ordinary white citizens have easy access to all sorts of guns and have not hesitated to use them against Africans at the slightest provocation, has contributed to the devaluing of African life. However, it is the Apartheid State's brutality that has contributed greatly to the devaluing of African life through the police beating Africans on arrest, arresting them without summons, detaining witnesses, brutalising them in jails—with such claims dismissed by the courts—and their houses invaded by the police at anytime (Xaba 1995: 70).

### Historical Responses to the Nihilist Threat

#### The National Liberation Struggle: Hope, Identity, Meaning, Mission/Purpose and Institutions—The Ward against Nihilism

The discussion above demonstrate that Black South Africa has always offered the fertile ground for nihilism. Here, the intention is to demonstrate that it is the National Liberation Struggle that has been a mitigating factor against nihilism. Through partaking in it, Africans in general have not only been able to maintain hope in the midst of abject poverty. They could also construct positive identities, meaning, and mission/purpose, but also, create institutional structures which served their needs. All these factors have acted as a ward against nihilism.

#### Why the Oppressed Joined Liberation Struggles

Reasons that motivated individuals and groups to participate in the liberation struggles are many and varied. Some joined because of the prospects for a better life that national struggle promised. Some joined because they needed to create an

identity to define themselves because definitional systems of the dominant group negated their humanity.

Once an identity has been constructed, life becomes meaningful and purposeful. All in all, this raises the self-confidence of subjugated individuals and groups. These are some factors that explain the participation of the lower segments of the black population in the national liberation struggles in South Africa, particularly the youth. Apposite to this discussion, Essien Dom (1962:83f) in his study of why African-Americans join Mohammed's Nationalist Nation of Islam, observes that:

The need for identity and the desire for self-improvement are the two principal motives which led individuals to join and remain in the Nation of Islam ... although they were three discernible groups of joiners, the majority were alienated from themselves and estranged from their community ....

Relevant to this discussion also, is Vilas' statement (1993:39) in his study on the rejuvenation of civil society in Latin America, that:

What is distinctive about recent re-activation of civil society is the broadening of the socio-cultural reference points for collective action. The spectrum of identities that people construct in the course of social action has been significantly extended.

#### The Black Consciousness Movement and Civic Movement: Constructing Identity, Meaning, Purpose and the Restoration of Hope, Pride and Collective Action in the Black Communities

At the end of the 1960s, the Black Domestic Periphery, under the leadership of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), was able to break the silence that had characterised the decade. The 1960s was a period of fatalistic silence in the black communities<sup>2</sup>. The fatalistic silence followed the banishment of the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) in 1960, the incarceration of political leadership on Robben Island and the criminalisation of political activities—not to mention the unprecedented state terror that followed the Sharpeville massacre. These factors, combined with apartheid proclamations on black inferiority and white invincibility, were able to anaesthetise and conquer the mind and soul of the black people.

In these circumstances, black response was political silence and the emulating of whites. For instance, black women using lightening creams trying to whiten

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 12: 'Fear - An Important Determinant in South African Politics' in Biko (1987).

their skin, only burnt it. Youth turned to crime. Led by the charismatic black leader, Bantu Biko, black students organised themselves under the banner of the philosophy of Black Consciousness. Biko (1978:29) and other leaders of the movement eschewed black complicity in their oppression through silence and preached black pride, black dignity and demanded the rights of blacks to self-determination.

To further their objectives; black students formed the South African Students Organisation (SASO) in December 1968. SASO formed cultural and community organisations from which the people could benefit. These organisations provided institutional mechanisms to break the inertia and restore hope and black pride. Arguably, it was largely through the influence of this philosophy that black Soweto students challenged the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in black schools. Through this challenge—that culminated in the June 16 student massacre—black youth sent a simple yet profound message to white South Africa: The African will never again anyone, any government nor any institution to impose the white world on him/ her.

The post-June 16 1976 uprising gave way to the Civic Movement. It is the Civic Movement, under the direction of the Liberation Establishment—which included the ANC and its partners (Mayekiso 1996)—that transformed the struggle into a fully-fledged national liberation struggle. It is the youth from the townships who fled South Africa, who formed the core of this movement.

Most probably, the township youth was the most alienated and marginalised group in the Black Domestic Periphery. They have been associated with crime and other vices and are often pejoratively referred to as 'Skhotheni' (scoundrels) by members of their own communities. They had been victims of marginalisation and stigmatisation. Since the 1970s, however, participation in the national liberation struggles, was to usher in a new township youth image and identity. This was the identity of a 'freedom fighter', a 'comrade', 'defender of the community', etc. They thought themselves energetic, flexible and the country's future (Marks & McKenzie 1998:224). Indeed, the total liberation of the African majority became their primary purpose in life, as exemplified in the life of Mzanele Mayekiso<sup>3</sup>. For this role in the community, the youth became the direct target of state terror (Marks & Mackenzie 1998:222). The youth responded by either establishing self-defence units (SDUs) or by leaving the country to join the liberation armies—especially uMkhonto Wesizwe (MK). It was participation in these para-military armies that truly transformed a 'skhotheni' into a 'defender of the community'. This helped to cement a positive identity of self and inculcated a culture of service to others.

<sup>3</sup> For a full picture of the participation, transformation, commitment and sacrifice of the Township Youth during the national liberation struggles in the 1980s, see Mayekiso (1996).

The Civic Movement created vibrant community structures that were governed democratically by local residents. These civic structures organised bus boycotts, protested against corruption of council members and operationalised the ANC's strategy of making the country 'ungovernable'. All in all, participation in the national liberation struggle engendered a true African personality characterised by African Self Consciousness and African Self-Extension Orientation that were mutually interactive.

### The New South Africa: Its Political Culture

With the opening up of the Apartheid state, the unbanning of political organisations, releasing of political prisoners and returning of exiles—in short: the political liberalisation initiated by President De Klerk in 1990—the duty to liberate the African majority became the prerogative of the 'heroes of the struggle'. The concerted demobilisation of the civic movement and the collapse of civic structures—e.g. the United Democratic Front (UDF)—accompanied the usurpation of civic structures and their functions. This usurpation rendered the comrade redundant. Thus, those who were once 'defenders of the community', lost that which accorded them not only identity, meaning and purpose but also provided institutional structures through which they could operate interactively, collectively and constructively. This led to the destruction of hope, the death of collective ethos, a lack of purpose and a loss of faith in leadership; in short, a crisis in black leadership. This raises the question as to the reasons which led to this new political culture of nihilism.

### Broken Promises, Shattered Dreams and Tarnished Futures: The lost Faith in the People

The African majority expected a 'lot' from the ANC's 1994 60.2% election victory. So did their petty nationalist leaders, as manifested in the ANC's election manifesto. It promised, *inter alia*, freedom from land hunger through the redistribution of 30% of arable land in 5 years; freedom from homelessness through the provision of 1 million houses in 5 years; freedom from joblessness through the creation of 100 000 non-agricultural jobs per year; etc. The overwhelming support that the African majority gave the ANC in the 1994 election could only prove that they did believe these promises. The strategy to be adopted to ensure that these promises were fulfilled was said to be 'growth through redistribution'.

In a dramatic twist of events, the ANC in government began to urge the masses of African people to be 'realistic and patient'. Some academic commentators suggest that the ANC in government, instead of challenging capital to give concessions to its poor constituency, chose to work 'with capital' (Callinicos 1996;



Marais 1998). In fact, the macro-economic framework of the ANC-led government is said to represent the very opposite of a transformed vision of South Africa it promised to its poor constituency (Adam et al 1997:206). While it promised 'redistributive transformation', it now bravely pursues 'free-market transformation'. The result of the change of vision and strategy has been the breaking of promises, unrealised dreams and tarnished futures.

The promise of job creation has been replaced by the reality of job losses amounting to 500 000 thousands formal jobs (*Sunday Times*, April 4 1999). The dream of owning a spacious house as articulated in the RDP (1994) has been shattered by the reality of having to do either without a house or to put up with one-roomed incremental houses which have been dubbed 'kernel' houses by the poor. The RDP promise of 'human resource development' and free ten-year transitional education has translated into the financial exclusion of students from especially historically black institutions catering for the poor ANC constituency, amongst other predominantly Black Parties. Since the 'free-market transformation' dictates that there should be user charges for all basic services, poor communities have had to do without water, for instance. Above all, the market-driven land reform process has translated to the redistribution of a mere 1% of the land by 1999 (*The Sunday Independent* May 23 1999).

These broken promises, shattered dreams and tarnished futures have profoundly affected the psyche of the African majority. If the 'heroes of the struggle' who sacrificed almost everything during the liberation struggles have backtracked on their own promises, the masses may justifiably ask themselves 'Who else can we believe?' By the same token, the people who sacrificed so much for their delivery from apartheid oppression may further ask themselves 'Which amount of collective struggle and sacrifice is needed in order for one to live just a modest life?' This intractable disappointment creates a culture of cynicism, disbelief and distrust in collective action and in a leadership which has destroyed hope of deliverance from oppression and exploitation for the masses of ordinary Africans. In the end, if life is devoid of hope and meaning, the struggle becomes unnecessary and undesirable and the *status quo* is naturalised.

#### **The Politics of Selective Payback: The Nurturing of a Me Attitude and Value**

One of the greatest achievements of the national liberation struggle was the reinforcement of a traditional African collective ethos and values. This was largely achieved through selfless sacrifice by the leadership and emulated by the masses of African people. To do something for the community, irrespective of the price to be paid, was encouraged and highly valued. The sacrifices were committed for the good of the entire community—liberation of Africans from the yoke of apartheid.

However, with the birth of the New South Africa, collective struggles for the good of the community gave way to selective payback.

Selective payback is ultimately reflected in the 'meteoric rise of SA's black middle class'. These new black rich are themselves members of the liberation establishment/aristocracy who include Cyril Ramaphosa (resigned ANC Secretary-general and one with probably the highest profile), Saki Macozoma, Tokyo Sexwale (former Gauteng Premier), Marcel Golding and John Copelyn (former trade Unionist), and more than 30 former Members of Parliament. The two conspicuous constants among them are to belong to the liberation aristocracy and to become millionaires. The ANC-led government supports their ascension to wealth. In other words, they are a creation of this government. Its procurement policies look like a 10-point plan, where black-owned companies get 10 extra points as they vie for lucrative contracts which range from road construction to computer system installation in hospitals (*Mail and Guardian* April 1-8 1999). Thus, the explanations of 'insufficient resources' and 'inadequate time for delivery' are unacceptable in the context of the 'meteoric rise' of these new 'filthy rich'. For example, it took Afrikaner capital 10 times longer to achieve the level of listed corporate ownership that the new deal-makers have notched up in the past four years (*Mail and Guardian* April 1-8 1999).

The creation of 'liberation millionaires' is regarded as selective payback because the benefits of black economic empowerment have yet to trickle down to the African majority. Yet, for now, this seems to be a far-fetched dream, because 'most black economic empowerment deals are limited to existing economic activities and do not create new employment' (Adam et al 1997:218). One of the results of this kind of black economic empowerment has been the closing of the income gap between the whites and the black new rich. In 1998 this also contributed to the richest 20 percent of the population taking home 63% of the wealth, while the poorest 20 percent made to do with just 3 percent (*Sunday Times* March 21 1999).

For the poor, the sights of the new black rich, in a very short period of time drove home the point that they have just been used as cannon fodder. They have been the means to an end for those enriching themselves. It is not true that South Africa lacks resources for the improvement of the standard of living of its citizens. Maybe, one can achieve economic mobility if one becomes a self-centred individual climbing on the backs of others. For the millions of ordinary masses though, who had put their hope of delivery from abject poverty on the democratic state, this destroyed their faith in collective struggles.

#### **The Market Culture and the Collapse of Civil Society**

Another equally unexpected feature characterising the New South Africa, is the collapse of civil society. Broadly, civil society can be defined as a variety of



groupings and organisations operating outside the state, excepting the business sector (Kotze 1998). These groupings and organisations must champion the cause of the disadvantaged members of society. Civil society in South Africa fully emerged in the 1980s (as discussed earlier) and played a crucial role in the dismantling of apartheid. Its role during the anti-apartheid struggle coupled with the almost universal acceptance of the importance of the role that civil society is supposed to play in the new South Africa: to address the unresolved issues of transformation, reconstruction and development. This link, however, has collapsed, and the question is: 'Why?'

Available international evidence seems to suggest that the concept 'civil society' has been appropriated by capitalist classes and that civic structures like NGOs have been co-opted into the neo-liberal paradigm. In the words of the World Bank vice-president, the bank considers NGOs—there are about 80 000 NGOs in South Africa - as 'important co-workers in a common cause' (MacDonald 1995:33). The capture of civil society by capitalism has resulted in the transformation of civic structures into market structures that stress and promote market values and moralities. NGOs that used to encourage the poor to fight for a just and egalitarian society, now

advocate the merits of market-led strategies for economic recovery and see their role as assuaging the worst suffering caused by economic structural adjustment, in order to ensure social stability (MacDonald 1995:32).

In South Africa, the transformation of civic structures into market structures was preceded by the decimation of NGOs with vast experience. The assault on the civic structures was propelled, on the government side, by their insistence that the democratic state must redress past imbalances and deliver basic services to the poor (Kotze 1998:92). This was done through the channelling of funds and other resources away from NGOs into consultants in the private sector. The majority of NGOs that have survived this onslaught have been converted (reluctantly) into mere market structures that exude market values and moralities unable to deliver on reconstruction and development:

Increasingly, development organisations have also been forced to start charging communities that they have traditionally worked with for their services. This has caused outrage and despair in these communities. A number of CBO people interviewed complained that many NGOs have turned into consultancy firms themselves and no longer have time for development facilitation and implementation. NGOs and CBOs are also increasingly being urged to resort to voluntarism. They are expected to recruit volunteers to work for them, and development programmes are to be implemented by volunteers. In a country with extremes of inequality

between rich and poor as well as high levels of unemployment, such urgings border on the unethical and smack of typically neo-liberal trends. It also brings up the long contentious notion of self-help, first associated with the community development movement of the 1950s. Although this notion was always misrepresented as a kind of empowering process, in reality, it usually amounted to shifting the responsibility of poverty alleviation right back on the poor (Kotze 1998:97).

With the stark reality of the conversion of civic structures into market structures that exude market values and moralities, it is not difficult to understand why young Africans have a don't-care attitude and have lost interest in community structures and politics (*The Independent on Saturday* April 17 1999).

## The New South Africa and its Cultural Life

### Consumer Materialism: The Inculcation of Individualism, Accumulation and Artificiality

Collective ethos and values underpinned the cultural life that characterised the national liberation struggle. This is reflected in the verbs that defined the virtues of the era: 'serve, suffer, and sacrifice'. There was little room for expression of shallow materialism. However, the advent of the new South Africa has led to the saturation of 'market forces and market moralities' in South Africa. In turn, these market forces have engendered new values: individualism, exclusivity, accumulation and artificiality. This new market culture 'celebrates rootless and ruthless profiteering, eschewing civic connectedness and national sacrifices as old-fashioned virtues' (Adam et al 1997:202).

Members of the liberation aristocracy in particular, and their black middle class fellows in general, are the carriers and transmitters of the market culture. This they achieve through their daily displays of flamboyant lifestyles and luxuries, a behaviour that is characteristic of an undeveloped middle class (Fanon 1963). They ride in 'luxurious sedans' and wear 'faux fur jackets and diamond-encrusted shoes' and display an 'attitude that exudes confidence and ownership' (*Mail and Guardian* April 1-8 1999). They are after 'quality' and 'name' and shop, in places like 'Disiel' where a single purchase costs anything between R700 and R1000. Some of them, like Peter Mokaba the deputy minister of environmental affairs and Tony Nyengeni the chair of the parliamentary committee on defence buy their clothes directly overseas and the latter also works as a promotion agent in one of the expensive and elegant shops in Cape Town. This kind of market co-option, which has created a crisis of value with the black community, confirms Karenga's dictum: 'Ours is a cultural crisis' (Karenga 1993:278).

Inevitably, this new market culture has invaded and conquered the Black Domestic Periphery. It has drastically changed the aspirations and attitudes of the youth. The 1996 study conducted by P. van der Reis for the Bureau for Market Research entitled 'Aspirations, values and other marketing considerations among metropolitan black youth' has been most revealing. In support of the thesis that the 'heroes of the struggle' in particular and their black middle class fellows in general, are carriers and transmitters of the new market culture, Van der Reis (1997:8) writes:

They [the youth] aspire to be like their heroes: educated, successful, prosperous and living in a beautiful home with a spouse and two or at most, three children.

Unlike bygone eras, spare time is reserved for self and mundaneness:

Free time on weekdays is largely home-orientated for the youth and spent studying, watching television, listening to music, or reading books when household chores have been completed. Weekends are largely devoted to watching soccer and to socialising. Going to movies and reading newspapers are popular too (Van der Reis 1997:8).

Like their 'heroes',

metropolitan youth appear to have a generally favourable attitude toward the quality of products in the shops ... which confer status ... their whole shopping environment has expanded, with access to a wider range of products and shops'.

The drive for material acquisition among the masses of ordinary youth, however, is challenged by the disappearance of work and the diminishing of job opportunities, which in turn drives the youth to commit violent crime against members of their own communities. Since status now is largely conferred through material possession, the struggle for meagre resources has intensified in the Black Domestic Periphery, which poses another element to this nihilistic threat I am attempting to articulate.

#### **Consumer Militarism: The New South Africa and the Promotion of Lethal Consumerism**

The sociologist Jacklyn Cock defines 'consumer militarism' as the normalisation of, legitimisation and even glorification of war, weaponry, military force and violence

through television, films, books, songs, dances, games, sports and toys. How does a government promote 'consumer militarism?' The most effective way to promote this is through the 'normalisation of the notion that private gun ownership is legitimate, a right, not a privilege' (Cock 1998:131f). This notion is materially reinforced through the institutionalisation of highly armed security forces, which confirms that the gun is the only guarantee of protection. Furthermore, 'consumer militarism' is promoted when access to arms and the ownership of guns are made easier—as is the case in South Africa), where 'licences are easily available and enforcement is minimal' (Cock 1998:131). No wonder, that at the end of 1996 the sociologist reports that there were 4.1 million South Africans in possession of firearms. In a society where guns are promoted, they become central in 'identity formation', and function 'as [a] marker of status', as a 'signal of particular style' and as a 'signal of affluence'. These factors only propel citizens to look for guns or to be 'in love with guns'.

More importantly though, guns are a symbol of the failure to create a good, just and egalitarian society. In other words, a gun is symbol of the failure of the new South Africa to extend social citizenship to more than half of the population whose life remain miserable. Therefore, the New South African society is not a secure society. Even though illusory, guns provide the only form of security in a climate of insecurity. The dilemma is that most of the legal guns end up in the hands of criminals making armed violence the 'fastest growing form of violence in South Africa' (Cock 1998:125).

The easy access to guns have meant that the poorly policed areas that are in the Black Domestic Periphery are more in danger in 1999 than it was in 1994. Demobilised youth who were either members of MK or SDU's find themselves unemployed and excluded from the new South African dream. The unemployed youth whom this society has excluded is not only denied love and dignity. For identity and dignity, their only hope is to resort to guns. In a struggle for survival, such youth end up terrorising their own communities (which care less for them anyway). Some carry and use guns because of the status it confers. To many members of Soweto crime syndicates, to ostentatiously display firearms, indicate the status of being a 'big man' (Wadrop 1996:8). This creates a climate of absolute insecurity which subjects the township resident to a state of terror. The situation is exacerbated by the inability of the police force to curb this crime which continues to induce defeatism among the ordinary helpless masses. This also forces many members of the black middle class to emigrate to more 'decent neighbourhoods' depriving the townships of remaining stable families. All these factors contribute to plunging the townships into ever deepening poverty without hope of ever-escape. As such, they contribute substantially to nihilism.

### Conclusion: Manifestations of Nihilism

The nihilistic threat in the Black Domestic Periphery is manifested in the losing of hope in upward social upliftment through formal and legal means. There are many factors: the legitimisation of the use of violent crime for survival; the loss of faith in collective political activities for social emancipation conditioned by the current crisis of black leadership; the terrorising of black communities; the rise in domestic violence and other vices like depression and alcoholism; the loss of collective ethos that are being replaced by market moralities.

The loss of hope in upward social upliftment through legal means is structurally conditioned by the economy that is not only failing to absorb new entrants to the labour force but continuously retrenches thousands of workers without any hope of finding employment. In many black townships, unemployment is reported to be above 60%, e.g. Alexandra. Informal and illegal means seem to be the only way in which thousands of Africans in the Black Domestic Periphery can survive. The article by Ferial Haffajee which appeared on the *Mail and Guardian* (May 15-21 1998), entitled 'Crime is the only business providing jobs', addresses exactly this point. In the same article, France Khawula is reported to be speaking on behalf of the many when he points out that a number of the unemployed youth 'have all got good matrics' and some have 'exemption in physics and maths' but cannot find jobs. In the same article, another spokesperson for the youth, Thulani Makhubo is reported as saying, 'we end up being tempted by crime' because there are no jobs. Moreover, 'our parents are unemployed'.

The legitimisation of violent crime results in the rise of crime in the black communities and threatens community destruction. For example: On a 'normal' weekend, especially at the end of the month, an average of 9 murders, 19 rapes and 43 robberies take place in Soweto alone (Mokwena 1992:30). It is needless to point out that this violence is fuelled by the disappearance of work and the marketisation of life, propelling a minority to material possession and disenfranchising a majority without any hope of the improvement of the quality of their lives. These factors are leading to the emigration of the members of the black middle class into decent neighbourhoods such as Sandton City. It must be pointed out, that this 'outmigration' is fuelled by the collapse of the group areas act regime. In turn, these factors contribute to the impoverishment of the black communities.

Yet, the most disturbing development is the decline in collective efforts for collective benefits. This is largely caused by the current crisis of black leadership - nationally but also in the Black Domestic Periphery. It is difficult to convince Africans to demonstrate faith in the leadership even through casting a ballot. The collaboration in the creation of the conditions of possibility for this apathy and nihilism, especially if it was created in a period of less than five years, is not excusable. It is the masses of ordinary African youth who bear a disproportionate

brunt of these conditions and therefore of nihilism. The conditions that have given rise to nihilism in Black South Africa must be eradicated. The only alternative is a new black leadership grounded in African culture and capable of removing the defeatist attitude from amongst the Black Periphery. The immediate challenge for true leaders is to convince the masses of ordinary Africans that it is only through collective struggles that they can remake themselves and this society in their best image. As such, they will have to reinforce the social justice tradition which developed during the struggle years, at grassroots level.

Social Policy Programme  
University of Durban-Westville

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## 'By What Authority?' Presentations of the Khoisan in South African English Poetry

Annie Gagiano

A quotation especially useful to this essay is found in Megan Bieseles recent study of the Kalahari Ju/'hoan people's oral art. She writes:

There is a kind of cultural rumination endlessly going on there, a milling process that brings the unseen into harmony with the seen, the old with the new; all aspects of the ongoing life of society are its grist. In the region of 'special realities' lies a huge reservoir of adaptive potential for our species since images of reality ... can encompass immense change (Bieseles 1993:192f, e.a.).

This is reminiscent of the simpler Achebean reference to 'Art ... in the service of man' (Achebe 1975:19). If Bieseles comment is meant to explain, in the first place, the unique integration of the practical and the spiritual in a living San or Bushman community, it would seem to mediate *also* towards the type of use a society much in need of mending (like our own) might make of the records, retentions and art of the KhoiSan people who lived here for so long before the present-day South Africans; both in our social and political strategies and in the art-work we in turn produce. This would be the benign, the imaginatively hopeful response. That there is another pole to this interplay of cultures, a severe danger of misuse and exploitation, has often been noted.

How extremely taxing and baffling a problem 'cultural encounters' present (both ethically and historically) is registered in the frequency and range of expressions of cautionary criticism amongst those who study the South African First People(s)<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Stuart Douglas (1995:74n1): 'I caution against the call to "recuperate the San"; to view "bushman" as a bridge between the past and the future is to potentially enter the realm of "dangerous diluted sewerage poison"'.

Chris Ballantine<sup>2</sup> (1995:135), for example, asks the following urgent questions:

In a post-colonial world by *what authority* do we confer upon ourselves the right to speak about other cultures? What does such speaking, or writing *mean*? How much does this speaking and writing 'really' tell us about other cultures, and how much—unwittingly—about ourselves?

Edwin Wilmsen (1996:186) writes that:

Nostalgia for 'Bushmen', both as existential presence and as available prose, arises from the European conception of the 'naturalness' of small-scale societies as opposed to the 'artificiality' of industrial society, often expressed in the fear that wherever 'civilisation' materialises the 'primitive' in people is attenuated.

A general point about what one might call the benign or apparently benign dictatorship of English in the African literary sphere is (also) relevant here. Since what is to be examined in this essay are evocations and representations in *English* of people who spoke their own San and Khoikhoi languages, the question of how adequately this presently dominant language can render their largely extinct and silenced presence to us, today, inevitably arises. For the arrival and construction of South African literature in English on the cultural landscape has had the consequence of dislocating and disrupting the indigenous literatures in African languages ... (Masilela 1987:50). Tony Voss (1990:60) comments dryly: 'This desire to identify with the San represents an ideological claim to a status other than intruder'<sup>3</sup>. The archaeologist Martin Hall (1996:118) makes the general point in a slightly different context, warning that

<sup>2</sup> See too: Wilmsen (1995:1-27) who has written an illuminating and demythologising study of the way Laurens van der Post represents the San, while Rob Gordon's writing has been prominent in debunking sentimentalisms and exploitations of 'The Bushman mystique'. See also my own short review of Watson's *Return of the Moon ...* (Gagiano 1992:78).

<sup>3</sup> Compare Carli Coetzee's (1988:114) observation: 'In current versions of [the Khoikhoi woman] Krotoa's life, she is being constructed [by 'whites'] as the mother of us all', as well as Ward and Worden's (1998:209) reminder that 'In place of slave ancestry, a popular claim in the 1980s was [for "coloured" South Africans to assume, instead] descent from the indigenous Khoikhoi and San'.

If such artistic production is to be revelatory ... then the dialectic of object and context, of body and landscape, is crucial. For if icons are allowed to float free they will attract like magnets those master narratives that are so deeply embedded in contemporary culture.

The present popularity or commodification (often 'kitchification') of KhoiSan images (on anything from playing cards to Olympic logos—see e.g. Tomaselli 1995:i-xxi) is of course to be contrasted with the cruder sort of racial and imperial power-play of earlier times, when the taking-over (or deliberate, attempted obliteration) of the KhoiSan presence was cheerfully undertaken. In our own time we need to bear a more paradoxical and difficult relationship with the past and with 'original inhabitants' in mind:

There is now no Native past without the Stranger, no Stranger without the Native. No one can hope to be mediator or interlocutor in that opposition of Native and Stranger, because no one is gazing at it untouched by the power that is in it. Nor can anyone speak just for the one, just for the other. There is no escape from the politics of our knowledge, but that politics is not in the past. That politics is in the present (Denning 1992:178-179)<sup>4</sup>.

All these ironies swirl around the poems considered in the course of this essay, *and* around the discussions themselves. As much as the poems reflect perspectives and political choices of the periods in which they were composed, so do present reassessments of their worth and function. In the (generally chronological) discussion following, nothing more authoritative than interpretations of interpretations can be claimed. Yet an interplay, on 'internal conversation' can be structured. South Africans are necessarily widely engaged, at present, in rereadings of local history<sup>5</sup>. Setting up an exhibition (as in this essay) of the ways in which the KhoiSan presence has been verbally registered or mediated by members of other South African cultures perhaps leads chiefly to self-interrogation (healthy or narcissistic). Yet the whiff of that 'past presence' is inextinguishable and precious. Every one of the cited poems documents political (in other words, *power*) realities. So does each reference and preference expressed here. If all humans are descendants of a KhoiSan foremother, we are the siblings, quarrelling over the family inheritance: our battles themselves becoming 'history'.

<sup>4</sup> Pippa Skotnes uses this ironic and wise comment to head her 'Introduction' to the volume *Miscast*, edited by herself (Skotnes 1996:15).

<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, the collection of essays edited by Nuttall and Coetzee (*Negotiating the past*) which appeared in 1998.



The earliest South African English reference to the KhoiSan in this paper comes from 1812 and states in fierce and unashamed contempt:

Scarce human form the squalid figures boast,  
Filth is their ornament, their cov'ring grease!

—though with nauseating condescension 'observing' that somehow (usefully to the missionary position), *even*

The thoughtful savage ...  
... points to Him that rules beyond the sky (Van Wyk 15).

This kind of writing (by one George Marshall, from his 'Cynthio to Leonora') prefigures the vision of the imperialist's duty of taking charge of the world's 'inferior' peoples expressed nearly a century later in Kipling's poem 'The White Man's Burden' (Van Wyk 198-199), though at Marshall's earlier stage the disdain seems to function to reassure Englishmen like himself, comfortingly, of their indubitable, cleanly godliness, as they advance like a tide of detergent over the 'dark' continent<sup>6</sup>.

In 1825 was published what may be the earliest scathing 'rainbow nation' reference, in Frederic Brooks's sneering, crassly satirical 'South African Grins':

A rainbow ball, take it all in all,  
Is a blithsome place to make a call;  
For there you may see female blacks,  
With nothing black upon their backs;  
But, all drest in white, black, red, and green,  
Each looking like a *Hottentot* queen! (Van Wyk 28).

How does one pinpoint the racial contempt that seems implicit here? Brooks provides an early instance of white South Africans' 'colour' preoccupation:

And groups of pedestrians of all hues,  
From pure white to the colour of shoes;  
In short, so strange and motley a crew,

<sup>6</sup> See Anne McClintock's brilliant analysis of the coincidence of the British imperialist project with the cult of hygiene and cleansing agents (McClintock 1995:207-36) and, indeed, of the major contribution the commercial enterprise made, both monetarily and ideologically, to the global extension of British rule.

'Pon no *British* race-course can you view (Van Wyk 30).

It is a relief to come to Thomas Pringle's 'Song of the Wild Bushman' with its *counter-contempt* towards the 'proud white man' and his sedentary opulence, the 'Bushman' speaker expressing a refusal to 'crouch beneath the Christian's hand'; the poem ending with the icon of the 'brown Serpent of the Rocks' (Chapman 1986:35-36) whose sting threatens the invaders' advance. The Scottish Pringle's verse thus long prefigures a University of the Western Cape lecturer's impassioned appeal, at a 1994 Johannesburg conference on 'The Politics of Representing the Bushman People of Southern Africa', that the 'new representation of the San ... should ... acknowledge the active, ... rationally driven ... and effective ... part these people played ... as resistance fighters' (Guenther 1995:113). The conference was called 'People, Politics and Power. The Politics of Representing the Bushman People of Southern Africa' and held at the University of the Witwatersrand and Johannesburg Art Gallery, 4-7 August, 1994. In 1997, an important conference was held in Cape Town, aiming 'to save [the] heritage of South Africa's first people' (*Cape Times*, July 11, 1997, p. 9) where, according to the chief organiser, Prof. J. Bredekamp, 'for the first time [!] the people being researched [would] form an integral part of the conference ... in charting ways to preserve their culture and history'. Guenther's report on the earlier (1994) conference refers (in embarrassment or indignation?) to the merely 'mute and marginal' presence of 'the Bushman conference delegates' on that earlier occasion (Guenther 1995:110). The benign intention and the inevitable absurdity sign posted by this statement irresistibly recall Pringle's well-known verse lines: 'Afar in the desert I love to ride/With the *silent* Bush-boy alone by my side' (Chapman 33-35, e.a.)<sup>7</sup>.

About thirty years after Pringle (in 1864) Bleek published his *Hottentot Fables and Tales*<sup>8</sup> in one of which (1864:69-73) the comforting message of enduring life is brought from the moon by the mantis (associated especially with the San people, their trickster god or Prometheus figure). But the mantis is outwitted and has his message of lasting life distorted and inverted by the hare, bringing the doom of death on man—the hare getting his lip split as a punishment (Chapman 1982:20-21). Could one now read into this image of disruption an unintended evocation of the

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Gray's 'reply' to Pringle, 'Afar in the Desert/(Bush-boy speaks)' (in his *Hottentot Venus and Other Poems*, 1979) is not particularly successful, in contrast with the far more impressive title poem of this collection (1997:12), discussed later in this essay.

<sup>8</sup> The full title is *Reynard the Fox in South Africa: Hottentot Fables and Tales*. See 'How death came' (Cope 1968:252 - which is probably the source of the Chapman: 1982 version).

future imperial advances by whites into these territories? The hare's malice is unexplained, but he is certainly the type of power figure who wants and manages to 'take over' and who displays his force by controlling the words which determine and rule the future.

Pringle and Bleek's attempts to ventriloquise the KhoiSan voices (expressive of political protest and self-sufficient culture) can be classed with W.C. Scully's 'The Bushman's Cave' (Van Wyk: 81-82), published in 1886. The gestures of cultural respect in this poem, combined with its awed sense of the loss of 'the vanished Bushman', are well caught in the metaphor describing the now empty cave as a 'casket with a rocky lid' (l. 7), since the speaker proceeds to imagine a community filling this cave with domestic, social and artistic life and value. The poem seems a response to the traces, in rock paintings, of that life; the 'strange, harmless, limning art' producing a momentary trance even in this modern observer. Predictably, there are touches of cultural condescension in the poem and its two concluding stanzas 'solve' the mystery of the Bushman's living and passing in a tidily social Darwinesque-cum-Christian explanation (their race failed *because* they lacked the divine 'light whereby/All men must walk'—ll. 65-66), yet the main impression of the poem is a sense of wondering recognition of the poignant and utterly recognisable humanity of the San<sup>9</sup>.

Much of the writing in English about the KhoiSan people of South Africa is rooted—directly or indirectly—in the work of

an extended family of /Xam San from the north-western Cape, some of whom had been arrested for stock theft and had been sent to the Breakwater prison in Cape Town for the duration of their sentences. The patriarch was Jantje Tooren or //Kabbo, his son-in-law Klein Jantje or /Han=kass'o,

//Kabbo's nephew, Dawid Husar or Diä!kwain, and Diä!kwain's sister Griet or !Kweiten ta //ken and her husband Klaas Katkop or =Kásin and their three small children ...[They] were a very small sample of the descendants of the tens of thousands of Southern San who lived throughout Southern Africa at the time of European contact (Deacon 1996:93).

These 'six /Xam-speaking people ... taught their language' to 'a German immigrant and philologist Dr Wilhelm Bleek' and his unmarried sister-in-law Lucy Lloyd, who transcribed and translated the testimony of these witnesses (quotations above all from Deacon 1996:93). This body of material became a cultural and linguistic testament. Despite the inevitable and analysable ironies and compromises involved in this encounter (see for example the astute commentary by M. Guenther 1996), this work remains the main and invaluable source of a *verbal* San presence from the past.

Bleek and Lloyd's *Specimens of Bushman Folklore* appeared in 1911. From it, the onomatopoeic 'songs' of two birds, 'The Song of the Blue Crane' and 'The Song of the Bustard' (or 'Kwa-Kwara') (Van Wyk 1-4) are delightfully evocative, partly because the translators *don't* translate everything, but leave the English tongue to struggle with the 'Rrru rrra' (spelt with 4 r's and 3r's respectively, to drive the point home) and 'Wára khau ...A wa, a wa, a wa, a wa!' sounds, with whatever uninhibitedness it can muster.

To remind us that the colonial encounter had—more often—an uglier face than this sort of ecological delicacy and social sensitivity takes no more than a quotation like the reference, in Francis Carey Slater's *The Karroo* (1924), to 'Scattered and wandering pygmies, hideous, filthy, and squat; ... Hating all that was human with blind and inveterate hate' (1947:97). Even uglier (and, considering the *enactment* of this ethos, more threatening) is Owen R. Thompson's 'The Bushman':

You pygmies lived in dust and filth,  
The earth with lepers sowing,  
and man, though gaining by your past,  
Is better for your going (1930:80).

This is rather worse than Marlow's disquieting thought (in *Heart of Darkness*) of possible remote kinship with dancing African 'savages'!

But the oscillation continues. Schapera in 1930 in his *The Khoisan Peoples of South Africa* published some beautiful 'San ...' and 'Khoi songs' (Van Wyk 5-7). The San song ('Ho, my hand is this') is self-affirmative, yet also a poignant invocation showing hunger, need and touching anxiety. In contrast with most of the San statements chosen much later by Watson (1991) from Bleek and Lloyd's transcriptions, the sense of the *body* is very real and robust here. A similar

<sup>9</sup> Compare the indignant and evidently - to judge by the appended editorial response of the time - uncomfortably accusatory poem in Afrikaans-Dutch, M.H. Naser's 'Di Klaaglied van di Laaste Boesman' (Van Wyk 126-128, the title meaning 'The lament of the last Bushman'), published ten years later than Scully's poem (i.e. in 1896). Cyril Meredith's 'The Home of the Alien' of 1905 implicitly protests the 'invasion' of South Africa by 'the Wandering Jew'; 'The puny Chow'; 'the Indian from Bombay', 'the gay Assyrian' and 'Stalwart Iberians', and already uses the term 'Democrat' with a sneer, yet he seems not to have noticed a single indigenous person or group (Van Wyk: 205-206) or to have thought of white European settlers as invaders. [The 1909 and 1910 poems by two stalwarts of the Afrikaans literary establishment, D.F. Malherbe and Jan F.E. Cilliers, form an interesting contrast with each other, paralleling the poles in the English poems I have been describing (Van Wyk: 214-215).]

combination of vitality and convincingly real hunger for food turns to piety in the Khoi 'Hymn to Tsui-xgoa' (Schapera still). The slightly Victorian 'Thou's' of 'The Hymn of the Thunder' work well in this context<sup>10</sup>, along with the satisfyingly deep 'Guru!' (spelt with exclamation marks on both sides) for the thunder-peals.

The self-chosen linguistic boundary of this text is here transgressed in order to bring in a central document which appeared in 1937, in Afrikaans: Eugène Marais's *Dwaalstories*—tales which had been told to the writer (years earlier than this publication date) by a very old Bushman who is identified by the Afrikaans name of 'Hendrik'. No less an authority than N.P. Van Wyk Louw, the leading Afrikaans poet, felt that Marais never produced anything else as magnificent as these tales (Gilfillan 1996), narrations of a culture convincingly evoked in the full health and density of its social, religious and natural life. The vivid portrayal of the beauty, humour, complexity, harshness and *livingness* of an intact, different, but recognisable culture evoked here (despite the probable impossibility of anyone's establishing how 'authentic', in scientific terms, these four tales are—and the very deep irony of that displacement) immeasurably enriches the scanty available literature representing the life of the San—that is, in distinction from their own rock paintings. From these *Dwaalstories* (perhaps translatable as both *wandering* and *wanderers'* tales) I offer a tentative translation of the opening and closing lines of the poem which concludes one of the tales, viz. 'Die Dans van die Reën'<sup>11</sup>:

First she peeps slyly over the mountain-top  
And her eyes are shy;  
She laughs softly.  
From far off she beckons with one hand.  
Her bracelets shimmer and her necklaces shine,  
She calls softly.  
She tells the winds of the dance  
And she invites them, for the yard is wide and the wedding grand,  
....  
She spreads open the grey kaross with both her hands;  
The wind catches its breath.

<sup>10</sup> Despite the criticism of such Victorianisms, e.g. by Watson commenting on the Bleek-Lloyd translations (Watson 14).

<sup>11</sup> The meaning of the title should be obvious: 'The Song/Dance of the Rain'. The poem concludes a story about great need and expectation of rain, and the arduous task of making it come. The poem I have part-translated occurs on pp. 18-19 of the 1964 printing of the Human & Rousseau separate edition of the *Dwaalstories*, in which the full story takes up pp. 12-19. See also the essay by Gilfillan (1996).

O, the dance of our Sister! (18-19).

Considerably later, in 1959, T.W. Barron published a poetry collection titled *The Captive Bushman*. The title poem (Van Wyk 406-407) is overwhelmingly sympathetic to the man in the dock for a murder committed in defence of his people and territory; the captive still manages to intimidate his captors, 'Like wild-cat filled with wrath' (l. 17), and eludes white 'justice' by taking 'A Bushman opiate' (last line).

The available date for the evocative poem<sup>12</sup> by Jack Cope, 'Rock Painting' (Chapman 1986:138-139) is 1960. Even if his versions of KhoiSan poems from Bleek and others had never been published, this item would testify to Cope's profoundly empathetic sense of San life, especially that of the San artist. The poem delicately, ramblingly, but deftly weaves a sense of the dreaming painter:

A leather-skinned wrinkled old man  
old hunter yellow as the stones  
from the rock he hears the rain talk  
hyena cracking bones (ll. 1-4).

This is the first stanza, which draws the reader insidiously from the outsider's (say archaeologist's/anthropologist's) perspective into the dreaming, vividly felt ruminations of the San artist. The poem affirms that 'the [probably painted] story is a hunter returning/who does not come alone' (ll. 23-24), but this sense of a culture presenting a lasting power and resource is balanced finely by the melancholic final stanza—

His trail is through the stars forever  
white ash thrown in the sky

<sup>12</sup> Sidney Clouts's poem 'Firebowl' from a 1966 collection (1984:106) is comparable to Cope's for using similarly modernist 'free association' techniques, but Cope's is the more dense, assured and moving of the two. A considerably later poem, Michael Picardie's 'Trance dance for the Cape KhoiSan' (Van Wyk: 818) seems likewise comparable to Cope's and Clouts's in that it also attempts to imagine premonitions of extinction from within a KhoiSan speaker (like Cope's) and uses the suggestion of 'flashes of awareness' (as do Clouts and Cope). As in Cope's poem, one can trace in Picardie's verse some of the Bleek and Lloyd material. There is something of a violation of the speaker's 'world view', though, in line 22 ('Stars are made of dynamite with which God blasts') and the concluding line has a rather false and pompous ring.

They know, the fire and the dancers,  
do they know he will die? (ll. 25-28).

-which combines the sense of individual and cultural extinction.

In 1965 R. Griffiths wrote a poem in which the speaker tells bluntly and wryly how his 'Grandpa shot the last three Bushmen in our district' (Van Wyk 470—'The last three Bushmen'). Yet the now deserted, painted rock dwelling of the San becomes a shrine to the speaker for its 'living line and glowing colours' (l. 31). The poem embeds both poles of settlers' responses to the 'first people' without (it seems) confronting that contradiction. Considerably more powerful and delicate are two lyrics ('Conquest' and 'The Conquered') by the exiled poet Timothy Holmes (Pieterse 1971:79-80), communicating a deeper sense of the tragedy of devastation. Holmes imagines the poignant awareness, among 'The Conquered', of their 'Leaving [merely] small shadows of [themselves and their] chattels/painted upon [rock walls]. For others' (1971:80)<sup>13</sup>.

In 1968 Jack Cope, with Uys Krige, published *The Penguin Book of South African Verse*. In this collection Cope's pioneering poetic versions of the Bleek and Lloyd translations appeared, the best known of which is undoubtedly the 'Prayer to the Hunting Star, Canopus', which when printed elsewhere does not always acknowledge Bleek's role clearly enough—nor Cope's. Cope himself is commendably scrupulous about acknowledging sources—first the Bushman narrator/poet X-nanni and then the European transcriber—and admirably modest about his own role<sup>14</sup>. In both these respects he can be contrasted with Stephen Watson (who, incidentally, never mentions Cope as a predecessor in versifying the Bleek and Lloyd translations—Watson 1991:7-20).

Like Schapera's 'Ho, my hand is this', X-nanni's 'Prayer to the Young Moon' (Cope 245) sounds young and fierce and bossy: 'Small moon/Hai! Young moon/hai hai!' (ll. 1-3), demanding the divine aid so urgently needed by the speaker in order to catch food. The vitality of rhythm is the most vivid element here. The

<sup>13</sup> Considerations of space prevent more than cursory mention of Peter Strauss's interesting sequence, 'Photographs of Bushmen', with its explorations of perspectival issues (1974:3-10). A weaker poem is 'Rock Paintings, Drakensberg' by Alan Ross, for which one source is the 1979 Butler and Mann collection, though it is likely that the poem had an earlier first publication (Butler 1979:155-156).

<sup>14</sup> He follows the title of the poem ('Prayer to ... Canopus') with the name of the San speaker/poet (said by 'X-nanni') while at the bottom of the poem one reads (in small print) 'C after W.H.I. Bleek'.

well-known 'Prayer to ... Canopus' (246)<sup>15</sup> is more melancholic in imploring the star's aid in hunting. Cope's selection also contains a lovely, delicately ambiguous 'Star Song of the Bushman Women' of only four lines (246), a welcome female presence in a rather male-orientated collection (here *and* in other editions). Wonderfully robust and aptly shaped is 'The Wind and the Bird' (247), which whirls up and subsides like its subject.

### The Wind and the Bird

(Naron Bushman Song)

The Wind is a man and goes out from his hut.  
As a bird, Xgauwa goes with the Wind:  
one with two names are they, Xgauwa and Hise.  
The Wind has the bird with him and he walks a little way  
but no more: from the earth he rises,  
into the sky he shoots up, he soars  
and he takes the grass and whirls it far  
scatters it so it falls a great distance.  
The magician sees the one walking with the Wind,  
it is Xgauwa, and the bird speaks to him saying  
'I am he who arouses the Wind' (after W.H.I. Bleek; Cope 1968:247).  
(Compared with this, the rhythm of the second stanza of Watson's 'The Wind is one with the Man'—Watson: 54—seems somewhat somnolent, rather than incantatory.)

The two next Cope versions from Bleek and Lloyd can be directly compared with Watson's. I would contend that in both cases Cope's versifications are superior to Watson's more recent and much acclaimed evocations of San life in his employment of the poetic qualities of rhythm, tautness and sound—however far from or close to the San originals, through Bleek and Lloyd's mediation, the poems may be. (I refer to Cope's and Watson's versions of Diä!Kwain's telling of the prayer to the new moon and to both poets' versions of 'The broken string'.) Cope's version opens with 'Young moon, take my face up yonder./give back to me your face up there, take away this pain' (247). Watson's has a semi-sentimental and stilted opening with 'Moon now risen, returning new,/take my face, this life, with you./give me back the young face, yours,/the living face, new-made, rising' and later 'be for me as you once were/That I may be as you'—Watson: 25. Cope's 'The Broken String' (248) has

<sup>15</sup> This poem appears also in Chapman's two collections, without evident credit being given to either Bleek and Lloyd or to Cope (as 'mediators').

weaknesses, but overall a more 'authentic' irregularity ('For/everything feels as if it stood open before me/empty, and I hear no sound/ ...and the old places are not sweet any more/for what they did'—248) than Watson's ('Because/the string is broken, the country feels/as if it lay/empty before me, our country seems/as if it lay/both empty before me,/and dead before me'—Watson: 59). Of course the essay-writer's—or any reader's—preferences raise the large but necessary questions of authority and of 'authenticity', which this discussion attempts to highlight, but cannot 'answer'.

Cope's collection in addition contains a children's scare-song<sup>16</sup>; a lullaby<sup>17</sup>; and (from Hahn) Khoikhoi songs like the 'Song of the Thunder'. In his short collection he includes a greater variety than Watson does in his more recent and influential publication (Watson 1991). Cope includes a 'Dance-Song of the Lightning'; the story 'How Death Came' from Bleek and Lloyd, a 'Hunter's Prayer' and the 'Hymn to Tsui-Xgoa' from Hahn, as well as a number of animal sketches, some of which are delightfully vivid (Cope 249-256). Overall there is also considerably greater variation of form and style in Cope's group of KhoiSan poems, compared with Watson's formally somewhat 'homogenised' presentations of the San speakers' thoughts.

An item which must be mentioned in a discussion like this is Stephen Gray's title poem from his *Hottentot Venus and Other Poems* (1979:1-2), to my knowledge one of the earliest expressions of indignation at the commodification and grotesque 'museumization' of this San woman known by the Afrikaans name of 'Saartjie Baartman', the process of her European exhibition and humiliation made possible by an utterly crass racism fiercely exposed in Gray's eloquent verse. There is great health in the poet's sarcastic evocation of the vulgarity of this woman's reduction to the role of 'a classy peepshow ... a special voluptuary a squealing passion' (ll. 307). Movingly describing her lonely (but unremittingly *observed*) death, the poem itself 'throw[s] another stone in [her] memory' on the 'cairns' in her motherland (ll. 22-23). Especially powerful is the sardonic equivocation in line 35: 'they mounted me without beads or skins or quivers' (2). But in the concluding lines of the poem, the speaker attributes to Saartjie's shade enough power to overturn the world. It would (yet) be a moot point whether, such a triumphalist suggestion glorifies or falsifies the starkness of this 'symbolic' life<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> 'The Song of Nu-Numma-Kwiten' (Cope 249-50).

<sup>17</sup> 'Song of the Springbok Does' (250). The latter poem has the postscript 'after W.H.I Bleek', which perhaps applies also to the preceding poem (no other source is given for it).

<sup>18</sup> See Carli Coetzee's chapter ('Krotoä remembered: a mother of unity, a mother of sorrows?'—*Negotiating the Past* 112-19) on the ironies and political implications of the use of another such Khoikoi 'icon'.

In 1982 Michael Chapman's anthology *Voices from Within: Black Poetry from Southern Africa* was published, in which Don Mattera's 'A Protest from a Bushman' appears under a pseudonym (157-159)<sup>19</sup>. The most memorable lines, 'My land is gone/Life is tremulous like/A drop of water on a mophani leaf' (159), are used as a refrain, achieving that difficult blend of melancholy and cherishing which so many poets seem to find appropriate to the subject. A striking poem, 'Khoikhoi-son-of-Man' by Modikwe Dikobe, appeared in 1983. Dikobe's poem describes the eye-opening discovery (by the 'black' speaker) of an unsuspected KhoiSan ancestor. This Khoikhoi ancestor, after escaping from his enslavement to Boer Trekkers, announces himself to a group of Batswana people as 'A tribesman, hunter, chief's servant and messenger' (Van Wyk 750), a delightful and impressive re-entitlement, mirroring the speaker's own redefinition of his supposed 'Pedigree muntu' identity (l. 2). Addressing as it does the ancient Bantu/KhoiSan fissure in the South African socioscape, the poem has an important relevance to the present South African 'identity' struggles.

One of the most distinguished of South African English poetry collections also appeared in 1983: Jeremy Cronin's *Inside*. Besides its famous, tentative 'counter-(national) anthem', 'To learn how to speak', which refers clearly to the KhoiSan in the lines 'To catch in the ... tongue's knot/A sense of the stoneness of these stones' (1983:58), the collection contains also the poem 'The River that Flows Through Our Land' (57). The river is said to be, KhoiSan-style, 'Clicking in its palate like the flaking of stone tools'. Especially beautiful are two other poems untitled and 'paired', the one beginning 'Our land holds' evoking 'The wind [which] tongues/Its gom-gom, frets a gorah' and 'sounds .... The names of decimated Khoikhoi tribes': 'Hessequa/Hacumqua .../ ... Cochoqua'. In this poem Cronin evokes the stubborn, heroic pride and the pathos of Khoikhoi 'warriors .../Charging zig-zag into musket fire', expressing the recognition that these

warriors ... left behind  
Their fallen spears that our land  
Like a peach its pip  
Holds now:  
This unfinished task (1983:50).

That 'task' links up with Dikobe's act of 'recognition'. Cronin's poem itself attempts both to enact and to promote the laborious process it envisages.

<sup>19</sup> The actual name/identity of the author is revealed in one of the Tony Voss articles (1990:67n2).



In the next poem by Cronin, 'If you're asking: Whose land?' (51), the speaker proposes the deep-down answer to that opening question—that it is to be found in 'the earth', 'among the bones', among

Grain's seed, grass, shrub's roots  
Where the men's bones [lie] with their snuff pouches,  
Women's bones with their porridge sticks, ask  
There where lineage on lineage sits  
Tucked in this earth (51, final stanza).

Such poems as these by Cronin are a tribute, an evocation *and* an exhortation and are among the finest of those inspired by the remembered presence of the KhoiSan.

Mark Swift's poem 'South African Museum, Cape Town' (Van Wyk 759) also appeared in 1983. In this poem, 'all attest to extinction'; 'The Bushman [is] stripped to the bone' by those who mounted these exhibits, by the colonial rape, by the gaze of the speaker. It is a fine poem, both ironic, melancholic and sensitively empathetic. Juxtaposed with Cronin's, though, the latter's greater richness of meaning and feeling are confirmed. The melancholia of extermination is there, in the Cronin lyrics, but both 'Our land holds ...' and 'If you're asking ...' (Cronin 1983:50-51), enrich the vision of the Khoikhoi—they are not seen as mere, inevitable, pathetic victims, but as the aristocratic ancestry ('warriors'—50; 'lineage'—51) and true owners (51) of the 'land' itself—a term here suggesting both the country and the earth on which it is built. Moreover, in both poems Cronin sees the Khoikhoi as being in the safekeeping of the earth ('Like a peach its pip/Holds now'—50; 'sits ... Tucked in this earth'—51); treasured rather than obliterated, exactly as the poems themselves cherish and revive the Khoikhoi. His poems illuminate for his reader a sense of the truly *first* people of this land.

The ironies of the politically awkward 'placing' of the KhoiSan in present-day Southern Africa are made scathingly evident in Dorian Haarhoff's 'San Song' of 1987 (Van Wyk 851). Depicting one of the degraded San communities of Namibia, formerly employed as trackers for the South African Defence Force, Haarhoff juxtaposes them in a tableau with 'Father Christmas, white bearded', in a military camp where they are kept in a (straggling) queue by 'the private's shout' and gawked at by journalists 'prais[ing]/ the primitive pre-cursor/grunter-gatherer, pristine man' (ll. 15-17).

But the speaker's sarcasm, wit and searing anger give way to a poignant sadness in the final, 'fade-out' stanza:

in no man's land, any December  
this close knit kin sing

in more than eleven clicks and grunts  
their North East South West song.

My difficulties and dissatisfactions with Watson's *Return of the Moon: Versions from the /Xam* (1991), despite its undoubted importance, result from a persistent sense of the contemporary poet's self-foregrounding, most overtly in the cover design, in the 'Introduction' (1983:7-20) in which the poet persistently refers to what he has done in this collection as 'translation' (which suppresses the extent to which his work rests on what Bleek and Lloyd achieved) and in such details as the effacement of the San poets'/speakers' names from the pages on which Watson's versions of their utterances appear. In Bleek and Lloyd's publication (1911) the parallel text format continually ensures the reader's recognition that s/he is reading transcriptions from sayings by individuals with their own 'strange' but complex and intact language, whereas Watson's unilingual and 'streamlined' presentations typographically as well as rhythmically erase individual and cultural differences. Compare, for instance, the naturally rambling, naturally 'poetic' and nostalgic telling of '//Kabbo's Intended Return Home' (Bleek & Lloyd 1911:219-317) with Watson's title poem 'Return of the Moon' (1991:71-73), which 'poeticizes' and regularises the irregularities and repetitions and asides of a confiding and endearing conversation which we as readers are allowed (through Bleek & Lloyd) to 'overhear'. Wanting from Watson's 'Versions' are not only the witnesses' names (tucked away at the back of the volume: 74), but also the precise sources in the Bleek and Lloyd documents, information which one would have expected an academic as generally scrupulous as Watson to supply<sup>20</sup>. Chiefly, though, the rhythms chosen are mostly so flat and monotonous (a kind of pseudo-iambic) that many poems effectively 'banalize' rather than vividly evoke the lives of the San as they seem to intend doing. It is hard to escape the sense that the well-known Watsonian predilection for a melancholic sense of (his) life's bleakness has coloured the emotional tone of these poems. What seems largely absent is that impression of taut vitality, of complex humour and unsentimentality so well caught in Marais's *Dwaalstories* and in a few other of the

<sup>20</sup> In her essay 'Producing Discourse: The Ethnographer's Dilemma' Elsie Cloete writes: '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' (1996:95). Cloete nevertheless uncritically admires Watson's work (1996:89) and does not seem to see the above ironies as applying to his *Return of the Moon/Versions ...*, as I do. For another evaluation (somewhat critical, but mainly approving) of Watson's work, see Van Vuuren's essay (1994:68-69).

poems discussed. It should be acknowledged, though, that almost every other review of/commentary on Watson's 'Versions' has been favourable: this commentator's view is definitely a minority opinion.

The most recent evocation of the KhoiSan presence which this essay can encompass occurs in Tatamkhulu Afrika's poem 'Dancing in My City' (1992:53-55), in which the speaker's both dreary and frightening sense (while on a political march) of the persistence of old power forms (in the unsympathetic 'audience') suddenly lightens when the rhythm turns to lilting:

But then I see her:  
the little, yellow, dancing woman,  
the rapt yet graven, shrivelled features,  
generous San buttocks rolling  
with a gentle, rhythmic, effortless abandon,  
small feet skittering,  
lightly as a water-bug on dust-glazed water,  
along the crowd-crushed, dead macadam.

And my feet move on again, knowing  
that under them,  
lies still a soil forever Africa,  
and it is not I that am the alien,  
but they that stand here, streetside,  
watching me  
dancing in my city (1992:54-55).

The poem hence becomes a triumphant image of reclamation, perhaps a fit point to conclude the gamut of perspectives examined in this essay. Open, *itself*, to all the ironies of doubtful 'authority' and questionable validity which have been raised in the course of the discussion, this essay has treated poetry as a type of social index. The material brought together in the end combines into a sociohistory of 'South Africa', a matter too large for this format, but providing a kind of small symphony in which dominant tones and lyrical, ghostly echoes can be heard. The essay writer has assumed the authority to judge on the issues of aesthetic and even ethical 'adequacy' in the portrayals and evocations of the South African KhoiSan peoples in (mainly English) poetry. The all too evident subjectivities of this method must be simply acknowledged with the plea in mitigation of the enormous interest and importance of the questions raised. It is to be noted that even the early, blatantly racist (poetic) denunciations of the KhoiSan could not manage to erase the humanness of the first South African people, even as these writers attempt to deny any kinship with the

KhoiSan by their brutalising comments. On the other hand, the evocations, appropriations (of) and tributes to the Khoikhoi and San by those who now write of or 'for' them, however sympathetically or empathetically, are seldom free of other limitations of vision. That the *enigma* of encounters between cultures and peoples is inescapable and persistent, is so pertinently expressed by Denning (1992:178-179) that his words bear quoting a second time:

There is now no Native past without the Stranger, no Stranger without the Native. No one can hope to be mediator or interlocutor in that opposition of Native and Stranger, because no one is gazing at it untouched by the power that is in it. Nor can anyone speak just for the one, just for the other. There is no escape from the politics of our knowledge, but that politics is not in the past. That politics is in the present.

A deeper irony is confirmed by the dry, sad comment made by Mr Mathambo Ngaeaja, speaking as delegate at the international 'KhoiSan Identities and Cultural Heritage' conference in Cape Town (July 12-17 1997): 'We must be some of the best studied people in the world, but our socio-economic position is declining in spite of all the research'<sup>21</sup>. As Sylvia Plath wrote, even words that '[ring]' 'like axes' can become 'dry and riderless'<sup>22</sup>, *signifying* nothing, passively gazing on 'history' and 'progress' proceeding in their obliterating course.

Department of English  
University of Stellenbosch

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<sup>22</sup> The quotations are from one of her last poems, 'Words' (Plath 1981:270).

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## The Challenge of African Philosophy: A Reply to Mabogo More

WJ Ndaba

### 1. Introduction

This article is a reply to Mabogo More's (1996:109-129) paper, 'African Philosophy Revisited', in which he argued that the Western 'valorisation' of 'reason' as the foundational act of Western philosophy and philosophical enquiry in general, covertly denies the existence of African philosophy. For the sake of clarity I set out below, my perspective on the questionable claim to superiority of Western rationality. I argue that a cut and paste description of Europe's denial of the existence or possibility of African philosophy serves well to confront the colonialist prejudice in all its formations and guises but does not do African philosophy any further good. In other words, I hold that More's account of Western denials of African philosophy neither advances debate on issues in African philosophy nor does it illumine the nature of African philosophy itself. As More's paper challenges the positions of Shutte (1993) and Rauche (1996), I reassess the contributions of these two South African teachers of philosophy and in so doing, reaffirm the merit which I consider their work justly deserves.

### 2. The Context of the Reply

I identify with More's strong feelings against what is commonly regarded as the Western underestimation of the African's capacity for dialectical and ratiocinative thought. In fact More's article neglected to mention Levy-Bruhl, who argued that the mentality of so-called primitive people was radically different to that of Western logic. Levy-Bruhl (in Honderich 1995:482) described 'primitive mentality' as 'mystical', meaning that it is dominated by feeling, whereas scientific experience is largely cognitive. Levy-Bruhl became celebrated for the findings he extrapolated from his ethnographic studies, that the 'pre-logical thought' of primitive peoples is dictated largely by the ethos of participation (non-distancing) rather than the law of non-contradiction. In this way, Levy-Bruhl embodies the worst expression of racism

against African people since Joseph Conrad's main but monstrous character of Kurtz as depicted in his *Heart of Darkness*.

The issue of language was not explicitly raised in More's paper, yet it is nevertheless relevant to place it on record to strengthen his powerful opposition to the obsessive ethnocentrism of Western ethnographers. In this regard, Hountondji well points out that ethnographic prejudice against Africans was underpinned by the spurious thesis, attributed to Levy-Bruhl, that African languages are rooted in a 'concrete' rather than an abstract orientation. He extrapolated this idea of a language with a concrete orientation from the example of the Yoruba language which expresses 'nineteen' as 'twenty minus one' (after the one-to-one method of counting concrete items such as cows, one by one). But he conveniently overlooked that Latin too, expresses 'nineteen' and 'eighteen' in exactly the same way on a one-to-one basis as *undeviginti* and *duodeviginti* respectively. Yet, as Hountondji (1997:24) quickly quips, no one ever dares call Latin a 'primitive' language. (Levy-Bruhls die hard. Without going into a peroration, some may recall du Toit's paper, presented at a Southern African Philosophical Society meeting, on the Zulu language as 'A Natural Language without a Philosophical and Scientific vocabulary'—n.d. unpublished).

To philosophers such as Hountondji (1993), the expressions and conclusions contained in some ethnographical reports reflect the worst denigration of peoples of African stock. Hoffman (in Odera 1994:194) also points out that in its ethnocentrism European rationality has had no other ambition than to search for a 'totally different world' in traditional Africa. Hence for More, and a host of similarly affected African thinkers, this writer included, such unpalatable estimations of Africans are like blocks that must doubtless be cleared before the undertaking of an African philosophy can begin. Levy-Bruhl, was of course, not a philosopher but an anthropologist or ethnographer interested not in the commonalities that bind human beings together as one human race but in people's differences and idiosyncrasies. Thus, he dwelled on the contingent features of culture and race in order to weave his theory of the lack of reason among Africans, (reason being regarded, as More rightly states, as the bed-rock of philosophical reflection). Such utterances acted as theoretical underpinnings for the historical period of colonialism during its phase of unchecked advance into Africa. This advance was programmatically and strategically intensified against Africans by specifically categorising them as non-European peoples. In this manner colonialism suppressed African people to the point of objectifying African existence. Even though Levy-Bruhl later abandoned his theory (of the *mentality primitive*), history probably will not easily forget him. He admitted in his last two years that his prejudice had misdirected him to locate mystical participation exclusively in certain cultures while in fact such participation is a universal human phenomenon (Levy-Bruhl in Honderich 1995).

As an African, I can sympathise with the emotional and psychological provocation such remarks (made under the auspices of science and 'reason') bear on the self-understanding and pride of the African intellectual. But one should sound a caveat here. Philosophy is a conceptual activity. As such the philosopher hardly ever makes a statement without entangling himself in a thicket. Such appears to be the case with More's paper. He decries Western sceptical assessment of the African capacity for rational judgement. Yet at the same time, More unwittingly absolutises Western rationality too. He adopts and engages a specifically Western model for critiquing Western denials of African philosophy. In the process, he loses the opportunity of indicating that which is essentially African in African philosophy and which can challenge 'valorised' Western rationality. He falls into the same prison house Hountondji (1983) and Bodunrin (1980) remain trapped in, namely the positivistic epistemological paradigms which often fail to develop bridgeheads with other traditions.

More's discussion of the Western valorisation of reason invokes the philosophy of *negritude*, which emerged as a counterweight to the western devaluation of African societies, which Western outsiders perceived as organised around emotional values. The strict separation of the knower and the object of knowledge, which remains a telling feature of occidental philosophy, sometimes poses a dilemma for an African philosopher trained in the epistemological ideologies taught in Western institutions. Although he has to internalise these ideologies, the African philosopher nevertheless cannot help feeling a sense of discontinuity or dissonance with his own personal experience. It was in this context of dissonance that Senghor unwittingly 'denied' rationality (analysis, system and logic) to the African mind by undermining the distinction between subject and object. He wrote that:

In dark Africa, people always dance because they feel, and they always dance someone or something. Now to dance is to discover and to re-create, to identify oneself with the forces of life, to lead a fuller life, and in short, to be. It is, at any rate, the highest form of knowledge .... The reason of classical Europe is analytic through utilization, the reason of the African Negro, intuitive through participation (Senghor in Solomon & Higgins 1995:255).

Conradie (in Burr 1980:392) explains the law of participation as

a direct spontaneous experience of the world, a life-surge and self-abandonment which effect a mystical sympathy with the universe. For this reason Senghor can state 'emotion is African as reason is Hellenic'.

By juxtaposing the Hellenic and the African, Senghor is not 'othering' the African but only underlining the inability of the Western discursive method of

reasoning to grasp the totality of reality in its width and depth, and the fact that only intuitive reason is capable of an understanding that goes beyond appearance (Senghor in Burr 1980:393). Senghor is supported by Anyanwu (in Ruch & Anyanwu 1981:89):

The African culture did not assume that reality could be subordinated to human reason alone. Imagination, intuitive experience and feelings are also modes of knowing. This is why the deepest expression of African cultural reality has been through art, music, folksong and myths rather than logical analysis.

With these remarks, Anyanwu and Senghor join the legion of thinkers who reject the Western monopoly on rationality. To appreciate what Senghor and Anyanwu are doing, the reader must understand where these writers come from. Having been trained in Western philosophy, they are convinced that not all principles of Western rationality can handle the totality of human experience without making Western rationality appear hegemonic. Dissatisfied with Western methods, Senghor and Anyanwu thus challenge the exclusivity of Western rationality precisely because it tends to undermine those pyramids of value and meaning which are not mediated through or do not neatly fit the singular Western prescription of doing philosophy.

Constructions of meaning in an African context easily become overlooked by Western thinkers because they ignore the fact that at various stages of existence human beings undergo various experiences. Some experiences are of a religious or subjective nature while others, by contrast, are of an objective and more public nature. The fact that the former cannot be predicated by verifiable means, does not mean that philosophy must sweep them aside. This consideration gave rise, during the early stages of this century, to the appearance of phenomenology, which led to the growth of contemporary hermeneutic philosophy, the forerunner of post-modern philosophy at the closing stage of the century. The challenge of African philosophy, is to adopt these latter-day methods and to adapt them to the peculiarly African situation. Conversely, African philosophy too can play a restorative and invigorating function in relation to Western philosophy. To strengthen my argument I shall illustrate these two positions.

To illustrate the *first position*, I must begin by stating that an African philosopher can harness a Western method in the service of African philosophy only by placing the African world-view at the centre of his theorising. Some philosophers would argue that the conceptual framework most suitable for African philosophy is the vitalist rather than the objectivist framework (Maurier in Wright 1979:11). The vitalist framework of African philosophy, with its focus on the priority of life, thrusts us right into those issues which led Senghor to reject the objectivist stance. To



ground a vitalist orientation in African philosophy, the African philosopher can derive much benefit from the views of Husserl, Heidegger and Gadamer. I mention these three European thinkers because of the implications of their phenomenological, existential philosophies for an African philosophy.

To move philosophy away from the concerns of theoretical science, Husserl (1954) developed the concept of the life-world or *Lebenswelt*. His concept of the life-world sought to demonstrate that the essential historicity of our consciousness can best be understood from the perspectives of the preconceptions which derive from our given traditions, social milieu and experience. If one considers for a moment the notion 'preconception', it means that which is not thought or not yet available to cogitation. Thus we discover that this concept shows that some Western thinkers have for a time grappled with the limitations of reason!

Heidegger subsequently reworked Husserl's preconceptual structure of the life-world as fundamentally pre-theoretical and pre-critical. By positing that *Dasein* is essentially in-the-world and cannot be detached from it, Heidegger's mode of philosophising resonates with Senghor's notion of 'participation'. The lived or experienced world is given, disclosed or revealed to humanity not by scientific knowledge but by pre-scientific experiences. But Heidegger goes further. He posits that things or entities in the world are not primarily objects of theoretical cognition but are tools that are ready to be used (*Zuhanden*) rather than studied or observed. Space does not allow us to tease out the full implications of Heidegger's notions for African philosophy, but they are enormous. Much of traditional philosophy in Africa is communal rather than individualistic. It should be clear from the above thumb-nail account of Husserl and Heidegger that any reflection which mediates between the extremes of Western (individualistic) rationality and the African (communal) experience must come to terms with philosophers such as Husserl and Heidegger.

Since much of African philosophy is cultural, an African philosopher cannot afford to ignore hermeneutics as a method of cultural penetration and understanding. I have noted that African philosophy is communal in juxtaposition to the critical and dialectical disputations of a single individual. I concede that this is the sense in which Rauche (1996) sees the value of hermeneutics for African philosophy. In this regard Hountondji's (1983) statement that:

Without any doubt, the problem of African 'philosophy' refers us back to the problem of hermeneutics,

is particularly relevant.

As Okere rightly maintains, the philosophical justification for ethnophilosophy (as an African cultural philosophy) can be found within the framework of a Western hermeneutic methodology. He defends the close relationship

between culture and philosophy. By using the ideas of Hans-Georg Gadamer, he systematically grounds modern African philosophy on Gadamer's twin concepts of prejudice and the hermeneutic circle (Okere 1983). To avoid unwittingly extolling the virtues of western rationality, More would do well to consider the gains African philosophies could achieve from a dialogue with the philosophers of the West such as Husserl, Heidegger and Gadamer, who have turned away from a singular preoccupation with Western 'rationality'.

To illustrate my *second point*, one can state the contrast between Western and African thought on the level of dialogue with reference to existentialism. It is a trite point that the mainspring of Western existentialism was to grapple with the problem of alienation. By contrast the problem of alienation is secondary for African philosophy because African people normally gravitate towards each other. Precisely at this juncture, because alienation is transcended in African society, the African communitarian and solidaritarian ethos could provide a counterweight, from a philosophical point of view, to the alienation reflected in Western existentialism. Thus the African communal experience, its insistence on the relationships and bonds between individuals, could open up trajectories of thought that can engage and thus invigorate Western philosophy. The African philosopher could even employ traditional Western rubrics of epistemology, ethics and metaphysics to open up these trajectories based on the African solidaritarian ethos.

Although More's (1996:110-119) challenge to the statements of some ethnocentric Western philosophers is understandable, his protest about the aberrations of Western rationality misses the benefits which the two traditions of philosophy could provide for one another. His catalogue of ethnocentric expressions, inferences and veiled accusations of lack of rationality (More 1996:119-125) is counterproductive for the progress of African philosophy in dialogue with other traditions of philosophy. Such cataloguing can only lead to a forgetfulness of critical sources of African philosophy such as that of the ethos of sociality mentioned already. For a moment the reader may consider that the systematic dehumanisation and extermination of millions of people during the first and second world wars has had minimal influence on French and German philosophy. Similarly the African philosopher's discourse may take its point of departure from reflection on the cumulative abuse of the Africans during the long dark decades of colonialism. Yet to be philosophy proper, in the critical and metaphilosophical sense, the anticolonial discourse must go beyond itself.

As can be gathered from the aforesaid remarks, the overlabouring of the denials of Western rationality conceals a self-contradictory overevaluation of the virtues of Western rationality. Such an unwitting stance seems to turn a blind eye to the internal problematics of 'Western philosophy' which accepts functionalistic methods (e.g. the analytical method) as exclusive instruments.

More denounces questions such as 'What is African philosophy?'; 'Does African philosophy exist?'; 'Is there such a thing as African philosophy?' (More 1996:119), as sceptical questions. I would suggest that these questions, far from denying African philosophy, wittingly or unwittingly, constitute for African philosophy its most special and intellectual appeal. This special appeal is borne out by the copious critical and vigorously analytical essays which have come in the wake of current discussions and debates on African philosophy. Indeed, any person who wants to understand the nature of the debates on African philosophy has to come to terms with the painstaking critical issues raised in terms of these searching questions. Deviating from More's position, I would say that these questions are removed in time and attitude from Tempels' *Philosophie Bantoe*. They are more in the tradition of interrogating the imperatives of the logic of intellectual scrutiny and independence than the descriptive mode of Tempel's ethnographic detail. The questions, in the style of Maurier, Wright and others (Wright 1979) are analytic through and through and prove that questions conceived and predicated on 'alien' assumptions and paradigms can also equally nourish the project of self-criticism and self-analysis in African philosophy.

More (1996:120) further refers to the neglect of African philosophy in most South African universities. I would agree with him but only to a certain extent. I would guess that in relation to the rest of Africa, South African philosophers are at least one to two decades behind, at least as far as the intensity of debates, published research and symposia devoted exclusively to an all-African philosophy agenda is concerned. It is not that there have been no stirrings on the subject. Papers on African philosophy have been presented at proceedings of the Philosophical Society for a considerable time. The sheer fact that More (1996:120n5) acknowledges the existence of a growing number of philosophy articles in a journal produced in Africa and exclusively devoted to a philosophical agenda is proof that South African philosophers are slowly waking up from their slumber. Thus the absence of a full-scale devotion to African philosophy should not be put down to a conscious and deliberate desire to exclude African philosophy *per se*. In any given tradition of philosophy, the themes that receive priority and the methods thinkers adopt or deploy are dictated by the biases of a people's culture and their existential situation and experience (Bodunrin 1981; Levy 1974). What More decries, however, is the overpreoccupation with a particularistic conception of philosophy. As Mudimbe (1988) observes, in Africa the themes and methods that receive attention invariably reflect preferences that presuppose non-African epistemological values and criteria. Thus Conradie (in Burr 1980:409) observes that South African universities are largely preoccupied with either the synthetic or analytic approaches, options which indicate stern devotion to either the European method of hermeneutic synthesis or the Anglo-American analytical tradition.

I am in agreement with More (1996) about the overly Eurocentric content of philosophy given in our lecture rooms and I would add that the same applies to the humanities as they are taught in our nation's established universities. I have mentioned elsewhere that the curricula of Historically Disadvantaged Universities do not reflect the widely dispersed world-views of the great majority of our population (Ndaba 1996). Thus, More (1996:120n5) is perfectly correct in his view that African philosophy is largely ignored at universities except a few isolated black (disadvantaged) ones. However, having decided so unhesitatingly in favour of the inclusion of African philosophy in the universities, I find his studied cold treatment of the philosophical contribution of Shutte and Rauche somewhat disquieting and self-contradictory (More 1996:120-122). In my view, Shutte (1993) successfully challenges or reverses the hegemony of Eurocentric epistemology, particularly in the context of our somewhat misplaced 'first world' focus. But, to leave Shutte and Rauche for the moment, it is clear that the picture of the neglect of African philosophy in our universities needs more objective restatement.

The situation is not as bad as More claims because the position he rightly decries is in fact fast changing. What he should crusade for is its improvement. For example Anthony Appiah's work *In My Father's House* (1993) is a prescribed set-work in the department of philosophy at the University of Natal. In 1994 the late Henry Odera Oruka, the Kenyan founder of sage philosophy, spent three weeks teaching at the University of Cape Town. As a consequence of that visit to UCT, Oruka was invited to visit the Universities of Durban-Westville and Zululand with the graceful co-operation of UCT. In the same year the University of South Africa hosted Prof. Godwill Sogolo of Nigeria. It was refreshing to realise what great progress can be made when institutions co-operate. Prof. Sogolo flew to Durban at the invitation of Durban-Westville and Zululand universities, where More (UDW) and myself (UZ) teach philosophy. Shutte's book *Philosophy for Africa* (1993), controversial though it may be, mentions the author's involvement with African philosophy in the context of teaching and research in African philosophy at UCT.

As More also indicates, the philosophy courses taught at our universities need to interrogate all the issues considered pertinent to the survival of our newly hatched democracy. In this respect, from a philosophical stand-point, the values and world-views of the majority of our black people can hardly be overemphasised. In the light of the foregoing remarks, the appearance of essays such as those of Shutte (1993), Rauche (1996) and More (1996), which could come to bear on the issues of our day should be welcomed. Hence, More must be commended for broaching the subject of an African oriented philosophy syllabus in our universities. However, prioritising African philosophy would, of necessity, force decisions of a serious and complicated methodological and substantive nature. This route in turn would no doubt present an opportunity for other thinkers to criticise those choices and

decisions as 'veiled attempts' to undermine Western philosophy. In this regard, I see Shutte and Rauche as two South African philosophers who have taken a bold and critical approach to African philosophy in the southern African context. Shutte, in particular, takes up the cudgels on behalf of traditional African philosophy, where some African philosophers castigate it because it dwells upon the descriptive details of African culture. More importantly, professional African philosophers reject it because they labour under a dominant and fixed Western over-evaluation of reason and its analytic method. Shutte questions the dominance of the analytical method. It is the writer's view that the analytical paradigm overlooks the notion that analytical philosophy is itself simply adopted from a specific approach in so-called 'Western philosophy'. Hence More (1996:121) also correctly points out that there is no universal agreement about the meaning of Western rationality. In fact, it could be argued, following his observation, that the concepts of 'rationality', 'philosophy', or 'reason' in Western philosophy, have assumed differing forms throughout the history of Western ideas. This concern, as More raises it, is shared equally by other writers. For instance Appiah (1992:85) also points out that the European philosophical tradition, which has castigated African reason, has failed to move beyond the notoriously contradictory and competing answers given to the question of the content and function of what should pass as philosophy. Hence I pose the question that those who support analytical philosophy ignore that it too often runs at loggerheads with the more traditional European-continental concept of 'world-view philosophies' such as vitalism, existentialism and others which sound closer to the pulse of African philosophy than the detractors of traditional African philosophy would like to admit.

Rorty (1979) argues that the above-mentioned strands in Western philosophy are a reaction against the pervasive view of (Western) philosophy, which reduces philosophy to epistemology, or as Rorty puts it, which regards philosophy as the *mirror of nature*. Gadamer (in Sprung 1900) also shows that the main reason behind Heidegger's hermeneutical philosophy was the latter's desire to shift Western philosophy away from its individual prejudice that only analytical statement can yield critical judgement. According to Gadamer, Heidegger demonstrates that the over-preoccupation with exactly how statements represent the external world is not a substitute for coherent judgement and experience. Gadamer (in Sprung 1987:49) writes:

Heidegger, as is well known, saw in Plato's doctrine of forms, the first step in the transformation of truth from unconcealedness to the appropriateness and correctness of statements.

As an African, More laments that certain Western philosophers tend to exclude the African from Western 'rationality'. He points out the aporia of Western

rationality, as revealed in its lack of 'unanimity' about the meaning of the concept 'philosophy'. The writer is not the first to point out the controversial nature of the self-understanding of Western philosophy. In a text on African philosophy, Maurier (in Wright 1979:11) similarly expresses the limitations of Western 'reason'. He states that:

Western philosophy is polarized by the problem of knowledge, the problem of universals, the problem of immediate awareness, the problem of empiricism, the problem of philosophical critique, and, recently, the question of phenomenology. We do not believe that this sort of problem seriously exercises African thinking. The problem of living, of life, is far more important than the problem of knowledge.

It seems therefore, that to overlament the 'veiled' attempts to deny reason to African philosophy glosses over the limitations of the very reason More and Maurier address above. I would support the view that a preoccupation with contesting Western 'denials' of African philosophy squanders African energies instead of dealing with issues capable of taking African philosophy forward. I am not defending any particular notion of an African philosophy. At a general level, African philosophy must just be philosophy pure and simple. To use Maurier's (in Wright 1979) formulation:

Philosophy should also be critical in the Kantian sense of the term: philosophy should question itself about the proper value of its rational procedure and on the epistemological or gnostic validity of its results.

My aim is not to wage a counter-argument against the recommendations of More. It is rather to deepen the rationality debate from an African perspective. Given the priorities in African life, given African history, I conclude that no method in an African philosophy would be free-floating and thus beyond controversy. Western philosophy, likewise, together with its methods, is not a-historical. Thus it must be assessed in the context of the time and environment in which it developed.

It bears mention that some philosophers, such as the French thinkers, Ricoeur and Merleau-Ponty, execute their philosophies in distinct personal orientations and styles which belie the claim of an exclusive hegemony for Western rationality. Ricoeur moves the debate about the mediation of meaning away from the exclusively rationalistic and scientific methodologies. He takes his point of departure from a special kind of language, namely symbolic language, the language of myth (Ricoeur 1960). Hence, I maintain that the interpretation of these symbols, embedded in mythological language, could serve as a convenient starting point for a

dialogue between ethnophilosophy and Western philosophy. In a similar manner Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological philosophy challenges the tendency of contemporary scientific and philosophic thought to valorise autonomous thought derived under experimental conditions. It seeks to undermine philosophy's traditional conception that the subject constitutes the world as an object of knowledge. In insisting that consciousness must be seen first from the point of view of bodily being, he argues that man's access to the world is through his body and as such is anterior to methodic or rational analysis (Merleau-Ponty 1962). A purposive orientation in an African philosophical perspective indicates that these two orientations of French thought, can be, and should be, in dialogue with African philosophy. The point I am making is that the African philosopher cannot afford to ignore a dialogue which could deconstruct the hegemony of rationality which More precisely challenges. Conradie (1980:396) restates More's objections against the valorisation of reason more succinctly:

... it may be added that the interpretation of Western philosophy to which Africans object is nothing new. It has been stated most strongly in the twentieth century by Europeans themselves. Moreover—and this is a point of immense importance—Western philosophy has given birth to a type of philosophizing which is no longer specifically Western but global in the true sense of the term. It is here that we must look for contact with African philosophy and for its inevitable role.

I believe, as I have presently explained, that Conradie's view is consistent with the orientations of Shutte (1993) and Rauche (1996). It is a view, too, which I think is not opposed to the Afrocentric foundations of understanding I earlier canvassed. In relation to the contributions of Shutte and Rauche, the overall sweep of More's article seems to fail to tease out the implications posed by the hegemony of Western philosophy for the debate *in* and *for* African philosophy.

More's restatement of Western denials of African philosophy keeps the historical consciousness of European ethnocentrism alive but does not discharge the challenge of communicating a distinct orientation in African philosophy. Enunciated denials of African philosophy fall short of coming to bear on the pressing challenge of philosophy in the light of the conditions of life today. By way of constructive engagement with More, one can give copious examples that throw sufficient light on themes in African philosophy which can join issue with burning discussions in Western philosophy. An example that is naturally inscribed in the African psyche is the African's ready solidaritarian coexistence with the environment. But More places a stricture against the weaving of African traditional philosophy with the Western philosophical methodology. His position closes off the possibility of contact between

these traditions. I question his perspective because it is counterproductive and stands at the opposite pole of the strategy which Rauche and Shutte represent. Hence More's position ossifies at the threshold where an African philosophy could begin to challenge Western 'denials' of African philosophy, as his paper rightly points out too.

At this juncture, it may be appropriate to address two issues which loom clearly in More's criticism of Shutte's book. The first issue is less substantive and will be discharged quickly: it revolves around the semantic preference for the preposition 'for' in Shutte's considered title 'Philosophy for Africa' rather than More's preferred title 'African Philosophy'. To concede to More, Shutte opened himself to attack by his usage of the preposition 'for', rather than the adjective 'African'. However, I consider the choice of preposition or adjective a question of style rather than a barometer of content. Shutte's controversial title is a classical example of a book that is rejected on the basis of its cover. What better counter-example than Western philosophy which for want of a better adjective is as misleading as the nomenclature 'British philosophy'. To whimper over titles of philosophy is to ignore the fact that philosophy arises out of particular historical and human contexts. To place titles before content delays the discussion of pressing issues, first, of the discipline of philosophy in Africa, and second, of the crisis of existence and habitation in Africa. In less direct words, however, Shutte wants philosophy to bear on social issues, especially those in the southern African context. Certainly, a philosophy *for* Africa sounds more amenable for application to social problems such as access to health care and provision of housing than the title 'African Philosophy', which suggests an activity of abstraction and word splitting. By overlamenting the 'denial' of Western rationality, I suspect that More's argument forces him to take a position that unwittingly reifies the very hegemony of Western rationality which post-modernity and African philosophy in essence interrogate. How would he classify his own article, bearing in mind that it is written by an African who is trained in the USA and who expresses himself in thought and language forms which are borrowed from Western culture?

The second issue in More's account is not so obvious. It harks back to the controversy between professional African philosophy and ethnophilosophy. The controversy boils down to a distinction between philosophy in the narrowly defined technicist analytical sense and philosophy in the broadly defined, loose or vulgar sense. Shutte's book neatly mediates a course between these two warring meanings of philosophy. If Shutte were truly guilty of the denial More charges him with, he would not be writing as he does. It may merit the space to quote Shutte (1993:16) in extenso:

If philosophy is defined by its method—rigorous, analytical, critical let us say—then professional philosophy in universities becomes the centre of

interest. If it is defined by its content—theories of the nature of the universe, of the mind, of death, as well as theories of society and morality—then traditional African thought has a great deal to offer that is of philosophical interest.

There is a common but facile reasoning that a writer, especially of non-African stock, who extols the virtues of traditional African philosophy or ethnophilosophy, is guilty of the type of 'denials' of rationality to Africans, such as More stridently criticises Shutte of. This line of reasoning arises in part, I suppose, from a failure to peel off the good and correct from the bad and unacceptable in the notion of ethnophilosophy.

### 3. Three Positive Meanings of Traditional African Philosophy

I suspect that More's critique of the concept of 'traditional' as used by both Shutte and Rauche is unfortunately attributable to this failure to deconstruct ethnophilosophy. Hence More is locked in the discarded ethnographical notion of 'tradition', which is not the sense intended by the two writers. Leaving aside the pejorative construction of 'traditional philosophy' as used by ethnophilosophers such as Tempels, Ka Game and Mbiti, the notion of 'traditional African philosophy' still encapsulates three positive meanings. To avoid confusing 'traditional African philosophy' with 'ethnophilosophy' it might be useful to unpack three relevant meanings indicated in Gbadegesin's (1991) essay.

#### 3.1. Traditional Philosophy as African Indigenous Thought

Gbadegesin distinguishes three positive senses of the meaning of traditional African philosophy. I suggest that these three senses are the meanings intended by Shutte and Rauche. The first meaning pinpoints a conception of African philosophy grounded in traditional African thought before the Western influences began to distort the African mind-set. It refers to the philosophical thought of traditional Africa harvested from traditional African world-views, myths, proverbs and a variety of other cultural expressions. Gbadegesin (1991:1) describes this body of traditional African philosophy as 'the philosophy indigenous to Africans, untainted by foreign ideas'.

The motive force of this understanding of African philosophy is that there were philosophers in traditional Africa and that a tradition of philosophizing in Africa did not suddenly emerge with colonialism. As can be seen, this meaning of traditional African philosophy is distinctly different from ethnophilosophy. I think that, having translated Shutte's and Rauche's use of 'traditional philosophy' as 'ethnophilosophy', More runs the risk of closing off the value of 'traditional' philosophies, although such philosophies might prove instructive in our present one-sided technological culture.

### 3.2. Traditional African Philosophy as Applied Reflection and Analysis of African Conceptual Systems

A second meaning of traditional African philosophy refers to the reflections and analyses of traditional conceptual systems embedded in world-views and social life. Some noted nationalist philosopher-politicians such as Nyerere, Nkrumah and Kaunda have employed ideas or themes from traditional Africa to ground programmes of economic, social and political reconstruction in their respective countries. Wiredu (1995:17) points out that:

With rare exceptions they argued for forms of socialism based on first principles deriving from traditional African communalism. The African provenance of their philosophies was clearest in the 'Ujaama' (Familyhood) socialism of Nyerere of Tanzania and the 'Zambian humanism' of Kaunda, who both steered studiously clear of foreign ideological admixtures.

Although these thinkers intended these utopian theories to realise solidaritarian social orders, the failure of these theories in practice does not mean that in themselves they are philosophically worthless.

### 3.3. Traditional African Philosophy as Presupposed by Culture

Gbadegesin enumerates a third meaning of the notion of traditional African philosophy. It bridges the gap between the two meanings mentioned above. It acknowledges the impossibility of pure precolonial thought but accepts that there is a sense of traditional African philosophy as interpreted by professional African philosophers today (Gbadegesin 1991:1).

As a result of this third meaning of traditional African philosophy there have in recent years been several scholarly studies of traditional African philosophy. Gyekye's *Akan Conceptual Scheme* (1987) is one example, and in its wake came Wiredu's *African Philosophical Tradition: A Case Study of the Akan* (1992). There are undoubtedly many similar studies which attempt to inaugurate a 'critical and reconstructive' debate based on the oral philosophy of a given African community. Given Africa's increased communication links with the outside world through trade and satellite connections, it can be accepted that many western philosophers will join the fray and plug into the intercultural debate. As can be seen, African philosophers have found no problem with these attempts. Okere (cited earlier) is a good example.

The reason why I have gone into this detailed peroration is that More's implicit understanding of the notion of 'traditional philosophy' as 'ethnophilosophy' was central to his dismissal of Shutte and Rauche. Yet, I see these two writer's as attempting to plug into African traditional philosophy in one, two or all of the three positive senses, in order to set in motion a dialogue with African traditional



philosophy, on the level of complementarity and resonance, not contrast and difference. In fact, they could well be said to be engaged in reversing what Mudimbe (1988:x) describes as the onslaught of 'theories and methods whose constraints, rules and systems of operation suppose a non-African epistemological locus'.

In the West, the epistemology of rationality is legitimated in writing. Rationality and literacy are two sides of the same coin (Wininger in Oruka 1994: 199). This point is relevant in relation to the sceptical arguments against ethnophilosophy, for not all traditional philosophy is reduced to writing. What I am arguing, in agreement with More, is that laying down writing as a prescriptive condition for philosophicness reduces to a disguised hegemony. In other words we have to widen the notion of literacy beyond the point at which Western, Eurocentric, professorite ideology presently locks it. Shutte and Rauche's strategy takes seriously an African tradition of doing philosophy.

To concede a point to More, Shutte does write in a manner that vacillates between the broader acceptable meaning of traditional African philosophy and the narrow and unpopular ethnophilosophical meaning of traditional African thought. He has not made this distinction clear. However he has definitely never stated that a philosophy for Africa can be constituted purely from ethnophilosophy. Shutte uses the concept of ethnophilosophy interchangeably with traditional philosophy to embrace the three positive meanings of traditional African philosophy. The reason behind this seeming ambiguity is that for some writers such as Wininger (in Oruka 1994:198) '... philosophies which are indigenous and have grown up in pre-colonial Africa are now called ethno-philosophies'.

I see nothing sinister or patronising in this innocent use of the word *ethnophilosophy*. Of decisive value in Shutte's book are his clear indications that ethnophilosophy (in the positive sense) or traditional African philosophy, shorn of foreign admixtures and accretions, can contribute to previously intractable or neglected philosophical problems, not only in theory but also in practice.

Shutte's orientation in geographic and historical perspective is recommended by Serequeberhan (1991:37) too. He writes that contemporary African philosophy should bring in tow traditional African world-views, not in order to satisfy an abstract intellectual debate but to engage these world-views in the service of the concrete problems presently plaguing African people. He advises that not all aspects of contemporary African philosophy need to follow the Western paradigm of analyticity and deductiveness. Some part of African philosophy should be primarily practical and thus contribute to the reconceptualisation of an authentic African social order.

More sees fit to censure Rauche for a chapter written not by Rauche himself but by a Master's student of Rauche. The chapter is entitled 'Hermeneutical Philosophy and African Thought: Objectivity and Subjectivity in African Thought'. Had More resourced the full copy of this master's dissertation (instead of relying on

the promoter's subjective evaluation), he would have been saved the risk of extrapolating or wondering 'exactly how much of the work is an imposition or reflection of the supervisor' (More 1996:124).

But the following salient points may be of help. First, the title of the student's dissertation is: *The Relationship Between Subjectivity and Objectivity in the Sciences with Special Reference to the Hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer* (Ndaba 1993).

Gadamer's hermeneutical philosophy emphasises the mediative function of culture, history and tradition in understanding. Following Gadamer, the main argument of the dissertation was that, although it is common to contrast understanding, *Verstehen*, and explanation, *Erklären*, even the natural scientist deceives himself if he believes that he can grasp his object a-historically. Gadamer's thesis in hermeneutical perspective is that whether in the human sciences, i.e. *Geisteswissenschaften*, or the natural sciences, *Naturwissenschaften*, the methodological canons we devise to grasp such an object, are historically conditioned. Although Gadamer does not write in the context of an intercultural communication with other philosophies, a dialogue between his notions of tradition, participation, knowledge, a fusion of horizons, etc., and similar themes in African philosophy, readily suggested itself.

The offending chapter in the dissertation, which More refers to, is premised on the realisation that Gadamer's hermeneutical approach to knowledge lends itself adequately to a comparison with African philosophy. Basic to the inclusion of this chapter is the assumption that genuinely African concepts and themes intrinsic to traditional African philosophy are adequate to penetrate the philosophic discourse of the West, and in the process to make the West understand the African situation from the African philosopher's own first-hand description of the African situation. I readily admit that More (1996:125) finds fault with this approach because he writes that:

To claim that African philosophy can be woven from a synthesis between western philosophical methodology and African 'traditional' thought is to privilege the Western model over and above the African model.

Okere, cited earlier, did precisely that. It is not clear to me how and in what manner the importation of a hermeneutic methodology 'privileges' European philosophy over African philosophy. If More is convinced that this is the case, the matter presents a crucial and vital point for further debate and clarification as philosophy is not just a game for intellectuals alone but is a matter of practical import for everybody. Hence the ongoing debate is crucial for life in general because traditions are not monads, separate in and of themselves. In short, were the dialogue between the Western and the African philosophies put on hold or embargoed, both traditions of philosophy would be the poorer. Hence, a philosophy of Africa

hermetically insulated from the rest of the world would serve no real purpose. Smit (1996) writes appositely that all philosophy is a synthesis (a creative integration) of what has come before by way of methods, theories and practices:

This approach is not unique. It is virtually the way in which all other philosophies originated throughout history .... given the focus of philosophy on Africa, African philosophers should also draw on philosophical systems and debates developed in other places and other times in the creative construction of their own (Smit 1996:133).

This creative interdependence should point the way for African philosophy to co-exist with other traditions of philosophy by using any relevant method of philosophy available. In the absence of a thoroughly African philosophy, sifted, systematised and circulated (in written form) by the Africans themselves, first for the education of their children and then for their own enlightenment, Africans must continue to select grudgingly what there is to gain from Western rationality simply for the reason that the West produces better and more effective cures against disease, faster and better means of air and land travel, better and better cost effective computers—the super modern tools for storing mind-staggering data. Because the West seized upon the opportunities presented by science and technology, it has a cutting edge over us. It invented and perfected technology. We should trust it to deliver it. When circumstances presented opportunities for Africans to go and study in Europe, Canada and America, it would have been spurious reasoning to say that studying abroad privileges European theories, philosophies and humanities over African one's. If ever there was a time for intellectual honesty this is the time for the African to acknowledge his blind spots. Doing so does not detract from his greatness in areas where he can be great too. Herein, as I see it, lies the challenge of African philosophy now. The realisation of this challenge lies in the future.

#### 4. Conclusion

In this reply, I began by placing More's critical analysis of the objectification of Western rationality in a perspective that clearly shows the unmistakable common ground I share with him with respect to the hegemony of Western 'reason'. I presented the context of my reply in a way that demonstrates that the Western 'valorization' of reason has not just irked African philosophers alone but has been a concern of European thinkers too. My main argument in critical perspective, as against More's central line of reasoning, points out the danger, in *African Philosophy*, of failing to move beyond a critique of the hegemony of Western rationality. In contrast with African philosophers, those thinkers of the West, such as

Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur, who think and write philosophy beyond the critiquing of traditional Western rationality, succeed, in my estimation, to move Western philosophy to a type of philosophizing that has become global. Because it has become global it has forged lines of communication with African philosophy. I argued that African philosophy in general, but especially traditional African philosophy, can and should contribute to the global debate on equal terms as a speaking, living, vibrant tradition. To effect dialogue between African and Western philosophy on the basis of mutual equality and recognition, we may conclude that contemporary African philosophers must debunk the notion of a 'traditional' African philosophy in its narrowly understood limited sense as a museum piece.

Department of Philosophy  
University of Zululand

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## On a Communitarian Ethos, Equality and Human Rights in Africa

M.E.S. van den Berg

### 1 Introduction

In this paper I shall look at the communitarians' accounts of human rights in Africa as conceived by scholars writing on the African experience. I shall explore their understanding of the notion of equality, and their ideas on human rights in terms of a proclaimed African communitarian ethos and proceed with a critique of these notions. I argue that despite many African thinkers' insistence that African communitarianism does encapsulate a respect for the individual's rights, dignity and liberties, communitarianism (whether it be extreme or moderate) does not enfold a paradigm of individual human rights-claims, but instead embraces an authoritarian and sexist paradigm.

I argue that the legacies of African communalism, humanism and egalitarianism, as claimed by many eminent scholars, are founded on a mythologised and romanticised ideal of African societies and that African philosophers are trying to give a more substantial status to the communitarian ethos in modern Africa, when in terms of reality and as far as certain traditional human rights are concerned, it is merely a straw puppet. I shall maintain that an increasing amount of revisionist historical and anthropological evidence, and closer analyses of African proverbs and sayings by writers and feminists, are questioning the legacies of the models of communitarianism and egalitarianism put forward by African philosophers. The consequences of these legacies are not as straightforward or seamless as the philosophers would have us believe. Drawing on anthropological evidence, analyses of African proverbs, and critiques by African women writers and feminists, I shall maintain that attempts by African male philosophers to lay a foundation for the recognition of individual human rights, based on democratic principles as they themselves envisage, nevertheless reflect a gendered perception of the notion of

rights, especially insofar as the reality of the status and rights of women throughout Africa are concerned.

In my analysis of some of the communitarian arguments of African intellectuals and how these are understood within a normative framework with reference to human rights in modern Africa, I shall focus on the following claims embraced by African philosophers in their defence of a communitarian ethos for Africa: (i) that the defining characteristic of African societies is communitarian; (ii) that the community has ontological primacy over the individual; (iii) that the nature of traditional African societies is egalitarian; and (iv) that an African communitarian ethos accommodates respect for the dignity and liberties of the individual and thus incorporates individual human rights. The four claims are central issues in African philosophy and have arisen in the course of the twentieth century as a response to the forces of the west's intellectual and philosophical paradigms which, along with the economic and political exploitative realities of colonialism, overwhelmed the cultural heritages of the colonised African.

African philosophy is not a static entity based on a singular response to colonialism but continues to develop as a result of ongoing interchanges between cultures who are all in transition. This latter aspect is the subject of a separate study though and accordingly I shall limit my critique to the four central tenets listed above and embraced by African philosophers.

## 2 The Legacies of Communitarian Africa

Every human society is characterised by a particular social structure or patterned arrangement of roles and status sets which are closely linked with economic organisation, legal and political standards and sanctions of a given community. The patterned arrangement in a given society reflects a specific public perception of person, and in its turn, reflects a conception of human rights.

Broadly speaking, concerns about human rights presently fall into two schools: liberal and communitarian. *Liberals*<sup>1</sup> give primary moral value to individual human beings and believe that the individual has autonomy and dignity and therefore

<sup>1</sup> Many people are inclined to equate a liberal perspective with capitalism, especially on the basis of the latter's emphasis on the individual's rights to property. I disagree with this view. Although capitalism is honoured by many liberal countries, it is not correct to argue that liberalism necessarily emerged as the ideological justification for the rise of capitalism, and that the value it places on the autonomous individual is simply a glorification of the pursuit of self-interest in the market. Quite to the contrary, most liberals insist that justice requires regulating the market to ensure equality of opportunity and of resources.

should be free to express his or her unique qualities and dispositions and that these should be respected by the community and the state. Liberals base the notion of human rights on the democratic basis of basic civil and political rights of all citizens as individuals and insist that since the individual's interests can easily be threatened, all citizens should be protected against the oppression of the state and against collective authoritarianism.

In contrast to the liberal perspective, *communitarians* emphasise the value of specifically communal and public goods, and conceive of values as primarily rooted in communal practices. They argue that the community rather than the individual, the state, or the nation is the ultimate originator of values. In their analysis of human rights, group or communal rights rather than individual rights are emphasised. Accordingly, for the survival and the preservation of the community and, hence, its members' personal lives, it would be perfectly justifiable for some individual rights and acts to be restricted or even banned—especially those rights-claims of individuals whose actions are not in harmony with the ways of society and are considered to pose a threat to the maintenance of the 'good' of the community at large.

But what do the scholars of Africa say about the relationship between the individual and its community and by extension about human rights in Africa? A communitarian ethos is embraced by many African scholars as a solution for the alienations and disintegration of ethical values and social institutions in modern African life. They claim that the roots of a communitarian ethos go back to indigenous African societies and that the social structure of these was communitarian (communalistic) in character. They believe that in traditional African societies, the principles of *communality*, for example the communal ownership of land ('the non-ownership of land by individuals on a private basis'), *egalitarianism* ('the equality of all human beings'), and *solidarity* ('mutual dependence and co-operation') were held. With *communitarian* they mean a social arrangement where the community is not conceived as a mere association or a sum total of isolated individuals, but as a unity in which the individual members are linked by interdependent relationships, sharing common values and working towards common goals.

This view is shared by post-colonial African intellectuals such as Nkrumah, Senghor, and Nyerere, who advocated African socialism as a viable solution for the problem of uniting people(s) into nation-states and tribal units (real or constituted by colonial government) which traditionally had different and often conflicting socio-economic and political systems. Contemporary African philosophers and scholars on African cultures such as Gyekye, Gbadegesin, Okolo, Okafor, Khapoya and Okoye are advancing the same kind of argument.

In Ghana, after political independence from Britain, Kwame Nkrumah (1964:73) observed:

... if one seeks the social-political ancestor of socialism, one must go to communalism .... In socialism, the principles underlying communalism are given expression in modern circumstances.

And the Senegalese political leader, Leopold Senghor (1964:49 & 93) states:

Negro-African society is collectivist or ... communal, because it is rather a communion of souls than an aggregate of individuals .... Negro-African society puts more stress on the group than on the individual, more on solidarity than on the activity and needs of the individual, more on the communion of persons than on their autonomy. Ours is a community society.

Here Senghor clearly emphasises the communal nature of African societies and the precedence the community takes over the individual. In this perspective Senghor is joined by Julius Nyerere who advocates *Ujamaa* as the ideal of social solidarity where people agree to subordinate their individual interests to the interest of the common objective of the collective. He maintains that *Ujamaa* emphasises

the Africanness of the politics we intend to follow ... it brings to the mind of our people the idea of mutual involvement in the family (Nyerere 1968:2)

and regards all human beings as members of this ever extending familyhood.

Several other contemporary African philosophers also support the view that African societies are community-orientated or collectivist societies. Kwame Gyekye (1992:102), a Ghanaian philosopher and scholar on traditional Akan culture, maintains that the communitarian aspects of African social-ethical thought are reflected in the '... communitarian features of the social structures of African societies' and that these features are not only outstanding, but the 'defining characteristics of those cultures'. Thus, the sense of community that characterises social relations among individuals is 'a direct consequence of the communitarian arrangements'. Gbadegesin (1991:65), a contemporary Nigerian African philosopher who focuses particularly on traditional Yoruba culture, observes that the

value that traditional Yoruba place on community and communal existence with all its emphasis on fellow-feeling, solidarity and selflessness ... leads directly to the social order of communalism.

He concludes that the social structures of African societies are communal—where human persons are conceived as communal beings embedded in a context of interdependence sharing the same common interests and values.

Chukwudum Okolo (1995:397), another Nigerian African philosopher, stresses the communal nature of African societies too in claiming that the African, through 'cultural upbringing', is not individualistic: 'There is no question of rugged individualism in outlook and life-style so characteristic of the European or the American'.

All these views, however, display a sentimental concern with the communitarian nature of African communities. By saying this, I do *not* claim that the social arrangement of traditional African societies were not *in general* communalistic. What I do claim is that this concern or entertainment with the collectivity displays a tendency to exaggerate African societies' unique communally-orientated character. Such an exaggeration is a sweeping generalisation about the actual ways people conduct and live their lives and reflects a tendency to romanticise Africa's past. African intellectuals claim that the social order of any African community is communal, but by claiming this, they implicitly render the social structure of these pre-colonial societies as static and unreceptive to change. Over thousands of years some communities were engulfed by others, or in turn absorbed into or over-run by other communities. Depending on the social and/or political structure of victorious communities, the level of communitarianism ebbed and flowed regularly. In addition, many, if not all, communities were influenced by the dynamics and personalities of the family, age-set, clan, ethnic and tribal leaders and elders. From recent social anthropological and ethnographic studies, analyses of post-colonial women's writing, proverbs, languages and legends<sup>2</sup>, it is becoming clear that traditional African societies were not isolated, but dynamic structures which had frequent and often violent intra-cultural, political and economic contact with other ethnic groups and societies radically different from their own. That is to say that there was continuous transculturation with communities which had religious, social, political and economic systems different from their own. The common good of one community was often in conflict with the common good of another. Ethnographic accounts, personal testimonies and oral histories increasingly reveal that the internal dynamics of communities were often less than egalitarian.

In reality, there has often been an involved and convoluted interpersonal stratification with regard to the private ownership of land; class differences between 'big men' and serfs which affected the role the individual could play in community affairs<sup>3</sup>; and between ordinary people and royal courts. Wealth also played a role in an individual's standing in a community.

<sup>2</sup> These studies include Berman & Lonsdale (1992a; 1992b) on the Kikuyu; the Comaroffs on the Batswana; Wilmsen et al on the Kalahari San; Schipper (1991) on proverbs and sayings; and Nfah-Abbenyi (1997) on women's literature south of the Sahara.

<sup>3</sup> See Kenyatta (1965) on the Gikuyu system of land tenure and Berman & Lonsdale (1992a; 1992b) on violence and ethnicity, and state and class in Kenya.



Furthermore, it is well-known that social stratification in any given society never occurs in terms of one fixed pattern only. This implies that it is erroneous to define societies as *either* communitarian, *or* individualistic. It is more often the rule than the exception that communality and individuality coexist on different levels in the same community. In the same way, sociological studies of rural communities in Europe and America, two regions unquestionably associated with individuality and liberalism, show that collectivist orientations are traceable and still discernible in the ways of life of such communities' members. Conversely, an individualistic orientation is discernible in the lifestyles of members of rural communities of Africa which are proclaimed as being communalistic<sup>4</sup>.

The west's concern with individuality and Africa's concern with the collectivity are both extremes of the same continuum. In an analysis of Buchi Emecheta's women characters, Iyer (1996:124) aptly points out the actual reality that:

All cultures expect conformity within a given framework, and 'individualism' or 'individuation' is tolerated or in some cases glorified only when it falls within parameters considered acceptable to and supportive of the operative ideology. The prevalent notion that Western culture glorifies individualism is by and large a fallacy, since it encourages only aspects of individualism which perpetuate the dominant belief system, such as economic individualism, while in general taking a hostile stance toward manifestations of individualism which seem to threaten the status quo.

To a large extent the realities of the collectivist society are not extreme either. In support of this view I refer to a well-known Akan legend expressed by Ama Ata Aidoo in her play *Anowa*. In Akan culture, this legend was often told to children by their parents. A brief summary of the legend would reveal that the main character, *Anowa*, refuses to marry the man selected by her parents according to community customs. Instead, she marries the man of her choice, Kofi Ako. Accordingly, they are sent into exile by the community. Contrary to the community's predictions, the two lovers do not fall into a state of misery and beggary but by following fair trading principles they become extremely wealthy and successful. Fair trading principles according to *Anowa* did not involve keeping slaves and serfs as was the custom in

<sup>4</sup> To a large extent legends and African literature provide numerous examples of individualism. However, until recently, analyses of literary works tended to emphasise communality rather than individuality, keeping in line with postcolonial political and philosophical trends in Africa. Recent articles in *Research in African Literatures*, *Current Writing* etc. reveal that critics are taking a closer look at the hybridly constituted individual.

that region long before the slave trade was expanded to the Americas by the West. Slavery or serfdom were often the only destiny for members of communities who were decimated by drought, famine, sickness or war.

The legend ends on a tragic note however. Both *Anowa* and her husband commit suicide on grounds of irreconcilable differences regarding slavery and children. Despite their wealth, *Anowa* resists keeping slaves. Kofi Ako however, wants to reclaim his full status within community standards by keeping them. I find this legend worthy of notice in that *Anowa* defies community tradition by making her own choice irrespective of what was expected of her by the community. *Anowa* and Kofi Ako initially also defy customary politics and economics by acknowledging the human dignity and rights of individuals they come into contact with.

In addition, African literature and history contain many accounts of community members who find the restrictions placed on them by the collective oppressive. Another interesting example is Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, where women who have borne twins as well as outcasts embrace christianity in order to escape the oppression and opprobrium of their community. However, things do fall apart for the main protagonist of the novel, a man who in terms of his rights as a male, has more to lose than the women and outcasts. It would appear that, despite increasing evidence to the contrary, proclamations about communitarian Africa reflect a largely *gendered* concern with the notion of communality. This, in turn, is based on a mythological ideal of pre-colonial African communities' harmonious past.

### 3 Collectivism and Individual Rights

Up till now, most African intellectuals, postcolonial politicians from the continent, contemporary African philosophers, literary theorists and writers on African life and human rights, have shared the view that human rights are a collective issue (group norms) rather than a matter of individual rights-claims<sup>5</sup>. Although African communitarianism can be broadly divided into radical and moderate perspectives—the former insisting on the moral primacy of the community without consideration of the need of individual rights, and the latter trying to accommodate communal values as well as individual rights by maintaining that both individuality and communality need to be recognised morally and functionally—there is in general a communitarian concern with the collectivity rather than the individual. Both perspectives share the view that human persons are *intrinsically* communal beings, embedded in a context of social relationships and have common values, interests and goals.

<sup>5</sup> See for instance the following African scholars on human rights who render equal and individual rights unimportant: Mark Anikpo (1990:211-219); Mokwugo Okoye (1990:164); Osita Eze (1990:88-105); and Issa Shivji (1990:70-73).

The Nigerian philosopher, Ifeanyi Menkiti follows an extreme form of communitarianism, asserting the ontological primacy of the community over the reality of the individual's life. He maintains it is

the community which defines the person as person, not some isolated static quality of rationality, will, or memory .... in the African understanding human community plays a crucial role in the individual's acquisition of full personhood (Menkiti 1984:172 & 179).

This communitarian view, however, proceeds from the assumption that the welfare, values and goals of the community are supreme and the overriding consideration for morality and social justice. It stresses the value of specifically communal and public goods and conceives of values as rooted in communal practices. This implies that the individual is submerged in community and that community interests and its continued existence take preference above the will and interests of the individual.

From the logic of Menkiti's argument about the 'ontological primacy' of the community, it follows that community values are not contingent but a necessary condition for personhood. This means that the individual must of necessity be subject to the normative power of the community and is thus not seen as the primary reference point for moral actions. Rather, his or her moral status is linked to the fact that the cultural community is the primary context or social space within which he or she is regarded as a moral agent. In other words, the importance of individual human rights is denied in terms of the priority of group rights.

However, Menkiti's assertion about the ontological primacy of the community over the individual is based on an idealised view and inflation of the importance of collectivity. Although I agree that we cannot do without communities, that people are largely interdependent and that the moral self develops within a social context where culture and history play vital roles, I *disagree* that the self is a mere product of a constitutive collectivity, submerged in the community conceiving of itself primarily as a member of a group and someone who *discovers* 'self' as constituted by a community's values. As with communities, the human person is not a static, one-dimensional and undifferentiated entity, but complex and dynamic. One constitutes 'self' not in terms of one unified identity but in terms of a complex of identities. Thus, to view the moral self to be socially formed from within one shared identity, is an illusion. The self may be formed within several intersecting and often conflicting communities. This hybridity of self-constitution is especially discernible in the growing body of life histories and autobiographies by women in Africa<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> See for instance Marjorie Shostak (1981); Mirza & Strobel (1989); JaneTapsubei Creider (1985); Mariama Bâ (1981) and many other West African writers.

Another point of criticism involves the view that the communitarian self is always the *object* of an ethical community encumbered with a community's values and a perception of the common good, but never a *choosing subject* or a moral agent who can make choices in terms of its own values and ends, and one who can never *change* or *resist*. When claiming that a member of a community simply inherits a set of values and discovers him- or herself primarily as a member of a group, embedded in a context of social relationships, one is also claiming that a community's values are to be taken as an *institutionalised given* or a *sanctioned absolute*.

Possibly one of the better known local examples to the contrary, is the decision taken by Shaka that Zulu men should not be circumcised as this would affect their efficacy as warriors. Circumcision is a rite of passage where boys pass into manhood and *acquire certain rights* as a result thereof. Scrapping the socially sanctioned institution of circumcision is evidence that an individual can effect change. On the other hand, Shaka was the chief and used his standing in the community to bring about the shift in perception—a perception of a new common good.

As with the old, a new social order can easily germinate into a hegemonic social order, a social order which reflects a dominant group's belief of which values and ends are important. In the section to follow, I explore this statement further.

#### 4 African Humanism and the Conception of Women

I have argued that an extreme form of communitarianism tends to exaggerate the communal structure of African societies and that this doctrine with its overemphasis on communal values renders individual rights-claims unnecessary. Kwame Gyekye, however, believes that communitarianism is not necessarily tantamount to a negation of individual rights. He is an advocate of moderate communitarianism and differs from the viewpoint of Menkiti and other radical communitarians, such as Anikpo, Okoye and Osita Eze who consider personal rights for individuals redundant. In an attempt to show that communalism (in this case moderate communalism) does not negate individual rights Gyekye (1992:114) maintains:

[T]he respect for human dignity, a natural or fundamental attribute of the person which cannot, as such, be set at nought by the communal structure, generates regard for personal rights. The reason is that the natural membership of the individual person in a community cannot rob him of his dignity or worth, a fundamental and inalienable attribute he possesses as a person.

Gyekye argues that since respect for human dignity is a fundamental attribute of all persons, individual rights cannot be negated. He develops this argument as follows: The respect for human dignity,

howsoever the conception is derived, whether from theistic considerations or through purely rational reflection on human nature, is linked with, and in fact compels, the recognition of rights (Gyekye 1992:115).

not only in an individualistic but also communitarian context. Gyekye (1995:158) bases his notion of human dignity on the African humanist conception of humankind where the well-being and interests of each member of the community are assured. Thus, according to Gyekye the recognition of individual rights, which includes the exercise of the unique qualities and dispositions of individuals by a communitarian political morality is a conceptual requirement. Failure to recognise this can lead to exaggerating the normative status and power of the community in relation to those of the person, and in its turn this can lead to 'obfuscating our understanding of the real nature of the person' (Gyekye 1992:106).

Gyekye's argument, however, is not very convincing. He fails to see that there is no necessary (inevitable) link between respect for human dignity and the recognition of individual rights, because a conception of human dignity does not guarantee (nor 'generate') regard for personal rights or liberties, especially not for the rights of women. Moreover, a conception of human dignity, even if it is based on the alleged African humanist view of human nature<sup>7</sup>, does not guarantee justice, neither does it necessarily generate equal treatment of persons, especially not equality between men and women with regard to rights or privileges. Thus, in addition to the legacies of the African society's communalistic and humanistic character, there is the legacy of its egalitarian nature that needs to be unpacked.

I have pointed out that African intellectuals claim that African humanism is the conceptual framework on which the African notion of the human person is founded. Now, in addition to this view, it is also held that the African conception of human rights and justice derives from a notion of egalitarianism as it is expressed in traditional African cultures. With egalitarianism they mean that all human beings are equal, because every human being has intrinsic worth or possesses creative humanity. In his analysis of the concept of the human person, Julius Nyerere (1968a:12f) says:

People can accept the equality of man because they believe that all men [sic] were created by God, they can believe it because scientific evidence supports such a conclusion, or they believe it simply because they believe it is the only basis on which life in society can be organized without injustice.

<sup>7</sup> Many African scholars claim that the social arrangement of traditional Africa is humanistic. See for instance Dzobo (1992); and Okafor (1995) where he maintains that in Africa, 'the sanctity of the human person is regarded as an inalienable and fundamental right'. See also Wiredu (1992-1993).

It does not matter why people accept the equality of man as the basis of social organization; all that matters is that they do accept it.

From this statement one can infer that Nyerere values the equal worth of every human being and that the acceptance of the notion of equality is essential for the realisation of a social organisation based on fair and just principles. Like many other African intellectuals (e.g. Nkrumah, Kaunda and Mbiti), Nyerere bases his notion of equality and morality on the African humanist view of the human being. A contemporary African philosopher, Gyekye (1997:259) supports this view of African morality too. He maintains that, as the outstanding feature of African culture, humanism means:

... to recognize the other person as a fellow human being, which, in turn, means to acknowledge that her worth as a human being is equal to our own ... and at the public policy level, that the basic rights, which intrinsically belong to an individual by virtue of her being human, ought not to be interfered with, subverted, or set at naught.

On this view, Gyekye is joined by Wiredu who agrees that the socio-ethical structure of traditional Africa is humanistic. Drawing out some significant normative consequences of the Akan concept of 'person', Wiredu emphasises that in Akan as in the thinking of many other African peoples, the idea is held that 'every human being has an intrinsic worth because of the divine element in her being' (Wiredu 1995:37).

Now, if it is indeed the case that in terms of African humanism all persons have equal worth as human beings, then why are there inequalities in terms of basic rights and privileges between men and women? What does Gyekye mean when he speaks of 'her equal worth' and 'basic rights' which cannot be subverted? Gyekye criticises Menkiti's viewpoint<sup>8</sup> that in the African communitarian ethos, priority is given to the duties which individuals owe to the community, and that the rights of individuals are seen as secondary to their exercise of duties. However, although Gyekye insists that rights belong primarily and irreducibly to the individual and that they are a means of 'expressing an individual's talents, capacities, and identity' (Gyekye 1997:62f), he does not address the condition of women and their general lack of rights. In all fairness, Nyerere (1996:312), commenting on aspects of the *Arusha Declaration*, does raise the issue of inequality between men and women in traditional societies:

There were two basic factors which prevented traditional society from full flowering .... the first of these was that ... there was, in most parts of

<sup>8</sup> Menkiti (1984:180) expresses this viewpoint in his article.

Tanzania, an acceptance of one human inequality .... [T]he women in traditional society were regarded as having a place in the community which was not only different, but also to some extent inferior. It is impossible to deny that the women did, and still do, more than their fair share of the work in the fields and in the homes. By virtue of their sex they suffered from inequalities which had nothing to do with their contribution to the family welfare .... This is certainly inconsistent with our socialist conception of the equality of all human beings ....

Despite Nyerere's call for the equality of all human beings in a new socialist Tanzania, the predilection to continue with old inequalities continued and does still continue. Thus, it seems that contemporary African philosophers' statements about the high value placed on human dignity and respect for individual rights are rooted in an idealised view of Africa's past. This also casts doubt on their insistence that in post-independence Africa, an African communitarian ethos (even if modified)—which they claim is founded on the egalitarian and humanistic structure of traditional Africa—enfold respect for the dignity of *all* individuals and hence for their rights and liberties. I am of the opinion that these claims are based on a controversial understanding of the notion of equality and by extension, of the idea of human rights<sup>9</sup>.

There is overwhelming evidence that pre-colonial African communities were not egalitarian, but in reality sexist and discriminatory<sup>10</sup>, not only towards women and outcasts but also towards other tribal units and groups. A denial of these facts by many African communitarians and philosophers has negative normative implications for certain human rights, especially the rights of women. With women's rights I do not mean *special rights* for women, for why should the rights-claims of women be different from those any other individual is entitled to? Would the issue of women's rights have been an issue at all if certain discriminating practices do not still exist? When I talk of women's rights, then I have in mind: (a) the right to decide about one's own body, about one's own future, the right to decide whom she wants to marry, and the right to decide in terms of her circumcision; (b) the right to participate

<sup>9</sup> I define human rights as rights *all* individuals ought to be entitled to because they are human, without regard to gender, race, ethnicity, class or status. Under equality I understand the state of being equal or being on the same level in dignity or worth. This implies that inequalities of rights (social, political, and economic) between men and women, between one class and another, and between one ethnic group and another are not justifiable.

<sup>10</sup> I am not saying that gender and racial discrimination is unique to Africa; Western and Eastern societies are just as sexist and racist, if not to some extent more so.

not only in the domestic sphere, but also to participate in the public sphere of community life, for example the election of chiefs; (c) the right of inheritance; and (d) the right to education and equal career opportunities.

The development and progression of thought on human rights in the twentieth century with regard to these rights-claims by the colonised, women (across the world), minorities (and in the case of South Africa the majority) etc. is the subject of a separate and fascinating study. The 'generation' of human rights-claims I have listed above is linked to South Africa's new Bill of Rights. Although the tenets of the Bill of Rights have neither constitutionally nor in practice been accepted or implemented in most of the world, the ideas on women expressed therein, have been consistently raised at international conferences on women (e.g. Beijing) to which African countries send scores of delegates.

I am aware of differences in perceptions pertaining to women's rights, not only between Western and African women, but also between many African women in rural communities and those living in urban areas. Among those scholars writing on the condition and rights of African women in modern Africa, Florence Dolphyne (1995:238-248) points out that, in her experience as former chairperson of the National Council on Women and Development in Ghana, the majority of women from Western countries favour immediate legislation banning certain African traditional practices such as polygamy and female circumcision. The rationale for this view derives from their negative psychological impact and the risks such practices pose to women's health. Although their counterparts agree that these practices stand in the way of the emancipation of women in Africa, they nevertheless insist that the immediate banning of these practices is not advisable. They argue that it will take some time to make women in rural societies aware of the health-dangers of circumcision and of the negative consequences of some traditional practices to their welfare. Also, Dolphyne maintains that there are certain issues, such as polygamy, extra-marital relations, and the division of domestic labour, that are not perceived as issues among most African women living in rural communities. These women, in contrast to liberated and educated African women in urban areas, do not question the traditional practices because, for them, 'the issue of women's rights is inextricably linked with that of survival' and their concerns 'relate to the provision of the basic necessities of life that will relieve them from the anxieties inherent in their existence' (Dolphyne 1995:242).

I am claiming, however, that in spite of the differences in perceptions and levels of education, the general lack of rights of women throughout Africa nevertheless is a reality that cannot be shifted into the background. Such a cover-up in philosophical circles for instance, serves as an instrument of *silencing critical questions* about the still oppressive status of women and thus perpetuates inequalities and injustices within the spheres of the family, education, power, and career

opportunities. Another way of shifting the importance of women's rights and the issue of sexism into the background is to blame colonialism and white patriarchy for the undermining and disintegration of family ties and communities. On this issue, bell hooks in *Talking Back* (1989:9) has the following to say about the denial of sexism and consequently the compounding of the oppression of women—even in post-colonial or in so-called liberated societies:

Traditionally it has been important for black people to assert that slavery, apartheid, and continued discrimination have not undermined the humanity of black people .... To acknowledge then that our families and communities have been undermined by sexism would not only require an acknowledgement that racism is not the only form of domination and oppression that affects us as a people; it would mean critically challenging the assumption that our survival as a people depends on creating a cultural climate in which black men can achieve manhood within paradigms constructed by white patriarchy.

To bell hooks, sexism is no better than the racism suffered by black people. However, in the quest for liberation by blacks, issues of manhood and masculinity became conceptually equalled with freedom. Often, then, manhood and liberation followed white patriarchies' paradigms of domination. According to hooks, sexism has always been a political stance connected to racial domination, enabling white men and black men to share a common affair about sex roles and thus upholding the importance of male domination. Thus, the denial of sexism in African societies in terms of white patriarchy as the only form of oppression, serves as an instrument to retain the importance of male domination. The adoption of white patriarchal sexist paradigms for modern liberationists does not reflect a radical shift from traditional African sexism, however.

Analyses of African proverbs and sayings on women reflect a sexist conception of women, rather than a paradigm of equal worth of men and women. Drawing on Akrofi's<sup>11</sup> analysis and interpretation of Akan proverbs, Saforo Kwame (1995:253-269) notes that most traditional as well as contemporary African societies' conceptions of women are derogatory and offensively sexist and that African women are seldom considered as the equals of men. He believes that Akan proverbs are reliable reflections of Akan customs, beliefs and ideas, also those concerning men, women, and children. From Akrofi's collection of Akan proverbs on women, Kwame (1995:260-261) mentions the following:

<sup>11</sup> Akrofi is an Akan scholar who made a thorough study of Akan proverbs. See in this respect his compilation, *Twi Mmeseusem* (Twi Proverbs) (1958).

1. If a woman is beautiful, it is because of her husband.
2. Even if a woman creates a talking drum, she stores it in a man's house.
3. All women are the same.
4. Women are in love with money.
5. If women say 'You are handsome', it means you are in financial trouble.

According to Kwame, all these proverbs usually have a negative connotation in Akan society. They are taken to mean that no matter how great a woman is, she is always dependent on a man, and that 'women are equally unfaithful, bad, evil, or even worthless' (Kwame 1995:261). This view is also confirmed by Minecke Schipper's compilation, *Source of All Evil: African Proverbs and Sayings on Women* (1991). Amongst the Kikuyu for instance, the saying, 'the man comes out of childhood, the woman stays in womanhood' refers to circumcision rights. Where a man obtains manhood and *all his rights*, a circumcised woman does not become entitled to new rights. Other Kikuyu proverbs echo the inherent offensiveness: 'A fool will suck his dead mother' meaning, he is far from wise who tries to derive benefit where none can be got, or 'A woman and an invalid man are the same thing'.

The article, 'In West Africa, paedophilia is an honoured tradition', published in *The Sunday Independent* (December 28 1997) supports Saforo Kwame's view that not only traditional but also modern African societies' conceptions of women are derogatory and sexist. According to this article, pre-adolescent or forced marriage is still common practice throughout sub-Saharan Africa. Forcing girls aged between 7 and 14 into marriage is especially widespread in African countries with large Muslim populations. The marriages occur within clans where the girl is compelled to marry a distant relative, often two or three times her age. But why does the tradition of childhood marriage still prevail in modern African? The article maintains that the reason these communities give is that forcing girls to marry at such young ages protects them from immorality, strengthens clan relationships and honours Islam. The real reason, however, according to Constance Yai<sup>12</sup> is 'that families often receive hundreds, even thousands, of Rands as dowry. It is what keeps this practice alive'<sup>13</sup> (*The Sunday Independent* 28 December 1997).

The article also stresses the impact of Islamic law on the lives of people in West African societies. According to experts on Islam, the Koran teaches that a girl

<sup>12</sup> Constance Yai is a women's rights activist in Abidjan in the northern Ivory Coast who runs campaigns against the practice of early and forced marriage. She wants to make women aware that they have the right to refuse this type of practice.

<sup>13</sup> In this context, honest empirical research is needed to trace the relationship between this kind of traditionalist argument and monetary exploitation—especially as it impacts on women within whatever religion or other social formation.



can be married as soon as she can conceive. But does the Koran also teach pre-adolescent and forced marriage, that when a girl is married, her husband is just under God and that she must obey her husband no matter what? Even if he ties her up, burns her with a piece of iron, locks her up in a room for three or more days without food, beats and rapes her, as was the case with one of the girls discussed in the article. Must she still obey him?

## 5 Conclusion

In the light of the increasing scholarly evidence and everyday eyewitness accounts that African society is in actual fact not egalitarian, but sexist, it is interesting to notice that the bulk of contemporary African philosophers—who are of course all male—have not addressed the issue of the African conception of women. This is so even though there is a firm opinion of women expressed in African proverbs, legends and beliefs. Philosophers such as Wiredu, Bodunrin and Hountondji who represent the professional African school of thought, went to great lengths to criticise ethnophilosophers for viewing African Philosophy as a collective system of thought. According to them, ethnophilosophers are conservative because they are looking for philosophy in the collective unconscious of the African people. Ethnophilosophy, they maintain, is folk philosophy—it is not philosophy developed by reason and logic which concerns logically argued thoughts of individuals, discussion and debate. Yet, apart from their proclaimed *critical* approach, they remain silent on the issue of women's rights. Their silence on women's subordinated status to men and their sexually determined roles, is even more remarkable when one considers African philosophers' predilection to extract from the *systematic and critical* analyses of proverbs, myths, customs, beliefs and practices African philosophical thought. In their analyses of the African conception of the human person, they neatly include the words 'women', 'she' and 'her' as if they want to suggest that they have not forgotten about women. But, from their literature, there is no evidence that they have adequately thought about the discrepancy of a communitarian ethos and women's inferior, non-egalitarian status and general lack of rights. Perhaps, they think that, in the light of more important issues like working out an adequate political system for modern Africa based on democratic principles—as they themselves envisage—the issue of women's rights is no issue at all!

I conclude. In line with other disciplines which have addressed Africa's past and in many instances revised their perceptions, African philosophers should pause and consider whether the legacies of communitarianism, African humanism and egalitarianism which they hold so dear, would necessarily be a legacy that African women would unquestioningly embrace if they were given the opportunity to voice their analyses of these legacies? A failure to address the issue of the subordination of

women by men in traditional and contemporary African societies, also implies a failure to recognise women as individuals, people with critical minds, and that they may be uncomfortable with, or even worse, indifferent to the roles their gendered societies have assigned them. If African philosophers were to address these issues in terms of finding viable solutions for contemporary Africa, it would entail a radical realignment of their claims in terms of humanism, egalitarianism and human rights. For the moment, they are extremely conservative by retaining the social hierarchies where one sex dominates another, one group suppresses another and where the majority of women in Africa are still regarded as beasts of burden who should obey men, no matter what. The social hierarchies which remain unexamined within the ethos of communitarianism, also conveniently slot into the hierarchies Christianity and Islam have brought along with them within the broader global context. The conspiracy of silence on the reality of the condition and rights of women remains, no matter what the legacy in Africa. Embracing a communitarian ethos as a solution for the alienation and disintegration of ethical values and social institutions in modern Africa, and as a foundation for a democratic system, needs a critical rethinking to give substance to claims made by philosophers.

Departement Wysbegeerte  
Universiteit van Suid Afrika

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## **Towards Sacrificial-Cleansing Ritual in South Africa: An Indigenous African view of Truth and Reconciliation<sup>1</sup>**

**Mogomme Alpheus Masoga**

### **Introduction**

Can symbolic ritual cleansing effect any change in the South African context? The death and suffering which befell South Africa during the apartheid era has not abated, especially in KwaZulu-Natal. There is no doubt that the past South African regime with its policies, ploughed the land for the germination of seeds of violence and vengeance. The separation legislature incarcerated black people in their tribal groups and in the process also divided them, thereby rendering them ineffective in collective sense (Reader's Digest 374). Lebowa, Gazankulu, Bophuthatswana, Venda, Kwa-Zulu, and Kwandebele<sup>2</sup> were brought about by this kind of system (Reader's Digest 378). In general, this led to political instability and incoherence.

The effects of apartheid also impacted on popular political movements. In the Vaal Triangle, this was evident in the splits between members of the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the Azanian People's Organization (AZAPO) (Reader's Digest 1995:477). Here necklacing was rife. In 1985 in KwaNdebele, people were divided into two groups. One which supported independence, and one which opposed it. Many people, especially youths, died because of this clash of opinions. Similar violence occurred in the same year at Khayelitsha township, about fifty kilometres from the city of Cape Town. People there resisted moving from the squatter settlements at Crossroads next to Langa (Reader's Digest 1995:476). Very few of these opted to move into four small roomed houses at Khayelitsha. The majority refused to move. The government of

<sup>1</sup> Paper presented at the Southern African Folklore Society's Fifth Biennial International Conference held at the University of South Africa, Pretoria, 15-17 July 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Formerly referred to as homeland states.

the time, through its police, forcefully evicted these residents. As a result, their houses were burnt down. In 1987, violence started between the UDF and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) at KwaMakhutha. It soon spread to other areas in the region—Pietermaritzburg, Impumalanga and KwaMashu. Later, its effects were felt throughout the whole province (Reader's Digest 1995:474-476)

After South Africa's first democratic elections, people have started to speak the language of reconciliation. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was instituted. Through its wide-spread hearings, it has started to bring to light many of the atrocities which were perpetrated during the Apartheid era. Within the conditions which Apartheid created, to various degrees, most were politically motivated. Many government leaders and operatives were implicated.

The TRC has created the conditions for people to come clean, to speak honestly about what they have done and to identify the reasons why. As such, it provided the possibility for South Africans to objectify and distance themselves from this horrendous era. It also assisted in re-locating the remains of lost people so that they could be laid to rest according to African culture. There is no doubt that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has initiated a process of ritual reconciliation in which both victims and perpetrators could participate. As this commission is winding down its activities, the question however arises as to how it can be continued—how can reconciliation be effected? How can peace be achieved, and how can the country be cleansed? Additional questions are: Has the TRC succeeded in bringing about reconciliation as African people understand it?—i.e. through ritual cleansing? Was it equipped to truly facilitate cleansing and reconciliation? And: what about 'the Church' and the traditional healers? Should they have been involved in the healing of the nation? What if both the Church and the traditional healers contributed to the death of some of these victims? Do they have the legitimacy to perform such a ritual cleansing?

During the second semester of 1995, I had the opportunity to offer four lectures on *African Theology and Rituals* at the University of Natal, School of Theology. I worked with a group of students who were enrolled for a course entitled: *African Theology and Modernity*. Some of my lectures dealt with the notion of ritual cleansing in the South African context. At the end of my lectures I gave students a brief task. They were asked to reflect briefly on the following questions: Which ritual cleansing activities would be suitable for the South African situation? Should the Church perform this ritual cleansing? or Traditional ritual elders? or Both? Which symbols should be used for this? The Church's or those deriving from Tradition?

This article tries to come to grips with some of these questions by looking at both ritual and sacrificial theory, in particular, ritual cleansing for the South African situation. Firstly, I reflect briefly on the views of two students in the *African Theology and Modernity* class. Then, I introduce three modern theorists on ancient sacrificial ritual. Issues raised by these theorists link with ritual cleansing theory. Finally, I offer

perspectives on the need for constructing a theological paradigm which is informed by a traditional ritual cleansing framework. In short, this paper argues that South Africa's healing strategy and mechanisms should also be traditionally informed in order for it to be meaningful, powerful, comprehensive and truthful.

### The African Theology and Modernity Class of 1995

Student Jabulani Tshabalala, a pastor at the local Lutheran congregation in Machibisa, Pietermaritzburg, wrote interestingly on the issue of ritual cleansing. He pointed out that ritual cleansing should involve both the victim and the perpetrator. For him, black South Africans suffered more under the legacy of apartheid than other groups.

On how ritual cleansing is performed in a traditional setting, he provided the following information. *Izangoma*, *izinyanga*<sup>3</sup>, community elders, are usually called for an *imbizo*<sup>4</sup> at the *inkosi*'s great place. A number of cattle are slaughtered for this occasion. The *amadlozi*<sup>5</sup> are evoked to take an active role during this ceremony. Only the *amadlozi* of the king are evoked and appeased. This has hierarchical implications. The presence of the *inkosi* at this occasion is crucial. He acts as the symbol of unity. The *imphepo*<sup>6</sup> is burnt continually to drive away any form of impurity or evil at the time. *Utshwala*<sup>7</sup> is prepared and served to the ritual participants to both indicate their participation and to evoke the *amadlozi*. Rev Tshabalala noted the following symbols for this occasion: *isigubhu*<sup>8</sup>, *umkhomba*<sup>9</sup>, *icansi*<sup>10</sup> or *ubuhlali* and *amanzi*<sup>11</sup>.

Student Mbulelo Hina pointed out that African culture has practices that cannot be regarded as deterrents by the Christian religion. He referred to the Xhosa

<sup>3</sup> A distinction is maintained between an *isangoma* and *inyanga*. *Isangoma* has the ability to diagnose an illness, while on the other hand an *inyanga* can both diagnose and heal (prescribe and apply traditional medicine on the patient).

<sup>4</sup> *Imbizo* refers to a traditional summoning and gathering of the elders, chiefs and other subjects by the *inkosi* (King).

<sup>5</sup> Refers to ancestors and ancestresses.

<sup>6</sup> Zulu traditional incense. Associated with sanctification and purification procedures.

<sup>7</sup> Traditional beer.

<sup>8</sup> Traditional drum. This drum has a significant role as it evokes and entertains both the ancestresses and ancestors.

<sup>9</sup> Refers to skin of either a goat or cow. It is commonly used to cover the body of the deceased person in traditional funerary rite.

<sup>10</sup> Traditional carpet.

<sup>11</sup> Water is central in any traditional ritual context. It symbolises purity and perfection. Every step of a ritual process is marked by the use of water. Participants have to make sure that they are pure and that their cleanliness is guaranteed before engaging in ritual.

ritual practice named the *ukungxengeza*<sup>12</sup> which literally means 'to ask for forgiveness'. The ritual is usually performed within the family when things are not running as they should. A cow is slaughtered and the *izinyanya*<sup>13</sup> are evoked and appeased. Participants confess *amatyala*<sup>14</sup> to each other. This then leads to a ritual purification ceremony which is usually performed by the family elder. If it happens that the elder himself had wronged either the *yiminyanya* or any person, he would ask for the *izinyanya* for forgiveness from the wronged person, to allow him to still continue to perform the ritual and thereafter correct the wrong which was committed. After the cow is slaughtered, the participants take its horns and put them above the kraal gate facing the direction of the main house. This symbolises that the ritual of purification was performed and there will be no other problem encountered by the concerned family. Only *uxolo*<sup>15</sup> will be experienced by the family.

## Theory of Ritual Cleansing

### I

In his book, *Homo Necans*, Burkert outlines his approach—an eclectic blend of functionalism, structuralism, and socio-biology (cf. Burkert 1983:xix; 1987:150; Alderick 1980:3). He defines ritual as 'Forms of non-verbal communication' and 'patterns' which are accompanied by motives (Burkert 1987:150). For him, human society is shaped by the past. Therefore, there is need to examine the development of human society over long periods of time. Burkert focuses on the primary function of religious ritual. His ideas are shaped by scholars like Meuli (1946) who pointed out that 'aspects of Greek sacrificial practice, especially the care and handling of bones of animal victims, were similar to the practice of palaeolithic hunters' (Burkert 1987:24). Meuli maintained that the practice of sacrifice emerged from the palaeolithic hunting period. Hunters killed animals for food. Man, the hunter, distributed meat among the community after the hunt. This act of distribution anticipated the founding of communities by communal eating, and relates to the necessity of the foregoing kill (Burkert 1987:165). Later, during the Neolithic age, when the domestication of animals was introduced, sacrifice became 'a transfer of property', a 'gift', instead of 'forceful appropriation' (Burkert 1987:166).

Burkert further shows that the killing and spilling of blood is a central ritual of religion. This practice, as he maintains, affirms, paradoxically, the necessity of violence

<sup>12</sup> To ask for forgiveness.

<sup>13</sup> Xhosa word and conception for ancestors and ancestresses.

<sup>14</sup> Xhosa word and conception for debts.

<sup>15</sup> Peace or harmony characterised by comprehensive well-being experienced by the whole community.

for the foundation of human culture. Even for Christians, salvation from the 'so-called evil' of aggression is confronted with the murder and the death of God's innocent son.

For Burkert, there are two important elements in this process: aggression and human violence. In his opinion, these two elements both mark the progress of our civilisation and continue to be central to the challenge to establish and maintain human community (Burkert 1983:1). Aggression, he points out, must be positioned within evolutionary human socio-biology. According to socio-biological theorists like Lorenz—to whom Burkert is deeply indebted—the human species is the sole species which has the aggressive capacity to destroy itself. Consequently, collective rituals, like hunting and its successor, sacrifice, evolved in order to channel this intraspecific aggression and so prevent the species from destroying itself. As Burkert (1983:40) concludes, 'killing justifies and affirms life, it makes us conscious of the new order and brings it to power'. Through the hunting ritual and later sacrifice, society was shaped, defined and rescued from the destructive power of intraspecific aggression. 'Sacrificial killing is the basic experience of the "sacred" .... *Homo religiosus acts and attains self-awareness as homo necans*' (e.a.). In other words, only man the killer (*homo necans*), has the capacity to become a truly religious being (*homo religiosus*).

Burkert's views are not without flaws. Lambert does not accept the view that Zulu sacrificers, unlike ancient Greek sacrificers who concealed the weapon in a basket of grain, do not attempt to conceal the violence of the act—the *giya* almost seems to emphasise the violence of the act' (Lambert 1993:305,308). Lambert's comparative study seems to suggest that the association of hunting, guilt and sacrifice is not necessarily the case in all cultural systems, as Burkert seems to imply.

Therefore, one should be careful about the idea of bones collected, hunting theories and theories of sexual aggression. However, one should accept the relationship between rituals of sacrifice and the renewal of life. In addition, one can accept the community-forming and relationship building or restoring role of sacrificial ritual.

### II

We now turn to another scholar on this subject. René Girard<sup>16</sup> is a distinguished French literary critic whose views on violence, aggression and sacrifice are shaped by literary texts such as Euripides' *Bacchae*. He uses Freud's model of the conscious and unconscious. For him, ritual is an act which is a substitution of a prior event, while, on

<sup>16</sup> His major work *La violence et le sacré* (Violence and the sacred) first appeared in French in 1972, the same year that Burkert's *Homo Necans* was published in German. Written independently of each other both are, arguably, reactions to the horrors of the Vietnam War and the problems which this raised about human aggression and the very survival of human culture and society. Girard concedes that he uses a literary approach and that his approach is close to Burkert's.



the other hand, myth is the verbalised concealment of the original event. Therefore, ritual becomes part of the social institution and it is repetitive because it claims to be a mimetic re-enactment of a prior event. Through the work of the myth-pretifiers the truth of the scapegoat phenomenon is repressed, and myth functions to describe the 'safer course, the most reassuring course from the standpoint of the community at large' (Girard 1987:99,100).

Girard views sacrifice as having originated with a fictional act of mob violence in the prehistorical period. This act of collective killing was generated by, he argues, the fact that 'humans have no breaking mechanism for intraspecific aggression' (Girard 1987:8). Therefore, the answer to one murder is another murder. Girard introduces another feature of human behaviour: mimetic desire. He points out that the vicious cycle of revenge murders was necessary because desire is learned by imitating the other (Girard 1987:9). For example, person A desires object C; person B imitates desires of person A for object C. In this process (mimetic desire), the closer person A gets to object C, the more persons A and B become locked in deadly rivalry. What began as imitation turns into murderous hostility. This cycle of murders can only be halted, maintains Girard, by making use of a surrogate victim. From within the group, one person is separated out as a victim and the killing of this person brings temporary peace in the community. Before the death of the scapegoat, there is disruption, while after its death, peace and reconciliation are attained (Girard 1987:92). The apparent ambiguity of the scapegoat is due to the fact that:

victimisers see themselves as the passive victims of their own victim, and they see their victim as supremely active, eminently capable of destroying them. The scapegoat always appears to be a more powerful agent, a more powerful cause than he really is (Girard 1987:91).

In conclusion, for Girard, the surrogate-victim is both the malefactor and benefactor. The entire:

mimetic cycle is projected onto him and interpreted as supernatural visitation destined to teach the community what to do and not to do in the future (Girard 1987:128).

This is due to the fact that people cannot share

peacefully an object they all desire, but they can always share an enemy they all hate because they can join in destroying him (Girard 1987:128).

In this case, the cure is really the same as the disease.

The details of Girard's thesis may be challenged, rightly, especially the reduction of everything to binary opposition and the positing of hypothetical original situations. But, the idea of projected guilt is helpful and could be combined with some of Burkert's views, especially on the community building aspect and the death-life exchange.

### III

Lastly, Jonathan Smith, a religious historian specialising in Hellenistic religions, postulates the following about rituals. He defines ritual as a mode of paying attention and a process of making interest (Smith 1987:103; 1982:54). What underlies this view is the fact that someone or something is made sacred by ritual (*sacrificium*). Ritual facilitates transitive categories. Smith stresses the *realm of thought* as opposed to the *realm of reality*. He does not accept the view that ritual elements should be associated with substances, but rather that ritual elements function as purely differential and countless signs forming a system which is composed of elements which are signifiers and yet, at the same time, signify nothing (Smith 1987:108; 1982:60).

Ultimately, Smith theorises that ritual is an assertion of difference which provides an occasion for reflection on the rationalisation of the fact that what ought to have been done was not, and what ought to have taken place, did not. Therefore, ritual brings to the fore the relationship between present reality and an ideal perfect world (Smith 1987:109).

It is clear that Smith comes from a society which no longer sacrifices. He is unable to explain the power and meaning of sacrifice to an insider. The key is that there is some collective process which effects some kind of communal transformation. It is here that Burkert's theory of sacrificial ritual processes as social affirmation and community building, offer clarity. It does this by means of a transformative ritual process between death and life which is able to offer a more satisfactory explanation. Smith's theory has no place for the sacred—leaving in its place meaningless and random actions of their own, appropriately to be interpreted by an individual, I propose, from a (Western) culture who does not participate in religious ritual nor appreciate community. More crucially even, he is unable to comprehend in his theory the transformative potential of the scapegoating ritual as expressed by Girard. So, in our context, one tends to accept Burkert's main thesis as modified by Girard.

### Pedi Traditional Ritual: A Case in Point

I conducted fieldwork in the Northern province among a community located at a place called Ga-Dikgale. The group consisted of elderly participants. The majority of these participants was either semi- or completely literate. Worth mentioning is the fact that one member, David Moloisi, participated in the First World War and was able to recall

the places that he visited when in the army. The research was on how Pedi Christians appropriate the Epistle to the Hebrews. Respondents pointed out that *mabele*<sup>17</sup> used to be thrown into the grave and an animal was slaughtered. Death was not understood to be the final end of life but the beginning of life. This might sound ironic or contradictory. It was this contradiction, they claimed, that had to be maintained to explain the Pedi cosmological structure. When death strikes in the family, a beast is slaughtered. The beast has to face the west to indicate the place of the dead. The east is seen as the place of the living. This binary opposition must always be maintained. Before the animal is slaughtered, the head of the family or clan has to 'speak' to it in a poetic manner. The animal is praised by the praise names of the deceased. Some of the oldest and most powerful ancestors and ancestresses are evoked to welcome a newcomer among them. At the same time, the deceased is informed about the long journey about to be undertaken to the world of the *living timeless*<sup>18</sup>.

Then the animal's throat is struck. When blood flows, bowls are brought. The first bowl holds the blood which is going to be used during the funeral ritual. The second bowl contains the blood to be used to evoke the *Ba-dimo* at a place called *lehwana*. The skin of the animal is put around the dead person. The respondents viewed this practice as an indication of respect. The fact that the animal's skin is placed around the dead person suggests a change of roles with the slaughtered animal. This is then, following Burkert, being reconstructed, thus implying that death and sacrifice are essential for new life.

### Toward Ritual Cleansing

The establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa has begun a ritual process. The commission facilitates a public ritual designed to bring about reconciliation and reparation (rather like a sacrifice) for the wrongs of the past. Victims of killing and suffering met with the commissioners to reveal their stories. This does not imply that perpetrators are left alone in this process. They are either subpoenaed or come before the commission voluntarily. This is a complex process that confronts all. The Church in general supports the principle and practice of this commission. It is seen as a vehicle of therapy intended to heal the victims. It is taken for granted that traditional healers support the whole course. Is this enough? Perhaps more is needed.

A public ritual, which brings together Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Hinduism, together with African traditional religions, would be a ritual cleansing on a national scale. Such a ritual cleansing would require the shedding of blood in sacrifice, as Bur-

<sup>17</sup> Sotho for seeds.

<sup>18</sup> This word is preferred by John Mbiti (1989). The Pedi refer to the ancestors and ancestresses as *Badimo*.

kert, Girard (scapegoat theory) and the Pedi responses indicate. Without this shedding of blood, there can be no new life, no reparation, no forgiveness and no new culture.

Gerd Bauman's view of ritual as implicating 'Others' is instructive in this regard. He argues that public rituals directed to an outsider are accompanied by the making of statements about the definition and redefinition of outsider and insider. When these rituals are performed, the messages are transmitted to both the inner and outer groups (Bauman 1992:98). This is done so that even outsiders who only participate as on-lookers, may participate in the performed rituals.

For South Africa, President Mandela's inauguration on May 10 1994 was a good example of a public ritual. This public ritual was witnessed by millions of South Africans and people from across the globe. A Christian archbishop, a Jewish rabbi, a Hindu priest, an Islamic *imam* and a traditional *imbongi*<sup>19</sup>, together with choirs singing the anthems from two diametrically opposed constituencies, combined in a ritual performance which negotiated meaning and reciprocally included one another. All participated in a number of ways, either as by-standers, spectators (via the medium of television), invited guests or close witnesses. All shared in the negotiation of meaning and redefined a common meaning complex in which all could participate equally. This was facilitated by the public ritual at a particular time and place with particular beneficiaries. Countless traditional presentations and dances were performed and broadcast on that day. Various opinions were aired, from right wing to left wing. Even those who opposed the idea of democratic elections in South Africa, watched and contextually redefined this public ritual performance. This ritual itself offered an opportunity to negotiate meaning and community with 'Others'. A brief moment of healing, reconciliation and stability was experienced by all South Africans.

In this context, a question which faces most Christian scholars is whether it is possible for traditional African Christians to synthesise both Christ and traditional ritual activities? It is important for Christianity to begin to understand traditional African views and practices. It is a fact that some of the Christian institutions have begun this process of enculturation. Both traditional African religion and African Christianities—together with other religions in Africa—have much to offer on the issue of creating community and of reconstructing reality which does not exclude the o/Other.

As Burkert noted, ritual creates and affirms social interaction (1983:24). It is indeed true that ritual practices do not only provide the opportunity for participants to partake in the same activities. Ritual also create and affirm a close interaction among them. It is from these practices that new community is born for the sake of the concord and co-operation beyond an evil commonly shared.

Most of South African Christian denominations have ritual practices which include activities related to birth (baptism), church unity (holy communion), marriage

<sup>19</sup> Zulu traditional praise-poet.

and death. These practices occur within particular communities with a wide variety of elements but also common elements.

The question is: What if these practices are transformed and related to traditional African practices to effect change and comprehensive well-being? From this question, the theology of *ubuntu*<sup>20</sup> could emerge in Christian context. The theology of *ubuntu* could enhance Christ as the surrogate victim (the *Sedimo-Christ*) who, through his death and blood foster genuine social interaction within South African communities. This could foster community between Christians and traditional African religion.

It would be within such a theology that the *Sedimo-Christ* would sacrifice himself (cf. Hebrews 9:11 & 12) and thereby transform death into life-affirming enjoyment, not only for those who profess his name, but the entire South African people. This then calls for the *Sedimo-Christ* who is not confined within certain boundaries but transforms boundaries to achieve genuine *ubuntu* among *abantu*. The African sacrificial paradigm with its ritual cleansing framework, not only looks at the dangers of those who profess to be Christian or from another religion, but is whole in a sense that it rescues the community from the power of intraspecific aggression. In this case, the *mvana* (*Sedimo-Christ*) which is slaughtered, binds every community regardless of the fact that that person is *Ikhola*<sup>21</sup>, Muslim, Hindu, Jew etc. This *Sedimo-Christ* offers one a place to fit in and still maintains one's previous practices. The *Sedimo-Christ* is in touch with the traditional language and values of the local people. This paradigm pushes for the knowledge that is locally mapped. Kwame Bediako's argument on the need to regard what he calls 'implicit' theologies in a serious light, is right in this regard. He poses this question: 'How is it that we hear in our own languages the wonders of *Modimo*?' (Bediako 1995:59) As he mentions,

The ability to hear one's own language and to express in one's responses to the message which one receives must lie at the heart of all authentic religious encounters with the divine realm. Language itself becomes, then, not merely a social or a psychological phenomenon but a theological one as well (Bediako 1995:59).

Bediako states inevitable facts. Local people should be listened to and valued. It is time for 'explicit' readers to keep quiet and listen to voices and sounds from below. African voices have been ignored in Africa by other Africans for far too long. The same is even more true for South Africa. It is time for the South African Churches to enter into a meaningful dialogue with traditional religious practices. It should begin to define

<sup>20</sup> Humanness which incorporates and ensures comprehensive well-being and development of both the individual member of the community and the community itself.

<sup>21</sup> Zulu for fanatic believer.

how it is going to integrate rituals like *umkhosi wohlanga*<sup>22</sup>, *umkhosi wamabutho*<sup>23</sup>, etc. into its own rituals.

It is well-known that most congregants place a certain amount of value on these practices. A meaningful and effective dialogue should take place concerning them. This would be possible only when there is a sense of mutual value and respect. It is important to respect the traditional African world views and thought patterns and treat them as 'an equal partner'. One should avoid superimposition. It would not benefit one to pick and choose what one considers to be good about a particular cultural pattern and discard what one considers to be 'problematic' and 'indigestible'. Important is to come to terms with what others hold as central to their own lives.

In addition, a cultural pattern needs to be treated in a holistic sense. Such a treatment does not imply that a cultural pattern is free of flaws or is completely perfect. In the light of the UN Fact Sheet No.23 on Human Rights (Harmful Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children), practices which mutilate, enslave, or exploit women for example, should be done away with. Recent feminist debates attack African traditional religions and ways of life for being oppressive towards African women. Indeed, there is need for some traditional African practices to be transformed in the light of recent African developmental models.

## Conclusion

It is time for South African modern culture, including the legislature but also the various South African Christianities and other religions, to begin to seek models of healing which would impact beyond the TRC truth process. Important as it was to bring the past out in the open, this process cannot effectively facilitate reconciliation and cleansing from African traditional perspective. More importantly, it is the people from this stratum in society—which constitutes the majority of South Africans—which have been at the sharp end of apartheid's atrocities in our country.

Healing is a complex and comprehensive phenomenon. Traditional African rituals could be used by both the South African Churches/ religions and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission under the leadership of Desmond Tutu to bring about a comprehensive, meaningful, truthful and powerful healing paradigm and *kgwerano*<sup>24</sup> for the South African context. Reconciliation in a form of *ukubuyisa*<sup>25</sup> and *ukugezwa*<sup>26</sup> will determine these genuine *kgwerano*. The bleeding graves of the victims of violence, rape

<sup>22</sup> Traditional Zulu reed festival.

<sup>23</sup> Zulu traditional festival of warfare.

<sup>24</sup> Pedi for intimate fellowship.

<sup>25</sup> This literally means 'to bring back'.

<sup>26</sup> To be ritually cleansed.

and crime should challenge us to speed up this process of healing which does not exclude but include, especially the living victims and the families of the bereaved and wronged.

Department of Historical Sciences  
University of the North—Qwa Qwa Campus

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## Outcomes-Based Education: Why the Alarm Bells are Ringing, And how to Turn them Off

Rembrandt Kloppe

### Review Article

*Changing Curriculum:  
Studies on Outcomes-based Education in South Africa*  
Edited by Jonathan Jansen and Pam Christie  
Kenwyn: Juta & Co, Ltd, 1999, 292 pp.  
ISBN: 0-7021-5063-0

*OBE: Outcomes-based Education, A Teacher's Manual*  
By Helen van der Horst and Ria McDonald.  
Pretoria: Kagiso Publishers, 1997, 254 pp.  
ISBN: 0-7986-4892-9

### I

In this article I review two books that deal with the introduction of Outcomes-based Education in South Africa: *Changing curriculum: Studies on Outcomes-based Education in South Africa* by Jonathan Jansen, Pam Christie and others, and *OBE: Outcomes-Based Education, A Teacher's Manual* by Helen van der Horst and Ria McDonald.

The first book essentially is a diagnosis of what many educationists consider to have gone wrong in the process of designing and implementing OBE. The second book contains many of the solutions to the problems that have been diagnosed in the first book.

## II

The South African educational system is being overhauled from primary school level to tertiary level as part of the rejuvenation of post-apartheid institutions, and to bring the country in line with current trends in international education. The South African Government has set very rapid time frames for the transformation of education. Primary and secondary school learning programs must be transformed to Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) by 2005. Tertiary level undergraduate programs must be transformed by June 2001 in order to lead to recognised professional and academic qualifications.

But what is OBE? An idealised characterisation of it would read something like this: The aim with OBE is to effect a mind shift away from an authoritarian mode of teaching to a co-operative mode of learning. The new model makes the educator a facilitator, and the learner an active participant in an interactive learning partnership. In the old model it was expected of pupils to unquestioningly memorise curriculum content without necessarily understanding the significance or relevance of information to be mastered. The new mode requires of the educator to facilitate the development of both critical and practical skills in individual learners by engaging a spectrum of active learning processes that incorporate cognitive motor skills as part of context-specific learning tasks.

The mind shift is away from knowing facts to knowing how to do things with information—information that the learner knows to be significant and relevant. Most importantly, the mind shift incorporates the life skills of employing one's knowledge within a broader social context to the benefit of both oneself and others.

If OBE is implemented successfully, the three minimalist R's of traditional education (reading, writing, and arithmetic) will be replaced with the three comprehensive H's (head, heart and hand).

## III

In *Changing Curriculum: Studies on Outcomes-based Education in South Africa* co-editors Jonathan Jansen and Pam Christie, and fourteen other contributors address various areas of concern regarding the implementation of Outcomes-Based Education on primary and secondary school levels in South Africa. One contribution focuses on principled problems regarding the introduction of OBE in higher education. *Changing Curriculum* is intended as a critical, but constructive contribution to the public debate regarding the soundness of OBE, the desirability of introducing it in South Africa, and the timing of its introduction.

Every text carries an inferential sub-text. The sub-text of *Changing Curriculum* is that the alarm bells are ringing because of the complex nature of outcomes-based education, because of the lack of proper prior consultation with all

interested parties, because of the low skills base of South African educators, because OBE is considered to be introduced prematurely without proper planning, preparation of learning materials, and without the requisite retraining of educators.

*Changing Curriculum* is organised in five sections. *Section A* is entitled 'Introduction, Overview' and consists of chapter 1 in which Jonathan Jansen reviews the origins of OBE, summarises the debate to date and previews the rest of the chapters in the book.

*Section B* is entitled 'Meanings, Motivations, Methodologies' and consists of three chapters dealing with diverse aspects of OBE. In chapter 2 *Andre Kraak* (Human Sciences Research Council) begins by analysing the competing discourses within the Department of Education regarding the nature of OBE. He subsequently outlines the complex interrelationship between various organisational structures involved in OBE, gives the key characteristics of the regulatory framework, discusses the distinctive systemic lexicology (terminology) that has evolved around OBE, and outlines the critical features of OBE before offering a critique of Outcomes-Based Education and Training. Towards the end of his contribution Kraak crucially highlights the cognitive imperatives of OBE:

Outcomes-based education and training ... is not merely about measuring discrete (visible) units of competence. It is about recognising the indivisible link between competence and the conceptual, problem-solving, interactive and context-bound abilities which underpin (but which are invisible in) the performance of 'competence' (p. 52).

In chapter 3 *Roger Deacon & Ben Parker* (University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg) focus on organisational and comparative aspects of OBE. They outline the complex interrelationship between the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) and various Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). They characterise OBE as being instrumentalist rather than rationalist, before finally suggesting a pragmatic alternative.

In chapter 4 *Cliff Malcolm* (University of the Witwatersrand) discusses the different models of OBE found in countries like the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Great Britain as well as the motivations for developing each particular model. He compares one American framework, developed by Spady, with the Australian framework, characterising the American model as ultimately 'behaviourist' (p. 91) and the Australian model as 'much closer to a constructivist one' (p. 91). Malcolm subsequently characterises the Australian framework as having a dual nature because Australian writers 'constructed the outcomes frameworks in a way that would support constructivist, organic approaches in the classroom, but also allow behaviourist, teacher-centered approaches' (p. 98).



Due to the heavy demands that OBE will place on teachers, school managers and learners, Malcolm characterises OBE as a voyage that requires faith' (p. 110), a high risk choice

in a country where teachers have a low knowledge base (in relation to what is required), the tradition is bureaucratic and text centered, and the system is woefully under-resourced (p. 110).

Section C is entitled 'Concepts, Contexts, Criticisms'. It consists of six chapters (Chapters 5 to 10) dealing with various philosophical, ideological and practical problems relating to the introduction of OBE.

In chapter 5 Jane Skinner (University of Natal, Durban) focuses exclusively on the introduction of OBE in higher education from a socio-economic perspective. She points out that since the first Education Act in Britain in 1870, the introduction of subsequent educational systems have been promoted as being part of the process of democratic reform while they in fact have

always been designed to provide appropriate economic support, in the form of human capital, for the power structures of the day (p. 117).

She argues that progressive educationists have for decades rejected positivist and behaviourist approaches to knowledge, but that 'now these are introduced through the back door as "market imperatives"' (p. 121), unrecognised for what they are, and seen as pragmatism. According to Skinner the educational system is being influenced by 'market thinking' (p. 121) with the aim of delivering competent workers to the economy while at the same time there is 'an extreme unwillingness among economists to examine their own assumptions' (p. 122). Skinner characterises the new educational policy as 'the commodification of education' because society is prepared 'to rationalise education down to this simple deployment of isolated profit-maximising individuals divorced from any sense of community into whatever spaces "fate" (read "global capital") dictates' (p. 126).

In chapter 6 Jean Baxen & Crain Soudien (University of Cape Town) focus on the one-sided control in the management and implementation of OBE in the Western Cape, based on documentary analysis of the proposals, interviews with teachers and 'selected role players' (p.132). Members of eight Learning Area Committees (LACs) were nominated by various stakeholders, including the teacher organisations. The majority of the committees were however co-ordinated and chaired by officials from the Department of Education.

Representatives on these committees were confronted with the OBE

narrative and were not provided with an opportunity to examine its origins—politically or pedagogically (p.137).

and

when a subgroup of people from the LACs were mandated to advise on the development of the indicators, they found that the indicators had already been developed by a separate specialist group at national level (p. 138).

In chapter 7 Jonathan Jansen (University of Durban-Westville) lists and discusses 10 reasons why he thinks OBE will fail. The main reason is that the language associated with OBE is too complex, confusing and contradictory.

The OBE curriculum policy is lodged in problematic claims and assumptions about the relationship between curriculum and society.

OBE is based on flawed assumptions about what happens inside schools, how classrooms are organised and what kinds of teachers exist within the system. There are strong philosophical rationales for questioning the desirability of OBE in democratic school systems. There are important political and epistemological objections to OBE as curriculum policy. The focus on what a student can demonstrate, given a particular set of outcomes, side-steps the issue of values in the curriculum. The management of OBE will multiply the administrative burdens placed on teachers.

### **OBE Trivialises Curriculum Content**

For OBE to succeed even moderately requires a number of simultaneous innovations in the education system, e.g. trained and retrained teachers, radically new forms of assessment, classroom organisation that facilitates monitoring and assessment, additional time for monitoring the complex process, opportunities for teacher dialogue exchange.

### **Radical revision of the system of assessment in the face of powerful interests insisting on retaining the assessment *status quo***

Jansen characterises the introduction OBE as 'an act of political symbolism in which the primary preoccupation of the state is with its own legitimacy' (p.154), and refers to research that shows

the national revision process (1995) was driven almost exclusively by official attempts to demonstrate to constituencies that at least some action was forthcoming from the Ministry of Education in the period immediately following the elections (p. 154).

In chapter 8 Haroon Mahomed (Gauteng Institute for Curriculum Development) focuses on reasons why Outcomes-based Education and Training (OBET) could succeed in South Africa and why it has to succeed, rather than why it will fail. Mohamed motivates the introduction of OBE: the need to break with apartheid education, the fact that the main goals and aims of the current system of education are in any case not being achieved, the need of a curriculum better aligned to the world of work, and the need to move education beyond the straight-jacketing, rigid authoritarian experiences of the past. In the last section of his contribution Mohamed responds to the criticisms made by Jansen in the previous chapter.

In chapter 9 Mahomed Rasool (Reservoir Hills Secondary School, Durban) formulates eloquent and credible responses to criticisms of OBE, while at the same time acknowledging Jansen's contribution to the curriculum debate. He cites 'the realities of constant change, globalisation, transformed workplaces, new competitive pressures and world-class performance standards' as reasons why South Africa needs OBE 'as it enters the global arena of the twenty-first century' (p. 174). Rasool stresses the importance in OBE of developing cognitive skills such as 'the ability to classify, infer, suggest, analyse and form testable hypotheses rather than concentrating on mastering content' (p.178), which he mislabels as 'life skills'. He concludes:

In the final analysis, the question is not whether OBE should be implemented, but rather whether sufficient support and encouragement is being given to teachers by all interested groups in education (p. 179).

In chapter 10 Ken Harley & Ben Parker (University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg) focus on the socio-economic aspects of OBE. They identify 'the emergence of global markets, mass consumerism, electronic technology and communications, and shifts in international power relations' as factors that have contributed to the fact that South Africa 'while under austere financial constraints—must negotiate a radical transformation of the state schooling system' (p. 183). They characterise the envisaged change as a shift from the mechanical solidarity that predominated the old South Africa to 'a new legal-organisational basis reflecting organic solidarity' which emphasises

human rights and a strong civil society ... the interdependence between people ... based on contractual relations with an emphasis on the rights and duties of individual citizens and their contractual relation with the state (p. 189).

Harley & Parker consider teacher identity to be one of the major problems with introducing Curriculum 2005, as it is an

attempt to graft a legalistic social framework and curriculum of organic solidarity onto a corps of teachers whose identities and roles were forged in the apartheid mills of mechanical solidarity (p. 193).

Section D is entitled *Inside Classrooms*. It consists of four chapters (chapters 11 to 14) dealing with various aspects of the implementation of OBE. In chapter 11 Jonathan Jansen reports on problems experienced in the introduction of OBE on grade one level in 1998. His research showed that grade 1 teachers held vastly different understandings of OBE, that they displayed considerable uncertainty about whether their practices in fact constitute OBE, that they uniformly felt that their preparation for OBE implementation was inadequate, that although most classrooms had basic curriculum 2005 documentation, many grade 1 teachers expressed the view that OBE was not implementable in the early part of the school year, that many teachers who claimed to be implementing OBE were in fact teaching in the same way as before, and that teachers understand and implement OBE in very different ways. Jansen comes to the pessimistic conclusion that 'C2005 and outcomes-based education will gradually fade into policy insignificance' (p. 216).

In chapter 12 Ian Bellis (Independent Education Training & Development Consultant), like other contributors, emphasises that OBE (adult training) entails a move away from a typically pedagogic subject-centered approach to a more behaviourist product-centered approach. Bellis then crucially adds that OBE entails a move 'to more cognitivist, gestalt approaches which, in delivery, focus on processes that express experiential learning' (p.225). Bellis effectively dispels the Cartesian competence vs. performance dichotomy (which is a vexing problem to at least some contributors) to: 'a key component of competence is performance' (p. 226). Bellis then shows that such an integrative approach to competence could lead to problem-centered learning programs where learners are led to explore problems for which they must generate their own particular solutions.

In chapter 13 Emilia Potenza & Mareka Monyokolo (Gauteng department of Education & Gauteng Institute for Curriculum Development) argue that

the critical factor in successfully translating Curriculum 2005 into practice is to ensure that the three pillars of curriculum transformation are in place and in alignment,

namely 'curriculum development, teacher development and the development, selection and supply of learning materials' (p. 231). From their subsequent comments it becomes clear that neither of the three are in fact in place yet, and that there is little co-ordination between teachers, the Department of Education, materials developers and publishers to make the introduction of Curriculum 2005 a success.

In chapter 14 Meg Pahad (Independent Examinations Board, Gauteng) reveals that 'At last consensus is emerging about several broad principles of assessment', but that 'there is very little help for teachers and other practitioners trying to assess learners within the new outcomes-based curriculum' (p. 247). She then shows that there are varying interpretations for such crucial assessment terms like formative assessment, summative assessment and continuous assessment in the department of Education's 1998 Draft Assessment Policy document:

This confusion about whether or not summative assessment is necessarily based on terminal examinations, whether continuous assessment is necessarily formative, whether summative assessment can be achieved by simply collecting and aggregating formative assessment, and so on, recurs throughout the draft policy discussion document (p. 250).

Pahad ends her contribution by listing and lucidly discussing a number of practical suggestions for improving assessment practice in the classroom.

Section E consists of a single contribution by one of the co-editors, Pam Christie, in which she characterises OBE as an

art of a suite of policies adopted by the post-apartheid government to restructure and transform the legacy of apartheid education and training (p. 279),

'a systemic umbrella' agenda according to which

education and training would be integrated in a system of lifelong learning that would articulate adult basic education and training, formal schooling, and learning programs for out-of-school children and youth (p. 280).

Referring to the acrimonious tone of exchanges in the curriculum debate, Christie points out that the denials and counter criticisms of policy innovators are not the most constructive responses, and that 'the task of winning the hegemony through intellectual and moral leadership cannot be side-stepped in the democratic state' (p. 285).

The image that emerges of OBE, and particularly of Curriculum 2005 from the contributions in *Changing Curriculum: Studies on Outcomes-based Education in South Africa* is that the alarm bells are ringing because we are about to take off on a journey in an aeroplane of which the body has not yet been bolted to the wheels, and of which the engines have not yet been bolted to body, let alone having a flight plan for the journey.

Jane Skinner's observations about the commodification of education, and its subservience to market forces dictated by economists who are slow to critical self-evaluation, are particularly relevant. This state of affairs will build such high levels of career redundancy into the social contract which civil society is based on, that social institutions—from governance to family relations—will be stressed and ultimately damaged. Global society is moving from the mechanical industrial age to the organic information age which demands of employees to constantly evolve their knowledge, career skills and personal values in order to remain viable. If implemented correctly, OBE has the potential of empowering learners to do just this.

Criticisms of the proliferation of OBE officialese are pertinent. Someone should close down the acronym factory. The terminological complexity in OBE has reached levels usually only found in subcultures and cult movements where slang and arcane terms are used to promote solidarity within the group, while at the same time excluding non-members from the group. The origins of words should also be considered before they are formalised as terminology. One of the most frequently used OBE terms, 'stakeholders' for instance, has its origins in the world of gambling. Complex concepts are best understood when explained in simple terms. When talking about every-day events, sixty five percent of what one wants to say can be done by using the first 1000 words of a language. While each discipline needs its distinctive terminology for the sake of precision and unambiguity, conscious efforts should be made to keep OBE meta-language to a minimum. Teachers who are supposed to implement OBE are bewildered by the number and the complexity of OBE terms.

A matter of great concern regarding *Changing Curriculum* is the fact that, with the exception of Andre Kraak and Ian Bellis, no other contributors refer to the cognitive dimension of the mind shift from teaching to learning. If eminent educationists fail to diagnose such a crucial flaw in the present implementation of OBE, we are in far more serious trouble than we think. Even more disconcerting is the fact that those that are critical of OBE do not present an alternative approach to replace the old style, authoritarian, content-driven approach that we dare not fall back on.

Finally, people in professional and technical occupations have all along been educated on outcomes-based principles. Would you trust your mechanic, your dentist, your surgeon or the pilot of the plane that you are flying in if it were otherwise? Educators do not use scalpels or joysticks. Their instruments are non-tangible, but nevertheless quite real, for they use knowledge to help shape minds, skills and values. Why are we then reluctant to base their education, and the education of our children on outcomes-based principles?

#### IV

If *Changing Curriculum* diagnoses what is wrong with the aeroplane that we are about to take off in, Helen van der Horst and Ria McDonald's *OBE: Outcomes-*

*Based Education, a Teacher's Manual* is the technician's manual needed to secure the plane's body to its wheels, and its engines to its body.

It consists of nine lucidly written chapters. Beginning with why educational change is needed in present-day South Africa, Van der Horst and McDonald outline what OBE is, set out the major aspects of OBE, and end with a future perspective of education in South Africa. The chapters are:

- Chapter 1: Understanding Outcomes-Based Education
- Chapter 2: From a content-based curriculum to outcomes-based learning programmes
- Chapter 3: Three types of outcomes
- Chapter 4: Quality assurance
- Chapter 5: Planning for classroom management and discipline
- Chapter 6: Classroom teaching in OBE
- Chapter 7: Assessment in Outcomes-Based Education
- Chapter 8: The successful learner in Outcomes-Based Education
- Chapter 9: New possibilities ahead—looking at the future of education in South Africa

*OBE: Outcomes-Based Education, a Teacher's Manual* is not merely an excellent account of the main aspects of OBE. It is also a model for how OBE learning materials should be organised and presented. Each chapter begins with a table of contents, followed by a very general, uncomplicated graphic representation that primes the reader for that chapter, followed in turn by a series of focus questions that engage the mind of the reader—all of this before s/he actually starts reading. The text is interspersed with a variety of highlighting boxes that provide directives, induce reflection, give examples, draw comparisons, and set tasks.

The authors consistently show a clear understanding of the cognitive basis of OBE. They for instance understand that learning is based on comprehensive, interrelated aspects of cognition such as being in command of verbal communication, having intellectual skills (like critical thinking, reasoning and reflection), manifesting the appropriate values and attitudes for particular occasions, and being in command of particular motor skills to implement knowledge practically. Van der Horst and McDonald stress the importance of basic forms of cognition, such as the mastery of content, for the development of higher order thinking skills and problem solving skills.

Van der Horst and McDonald outline the overall organisation of OBE, and the nature of the various learning areas in easily understood terms. They have a very good chapter on how a classroom should be organised and managed in OBE. They bring clarity to the confusion that is said to reign regarding the different forms of assessment in OBE. Their chapter on the learner as active participant in the learning

process is concise and crystal clear. Involving De Bono's extended metaphor of the six thinking hats for the basic forms of critical thinking is inspired.

My impression as a cognitivist is that, in general, the crucial role of cognition is poorly understood in the demarcation of learning areas in OBE. Cognitive principles will therefore not be systematically applied in the development of learning programs.

The exception however seems to be Van der Horst and McDonald, because of the comprehensive and consistent way in which they ground OBE on cognitive principles. This makes *OBE: Outcomes-Based Education, A Teacher's Manual* mandatory reading for any educator who wants to master the principles and practices of OBE. For the teacher in the classroom it is nothing less than a survival manual.

## V

For the benefit of those that despair at the prospect of introducing OBE under the daunting circumstances outlined in *Changing Curriculum*, I want to end this review article on a personal note. Looking back on my own formal education, I consider my grade 10 year to be the most significant formative year, for in that year I had the good fortune of attending a parochial school that taught an international academic curriculum, which in retrospect came quite close to present-day Outcomes-Based Education. The reason for this was that the particular school mainly catered for the children of businessmen and missionaries from Europe and America who were stationed elsewhere in Africa.

A particular feature of that school was that its mission was to educate the head, the heart and the hand. As part of training the heart and hand (otherwise known as inculcating proper work ethics) all learners had to engage in supervised practical work for one hour a day, for which we were paid by the hour according to American wage standards. Such work ranged from janitorial duties, laundry duties, carpentry, basic engineering, farming, cooking and coaching to supervising. If one's grade point average was high enough one was permitted the luxury of holding down more than one job at a time. I to this day do my own cleaning, cooking, pruning, carpentry and plumbing by using skills that I acquired in my grade 10 year.

In the carpentry shop we learnt to convert our three dimensional drawings, made in technical drawing class, into actual tables and chairs, and doing so made it easier for us to visualise more complex technical drawings. In the engineering shop we learnt the realities of force dynamics while installing water pipes, taps and geysers, and by having to bleed air locks out of our constructs.

Coming from an Afrikaans background and having attended government school up to then, I arrived at the new school with a reasonable passive understanding of English, but unable to properly express myself either verbally or in

writing. The result was that my grades plummeted. Spotting my predicament and frustration, my English teacher offered to give me extra lessons if I complied with three conditions: I had to read and summarise the contents of one novel a week over and beyond my prescribed books, I had to make at least one English speaking male friend, and I had to get an English speaking girlfriend. My extra lessons mostly consisted of my personal verbal reports on what I had read, and what my friends and I got up to during the previous week. Our English curriculum incidentally included not only mastering grammar and interpreting literature. We also learnt to write sonnets and haikus, to make verbal presentations before the rest of the class, and to conduct parliamentary style debates on topical issues.

While learning English communication skills that year I also gained invaluable interpersonal life skills. Rubbing shoulders with peers from America, Britain, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Spain and Portugal, and having to measure my views against theirs, drastically and permanently altered my perspectives of South Africa and myself, and significantly influenced my personal values.

The following year I decided to attend a parochial school closer to home—unknown to me a school that taught the standard South African curriculum. It was like having been subjected to a frontal lobotomy.

Having personally experienced the cultivating, empowering and liberating effects of comprehensive secondary education in a multicultural context during my grade 10 year, and having had to go through grades 11 and 12 in the old regime again, I think it will be an indictment of this country if we choose to remain shackled to the old-style authoritarian system of education. In this context, the two books reviewed here, are important milestones in the history of education, training and learning in South Africa.

Department of Afrikaans  
University of Zululand (Umlazi Campus)

## Unthinking White Mythologies

Johannes A Smit

### Review article

*Unthinking Social Science: The Limits  
of Nineteenth-Century Paradigms*

by Immanuel Wallerstein

Cambridge: Polity Press, [1991]1995, 286pp.

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The nineteenth century formation, institutionalisation and professionalisation of modernism's disciplines and organisations have become an object of embarrassment and a source of discontent. From various perspectives and societal sectors, this is the case with the university system as such. With the rise of the polytechnic and technikon—mainly due to their links with market related forces, sectorally focused skills development and promises of employment—the university and its disciplines have to honestly confront the challenges the current juncture in South African tertiary education transformation poses. But, there is a more pressing reason.

With the epochmaking potential of the world-historical events of the 1990s, the criticism of imperial and colonial practices has become a rising tide also within the university's disciplines and social formations. As such, these criticisms threaten to explode the disciplines from within. And as universities continue to fail to deliver on legitimate expectations—given the challenge in South Africa to transform to a democratic, and equal opportunity state beyond or different from the race, class and gender biases entrenched in its institutional organisation—this may be quite daunting.

That the real timespace complexities involved in this scenario has not been addressed adequately in South African academia is an understatement. Indeed, academia is so close to the pressing transformation challenges that it leaves many powerless, unmotivated, apathetic if not blind. Why? One reason may be that one does not know one's way around the labyrinth of power relations in flux, deformation and formation but then deformation again. Another may be that the mere notion of transforming existing disciplines to different ones and in the process close departments and discontinue faculties or form new ones, send shivers through the academic spine. This means that one's life's work within one disciplinary complex



may be regarded as irrelevant, un-productive and not contributing to training and educating a workforce necessary for the new global economy and its local tentacles. Given this general condition, some take on the challenge, transform to different, usually interdisciplinary configurations; some remain with their focus of study but switch the traditional disciplinary theorising and methodologising for that of another existing discipline; others muster local or international organisations in support to retain disciplines in which not much is changed; yet others, especially in South Africa, scramble to link up and get published in some similarly outdated international publishing consortiums or opt out of the system. Within the humanities—arguably the hardest hit—this state of affairs needs direction.

Even though the most pressing challenge is to seriously engage the actual problematics of our current juncture, this article aims to make a contribution to the historical decision making processes which may eventually lead to the direction referred to. I have chosen Wallerstein's book above for review because I think that there are important views and dialogues related to the issues it raises which need to be addressed. Its greatest importance is that it represents a tertiary disciplinary paradigm different from the nineteenth century splitting of the 'social sciences' into economics, political science, sociology and anthropology.

The article is organised in seven sections. The first deals with the title followed by a brief overview of each of the book's sections. Finally, I provide a few suggestions.

## I

Derrida's 'White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy' (1982:207ff) derives from Anatole France's 'Aristos and Polyphilos on the Language of Metaphysics' from *The Garden of Epicurus* (1924). In response to Aristote's question as to where Polyphilos's reflection on the 'verbal form' of metaphysical propositions have lead him, he replies with a metaphor. Similar to a knife-grinder who chooses to grind coins and medals and not knives—effacing the image and date from them and in the process both frees them from time and space and for universal consumption—the metaphysician universalises rationality while concealing the universal's own contingency (see Harrison 1999:505-507). In language, the case in point is metaphor itself because reason is supposed to function logically and rationally and not-access or employ metaphor. This is 'white mythology'. It constitutes an originary excess which is not accounted for. This can be called 'whitewashing' systems and practices and derives from the French where 'white' also has the cognates 'to bleach', 'whitewash', 'exonerate' (see Harrison 1999:507).

The same insight is captured in Derrida's October 26 1990 to January 21 1991 'Mémoires d'aveugle: L'autoportrait et autres ruines' (Memoirs of the Blind: Self-portrait and other ruins') guest-curation of an exhibition of drawings at the Louvre's Napoleon Hall from its own collection. For the exhibition, Derrida (see Rubinstein 1991:47-53) included one drawing on ruins, 'Ruins of the Coliseum in Rome' (1587) by Francois Stella. Exploring the relationship between drawing and

blindness—the abyss of difference which opens up between 'the thing drawn and the drawn line'—at the moment of the pen or pencil stroke, the single drawing on ruins was to be a metonymy or counterpoint of the theme of the whole exhibition (Rubinstein 1991:47). It was to capture the deconstructive insight that the selfportrait is not only a ruin because the subject ages immediately after but that 'the image is a ruin "from the first glance" ... [w]ith no hope of restoration'. Even so, this "dimension of ruinous simulacra" does not stand in the 'way of creation, of the "emergence of the work"' (Rubinstein 1991:49). Even so, the moment of creation is already a blindness, a ruin.

One final perspective on the title comes from the oracle in the book Ezekiel in the Bible (Ezekiel 13:10-15). The oracle comprises a prophetic critique of fellow prophets claiming peace while there is none, metaphorically whitewashing recently built unstable walls in the face of brewing metaphorical storms. As such, one may argue that the suspended metaphor here too, is that of the ruin at origin.

In her exposition of 'myth' in structuralist perspective, Sontag (1986) points to the structuralist revolutionary finding that the subject is not free but determined by a multiplicity of languages; and that it also unmasks that from which the subject is not free—in the face of 'ahistorical and apsychological' structural description/ thinking. These two complementary effects of structuralist thinking—to reveal both that the subject is not free as well as that from which the subject is not free—confronted western knowledge systems (whether popular or academic) with the reality that these systems or languages are *myths*. 'Myths', here, does not mean that these languages are false but that it is the myths themselves which function as 'explanatory models for fundamental states of affairs' or that they 'produce social cohesion'. As such, structuralist thinking itself functions as 'explanatory model' or creating its own 'myths' and 'social cohesions' (cf. Sontag 1986:xixf). To various degrees, the same is true of those languages or models of description/ thinking which developed in the wake of structuralism or which—similar to structuralism—likewise arose out of a disenchantment with western knowledge(s).

Wallerstein confronts this broader context of the disenchantment with western knowledge—both within western institutions as well as in the erstwhile colonies—quite creatively. His proposal of 'unthinking' and not 'rethinking' the social sciences, exposes the mistaken assumptions central to the social sciences—the nomothetic/ idiographic binary (or event-focused historical description and chronologising, and universalising social theory); expectations related to [third world] 'development'; the presumption that geographical and chronological studies within the social sciences are 'physical invariants' and hence 'exogenous variables'; and that Marx as articulated with party-political ideology has been fully appropriated by academe. In this context, 'unthinking' wishes to capture both a moving to a different set of grounding assumptions for the nineteenth century social science paradigm and the 'thinking' of the whitewashing mythologies proper. It is only when they are arrested in their partiality that different assumptions can be developed.

## II

*Unthinking Social Science* contains a number of essays which Immanuel Wallerstein had published elsewhere previously—i.e. through 1982—1991. These have been collated under six subject headings: 'The Social Sciences: From Genesis to Bifurcation'; 'The Concept of Development'; 'Concepts of Time and Space'; 'Revisiting Marx'; 'Revisiting Braudel'; and 'World-Systems Analysis as Unthinking'.

In his four page 'Introduction', Wallerstein makes a case for his choice of 'unthinking' against 'rethinking'. He reasons that 'rethinking' implies the natural academic tendency of changing premises in the face of new evidence calling for a change of theory and prediction/ hypothesis. The assumption is that this practice alone does not clear the way towards a new paradigm. 'Unthinking', however, calls for the debunking of the 'misleading' and 'constrictive'—also labeled 'highly dubious and narrow-minded'—'presumptions' still operative in the social sciences. It is this well-defined 'forest' of 'methodological assumptions' which is cause of academic blockage to 'our vision'. He says,

[t]hese presumptions, once considered liberating of the spirit, serve today as the central intellectual barrier to useful analysis of the social world .... [and] that those who criticize the existing dominant epistemology, even when their criticisms are serious and pertinent, often remain nonetheless less than fully liberated from the *Weltanschauung* they renounce. I feel I am not exempt from this backsliding myself (p. 1).

In his overview of *the social sciences from genesis to bifurcation*, Wallerstein treats the social history of the epistemology of the social sciences as deriving from a presumption of progressively developing through different stages, e.g. that the French Revolution is that juncture at which the rising bourgeoisie overthrew the *ancien régime* (p. 7). This progressive dialectical view rests on the assumption that 'change is normal' and is shared by nineteenth century European conservatism, liberalism and Marxism (pp. 16-18,20). Due to the refraction of scholarly thinking into 'ideology', 'social science' and 'the movements', this provided the basis on which the human sciences became institutionalised in universities since 1789 (pp. 21f,18f). From scientific perspective and the belief that it should be possible to comprehensively and rationally order the totality of human existence, this refraction became fully focused in the chunking of human community into the categories of mind; society; business; government; ethics and international relations with their accompanying disciplines (p 31f). A different point of departure for an alternative system would be—following Prigogine's physics—notions of 'non-equilibrium'; 'interactions'; the introduction of a plurality of times or turbulence; that all science is human science and that the scientist cannot stand outside science; and a working with both micro- and macroscopic stochasticity or indeterminacy (pp. 32-

35). As such, new conceptual categories have to be developed in the social sciences—ones which at different levels of abstraction, articulate this new centre (p. 37).

Wallerstein's critique of the notion of *development*—prevalent in social science theorising since 1945 and especially focused on the 'Third World'—turns on the mistaken assumptions related to the 'industrial revolution' in Europe (pp. 47-49). Even though it is partially correct when dealing with Europe, it is not so in the colonies where it effects guilt—'for its inability to match the West's economic living standards unless they are ready to assimilate assiduously Western culture' as well as 'intellectually and politically ... false expectations' (p. 43,49,2). Since most historiography but also all the varieties of nomothetic analysis turns on this mistaken assumption, it needs a different framework (p. 2). If this view is accepted, then it problematises all current economic theories (pp. 51-63)—which have mainly been built around organising myths—and notions of societal development (pp. 64-79).

The main problem with the first is that it works with the modern state as unit of analysis; that the bourgeois/ proletarian distinction does not bring anything new to analysis and that aristocrat and bourgeois as well as proletarian and peasant are not so different as assumed within the development notion of history; and that feudalism came to a fall with the squeeze the peasantry put on its surplus (p. 57f). Moreover, the 'structural crisis' in which the present historical system finds itself in at present, has arisen due to the 'historical disparities of development' exemplified in the polarization of surplus distribution between 'the capitalist world-economy as a whole and not within individual nation-states'; and that capitalism's success and not failure will bring about its downfall. The main reason for the latter is that enterprise, trade and the factors of production were always only partially free (p. 59f). This begs the question of a new metahistory of more comprehensive theorising of large-scale and long-term socio-economic changes, which, with greater historical depth (see the example, pp. 60-62) may inform current practical decisions (p. 51,60,63).

The fundamental problem of the second is that both the notions of 'society' or *Gesellschaft* and development or *Entwicklung* have not had 'very adequate conceptual tools' developed over the last one and a half centuries (p. 67). The society-state split, the definition of the citizens of a state and the question of what precisely constitutes 'the popular will' on the one hand and the modeling of development after biological evolution on the other, are fundamental to this hiatus (p. 66-68). When these two notions are combined—in 'societal development'—it appears as if one deals with an entity which had pristine beginnings and progressively developed. This understanding, however, is equally flawed (see Wallerstein's examples from Germany and Puerto Rico, pp. 68-74). On the one hand, the 'world system' and not separate 'societies' have been 'developing'—meaning that one has to accept in principle the fluidity of the social bond and its politicised boundary; on the other, rather than a moving from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*, or *Gemeinschaft*

'dying out', the capitalist world economy, due to a new 'cultural rebellion', has been creating new *Gemeinschaften*—fundamentalisms, hedonisms of withdrawal and the hedonisms of total self-interestedness, the multiple "countercultures", etc. (p. 75).

They represent screams of pain against the irrationality that oppresses in the name of a universal rationalizing logic. Had we really been moving from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*, all this would not be occurring. We should instead be bathing in the rational waters of an Enlightenment world (p.76).

Despite this situation, 'signs of malaise', 'the cultural pessimism' and 'the myriad antisystemic movements that have begun to develop momentum and get out of hand' (p. 77) there is hope. This, however, is to be found in the contradictions of the economic and political structures of the last century and a half, the historical choices we are faced with in the light of these contradictions and the reenchantment of the world by science (p. 77). What is clear, however, is that the liberal-Marxist consensus does not provide an adequate framework for the social sciences (p. 76). Rather, a radically different conceptual apparatus has to be developed (p. 78).

Nobel Prize winner for Economics, Gunnar Myrdal, has devoted his whole academic career to expose the 'closed models' of 'conventional economic theory' to ever more variables; the mistaken assumptions informing the 'superficiality and logical inconsistency' of modern welfare theory; the fallacy of economist's adoption of the moral philosophy of utilitarianism since the early nineteenth century; the narrow professionalism of contemporary establishment economics; the development of theory and offering of practical solutions for racism and underdevelopment in contemporary social reality (pp. 81ff,93f). His whole career was also inspired by his own views on 'value in social theory' and 'objectivity in social research'. Since one's position on the latter two issues impacts on whether one's research leads to practical conclusions or not, Myrdal's emphasis that it should, derives from his premise that social science is essentially a 'political' science and that one should, therefore, assert explicit value premises. If one hides behind pseudo-scientific policy and arguments purported to be objective, they will fall apart at the moment of application or where they have to be implemented in practical action—especially in a democratic setting (p. 82). Within the ambit of these views, Myrdal's legacy hinges on 'the negative social realities constituted by racism and underdevelopment' and 'the role of the social scientist in relation to these realities'.

*Racism and underdevelopment* manifest in processes 'which keep people out while keeping others in' (p. 83). Racism has its origins in the ethnic dimensions of society and underdevelopment (poverty) in class dimensions (p. 84f). In each social organisation, people and groups are socially ranked in terms of these dimensions. In the world system, it can further be proved that the lowest ethnic ranking overlaps not only with the lowest class ranking in that particular society but also determines who has more and who less political rights. Those with the least rights are those at the bottom, the 'class-ethnic understratum' (p.86). It is a legacy of

the capitalist modern world system that this ethnic-class linkage is so endemic that people from the underclass who ethnically belong to a higher ethnic social category, are treated in society as you would someone who belong to the class-ethnic understratum (p. 86f). [The inverse of this view is just as relevant and may be proven especially in South Africa—given our racist past: people from the lowest ethnic category who economically belong to a higher class, are treated in society as you would someone who belong to the class-ethnic understratum.] In any case, this is the source of the capitalist world system's moral dilemma (p. 86). And if South Africa succeeds in moving to different and more just social and economic formations, it will also its moral dilemma as it relates to Africa north of the Limpopo. The reason for this state of affairs and its accompanying moral dilemma is that,

[i]f one has an inegalitarian historical system, and the capitalist world-economy is an inegalitarian system, then it follows by definition that there must be understrata (p. 86).

In this context, both defenders and critics accept that capitalism is an inegalitarian system by definition (p. 83); and further, that, despite statements to the contrary, both racism and underdevelopment are therefore constitutive of capitalism. The moral dilemma for the capitalist world system, therefore, is that it will remain incapacitated of 'developing' to such a level that it meets up with the moral ideals of 'radical political democracy' and of 'equality of opportunity'.

Available possibilities will also not deliver—meritocracy, education, nationalism, conservatism, liberalism and the 'revolutionary approach'.

Meritocracy—desireable as it is in this unequal system—will not provide the answer, because as much as there is upward social mobility of those with 'talent' and not born into the highest classes (or castes—p. 86) there is just as much downward social mobility (pp. 86f). Neither will education bring about the desired 'development' in the 'Third World' for example, because it is something which is always futurist.

The third World must learn the skills, and even more, absorb the underlying values, of the industrialized world, and they will then 'catch up'. The industrialized countries must learn to shelve their prejudices, and aid their brethren to catch up. Today we educate. Tomorrow we shall be equal. But tomorrow, for the dilemma of underdevelopment as for the dilemma of racism, remains a long time (p. 90).

Nor will 'nationalism' provide help. Precisely because it organises people to struggle against the inequalities of the world system, it remains its victims. Moreover, because it positions itself as victim, it continues to socialise its nationalist adherents into positions of subservience (p. 90f). Conservatism will not deliver because it denies this dilemma; liberalism with its policy changes and ameliorative politics will

not either, despite the real advances it did achieve; nor will revolutionary politics because it aims at acquiring state power and, once acquired, becomes entangled in the same world capitalist system (p. 91f).

Racism, however, is the main component which 'keeps people in and others out'. Wallerstein only notes that capitalism's racist processes work as such by keeping people disempowered politically and economically to draw on labour on an ad hoc basis (p. 89f). What needs to be added is that this 'labour' does not only include unionised labour but also informal labour, that it is mostly 'illiterate', 'innumerate', 'unskilled', and most fundamentally, without access to systems. The most crucial is that people grow up in house-hold systems—if at all—bereft of any intellectual and skills learning. The class-ethnic substratum is only systemically organised in what can be labeled 'survival systems'—those of the traditional authorities and independent social formations which split off from modern colonial hegemonic systems due to discontent. In the South Africa of today (as for post-independent Africa), I therefore claim that, despite the current drive (and those of the last forty-odd years in Africa) towards literacy, numeracy and skills training—which still leaves much to be desired—this is not the major hurdle in the way of (South) Africa's hopes of advance. It is 1) the scarcity of systems; and 2) the scarcity of people devoted to create systems which will not only give people access to resources but also co-operatively facilitate the production of resources.

Following his exposition, Wallerstein claims racism and underdevelopment not only to be a moral dilemma—as Myrdal did—but in fact are

constitutive of the capitalist world economy as a historical system. They are the primary conditions and essential manifestations of the unequal distribution of surplus-value. They make possible the ceaseless accumulation of capital, the *raison d'être* of historical capitalism. They organize the process occupationally and legitimate it politically. It is impossible to conceptualize a capitalist world-economy which did not have them .... From the perspective of those who hold power in the capitalist world-economy, solving or not solving the 'dilemmas' of racism or underdevelopment are 'equally unpleasant alternatives'. The system cannot operate without them, and in the long run the system cannot operate with them. It is more than a difficult choice; it is an impossible one (p. 92).

In view of Myrdal's asserting of *the role of the social scientist* and contextualised within Wallerstein's exposition, the latter argues that Myrdal's primary fallacy is that his blinkered focus on 'establishment economics' is a *reductio ad absurdum* and that he did not see the wider problem not only of this kind of economics but of the 'historical social sciences'. This latter expression comprises of a number of facets and premises. Firstly, despite the fact that what came to be known as the social sciences had many forerunners—especially in philosophy—it was mainly the French Revolution which,

produced an institutional shock to the world-system which resulted in a whole series of cultural transformations. One was the emergence of social science as a specialized activity .... what had been a single domain of intellectual discourse with rather vague boundaries became differentiated, primarily between 1848 and 1914, into a series of so-called disciplines, each with a name, often a neologism .... history, geography, economics, sociology, political science, anthropology, and ... Orientalism (p. 95).

National associations bearing these names existed by 1914 and international ones with their scholarly journals, by 1960. This development sprang from four premises. The *first* was the initial modern distinction between 'the public sphere of the exercise of power, the semi-public sphere of production and the private sphere of everyday life. To confound these sphere was "medieval"; to separate them, divine' (p. 96). The *second* derived from the French Revolution and the Napoleonic—that 'change was normal', that 'we live in a progressively evolutionary world' and that progress marks the industrializing, capitalist world. It is this assumption which had scholars assert that Africa has no history. The *third* premise derived from nature. It was the utilitarian perspective on human psychology—founded on 'human nature' and emulated in successful entrepreneurs' social habits. This allowed for the mapping of social reality in terms of the Newtonian model. *Fourthly* was the self-evident superiority of (Christian) Western civilization and empirically verifiable from Europe's technological and military advances during the nineteenth century. From these premises, history primarily focused on Europe's political past; ethnography, the study of the 'exotic people in the process of being conquered'; and Orientalism the world's exotic cultures which once had 'high' civilization. In the process, alternative critical formations such as *Staatswissenschaft*, were eliminated, primarily because this new disciplinary social refraction through the *Methodenstreit* diverted scholarly focus away from 'the real issues' (p. 97). This refraction had its origins in the distinction between nomothetic and idiographic disciplines or those focused on 'the uniqueness of each specific human/ social phenomenon' and describing unique European and non-European pasts and presents; and those focused on 'universal laws that were to be objective of research'. In the universities, this lead to the distinction between the faculties of the humanities and social sciences (p. 97f). The main problem with this distinction manifested in its procedures as well as its inability to answer questions related to the 'real issues'. The procedure of nomothetic disciplines was to work through quantification in its 'search for formulae which are linked to theorems'. As championed by Ranke, the idiographic disciplines focused on archival research—archives kept by state functionaries. Due to their foci and procedures, these disciplines failed to explain the 'real issues' of racism and underdevelopment as well as their persistence.

We could not even explain how and why the states came into existence, nor why we have assumed implicitly that every state has a 'society' and every

'society' a state. And a world of knowledge that cannot explain such central phenomena is bound to run into great difficulties. The real world is bound to catch up with it (98f).

For Wallerstein, 1968 constitutes not only 'an antisystemic revolutionary moment' but also a 'revolution against the antisystemic movements themselves' who had come into power since 1945—the Social-Democrats in the West, the Communists in the East and the liberation movements in the South (p. 99f). Within the universities, 1968 set a process in motion through which the dividing line between the historical/ humanistic sciences and social scientific studies could be crossed. This has resulted in the still continuing flux in which the disciplines find themselves. Even so, it also indicates the challenge to truly break away from the Newtonian linear dynamics and equilibrium-seeking research to one which seeks to explain complexity à la Prigogine (p. 101).

In the face of the failure of the world capitalist historical system to explain racism and underdevelopment, the question which arises is that of economic development. Especially since 1945, Wallerstein argues, no government in the world would not have this ideal as a top priority. The ideal is the same, the policies differ. He therefore sets out to review the history of the capitalist world-economy in order to address the questions of 1) what is developed in development? 2) who or what has in fact developed? 3) what underlies the demand for development? 4) how such development can indeed come about and 5) what the political implications are of the answers to the first four questions.

In his brief overview, Wallerstein argues that development can mean either 'growth' modeled after that of biological organisms or simply 'more' as in accumulation. The problem in both models, however, is that they do not account for decay and death.

Addressing the question as to who or what has in fact developed, Wallerstein argues that, especially during the twentieth century when popular forces came to occupy state power, there was some development in industry, consumer goods, etc. The main explosion, however, happened since 1945. Even so, the central question on the agenda currently, is that

Each type of [popular/ initially anti-systemic movement now in power] has come under internal criticism from within their countries, and often even from within the movements in power, for their failures to achieve, or to achieve to a significant degree, these goals—economic growth and greater internal equality ... [a] source of disillusionment (p. 115).

So, what underlies the demand for development? The ideals of transformation towards greater internal social equality and economic growth as a 'catching up' with more affluent powers (p. 115). The problem with these twin goals, however, is that governments have usually given priority to the latter while they were

split on the importance of the first. Whereas this contradiction is held together in antisystemic movements prior to their coming to power, once in power, political choices are required and these choices normally go towards 'catching up' (p. 116f).

The question then of how such 'catching up' development can indeed come about can be answered if one looks at 'national development' in history. Contrary to the usual view that development progressively expanded in ever more national countries between 1750 and 1950—the 'export-oriented model'—Wallerstein does not hold to the premises of the 'de-linking model' which calls for a total rupture with the system. He sees this 'development' as 'the story of the secular expansion of the world-economy' rather, and that this expansion has reached its zenith. On the one hand, since new nationalist countries were added to the world economy 'to create low-cost, surplus-creating but not surplus-retaining segments of the worldwide commodity chain', the core grew. This means that these countries did not 'achieve' development but 'had it thrust upon them'. On the other hand, if ever more countries are added to the world economic system, it means that some countries will fall out of it (pp. 118f). So, because 'catching up' means competition, some countries may advance in the world economy, but it will be at others' expense.

Against this background, the question as to what needs to be done or what the political implications of this analysis are is, 1) that national development is not the answer; 2) that, in the face of the world's unequally allocated created surplus, the ideal remains a truly 'egalitarian, democratic world and not simply a reversal of fortunes inside our present inegalitarian, undemocratic world-system' (pp. 119f); 3) that, whereas the route to this objective was via 'nationally organized working class movements' prior to 1945 and following it, via 'popularly organized national movements', now it is also not via the state. The main reason is that, since the state will have to retain surplus as much as possible, governance and bureaucracy will out of necessity gravitate towards the 'catching up pole' and not the equality pole.

As long as solutions are framed and sought at the national level, the dilemma will remain, and states governed by erstwhile antisystemic movements will remain repressive of their own popular strata and at best only partial winners of the catching-up game, to the primary benefit of the cadres (p. 120).

In this scenario, and apart from the notion of a true world-wide revolution—which is in any case not realistically achievable, at least for now—Wallerstein suggests that the only option open for the so-called developing countries is to struggle to retain most of the surplus created at production level, i.e. to increase either the price of sale or the price of labour as part of political struggle (p. 121f). This, he argues, is precisely what capitalists do—'they spend a considerable amount of their worldwide political energy on the politics of pricing'—or 'relocate the locus of their capital' as evident from the OPEC crises. Even so, the movements



cannot afford their close links to the states, even to the regimes they have struggled to bring to power. Their concern must be how at each point on very long commodity chains a greater percentage of the surplus can be retained. Such a strategy would tend to over time 'overload' the system, reducing global rates of profit significantly and evening out distribution.

The assumptions for this strategy is that 1) global rates of profit are quite open to 'political attack at a local level'; 2) it will 'force the pace of secular trends of the capitalist world-economy'—what capitalists fear most; and 3) it is both 'politically mobilising and economically redistributive—keeping the twin ideals of democracy/liberty and equality together and not separating them off; 4) the antisystemic movements [including those who came to power] must become aware of their ambivalence on the issue of these two ideals and organise themselves as suggested above. This, however, cannot be done by the state—because it is implicated in the 'catching up' game and will always be. It is for the anti-systemic movements to achieve (p. 122-124).

### III

For the reconceptualising of *time and space*, Wallerstein draws on Braudel's distinction between *l'histoire événementielle* (episodic time), *l'histoire conjuncturelle* (cyclical time), the *longue durée*—*l'histoire structurelle* (structural time) or 'the time of the sages'—and articulates these with space to form distinct timespace loci (p. 136). Connected to space, the proposed timespaces are those of episodic geopolitical timespace; cyclico-ideological timespace; structural and eternal but also transformational timespace. From the perspective of the world historical system, the most significant is that the *geopolitical* articulates the political and historical judgements which configure the brief, event-like decisions in history where, for instance, nations' boundaries are drawn in particular ways and not others. The *ideological* link to the longer cyclical time captures 'middle time' or timespans longer than events—the 'times of the alternating rhythms'. The distinction between East and West since 1945—the cold war era—is a case in point. The 'too long' structural time or 'time of the sages' has *structural space* as corresponding spatial marker. The beginning and end—of which neither can be identified with absolute certainty—of the capitalist world economy is an example. The real time of the sages is the time of universal and eternal validity of which nomothetic social science with its theorems is a good example. Again, as earlier, nomothetic and idiographic historians come under critique. Wallerstein says:

The TimeSpace of our nomothetic social scientists seems an irrelevant illusion. The TimeSpace of our idiographic historians—events in immediate geopolitical space—seems a series of self-interested inventions about which there will never be agreement as long as political discord exists in the world (p. 144). [And I may add, this will be a very long time.]

This scheme of time-space configurations raise many questions on the complexities in the world system beyond too easy Enlightenment distinctions (p. 145)—questions which will still take a long time to answer (pp. 139-148). Even so, Wallerstein borrows the theological notion of *kairos*—the decision in qualitative time or the 'fundamental moral choice'—to articulate its secularised version of the 'intemeshed connection of "crisis" and "transition"'. It is precisely the choices for order within chaos which makes up this *kairos*—the choices in 'transformational time'. These choices are not free nor unfree. And, they bring about orders for good or ill (p. 147).

Part of this complex of timespace nexuses, however, is how to position Africa and for that matter every other country—India is an example. For *Africa*, he does not see it contributing to this discourse in a major way, mainly because it is so caught up in the capitalist world economy's doublebind. If it would, it would do so in a different terrain together with all other countries and continents, focused on the questions 'what is science and what scientific knowledge?; and 'what systemic options do we have? If the modern world system is in crisis, what alternatives present themselves" (p. 129). In his discourse on India, he points to the fact that all history is always written from the present (p. 131). This means that whatever the exigencies of present econo-political, politico-social or religio-political realities, it will always be possible to develop a history for that quest. This general insight is true of all countries. On the historical specificity of a country—the ultimate aim of all historical interpretation of the concrete—however, this only reveals the 'ever-changing, very fluid' phenomena the theoretician of the world system deals with (p. 134).

### IV

Part four turns to Marx to uncover that from Marx's notion of political economy which political formations have failed to incorporate. Wallerstein positions Marx's theory and history within the same Enlightenment tradition as 'bourgeois liberalism' (p. 151f) and that both come under the same critique he has mustered earlier against racism and underdevelopment—even though differently developed, both complexes believed in progress. He then abstracts and discusses three messages which the socialist movements incorporated from Marx and Engels (pp. 152-160). These are 1) that only the industrial proletariat produced surplus value; 2) that only advanced countries progress, that they did so due to the rise of the proletariat and because this happened in Europe, this is also the arena in which the first successful socialist revolutions can be expected from; 3) the distinction between merchant and industrial capital (p. 152). Drawing then on Marx's work itself, Wallerstein shows how this incorporation into political formations was not only slanted but that it ignored vital insights from Marx and Engels themselves (pp. 153-160). For the purposes of this article, I shall not go into these. Suffice it to say that these oversights or white mythologies constitute vital elements within Communist/ socialist formations.

In order to account for the history of the world system of the last one hundred and fifty if not four hundred years, Wallerstein draws forth six major theses

from Marx which 'indicate both the hopeful possibilities and the great dangers of the immediate future' (p. 161).

1) Social reality is a process of ceaseless contradictions, which can only be apprehended dialectically. 2) Capitalism is a process of ceaseless accumulation of capital, which distinguishes it from pre-capitalist modes of production. 3) Capitalism as a historical system involves the transformation of the productive processes such that they create surplus value which is appropriated by the bourgeois in order to accumulate capital. 4) Capitalism over time polarizes the social organization of life such that more and more persons are grouped as either bourgeois or proletarians and that the proletariat suffers immiserization. 5) In a capitalist world, the state is an instrument of capitalist oppression; socialism involves the withering away of the state. 6) The transition from capitalism to socialism cannot be evolutionary; it can only be revolutionary. To believe otherwise is utopian in the negative sense (p. 161).

These theses account for 'underdevelopment' not as anomalies but as constitutive of capitalism—'non-wage labor forms of market production, marginalization and squatting, a distended tertiary sector, the emergence of the social role of the housewife, ethnicity, clientelism, corrupt and oppressive state-machineries, etc.' (p. 161). If they are taken to explain that the world system's 'development' has as corroborative, 'underdevelopment' and that development is based on underdevelopment, 'they are not only valid, but they are revolutionary as well' (p. 161; cf. further Wallerstein's too brief account of the development of the world system together with its constitutive contradictions—also that of the antisystemic movements, since late Medieval times—pp. 162-169).

What he does advocate in this context, is not passivity but:

active intelligence and active organizing energy that is simultaneously reflexive and moral, in the class struggle of the majority against the minority, of those who are exploited against the exploiters, of those who are deprived of the surplus-value they create against those who seize this surplus-value and live off it (p. 169).

As explanation of the world system, Wallerstein's dialogue with the notion of utopia engages Thomas More, Friedrich Engels, and Karl Mannheim. From his perspective, he then outlines three Marxian eras—Marx's himself (1840s–1883); the orthodox Marxism of the parties (circa 1880-1920; 1900-1950); and Marxism exploded (1950s-). Underlying Marxism as well as liberalism, however, are a number of assumptions which Wallerstein calls the social sciences to debunk (p. 182). This must be done in favour of a choice for 'social science as interpretation process' (p. 182). As such, this social science is

looking for a truly efficacious utopia—a social science that is neither moral instruction nor value free, a social science that is truly efficacious in its ability to enable us to 'adjust' the world. It is a social science engaged in a 'search for a method' (p. 182).

What is needed in this search is to radically scrutinise the second era, to not dispense with the ideological notion of utopia—because that will mean dispensing with rational will—but to be direct about it and, I surmise, be open and honest about assumptions (p. 183). Further, keys to social science thinking will be contradiction: the explanation of social reality, but also the acceptance of its inescapable endurance; the 'eradicating' of 'the vulgar, brutal, unnecessary consequences of material inequality'. In this way, utopia must be seen as always in process but also that it needs to be 'brought to fruition [not] by some (a few) on behalf of others (the many). That can only be done by the many on behalf of themselves' (p. 184).

## V

In order to make a contribution to his call for the social sciences to reconceptualise and reconfigure themselves, Wallerstein accesses Braudel. His main argument is that Braudel has provided some important incentives which must be developed further.

After a brief biography of Braudel—ultimately, biography and actual scholarly engagement can never be separated—Wallerstein discusses European social science history in terms of structural and cyclical time as derived from and framed by the history of the *Annales* school itself (p. 190-201). I shall not elaborate on this here. Suffice it to say that one of Wallerstein's main arguments is that *Annales* undeservedly became unpopular—perceived as part of the establishment since 1968 (p. 190,200). This is followed by a brief detour of Braudel's understanding of the relationship between market and capitalism—how the market may become (i.e. in future) not the sign of capitalism but 'world socialism' (p. 202-206); as well as Braudel's critical unpacking of the two assumptions which both classical liberalism and classical Marxism shared—1) that capitalism involves the establishing of a 'free, competitive market'; and 2) that capitalism's success derives from specialisation.

Wallerstein then shows how Braudel argued that capitalism was and still is not free and competitive—and that the state functions as 'guarantor of monopoly' (p. 207-211). For the second, Braudel's argument was that capitalism does not exist and has not survived due to specialisation but its 'unlimited flexibility'. 'The real capitalist always resisted specialization, and thus being trapped in one arena by past investment, past networks, past skills' (p. 213). This view—if accepted—impacts on the historiographical agenda; harbours an implicit critique of Enlightenment theories of progress; and has a 'different policy message to the contemporary world' (pp. 214-217). In view of the many assumptions about nineteenth century social science (cf. the summary on p. 219) and pointers to different one's, Wallerstein believes that one of the principal pointers to a new social science is that of working within the timespace of the *longue durée* (p. 223) but to also go beyond *Annales* (p. 225).

## VI

In his concluding section, 'World-Systems Analysis as Unthinking', Wallerstein recaps his theorising of ten years and condenses insights. These condensations centre around seeing 'historical systems as complex systems'—'the more complex the structure, the more crucial its history'; and issues for debate in the paradigm to be fashioned for 'world-systems analysis' (pp. 229-236; and 237-256). Even further condensed, and forming the basic outlines of a methodology, these issues are: 1) to specify and justify the unit of analysis; 2) to distinguish between cycles and trends; 3) to identify and specify the contradictions inherent in the specific structures of a specific type of historical system; 4) to carefully distinguish between a shift in *conjuncture* and a historical transition; 5) to specify and justify the chronosophy or the relations between past, present and future that underlies the theorizing; 6) to not distinguish between distinctively economic phenomena different from political and social ones—'the whole is a seamless skein' (pp. 257-265).

## VII

Wallerstein's major contribution is that of arguments for the reconfiguration of the social sciences in terms of a larger paradigm of the 'historical social sciences' and his outlines for the basic strands of its methodology. The major framework within this paradigm is to think in terms of the 'world system' and of capitalism—even more challenging now that it has gone virtual—as of a particular development within this system in the *longue durée*. His unearthing of the common progressive assumptions in terms of which both racism and development have configured their own particular discourses within classical liberalism and Marxism has unmasked much of what, in post-independent Africa has and currently in South Africa is driving discourses of development—presumably separated off from 'racism'. Amongst others, important views are also his linking of 'complexity'—and that the social sciences will have to deal with it constructively—to Prigogine's theorisings. So too is his informative discussions of Myrdal's legacy, those elements within Marx and Engels' writings which have not been incorporated into party formations—because they go against the grain of Enlightenment idealism—and that of Braudel.

As South African academia embarks on its transformation of tertiary education, takes historical decisions, and starts to operationalise its transformed curricula and institutionalised structures, Wallerstein's framing and reframing—or in his parlance, (thinking and) 'unthinking'—of the social sciences, may prove important. Especially his exposure of mistaken assumptions underlying the modern world system—if taken as 'white mythology'—may prove vital if South African academia desires to radically break with the racist foundations of its scholarship. As many curricula are changed to incorporate notions of 'development', Wallerstein's warning that 'development' in the current paradigm cannot be de-linked from its racism, scholars need to carefully think about their curricula and their 'outcomes'. Moreover, if it is true—especially in the South Africa of the 1990s—that political developments have outrun scholarly research and informed reflection—which also

include institutional transformation—then it is of the utmost importance that academia seriously engage research on all the variegated issues Wallerstein has raised and pointed to above.

On the question of what kind of research, I think Wallerstein already provides the answer (read especially pp. 268-272 but many other suggestions are also in his book not mentioned above—cf. p. 61 amongst others). Most important, however, is that, apart from some activity in the field of historical social sciences, either under apartheid and colonialism's exigencies, as part of the anti-systemic movements or as practices related to an other, the work which needs to be done has not even started. This is even more true for post-independent Africa. If the problem is that our current world historical system is one which has been fashioned in the nineteenth century and is indelibly infused with this century's racist morality, then it follows that the only way to 'think' this—or 'think *that*', if you will—is to fully study its resources. These resources—whether of a social, economic, political, or anthropological nature—are all in our archives if not still in our libraries both here and in Europe. Moreover, they are all 'literature' in its broadest definition. And who are the best qualified to study them? I believe those who have the best reading, writing, interpretation, research but especially world systems analytical skills—our scholars of literature. Among others, I believe that had (literature) scholars of post-independent Africa focused their research and publishing in this area, these states would have had systemic resources which would have enabled them to bring out informed critique of the capitalist world system, to fashion/ negotiate others, develop systems which could have benefited the fledgling 'nationalisms' and prevented the syphoning out of colonial capital and destruction of industry. Most important of all, African scholars could have contributed towards groundbreakingly developing a new world system different from cowering before the West's racism and waiting/ hoping for aid.

The quest, however, will remain for the slanted French Revolution ideal—*liberté, égalité, fraternité* (cf. pp. 22,79 but also all Wallerstein's arguments on why 'development' has not delivered and will never)—now in the world system, and for the collective moral will to make the needed moral decisions.

Centre of Religious Studies  
University of Durban-Westville

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## Book Reviews

### Religion and Politics in Africa

*Religion and Politics in Africa*

By Jeff Haynes

London: Zed Books, 1996, 266 pp.

ISBN 1 85649 392X

Reviewed by Daryl M. Balia

Public Service Commission

Pretoria

Turbulent, volatile, chaotic, corrupt and complex might all qualify as more or less appropriate adjectives to describe the African dilemma in the face of modernisation. Complex or varied more accurately, though, are words that come to mind in trying to understand the intricate relationship between religion and politics on the African continent. This does not deter Jeff Haynes from attempting an enormous and near impossible task of examining the religious impact on modern African politics. This is done in a highly readable and skillfully lucid text that provides examples of such interaction from literally Cape Town to Cairo.

The first part is devoted to the advent of colonialism while the second is illustrative of the interplay between state and religious institutions after colonialism. Part three is an updated analysis of the contemporary scene where popular religiosity finds expression in new movements and fundamentalism. Haynes' bibliography is an interesting collection of only secondary sources (on which his work is entirely based) which will prove useful to college and university students of African politics. That seems to be the intended audience in any case as Haynes is primarily interested in drawing comparisons and teasing arguments among established scholars. Haynes' attempt would therefore be best described as a survey of the religious impact on modern Africa, with a plethora of examples to demonstrate the complexity of issues raised.

Haynes must be complimented for paying particular attention to Islam and its particular nuances, expressive forms and sectorial manifestations in different African contexts. Far too often have we been treated to texts that conveniently

assume a Christian character for the entire continent. Yet Haynes does little to show how indigenous and traditional African religions might be playing a more pronounced role in shifting the balance of political power.

It is actually quite difficult to fit African experiences of religious and political interaction into any preconceived framework because no two countries are alike tribally, ethnically, religiously, and politically. Whatever generalisations are made will be subject to a series of qualifications and exceptions. The Islamic impact in Southern Africa, for example, is completely ignored and the South African experience is worthy of mention in only two pages. This will disturb proponents of the view that religion has played a central role in the dismantling of apartheid.

Historians, and theologians belatedly, have clearly demonstrated the critical contribution made by women in the total experience of religion. Haynes has a page on women in Islam, where such a contribution is less critical, but little to offer on their significance in Christian leadership roles.

Due to the relative instability and rapid pace of political change, one should expect Haynes' book to be in need of revision shortly. In its present form, though, it is still an important study tool for the uninitiated student of African politics seeking a short overview of how religion continues to exercise a steady and growing influence in shaping political reality.

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## Conflict in Africa

*Conflict in Africa.*

Edited by Oliver Furley (ed).

New York & London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1995, 319 pp.

ISBN: 1-85043-690-8

Reviewed by Sanusha Naidu  
Department of Political Science  
University of Durban-Westville

The political conflicts, economic disparities, and social disharmony in Africa have remained a major cause for concern for many. Extensive discussion regarding the causes and effects have produced a myriad works, both within and outside the region.

It is within this context that this book positions itself. Examining the dimensions of the strife from a general perspective, the book provides a comparative overview of the African condition in relation to 'conflict'. Set against the backdrop of internal constraints and external pressures, the book progressively addresses the magnitude and essence of the conflict, systematically introducing the novice into basic elements of the nature of the wide-spread strife. This is clearly demonstrated by the different case-studies which serve to bring to the fore the various dimensions of the conflict in a region-by-region manner.

'Child Soldiers in Africa' is a narrative investigative chapter exploring one of the most important effects of the conflict. Furley examines the widespread use of children within the African conflict by addressing the following questions: 'How and why they were recruited? Why did they stay? What effect may this have on their generation and what of their future?' (p. 28). Using this as a framework, Furley proceeds to enlighten the reader about the peculiarities of the conflicts in Mozambique, Uganda, and Liberia which had inherently absorbed children within its ranks. 'Conflict in South Africa' by Alexander Johnstone, analyses the political struggle inside the country within the confines of the 'twofold legacy of conflict, both from the apartheid years and from the first four uncertain years of transformation' (p. 46).

Chapter four, deals with 'The Horn of Africa: A Conflict Zone', and supplies a modest account of the conflict within this region. The central argument put forth by Clapman notes that the struggle is a product of 'secessionist, irredentist, regional, ethnic and ideological conflicts combined with straight-forward power struggles and disorder resulting with the proliferation of imported weaponry' (p. 72). Inadvertently, this necessitates the rise of a complex variety of interrelated acts of violence. In chapter five, 'Sudan: War Without End', Peter Woodward examines the strife within a broad framework of the country's colonial legacy which precipitated the rivalry and subsequent clash between the Arab and Muslim majority in the North and the African and often Christian minority in the South. Woodward highlights the extent to which this strife was influenced by the support and interference of the big powers. George Joffe in his chapter, 'Conflict in Western Sahara', echoes that the conflict is a direct consequence of decolonisation. While Paul Richard's comments upon the effect of the struggle in Liberia and Sierra Leone is informed by the need to eradicate entrenched and corrupt regimes, this hope may remain elusive as the conflict is infused by political power struggles over resources and human conscription.

Chapters eight and nine address the implications the demise of the Cold War had on the African state. Peter Lyon broadly discusses the perceived threat of the marginalisation of the African Continent within contemporary geopolitics. And Kathryn O'Neill and Barry Munslow provide an in-depth review of the changes in the



foreign policies of the two superpowers during the 1980s and the effects their global compromise had on the conflicts in Angola and Namibia where the Cold War confrontation in Southern Africa appeared to be most intense.

The chapter on Namibia by Reginald Herbold Green is a historical account of the colonisation process, the Namibian liberation struggle and, eventually, the road to democracy. In his chapter on Uganda, Amii Omara-Otunnu explores the conflict as a consequence of disturbances within the country's socio-political equilibrium, shifts in the locus of power together with concomitant economic benefits, and the influence of shifts in society, notwithstanding attempts by incoming ruling groups to restructure power relations. The final three chapters of the book cover the conflict in Africa from an even more general perspective. 'The Colonial Legacy' by David Throup reiterates the impact of colonial rule upon the African state—which in itself served as a catalyst for the onset of a variety of struggles in most African countries. Chapters thirteen and fourteen outline the more obvious effects of the conflict, namely human rights abuses, mass migration in the form of refugees, and economic stagnation caused by the destructiveness of the struggle.

By examining the nature of the conflict in this way, the book can relate its various findings to a neatly compiled theoretical framework which correlates Timour Dimitrichev's major causes of tension and conflict: 1) Military; 2) Political/International; 3) Political/Domestic; 4) and Persecution, with a typology that breaks down domestic political conflicts into five main types.

First, elite conflicts can be between old guard politicians and younger technocrats; between ideologists and bureaucrats; between party functionaries and civil servants. Second, factional conflicts can be organised by elites but usually reach down to a variety of social groups, involving regional and ethnic inequalities, where mobilisation in the conflict may be based on appeals to ethnicity and class. Third, communal conflicts involve a threat to the state by a sub-group, such as a secessionist movement or a group organising for and fighting a civil war, often involving external support. Such conflicts may transform themselves into guerrilla struggles. Fourth, there are mass conflicts where political movements call for complete revolution and change in the power structure. Last, there are conflicts where popular political protest erupts, is mustered or orchestrated against existing patronage networks that exclude large numbers of the general populace. In such situations, general resentment is the force which brings the people together to confront the regime—often accompanied by outbreaks of violence (p. 5).

This typology provides the underlying basis of the text and seeks to explain not only the causes but also the effects and outcomes of the various conflicts and struggles. The latter are those related to Africa's refugee crises, casualties, disease, malnutrition, starvation, social and economic decline, and general moral decay. This is dealt with adequately in the chapters pointed to above, all of which offer a broad

exploration of the causes, effects and consequences of the conflict within the Continent. As much as the literature is enlightening and provides the reader with an invaluable databank of information, the book remains primarily an introductory descriptive reader particularly aimed at the non-initiated African scholar. For this reason alone the predictive dimension of the text is weak (apart from the chapter by Ali Mazrui), and fails to provide any thoroughgoing analytical commentary regarding the origins, nature, and solutions to the conflict—i.e. other than that already investigated and tabled by previous authors.

Ali Mazrui's chapter, 'Conflict as a Retreat From Modernity' is the only essay that succeeds to provide a more profound theoretical analysis of the African struggle. His study is informed by questions related to the following: Are these African conflicts the product of an over-reaching rush towards an ill-thought-out goal, that of modernity? Are Africa's conflicts caused by failures in development? Is Africa's development dependent upon at least a partial retreat from modernity? Mazrui's thoughtful problematisation facilitates a more profound understanding of the conflict than any of the other studies. This is so, because he questions the method followed in post-colonial and post-independent African countries with regard to issues related to development. The main problem here, seems to be that the conflicts are the result of the fact that development is typically modelled after Western models and standards. This, it seems, is the primary cause for the tension and conflict or for that matter, the collapse of the colonial state in the 1990s. If this is indeed the case, this fact will either signal the onset of true decolonization and eradication of the old colonial order, or the birth pangs of a new African political order trying to establish itself. This poses the question, however, as to whether the essence of the conflict in Africa must be understood generally in terms of supposing it to be a retreat from modernisation or an advance towards a particularly African post-modernity.

Notwithstanding the generality of the work, the book is a well-structured and easy readable text that provides comprehensive insight in general into the conflicts that plague the African Continent. As such, it caters for the otherwise uninitiated scholar of African affairs. Even though the book does not successfully contribute much towards understanding the conflict(s), it is a useful reader for anyone interested in obtaining a general understanding of the conflicts and struggles, and should serve as an elementary text to those seeking to further their knowledge-base in this area of study.

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## Fanon: A Critical Reader

*Fanon: A Critical Reader*

Edited by Lewis R. Gordon, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting & Renee T. White  
Oxford: Blackwell, 1996, 368 pp.  
ISBN: 1 55786 895 6

Review by Richard Pithouse  
Department of Philosophy  
University of Durban-Westville

This book includes twenty-one articles on Fanon as well as a 'Forward', an 'Introduction' and an 'Afterward' which are all valuable pieces in their own right. The standard of the work is generally high and a particular feature of this volume is that many of the contributions make use of the editors' new, and often illuminating, translations from Fanon's original French.

The introduction includes a brief but compelling biographical sketch and a useful five stage outline of the development of Fanon studies. This runs from the early engagement with Fanon's ideas by practical revolutionaries like Che Guevara and Paulo Freire through to biographical research; investigations into Fanon's contribution to political theory; the analysis of Fanon by postmodern and postcolonial thinkers like Said, Bhabha, Gates and Spivak and on to the recent attempts to use Fanon's thought to develop original work. The editors make it clear that this is where they locate this volume and that their purpose 'is neither to glorify nor denigrate Fanon but instead to explore ways in which he is a useful thinker' (p. 7).

Fanon is clear about the necessity to develop 'a voracious taste for the concrete'<sup>1</sup> and it's no surprise that Marxists like Cedric Robinson have attacked Homi Bhabha, Louis Gates Jr and Gayatri Spivak for bringing 'an imagined Fanon in (to) their self-referential debates on colonial discourse'<sup>2</sup>. Most writing here takes the world outside the seminar room into account and the majority of the papers collected are valuable attempts to investigate how Fanon's work can help us to make sense of the world. Fanon's ideas are bought to bear on everything from the struggle to decolonise psychiatry and psychoanalysis through to the politics of identity, the sociology of resistance and the relationship between national and feminist struggles.

<sup>1</sup> Robinson, Cedric in *Race and Class* 34,1 (1993) p. 78.

<sup>2</sup> Fanon, Frantz 1976. *The Wretched of the Earth*. London: Penguin. p. 74.

In recent times, Fanon has often been appropriated and domesticated by commentators who chose to ignore his clear commitment to, as Cedric Robinson puts it, 'locate and subsequently advertise a fixed and stable site of radical liberationist criticism and creativity' (p. 87). Moreover, as well as ignoring Fanon's commitment to revolutionary change in the economic structure of society, many commentators have also ignored,

his understanding of the role of the intellectual as well as his critique of the national bourgeoisie's attempt to reduce the nation to itself, his Leninist theory of imperialism and his insistence that the struggles of black Africa and black America are not equivalent<sup>3</sup>.

While not all of the papers in this book take Fanon's African radicalism as their central concern, none of them can be accused of writing as though Fanon were not a revolutionary. Only a few write as though Fanon saw no distinction between material conditions in America and Africa. The majority of the papers here, as well as the introduction and afterward which frame the collection, do give due and welcome recognition to the consciously and explicitly radical and African intellectual legacy of Frantz Fanon.

The South African fascination with Fanon didn't end with Biko's murder. On the contrary, Fanon's burning passion, heroic life, and deeply sophisticated analysis continue to challenge and inspire South Africans whether they be graffiti artists, poets of the stature of Lesego Rampolokeng or radical academics like Mabogo More, Benita Parry, David Goldberg, Andrew Nash and Grant Farrel. Indeed, Fanon's name was mentioned more than any other at the successful conference on Racism and Multiculturalism held at Rhodes in June 1999 and it is abundantly clear that Fanon's critique of neo-colonialism is of enormous relevance to contemporary Africa.

Although all the contributors to *Fanon: A Critical Reader* were based in the USA at the time of writing their papers, at least five of the 21 papers in the volume are likely to be of particular value to readers seeking to think from Africa about Fanon has to say to Africa.

The first is by South African émigré David Goldberg. He contributes an excellent paper on race and in/visibility. He begins with a careful analysis of Fanon's highly nuanced phenomenology of invisibility (in terms of his excellent analysis of the significance of 'the veil' in colonial context) and goes on to argue that 'the value and virtue of in/visibility are contextually determined' (p. 189). And so, the invisibility of a group can make them powerless and shield them from power.

<sup>3</sup> Fanon, Frantz 1976. *The Wretched of the Earth*. London: Penguin. p. 174.

Equally, the visibility of a group can make them powerful *and* leave them exposed and threatened. Goldberg applies this insight to a number of contemporary examples including the way in which the increased visibility of the racially marginalised in Los Angeles and Johannesburg has led the powerful to organise the entrenchment of spatial segregation and the insulation of racialised daily life experiences through 'fences, alarms, and private armed response units' (p. 196).

Another useful paper is the one by Gail Presby who is now working on the Sage Philosophy project in Nairobi. She develops a comparison on the role of violence in the thought of Gandhi, Mandela and Fanon. Her argument is that all three thinkers share a common diagnoses of the colonial condition and that, while their strategies for achieving a more human world have much in common, there are significant differences. In particular, Fanon aims at quick and total destruction of relations of domination, while Mandela seeks to 'force the enemy to give in while preserving as much as possible the future hope of healing the community' (p. 296), and Gandhi advocated the preserving of the lives of the enemy in order to win them over. Her assessment is that the best strategy will be determined by 'the concrete circumstances of each situation, where history and culture play a role in shaping the consciousness of the people' (p. 296).

Further contributions are by Olufemi Taiwo and Paget Henry. Taiwo applies Fanon's critique of the national bourgeoisie to Nigeria and Henry's piece is an interesting meditation on the failure of Caribbean Philosophy to cultivate (as has been achieved with other forms of expression, such as music) a Creole identity.

The volume closes with Lewis Gordon's excellent paper on Fanon's 'Tragic Revolutionary Violence'. There is some overlap between this paper and Gordon's well-known contribution to Emmanuel Eze's *Post-colonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader*. That paper is a general investigation into the tragic dimensions of neo-colonialism but here, Gordon's focus is more specifically on Fanon and the idea of revolutionary violence as tragedy. Gordon begins, by way of Aristotle, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, with some incisive observations on the nature and social function of tragedy. He then shows that colonialism is a state of institutional dehumanisation which is nevertheless inhabited by humans. Gordon points out that violence in support of, or against the system must, tragically, be directed at a 'shrieking flesh-and-blood reality' (p. 305) rather than some dehumanised enemy. However, the struggle for liberation is morally distinct from the struggle to maintain oppression because

in the accomplishment of the former's struggle is the possibility, fragile though it may be, of a world that is not by dint of its very structure violent (p. 306).

Gordon's paper will be of enormous value to anybody interested in trying to understand the ethical dimensions of struggle or the nature of post-apartheid reconciliation.

*Fanon: A Critical Reader* is a very well thought-through collection of essays and an excellent tool for stimulating critical thought about Fanon's rich legacy. Readers will occasionally have to remind themselves that a few of the papers collected in this volume are specifically American attempts to harness Fanon to American issues. Nevertheless this is top-class critical reader which should be in the library of every (South) African university.

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### Three Recent Poetry Collections

*Songs of Africa: Collected Poems*

by Alan Paton

Durban: Gecko Books, 1995, 218 pp.

ISBN: 1875011153

*Ferry to Robben Island*

by Alan James

Durban: Eyeball Press, 1996, 105 pp.

ISBN: 0620202564

*Tongue Tide*

by Geoffrey Hutchings

Durban: Preprint Publishing, 1996, 86 pp.

ISBN: 0620203080

Reviewed by Andrew Johnson

Department of English

University of Zululand

The most entertaining part of Alan Paton's *Songs of Africa* is the 'notes and personal recollections' of Douglas Livingstone, with which the volume begins. In a series of anecdotes, Livingstone shows how he eventually got beneath Paton's severe and 'forbidding carapace' (p. xi) and discovered the man who loved poetry 'with a rare and untidy passion'. Livingstone comments on Paton's own poetic talents:

Was Alan a great poet, or even a 'good' one? His passion for poetry was certainly prodigious; at times—it must be allowed—his reach exceeded his grasp. It never ceased to amaze me that a deployer of such sublime prose, a consummate master, would so hunger after the more frivolous and vatic fifth dimension of verse as a channel of self-expression (p. xix).

But Paton could write at times with simplicity and grace. The tone of Paton's 1931 poem, 'The Poet' is primarily one of envious yearning:

You with some trick of phrase  
At one leap scale the walls  
And tread the heights of truth.  
I hear your calls  
As I swim moats, climb battlements;  
I tell myself  
You know not what you do  
And all my life of days  
Wish I had gone with you (p. 44).

The poet is depicted as having it too easy, of tricking his way effortlessly with language ('at one leap') while the prosy Paton swills through moats and impales himself on various obstacles of what amounts to a sort of literary assault course, the poet safe in his metaphorical helicopter, for which he clearly hasn't paid. And worse, the poet appears to be blissfully ignorant of his levitational abilities ('you know not what you do'). The suggestion is that the poet's success is both enviable in its skill and somehow vacuous in its (fundamentally escapist) achievement, as if the only reality is down there in the muck of the 'moat', and on the bruising, blood-smeared 'battlements'. So, while poetry may be a mode of writing devoutly to be wished, it is also a luxury the nitty-gritty prose writer cannot afford.

Paton acknowledges that poetry, with its ability 'at one leap [to] scale the walls', is the riskier business. And the fear of risk-taking comes through in the envy. It reminds me of the 'poet like an acrobat', of Lawrence Ferlinghetti's 'Constantly Risking Absurdity' (Ferlinghetti 1994:181)<sup>4</sup>. Paton's fear is mostly to do with a loss of control over the words, a fear that the words might begin to speak for themselves. In 'To Walt Whitman', this is imagined in terms of the words held safely but uselessly in a locked womb:

<sup>4</sup> In: *A Coney Island of the Mind*. New York: New Directions.

woke afraid

That the great living host of tumbling words  
Was a delusion, a brood of children  
Locked within a womb that ne'er would open (p. 67).

Play is a kind of release from control, and poetry a release of 'tumbling words'. In 'I Have Approached', Paton's attitude to linguistic play is stern and ascetic; play is irresponsible, and responsibility is all about control:

there is nothing more meretricious  
Than to play with words (p. 65).

In 'The Poet', only the poet can leap the walls: the prose writer is unable to do so. This calls up a theme which pervades Paton's verse, that of imprisonment and escape. To some extent, Paton's professional involvement in and study of penal reforms, especially his period from 1935 to 1948 as Principal of Diepkloof reformatory, may account for an interest in such imagery, and while poems such as his renowned 'To A Small Boy Who Died at Diepkloof Reformatory' (p. 36f) deal with his experiences at this time in the public arena, as it were, the use of imprisonment imagery sometimes has much tougher implications in Paton's work, especially as he appears to use it as a means of investigating the state of his own psyche. In part II of the pseudo-Biblical 'I came to a valley ...', Paton recounts a strange parable:

1. I slept and saw a vision of a certain man that took a wild beast that he feared, and fenced it in with wood and iron. He fenced it in both high and strong, and gave all his mind to his labour.
2. And the beast moved to and fro in the place of its captivity, and filled day and night with its roaring. It ceased not from roaring, nor from moving to and fro in its captivity (p. 59).

The beast keeps threatening to break down the fence and the man builds another. Only when the second fence is built does the beast manage to break down the first one. The man becomes obsessed with building fences and neglects to feed his family. The man is so driven by fear of the 'beast' that he cannot achieve anything. His whole life is wasted in a futile act of containment. Part II of the poem ends:

13. And in my dream I cried unto him, man, thou art in captivity. And taken unawares he woke from his sleep, and stretched out his arms to me, and I

saw the anguish of his eyes. And he would have answered me, but that the beast was awakened by my cry, and roared with anger and fury, and went to and fro in its captivity. And the man rose and followed him, and had no more ears and eyes for me, and I watched him with pity, till I too awoke, and saw neither man nor beast in the valley (p. 61).

Psychically speaking, at its least threatening, the beast is a huge short-circuit, merely energy wasted, dread sloth and debilitation. But in Christian terms, as signalled by the heavily King-James-Version style, the beast must be a more direct threat, Satan within, no less. In this regard, see also 'The Prostitute' (p. 26). The battleground is the self, the war to be won, that of self-control. And God is the omniscient policeman, the only one who can tame the animal and beastie. In 'My Lord has a great attraction ....' Paton writes:

He passes through the great gates of Alcatraz, and there is  
no searching machine that can prevent him ...

Oh Lord teach us your wisdom, and incline our hearts to  
receive your instructions.

Then the maniac would stay his hands from the small girl,  
and the drunken man from the throat of the woman (p. 128)

In a poem entitled 'Faith', the beast escapes. The scene is 'a vision of the end' (118) and this dire imagination gives rise to one of Paton's most startling images:

And ruined cities silent on the shores  
Of dying seas, hive in their sewers the brood  
Of man-faced rodents, Evolution's last (p. 119).

This is a time of cannibalism and fratricide. In 'Heavy with secret knowledge ...', another glimpse of doom is the occasion of another strange figure:

Is the earth dead, and the great meanings  
Of the great event perished like rubber  
So that none may dare to stretch them out  
To cover us again (p. 132)

as if 'meanings' were some kind of carapace, or anorak, or shield against the beast,

perhaps. Paton is at his best when he allows the best of Whitman to shape his verse; tension seems to work against his poetic intentions. His best writing is the most relaxed. Perhaps that is why the song lyrics from the musical *Mkhumbane* (pp. 100-116) that Paton wrote in 1960 look so good on the page, read well aloud, and promise to sound well sung. The more stressful, agonised writing appears more highly wrought, but betrays an imprisoned desperation in a world of violence, rape and torture, with the hopeless hope (Frankenstein's project) to 'get the frozen heart/ to beating'. Here is 'I'll stab the conscience ...' (Is the world a woman who needs to be raped and tortured in order to wake her up?):

I'll stab the conscience of the world awake  
With fine-pointed barbs, and shafts of steel  
Red-hot to follow, I'll uncover her,  
Cut open her cold breast, and with brass gloves  
Steel rasped and diamond-pointed get the frozen heart  
To beating, and I'll hear her cries unmoved (p. 87).

In his 'Afterword' to the poems, Peter Kohler describes Paton as 'willing to speak of the future, to speak in the language of the future' (211) but Paton's English is not nearly risky enough to be able to have much to do with the future. Rather than exhibit the free play that such negotiation with the future must entail, Paton's poetry is generally inhibited and controlled by received language, imprisoned, unable to liberate desire, just as his furious spirit can be seen caged behind the lined skin of his face in the fierce photograph on the front cover of *Songs of Africa*.

Alan James' *Ferry To Robben Island* takes its title from the interesting and varied concluding sequence of 12 poems. Most of the rest of the book is devoted to other kinds of experience in other places. Western Australia is the setting for the opening set of 10. There is a determined effort to shape the language to fit the event. This is how the first poem, 'Dawn in a Caravan Park', begins:

Nothing stirs all black night among  
beetled vans and tents among  
hanging eucalypts among black  
bush-dunes.  
Nothing but a black possum scratching bark as it scrambles,  
its splayed claws rasping as  
they grasp and its white tail  
trailing (p. 2).

Syntactically and rhythmically, an ambitious delight feeds the mockery of descrip-



tion, yet description is paramount in this touristic littoral. Sharp imagery gets muddled by an over-hesitant, oratorical syntax with too much reliance on repetition ('among' is not nearly mysterious enough). It is as if syntax runs away with description, as the dish ran away with the spoon. This goes against a natural tendency to verbal economy, imagistic conciseness, in James' writing. In some ways it's Whitman against Pound, expansiveness against precision. The vocabulary in this extract, from 'A Coral Reef', also from the opening Western Australia sequence, shows the necessary density and intensity, but it all falls apart at the repeated 'feed on' with its laboured food-chain pedantic semantic antic:

worms burrow into coral, crabs scavenge  
among fronds, urchins gnaw at  
algae, starfish advance upon  
mussels, angel fish chew tissue  
from sponges, shimmering gobies  
feed on parasitic crustaceans  
that feed on hosts that feed on  
hatchlings that feed on plankton (p. 7).

Alan James' poems contain a certain amount of jewellery. He nevertheless needs to be more severe, to cut, to resist the grammatical loss-leader. There are elements of Whitman, possibly of Charles Olson, but the energies are diffuse, the rhetorical moves too often cheaply won, despite a good collection of polished pebbles in the form of an image-repertoire.

If we are to take James at his word regarding the knife-edge significance of his own 'littoral zone':

A coincidence of lives at the deadline of  
land, at the mute edge of assurance,  
at the last station of speech (p. 10),

then his enquiry into language is not rigorous enough to suit the stringencies of his own insistences. Paul Celan is the only poet I know of, who has approached the security fence surrounding 'the last station of speech'. Again, James is ambitious, and rightly so, but not quite able to carry it through. 'What edge are you on?'. Or as Tom Raworth put it:

listen you said i  
preferred to look  
at the sea.

everything stops there at strange angles (Raworth 1988:17)<sup>5</sup>.

James is aware of the 'strange angles' and generally able to capture them. He just needs to prune the connectives. Direct, precise observation, combined with the words to get some of it down, seems to be the main aim, but the sense of inscribing nature can be dangerous, and a complacent reading of the descriptive details gets a rude awakening, if the caravan park wasn't enough. Cyclists stop:

at a place of shade above a bay  
of rock and sand and blue water (p. 18);

and after a suitable interval spent looking unsuccessfully for dolphins:

Phil takes out his Walkman: 'This calls  
for music'.  
'What is it?' I ask.  
'Led Zeppelin—classic stuff', he grins (p. 19).

Again, if the aim is 'to hurt/ oneself into identity' (p. 48) the language needs to be made of sterner stuff than this. No use the glibly pseudo-sombre Wordsworthian:

And so to dwell in places of remembering:  
streets where I have compassed, bridged,  
stopped:  
suburbs of my planting and of my sleeping:  
cities whose frames my eyes have clasped ... (p. 54)

*Ferry To Robben Island* is an ambitious collection, containing some fine poems, but there is sometimes a lack of purchase at the local levels of collocation, cataclysm, interaction among words.

Geoffrey Hutchings launched *Tongue Tide* in Durban just a few weeks before his death in a car accident in August 1996. He was 59, and looking forward to devoting more time to poetry. *Tongue Tide* represents the author's own selection of work written between 1982 and early 1996. The poems shape up in a variety of traditional forms.

Some of the poems deal with birds, mountains, rivers, plants and forests, others with fishing, loving. Current, immediate experience seems mostly to provide

<sup>5</sup> Raworth, Tom 1988. *Tottering State: Selected Poems 1963-1987*. London: Paladin.

the springboard to poetic composition, with poems of reminiscence or recollection less common. In 'Johannesburg Wartime Childhood', Hutchings delicately captures the geography of innocence of his early years, from the viewpoint of a fast-walking schoolboy, or more likely, one cycling:

looking south,  
 Into the yards behind the shops  
 In Raleigh Street—then turning east,  
 The Yeoville Cinema—another turn—  
 More flats, the police next door, and west  
 The synagogue—end of the world a mile  
 In each direction (p. 7).

The poem makes deft use of part-rhymes (brick/back, mile/school/hill, rye/away, frenchies/Shoes) to give a hint but never an overt statement that the verse is more carefully patterned than it looks.

The transcendent is never far away from, and always implicit behind the percepts recorded in Geoffrey Hutchings' otherwise descriptive poems. The labelling provided 'frames' the 'natural', African observation and familiarises or appropriates it into a canonically readable context. The poem entitled 'Hadedas' is the first of 'Four Carols', and the only one that has an epigraph (from 1 Peter, 2:9 - 'a chosen generation, a royal priesthood'). The Bible quotation reaffirms the context in which the name 'carol' places the poem and simultaneously describes a kind of transformation 'who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light'. The roughness of the stop-start rhythm and the assonant-dissonant sway provide highly appropriate props for the ungainly, stooping birds:

And they are part of a royal priesthood,  
 Raucous, awkward, gaunt—  
 They grub in grass to get their slugs,  
 And even flying, flaunt  
 Their lack of musical talent or taste  
 In disproportioned flaps—  
 Ugly buggers, crook-necked,  
 Like you and me perhaps—  
 And yet, at some sudden moments  
 Their bodies deflect from dun  
 To iridescent splendour turned,  
 Refracting light from the sun (p. 48).

Sometimes the awkwardnesses of Hutchings' poetry cannot be ascribed to the desire to mimic a clumsy bird, but here, the clear but not overemphasised symbolisation of the hadedas into human god-fodder, by one twist making the transcendent seem possible, as oilslick can turn rainbow, combines with the stumbling gait of the verse and the deliberate trumpeting raspberry 'Ugly buggers', to come splendid, transformed. At its best, Hutchings' verse drives along with the urgency, as he phrases it in 'Touching', of 'a gut-contracting sweet confused alarm' (p. 9). Or exasperation, mellowing into another affirmation of transcendent faith, in his ungainly sonnet for Douglas Livingstone, 'Resurrection Bush':

How on earth, or in air above  
 Can this so neatly ordered form,  
 These well-expected rhymes that shove  
 At us an evangelical swarm  
 Of glib perceptions bearing designs  
 Upon us, how can such a bland  
 Enclosure hold within its lines  
 The finely-grained uncertain sand?

I know a plant that suffers drought  
 For years on end, its branches stripped  
 To brittle sticks—until the rain's arrival.  
 It wins within the day survival—  
 A deep genetic plan is tripped  
 As folded leaves take flesh and sprout (p. 38).

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## Interview

### A Community Bard: Interview with Ahmed Essop

Interview by Rajendra Chetty  
Associate Director: Research (Arts)  
M.L. Sultan Technikon

I interviewed Ahmed Essop at his Lenasia home on 23 October 1999 at about 10h30. His *oeuvre* includes three collections of short stories, *The Hajji and Other Stories* (1978) (which received the Olive Schreiner Award in 1979); *Noorjehan and Other Stories* (1990); and *The King of Hearts and Other Stories* (1998). His two novels are *The Visitation* (1980) and *The Emperor* (1984).

Nadine Gordimer once commented that Essop is simply so true to his insights and observations that nothing appears to be, or is, contrived. Lionel Abrahams observed that Essop's style is simple and direct,

his subtlety is born out of nothing more or less than his fascination with the endlessly varied ways of the human heart. Thence the power to amuse, delight, move and challenge us. Thence an achievement of a timeless sort.

In an endeavour to shift South African Indian writings to the centre of this country's reception, appreciation and teaching of English literature, I found it appropriate to research a community bard who takes up the responsibility of recording individual histories of the 'other', and in the process provides a unique dimension of South African life.

**RC** How has your background influenced your writing?

**AE** Well, firstly, I was influenced by my teachers. I attended the Waterfall Indian Islamic Institute which is halfway between Johannesburg and Pretoria and I had wonderful teachers like Krishna Pillay and Rajoo Pillay who were very interested in literature. Even in Standard 4 we were already reading Dickens and I remember in Standard 6, I started to read Conrad. The Principal, Mr Drackmeyer was a man who was interested in the arts, music and literature. We used to read a great deal and reading played a very important part in our lives.

Culturally, of course, the school was a seminary as well, and religious activities played an important part of our learning and education.

I lived in a place called Fordsburg for about 15 years. It was essentially an Indian suburb, but there were people from other groups who also lived there. Nearby was the suburb called, Pageview, also known as Vrededorp. We lived very close to each other, many houses had shared walls and it was a sort of Casbah—a communal existence. People visit you, you talk to your neighbours, and there was this joy in Fordsburg and Pageview. In Lenasia we lived as the whites lived, with high walls and edges and so on, but in Fordsburg and Pageview doors were always open. You could walk into anybody's home at any time. There was no need to phone them and make appointments. People walked in the streets and sat on the porches and verandas and there was a kind of friendship, a close-knit community.

The Majestic and Avalon cinemas were there and we were in close contact with people. Politics was a common topic then and many politicians lived amongst us. There was a square called Red Square where I listened to politicians such as Dr. Dadoo, Mandela and Dr. Moraka, the then president of the ANC. Of course, the police were always present when meetings were being held.

**RC** What has been your perceptions of South African literature during apartheid?

**AE** Well, I felt that the human element had to be predominant in our writings. Apartheid formed one aspect of life. There are many other aspects of life. I was exposed to the different aspects of life in the community. There were humour, joy, marriages, funerals and so on. I felt that in my writings I should present a comprehensive whole, rather than selecting one aspect, the apartheid aspect, the aspect of oppression. That was one aspect of our lives. It was not to constitute our entire life.

**RC** Critics often distinguished between those writers who linked their work with political activism and those that wrote about themes other than protest. Do you see writers that did not write against apartheid as having had a different constituency?

**AE** If you were not exposed to the apartheid situation, perhaps living in the country, black writers or white writers, could give an account of life in those areas where apartheid did not have an immediate or daily effect. There were also the human relationships and the personal relationships and so on. I see no reason why that should be excluded from literature. It can constitute literature as well. One did not have to write about apartheid if you did not want to.

The realities of apartheid intruded into many of my stories, but the people of Fordsburg achieved a distinctive identity through their personal dilemmas and concerns. South African life involves a complexity of issues, not only apartheid.

**RC** How did you handle the tension between politics and aesthetics in your writings?

**AE** I think that one can combine aesthetics with reality. The apartheid situation is an aspect of reality, and art, I think, has to write about reality. So aesthetics and reality, the human experience, have to be combined. The socio-political reality is just one part of my life that I wish to present. I refuse to limit the scope of my art and I also resist the attempt to pigeonhole my writings.

**RC** Were there any negative aspects of writing during apartheid?

**AE** Look, there were books that were banned. It could affect the writers who think that if they are going to write about apartheid, nobody is going to publish it. In my own case, I was very fortunate in that I appeared in a time when there were a number of literary journals such as *Contrast*, *Seseme*, *Staffrider*, and other journals which published my writings and there were publishing houses like Ravan Press who were fearless in publishing protest works. *Staffrider* was published by Ravan Press. I was also very fortunate that I had friends such as Lionel Abrahams and Mike Kirkwood who were literary people. Mike Kirkwood, of course, was the director of Ravan Press at that time and he published my works.

**RC** Which writer, if any, did you admire most and had the greatest influence on your writings? I note that Lionel Abrahams draws parallels between your writings and that of V.S. Naipaul and Bosman.

**AE** I first of all grew up on Dickens and Conrad. South African literature never appeared in our prescribed lists of readings at school in our times. The first South African book that I picked up was *A story of an African Farm*. Yes, (V.S.) Naipaul was an influence. But, I also read other West Indian writers such as Wilson. I read most of Wilson's works. I have been brought up on English literature. I did a BA and majored in English and then did an Honours in English at Wits. Then I read R.K. Narayan and Ruth Jhabvala whose works I loved, and also Anita Desai. It was these Indian writers who were my favourites. One gets influenced by writers, but it is essential to keep one's own perception, style, and the aesthetic part is one's own. The question is: How are you going to present that work? That you will have to work out on your own.

**RC** How do you feel about short stories as compared to novels? How do they differ in the actual writing?

**AE** There are segments of experience that can be put into a short story form and other segments that require a larger canvas. So, I found that I could write a short story in three pages and another in ten. And then, of course, for the novels, *The Visitation* and *The Emperor*, I realised that what I had to say had to take a novel

form. The short story is very demanding because you want to exclude everything that does not focus on what you want to convey in terms of the message. It can be a segment of experience, or it may be a character that I wish to create, or some meaning I wish to convey. But, I have to do that artistically. What I like of the short story form is that I can spend a lot of time on the sentences, syntax, choice of words and the diction. I enjoy the fine workmanship and I also write with a pen and then I type it. So, I am still very primitive in that I do not use the wordprocessor.

**RC** When you work on short stories do you look for something to link them to make a collection?

**AE** Well, it can follow quite naturally. Many of my stories are set in Fordsburg and Pageview, and they are linked geographically. Some stories are set in Lenasia and few are set in Eldorado Park, Durban and overseas. But, the stories get linked with their particular locality. I lived there for 15 years, I know the names of the streets, the names of the buildings and I also use the actual names of the area like Fordsburg, Lenasia, and so on. Other writers, of course, invent names like Narayan's Malgudi.

**RC** Are some of the stories in *Noorjehan and Other Stories* autobiographical?

**AE** No. I do not write autobiography. There are experiences in life which I draw on. There are people that I know. I recreate that imaginatively so that they are not quite the people that I know. No one has come to me and said, 'look, that's me'. There was no Mr Moonreddy. The writer uses his or her experience. Sometimes the story may be close to a character in the community but it is not the same character. For example, the character Gool, the gangster. There was a man in Fordsburg who had that sort of power and reputation. When I wrote the story, I wanted a man who is very intelligent, and also a man who reads. Apparently, our local gangsters could not read, although they had this great power. Gool also had great admiration for beauty. So, he is quite a different man when compared with the local gangster. And then, of course, in 'The Novel', a story in *The King of Hearts and Other Stories*, a renowned Fordsburg gangster comes to visit me and claims that he is the character in the novel *The Visitation*. He tries to re-enact some of the incidents in the novel. That was one of my funnier stories. Many people identify my stories with our gangsters. A local gangster who passed away a few years ago in Fordsburg was told of this book in which he appeared. He was very pleased. Of course, he could not read (laughs).

**RC** You have explored major feminist issues on different levels in *Noorjehan and Other Stories*. What made you tackle the question of women's rights?

**AE** I knew many ladies who were educated at Wits and who taught at the private schools where I taught. I was a teacher for about 35 years. There were many lady teachers and I was very impressed by some of them. Anyway, I never felt that women were inferior to men in intelligence. Some of the girls that I taught were brilliant students and I felt that they could equal men in any way. So, it is the character Zenobia Hansa in *The Emperor* whom we are talking about. As far as Islamic religion goes, the woman has complete rights, even the right to divorce her husband. I needed women characters who are strong.

One must remember that women were never liberated until the industrial revolution, really. When they go to work and they have their own resources, they become independent. I also knew women in the political movement. I was part of the Unity Movement for a period. I was also part of the Black Consciousness Movement for a period and we met in small groups. In Fordsburg, although I was not part of the Indian Congress, I attended many of their meetings and I came to know political figures like Amina Cachalia and her sister. There were many women, like Ruth First, who spoke on platforms. I drew from my experience. None of the women characters are real. I am not writing sociology or biography. I have to re-create and give them qualities. During 1975-1976 when I had problems with the education department there were many men and women who supported me in my struggle with the authorities.

**RC** Which are your favourite short stories from your own writings and Why?

**AE** (Hesitation) That is a very difficult question to answer. I enjoyed the whole process of creation and spent a year or two writing some of the stories.

Well, some of the stories that I am close to are 'Noorjehan' and 'The Hajji'. Some experiences in the process of creation of the story are enjoyable. Many of the issues in *The Emperor* were my ideas on education that I presented. Some of the incidents are actual events. For instance, there was a teacher who had been charged in the Chief Magistrate's court for not doing his daily forecast. It was a male teacher, not Zenobia, so in the whole process I had to recreate that. The demands of the novels are quite different from writing a bit of history. 'The Hajji' also seems to appear most often in anthologies.

**RC** Did you forge any links with other South African Indian writers?

**AE** In Lenasia I met Ronnie Govender when he came with some of his plays, so I know Ronny. And I know Deena (Padayachee). I met him in Grahamstown. He came to my home and I am in communication with him. Then, of course, there are the poets Farouk Asvat, Essop Patel and Achmad Dangor. There was a period when there was a writer's organisation called PEN. But, eventually, that was dissolved. Today I do not meet any writers.

**RC** Is there a valid category called South African Indian writings?

**AE** Yes. That category relates to a particular group of people and their experiences in their own localities created by apartheid. But, I think, even if there was no Group Areas Act, Indians would live together, in that we share certain cultural values and there is also a joy in community living.

My stories manifest themselves most immediately as mirrors on the life of the Indian community, and in a larger sense, South Africa as a whole. A tale like 'Jericho Again' bemoans the apartheid demolition of Fordsburg and the exile of the inhabitants to Lenasia.

There is enough South African Indian literature already, and the more that we have the better. This is a new era now. Indians are moving away from their group areas, but areas like Lenasia will lie intact for many years, I think, because of shared values. I think all of our writers are not writing parochially, they are also dealing with human nature, and human nature is essentially the same all over the world, although values are shifting.

During apartheid very few South African works were prescribed at schools. Now, some writings are prescribed. What can happen is that we will have the emergence of more Indian writings although reading and writing is on the decline because of the advent of TV.

**RC** How have the critics received your writings? Has this informed your subsequent writings?

**AE** Well, I have been very pleased. Generally it has been very positive. Whatever I wrote was not confined to Indians only. I always tried to present a larger human dimension—not only here but also outside. One of my stories has been translated into German, several into Dutch and French. *The Hajji and Other Stories* and *The Visitation* were published as a one volume edition by Readers International in New York and London. Jacques Alvarez-Pereyre has been trying to translate two of my novels into French.

**RC** What are your reflections on the House of Delegates banning of *The Hajji and Other Stories* as a school text in 1984 based on religious grounds?

**AE** It was prescribed in 1984 and recommended by the English Society of the Indian Teachers Association. Thirteen to fourteen thousand copies were bought by schools in Lenasia and Natal. After about three months, the book was withdrawn. No reasons were given. The Hindu Maha Sabha in Durban objected to the story about the Hindu firewalker and complained that a character in the book referred to the sari as an ugly Hindu garment. It was taken out of context. Characters comment in texts; I deal with characters and realities and it is not Ahmed Essop saying that. I created a character who had a particular vision about certain things. The Maha Sabha felt that I



had attacked the Hindu community. If the character makes positive or negative comments about something that is not my view, it is the character's view. I am dealing with the world of human beings and human beings have different views about different objects. And I had to create a comprehensive picture of life if it is going to be worth anything.

I am not sure if they did not use this to get back at me. The authoritarian hand of the education department persecuted me by arbitrarily transferring me to four different schools in one year. I took them to court and a protracted three-year court case came to nothing. They felt embarrassed that the man that they put out of teaching now had a book on the school's prescribed list. The director of Indian education had dictatorial powers and he did not have to give reasons for his actions.

**RC** What have you been reading recently?

**AE** I continue reading South African writings and the few journals that are still around. I also read history, philosophy, and so on. At present, I read about the new era. One era has passed and a new era has arrived. I question how people live in the new era, how they perceive it, and how they see the future.

**RC** Are you working on any new material at the moment?

**AE** I have finished my third collection of stories. There are a number of stories there that deal with this present era and my own vision of where I see it going. I have some ideas for a few stories that I will work on.

**RC** What message do you have for the readers out there?

**AE** When reading declines, civilisation declines. There is a lack of appreciation of the beauty of a sentence, and of poetry. Our teachers do not read, they only read prescribed works. Neela Alvarez-Pereyre, when she visited from France, mentioned that people in academic circles in this country have not heard of my texts. The writings from India, Australia, the West Indies and Canada are the great rivers that flow into the ocean of English Literature.

We must read the literature of Britain, but also 'other' writings as well. If you have not read writings from India then you have not read a dimension of English literature. It is the same case with South African Indian writings.

\* I would like to record my gratitude to Ahmed Essop for the hospitality extended by himself and his wife, Farida.

## Laduma by Alfred T. Qabula

Laduma landindiza lakhiza lakhemezela  
Ingani bayithintile iminyovuu neziqandu  
Lapho inqonqozo inyathi isithi umpondo nesihlanu ngelanga  
Abaqashi abayishayangamkhuba  
Bona bathi eyiti sheleni ngelanga.  
Babe bayithintile iminyovu, iziqandu zagcwa'umgwaqo.

Imikhumbi yanqwabelana olwandle  
bakhal'onxiwankulu bathi wasenza Phungula  
Ingani abadlali bengoma uthe mabadube, khona sizokufa yindlala  
Ishwa laphuma nawe mfoka Phungula  
Onxiwankulu baz'ukuthi uma uhol'abantu  
Abantu benza lokh'obatshela khona

Yab'ibhonga ibhukud'inyathi  
Nemikhumbi ayibanga nabo abethuli  
Abangazi babuza kwaba nolwazi ukuthi  
Ngubani oyithintil'inyathi ?  
Laduma lamthath'okaPhungula  
Ingani abakwasidlodlo bamhlafuna bamshwabadela ?  
Bamgalela kwebandayo izisele  
Besithinguy'umsusi wothuthuva ?

Kunjenje yiwena othe abayibeke phans'insimbi.  
Phungula hambubatshele bay'emsebenzini  
Ulaphanje yimisebenzi yakho.  
Angithi yiwen'ushumayeli wevangeli lobukhomanisi ?  
Lababantu usubabaphendule amahlongandlebe  
Abasezwalutho abalutshelwa abaqashi babo

Angithi sowabagxisha izimfundiso zamakhomanisi  
Sebemakhand'alukhuni ngathi bakhula beselus'amabhubesi  
Singakusiza thina ngoba siyezwelana nawe,  
akukuhle ukuba ubelapha, uyindoda ehloniphekile  
Singakuyisa kubo wen'ubatshele bakhohlwe abakucelayo  
Mababuyel'enkomeni sebezoholelwa u eyiti sheleni ngelanga  
Wen'uzokuba sewukhululekile ngokwenzenjalo

Yaqhamuka iveni intengantenga ihlomeka  
Uphaphe selungathi yisiswebhu somshayili wespani sezinkabi  
Yema, qede abakwasidlodlo bamehlisa okaMsapho.  
Wema, wabingelela, Shaka Bayeeethe Zuuulu  
Amadashi abona ukuthi uGeneral Botha walwa

Aseqala ukuthi abamnyama balunge kakhulu  
Masilwele ukufa nokuphila desikuthole esikudingayo  
Angazi ukuthi uzakubayini umphumela walokhu ?  
Njengokuba izwe sebasephuca lona  
Niyabona manje? sibambela igolide nedayimani  
Bona inye kuphela into abayenzayo.  
Bahlala kweziphakeme izihlalo  
Yingani bengasiniki okwanele okuyizidingo zethu  
Abamhlophe bathi manginitshela nibuyel'ebenzini  
Khona bezakungidedela,  
ngoba akungifanelanga ukuhlal'ejele  
Mina ngimisele ngokufa, nokudonsa ejele ukuze ngilimel'iqiniso  
Zaphendul'izinyathi zathi  
Abamhlophe mabangacabangi ukuthi,  
isiteleka lese akusona esikaPhungula  
Siteleke ngoga sifuna ukusebenzela umpondo nesihlanu nglanga  
Kade basiqala besixhaphaza, manje bafik'ekugcineni

Zadidizela izibonkolo, zaphithizela iziqandu,  
yaveva iminyovu, uyoguga ubazi abantu  
Yanqwabelana imikhumbi olwandle  
Zagcwal'igaz'izinhliziyi kubaqashi bagcwalizibhedlela  
Ingani siyavunguz'isiphepho ? ashw'axeg'amadolo kumatilosi  
Yibambeni zinkunz'ezimidwayidwa kukuxhatshazwa nencindezelo

Igalelo lenu liyezwakala, ngish'umhlaba wonke uyenanela  
Zinsizwa zakwa Sibitolo qinani nigcwale amandla,  
umzabalazo wenu ungowabo bonke basebenzi baseMzans'Afrika  
Kade basiqala besixhaphaza, besicindezela, namanje basaqhubeka  
Masiyilwe ngobumbano lempi mAfrika ukuze siyinqobe.  
Shaka Bayeeethe Zuuulu.  
Ngu Thembe.

## Its Thundering by Alfred T. Qabula

Its thundering drisling and slightly raining  
they have disturbed the wasps and army ants  
when the buffalo kunks saying two pounds fifty shillings a day  
The employers, they did not pay attention to it  
They just imposed eight shillings a day  
that was when they disturbed the wasps  
They were scattered in the roads

Ships were flocking into the sea  
the capitalists cried  
saying if it was not you Phungula  
Since he said the dancers must boycott dancing  
so that we should die of hunger

Bad luck came out with you son of Phungula  
The capitalists always think that if you lead the people,  
people do what you tell them to do  
Then the buffaloes roars and stampered  
even the ships were not off loaded  
Those who did not understand  
they asked from those with knowledge  
As who touched it on its tail ?

It thundered and take away Phungula  
The police ground him swallowing him  
and he was dumped to the cold cells  
saying you are the trouble maker  
As if, its you who said  
they should put down the tools  
Phungula go and tell them  
to go back to work.  
You are in here for your deeds

Are you not a communist gospel preacher ?  
You've influenced those people  
not to listen to their employers  
You spoon fed them with communism  
now they are hard headed

as if they grew up as the lion's shepherd

We can help you, we sympathize with you  
its not good that you are here  
you're a respected man

We can send you to persuade them  
to forget about what they want,  
they must go to work  
they'll be paid eight shillings per day  
By so doing you'll be a free man.

There comes the van speedily  
uncontrollable  
with its long aerial  
waving like of a farmer whip  
driving his ox span  
It stopped  
the police released the Masapho's son  
He stood and greet, Shaka, Bayeeethe Zuuuulu

The Dutch people noticed  
that General Botha fought  
They started to say  
the black people are so kind

Let's fight a life and death struggle  
Till we get what we want.  
Since they confiscated the land  
I don't know what will be the answer to this  
Do you see now ?  
we are digging gold and diamonds for them  
The only thing they do  
is to sit on highest chairs  
Why don't they give us enough of what we need ?

The whites say I must tell you  
to go back to work  
So that they can release me  
because to stay in jail is not for me  
I am prepared to die  
to stay in jail

to stand for the truth  
The Buffaloes answered  
the whites must not think  
that this strike is Phungula's strike  
we are engaged in the strike  
because we want to work  
for two pounds five shillings a day  
We've long been exploited  
and oppressed  
now they have come to an end.

The army ants wandered around  
and the wasps were up and down  
shivering  
you'll know the people  
before you get old.  
The ships flocked to the sea  
The employer's hearts  
were filled with blood  
The hospitals were full for them  
Because the strong winds are blowing  
the sailor's knees started to loosen

Hold it there buffaloes  
with scratches in their bodies  
because of oppression and exploitation  
Your effort has been heard  
Even the whole world is echoing  
Stevedoor workers be courageous  
and have strength  
Your struggle is for every worker of South Africa  
They started long ago  
exploiting and oppressing us  
And they are still carrying on.  
Lets fight this war  
in unity Africans so as to conquer.  
Shaka, Zuuulu Bayeeethe  
You are the great.