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# Alternation

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## ARTICLES

<i>Judith Lütge Coullie</i> Introduction: Symptoms, Theories and Scholarship ..	1
<i>Pamela Ryan</i> Plain Women and Ladies in a Strange Country .....	6
<i>Elmar Lehmann</i> Douglas Blackburn and the Anglo-Boer War .....	28
<i>David Burchell</i> 'Let Down Your Bucket Where You Are'. A Critique of The Curriculum at the University College of Fort Hare in its Pioneer Years .....	41
<i>Vasu Reddy</i> Witnessing the Knowable Past: Knowledge, Truth and Humanity in Three Testimonies .....	62
<i>Johan Coetser</i> Afrikaans Theatre: Reflections of Identity .....	81
<i>Jean-Philippe Wade</i> 'Sparks of Carnival fire': Alan Paton's 'The Quarry' (1967) and the Bakhtinian Carnavalesque .....	105
<i>Miki Flockemann</i> Fictions of Home and (Un)belonging: Diasporan Frameworks in Michelle Cliff's <i>Abeng</i> and Zoë Wicomb's 'Journey to the Gifberge' .....	116
<i>Themba Moyo</i> Malawi's Marginalisation of Indigenous Languages in Literary Publications .....	134
<i>Sinthe Qono</i> South Africa within Global and Post-Apartheid Constraints ..	150
<i>Jabulani Mkhize</i> Literary Prospects in 'Post-Apartheid' South Africa .....	170
<i>Gerrie Snyman</i> 'Who am I?' Thoughts on Fabricating the Body in Postcolonial/ Post-apartheid South Africa .....	188
<i>Wilhelm Verwoerd</i> On our Moral Responsibility for Past Violations .....	219

## INTERVIEWS

<i>Rajendra Chetty</i> At the Edge: An Interview with Ronnie Govender .....	243
---	-----

## DEBATES

<i>Damian Clarke</i> 'My dear lads ...': GA Henty, Author of Empire, and the New South Africa .....	254
<i>Myrtle Hooper</i> The Ethics of Reading: Conrad's <i>The Secret Agent</i> .....	259

## BOOK REVIEWS

<i>David Bennett</i> Breakout: Cyberporn, Privacy and Reality-effects .....	270
<i>Elizabeth Thompson</i> African Unity .....	277
<i>N.N. Mathonsi</i> Common Ground .....	280
<i>Lazarus Chifumbe Mulenga</i> Gender .....	282

## RECENT BOOK REVIEWS

<i>Judith Lütge Coullie</i> Recent Reviews of Life Writing Publications .....	286
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# Introduction: Symptoms, Theories and Scholarship

Judith Lütge Coullie

About fifteen kilometres up the coast from Durban, on the warm Indian Ocean, lies the coastal tourist resort of Umhlanga Rocks. Two or three decades ago, this was a little village (for whites only), attracting holiday makers to its sandy beaches. One of its erstwhile residents, Meta Orton, in her privately published autobiography, recalls this much more quiet time, before a mega-mall and crowding skyscrapers arose out of the sugarcane and dune scrub. But the rather quaint title which she has chosen—*The World and Umhlanga Rocks*—reminds us that even then, insularity was not guaranteed.

In attempting to account for the breadth of the subject matter dealt with in this volume I was reminded of Orton's title, since this issue brings together a number of diverse essays whose subject matter could perhaps be collectively described as 'The World and southern Africa' (or vice versa). With papers ranging from those which focus on the syllabi at Fort Hare (David Burchell) to the suppression of indigenous languages in Malawi (Themba Moyo); from Ronnie Govender's Cato Manor (Rajendra Chetty) to G.A. Henty's British colonising stronghold (Damian Clarke); and from Cape Town to Jamaica (Miki Flockemann), this issue demonstrates that there are no boundaries which can keep the world at bay or distinct from our southern part of this continent.

Casting a wide net geographically, the essays also cast a wide temporal net. In addition to those already mentioned, the essays range from those focusing on the Anglo-Boer War (also known as the South African War), at the turn of the last century (Elmar Lehmann's essay on Douglas Blackburn) to contemporary cyber-porn (David Bennett's review essay); from Alan Paton's apartheid South Africa (Jean-Philippe Wade) to post-apartheid fiction (Jabulani Mkhize). Pam Ryan's 'Plain Women and Ladies in a Strange Country' considers the ways in which three colonial women in the British colony of Port Natal in the mid-nineteenth century wrote about home and Home. J.L. Coetser, Myrtle Hooper and Vasu Reddy bring together divergent material in each of their essays. Coetser surveys a century of Afrikaans theatre while Hooper questions the ethics of reading and teaching, with specific

reference to Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* and J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*. Reddy's essay on testimony juxtaposes the memoirs of the Boer War General, Denys Reitz, the anti-apartheid freedom fighter, Albie Sachs, and the Nobel prize-winning writer, Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Sinthi Qono turns her attention to issues which are current (and perhaps, for many, painfully raw), problems relating to globalisation and the economy in post-apartheid South Africa. G.F. Snyman and Wilhelm Verwoerd focus on ethical responsibilities in post-apartheid South Africa.

Many of these essays are clearly at home in a journal dedicated (as the inside cover reveals) to the study of 'Southern African Literature and Languages', but some may seem to be quite foreign to these 'fields'. Is nothing sacred?

Not that long ago, Tony Parr (1996:76) expressed his regret at the loss of a clearly defined discipline of 'English Literary Studies'. There may be numerous *Alternation* readers who sympathise with Parr's wistfulness. Moreover, the desire to keep boundaries intact, to secure definition and demarcation, can be justified on the grounds of manageability; pursuance of specific and localised goals; theoretical and conceptual development within clear parameters; and the maintenance of traditional (and generally acknowledged) trajectories. But the clarity and delimitation were by no means unproblematic. Eurocentrism, élitism, racism and sexism (to name just the most obvious) could flourish quite unnoticed when 'prac. crit.' dominated the discipline. How many readers remember when the 'English Literature' syllabus was almost exclusively British, when American literature was largely relegated to the margins, barely rising above its diminished status as the product of an erstwhile colony, and South African (and Caribbean and Indian and Australian and so on) offerings were hardly able to earn the epithet 'literature'? Such days belong, for South Africans, with memories (probably—hopefully—quite hazy) of the excesses of apartheid: the police state which infiltrated all lives and that deathly Sunday-*verkramptheid*. However, even those whose recollections of the era are uncontaminated by political context would concede, that at this point—having learned hugely from Marxism, structuralism, post-structuralism, deconstruction, feminism and post-colonial theory—nostalgia isn't what it used to be. The unavoidable ventures out of the safety zone of previously seemingly insular knowledge systems such as literary studies have been both necessary and beneficial to our understanding. In any case, disciplinary porosity, embraced in the radical theories aforementioned (with what was, at least in the early days of each, revolutionary zeal), cannot be stopped.

At South African universities, partly in response to such theoretical movements and the resultant conceptual shifts, and partly in response to much more recent pressures from the State, inter-disciplinary 'programmes' are increasingly replacing discrete disciplinary 'majors', and multi-disciplinary schools are assimilating departments. Unsurprisingly, this volume comprises essays informed by

diverse discourses whose boundaries are now rather less distinct than they were twenty or even ten years ago. In this issue, analyses which emerge from, and are informed by, the concerns of history, economics, cultural studies, education, philosophy and ethics rub shoulders with—indeed, in certain of the papers, *infuse* and certainly invigorate—literary and language studies. It is hoped that all readers, of whatever leanings, will find the array of approaches represented in this collection relevant and challenging.

One of the dangers of interdisciplinarity—and it is one which the scholars whose work is reproduced in this volume seem to me to have avoided—is that the desire to draw on, and draw in, varied approaches to the constitution of knowledge can result in a lack of clarity of conceptual focus. Whether we share Parr's sentiments or not, his concerns should serve to remind us that as academics, of whatever discipline, we need at least to be constantly aware of the perils of trying to do too much and of positioning ourselves as experts in a range of disparate disciplines. Perhaps it is a sign of the times that there is evidence in this collection of a turning of the tide towards a more modest scholarly reach, a more carefully substantiated, more circumscribed analysis.

We also see evidence in several of these essays of what appears to be a rather widespread movement—something of an apparent retreat in the Humanities from 'Grand Theory'. This trend away from grand abstractions and generalisations is to be welcomed to the extent that it entails a move away from what—in much academic writing in the 'eighties and 'nineties—manifested itself as a kind of intellectual 'groupie-ism' in which the writer would seek to score 'brownie-points' by aligning her/himself, by means of mantra-like references, to some or other academic celebrity. Analytical rigour in such writing was sacrificed to rhetorical genuflection before the latest, hottest theorist. Generally, the essays in this issue seem to have eschewed that kind of lapse in scholarship which is manifested in arguments which are shored up by shrewd name-dropping. Parr (1996:75) had something to say about this too:

I have lost count of the times I have encountered ... a referenced comment about the colonial encounter or the origins of subjecthood ... and obediently traced number to note hoping to find some supporting evidence, only to read instead something like 'here I am using Spivak's/Bhabha's/Foucault's notion of ...'. This reveals very little besides a dependence on the new counter-canon of cultural prophets ....

Parr is right, of course, in arguing that an almost religious reverence for the ideas—or, in some instances, what are only dimly understood to be the ideas—of intellectual hotshots should be avoided. So, too, should any kind of complacent sense



that we have now emerged into a conceptual world beyond theory. There is no such world, and to try to find or create it is misguided. One of the ideas that theorists have persuaded even conservatives to recognise is that all conceptual systems, whether monological or pluralistic, are informed by (explicit or implicit) theories. If I may be forgiven for referring to a 'Big Name', it is as well to heed Foucault's warning that 'everything is dangerous' (quoted in Sawicki 1988:189); no political or theoretical models (even those which are eclectic and iconoclastic; even those which apparently eschew theory) are free from possible abuse.

The 'best' theories do not constitute a very effective protection against disastrous political choices .... I do not conclude from this that one may say just anything within the order of theory, but, on the contrary, that a demanding, prudent, 'experimental' attitude is necessary; at every moment, step by step, one must confront what one is thinking with what one is doing, with what one is (Foucault 1984:374).

It is with this warning in mind that I am especially pleased to have been able to include the essays of Gerrie Snyman, Sinthi Qono and Wilhelm Verwoerd. They are likely to provoke debate because they address issues which are crucial to the continued attempt to achieve the fulfillment of the project of democratisation, namely, non-racialism, non-sexism and a more equitable distribution of wealth which climaxed—but was not completed—in the installation of South Africa's first democratically elected government in 1994 and the subsequent adoption of the new constitution. For instance, however fervent and widespread the desire to move on from race-obsession may be in post-apartheid South Africa, and however strongly emphasised is the desire to shun gender-based discrimination, few would contend that resolution has been achieved or that popular rhetoric addresses the issues adequately. Realities of life in South Africa today belie the arguments that the gap between rich and poor is narrowing or that racism can be combated by a studied oblivion to race, or that sexism has disappeared because legislation prohibits it. Rhetoric and idealism fail to stand up to scrutiny or experience. In his analysis of post-apartheid literary production, Jabulani Mkhize recognises these perpetuated differences, as does Sarah Penny in her memoirs, *The Whiteness of Bones*. Writing about her experiences in post-independence Zimbabwe, Penny recounts how she discovers that her fear of rape is mixed with her own previously unacknowledged racism and that the liberal slogans denouncing all prejudices have little validity. But she realizes, also, that even if she can eradicate her own unconscious prejudices, the problem will not go away. When she is mocked and groped by Zimbabwean men, she can no longer deny that it is her race as much as her gender which marks her as a target:

This black/white thing, this man/woman thing—I wanted these divisions to be myths only, but they would not become myths. I am mocked because I am white, I am molested because I am a girl. If I pretend not to see the divisions, they will still exist and others will insist on them. Africa is a continent of polarisations.

To the black mass I am the enemy.

For the first time in my life, I was essentially aware of myself not as a young woman, but as a young white woman.

A member of the white race (Penny 1997:118).

I would argue that only a minority of South Africans (black or white, female or male) experience persistent divisions in such extreme terms. Nevertheless, Penny's reluctant admission that race and gender are still significant markers of difference is instructive.

In 1956, after the destruction of the black freehold suburb of Sophiatown, Dr. H.F. Verwoerd, the architect of apartheid, declared triumphantly: 'apartheid is relevant in every sphere of life' (quoted by Lewsen 1996:154). Many of the essays in this issue point to the fact that that statement, and its corollary—that colonialism's legacy lives on—are not yet untrue. The essays written by Dr. H.F. Verwoerd's grandson, Wilhelm Verwoerd, Snyman and Qono, in particular, bring to our attention the momentous questions which still need to be asked in order to ensure that this fledgling nation, still struggling to imagine into being the 'new South Africa', can embrace all its people, regardless of race, ethnicity or gender.

University of Durban-Westville  
School of Languages and Literature

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# Plain Women and Ladies in a Strange Country

Pamela Ryan

The concept of home is needed (and in fact can only be thought) only after the home has already been left behind. In a strict sense, then, one has always already left home, since home can only exist as such at the price of it being lost (Van den Abeele).

From the far plains of Southern Africa—from the shady valleys—from the wooded banks of gliding streams and noisy torrents—from the dark recesses of the deep ravines—from the cultivated lands of the industrious settler—from the well-filled cattle-fold of the idle and ferocious savage—from the smoky hut of the indolent Hottentot—and from the tent and bivouac of the soldier—let the Truth be heard! Ye philanthropists—fallacious reasoners on subjects of which ye know nothing certain, who romanticise about savages and slavery till ye get entangled in a web of metaphysics of your own weaving, from which ye have neither the power nor the courage to extricate yourselves—who would leave the savage in undisturbed possession of a vast tract of country as much in need of population as England is of the reverse; who would take the yoke from the slave's neck and send him forth—free, indeed, in body, but trammelled in mind with sin and sorrow, since he knows not how to live, or to earn a living—hear the voice of Truth! (Harriet Ward).

Harriet Ward, far from 'home', writes back from the Cape Colony in 1848, using rhetoric typical of the Victorian colonial voice. Here is the metropolitan vision of darkest Africa, the colonial narrative of the good settler and the indolent indigene,

and the pragmatic declaration to the ignorant liberals who make laws but fail to see the consequences of their actions.

In this article, I intend to examine different forms of rhetoric in the colonial memoir written by English women who settled in Natal, South Africa, during the mid-nineteenth century. The act of retrieving, reading and reporting on unfamiliar texts by women is, of course, in itself a feminist endeavour and it has become a feminist commitment 'to draw on women's daily lives as a resource for analysing society' (Frankenburg 1993:6). The memoirs, which were written during 1852—1876, situate my paper within an historical enterprise, but because they are all written by British colonial women, and because I am a white woman, born and raised in Natal, this paper is, by necessity, a postcolonial critique, both of the texts and of myself, who is implicated in the colonial attitudes on which I will elaborate. In order to discuss the colonial memoir, I will identify a range of different and often competing discourses, using a variety of theoretical tools, including colonial discourse analysis, within a context which is feminist, historical, and postcolonial and which makes use of anthropology to illuminate the deep structures of human interaction.

If justification is required for focusing on the texts of white women in the colonies, I can cite Simon Gikandi's suggestion that 'students of colonial discourse and postcolonial theory do not know what to do with the women of empire' (Gikandi 1996:121). In addition, this is a relatively neglected field in that little attention has been paid to settler writing (although this is becoming more closely investigated than hitherto) because the urge has been, understandably, to research issues surrounding decolonization and black women's writing. My paper benefits, therefore, from recent scholarship on colonialism (see particularly Stoler 1997; Callaway 1987; Mills 1994; Blunt 1994; Whitlock 1996; and Pridmore 1997) which replaces the narrative of men and public events with an interdisciplinary inquiry into those cultural formations that foreground the routines and rituals of everyday life. Following Gillian Whitlock (1996:69), I will avoid 'expressive views of authorship and text in which literature floats free of social and cultural determinants' by situating the texts within their historical and cultural contexts and endeavouring not to elide 'deeply embedded contradiction and resistance' (Whitlock 1996:69). Further, my focus is on settler writing and not travel writing (although the case of Catherine Barter is situated somewhere between the two). Investigations of the discursive formations of the settler or colonial woman differ from those of the 'lady' traveller in that the necessity to accept that the colonised country is 'home' complicates the accompanying need to belong to the imperial centre (abroad). There is thus a difference between the writing of temporary visitors to South Africa and those who are settled.

I will be dealing mainly with three texts: *Alone Among the Zulus*, by Catherine Barter (1866), describing a journey she made by ox wagon from

Pietermaritzburg across the border of Natal and into Zululand; *My African Home or Bush Life in Natal When a Young Colony 1852-1857*, by Eliza Whigham Feilden, describing the domestic life of a middle-class woman in the 1850s; and *A Year's Housekeeping in South Africa*, by Lady Barker, describing the year 1875-1876. I shall also make passing references to other memoirs written during this period.

The events recounted in these narratives take place after the annexation of Natal by the British in 1845 and before the Zulu victory over the British troops at Isandhlwane in 1879. Britain was reluctant to add yet another colony to the forty-three already under its control, especially as the Boers, who had trekked into Natal in the 1830s to escape British rule in the Cape Colony, were, understandably, unwilling to accept British authority in Natal. However, in an attempt to prevent possible conflict between the Boers and the Zulu, conflict which had the potential to disrupt the chiefdoms south of Natal and endanger the Cape's eastern frontier, the British reluctantly accepted that imperial authority would have to be extended over Natal<sup>1</sup>.

Natal was not deemed especially lucrative although it was known to have coal deposits and was believed to be suitable for cotton cultivation. The Imperial government believed, however, that the Boer families resident in Natal would remain, giving the new colony a white farming population. This belief was dashed when the 'Second Great Trek' of 1847 saw the departure of most Boer families from the new colony. The port settlement of Durban had sustained a small British population since 1824 but apart from the few traders and hunters in the town the only other British inhabitants in the colony were officials, troops and missionaries. It was only after the emigration schemes proposed and initiated by Joseph Byrne (1849-1851) that an established band of permanent settlers came into the area resulting in a swelling of the number of British settlers to 5000 during the period 1849-1852. The African inhabitants in the new colony, many of whom had entered Natal during the 1830s and 1840s as refugees from Zulu rule, were prepared to accept British authority as it offered them a guarantee of protection against retaliation from a resurgent Zulu kingdom under King Mpande. As a result of this fear of Zulu power, and of the fact that the small white settler population in the colony left an abundance of land for the Africans, there was little resistance to the settlement of white farmers among them.

At the same time, Mpande, wary of Boer expansion in the lands north-west of Natal, was anxious to maintain good relations with the colony. Because of this, the

<sup>1</sup> There seems to have been a sense of responsibility evidenced in the words of Earl Grey: '... the present state of Natal and of the black population which has flocked there for our protection affords a noble opportunity for the diffusion of Christianity and civilisation which it would be a disgrace to this country to neglect'. Earl Grey to Sir Harry Smith, 30 November, 1849, quoted in Hattersley (1950).

Thukela was an open border and 'increasing number of colonists were annually entering the Zulu kingdom to shoot wild animals and barter for cattle and other natural products' aided by the local inhabitants who were hospitable and willing to act as guides and hunters (Merrett 1995:28)<sup>2</sup>.

During the period of two of the memoirs (Barter's & Feilden's; 1852-1855), settlers lived mainly in wattle and daub houses and had access to schools, churches and limited entertainment including hunting and cricket. The memoirs are replete with references to the inconvenience of living with constant dust and mud, of terrifying thunderstorms, of gardening, and of trying to replicate the British way of life in social custom and in dress. In leaving 'home', most aim to recreate the feeling of home in the colony and managed to recreate an 'imagined community'<sup>3</sup>, in part by entertaining mythologies of heritage and family but also by writing home their sense of dislocation between their experience of their new home in Natal and their memory of old home in England.

However, I do not intend to embark on a description of the social customs of the settlers. Moreover, because I wish to avoid a realist rendering of the text, one that purports to provide access to the lives of the writers, the focus of this paper will fall on the discursive strategies used by women colonial writers. Similarly, I would not wish to offer a seamless account of colonialism or of women in colonial situations. Following Roland Barthes's suggestion that the reader is someone at a loose end, I will drop some stitches in this account, knowing that I will not be able to knit a perfect garment. My aim is neither to participate in a recuperation of colonial ideologies nor to judge the attitudes of the women I write about. Rather, I wish to allow the competing discourses to exist in an uneasy juxtaposition in the belief that women's daily lives can only be properly understood 'by "mapping" them onto broader social processes' (Frankenburg 1993:7). As Birkett and Wheelwright (1990:50) suggest:

Rather than explaining [unpalatable facts] away, we began to incorporate them into our subjects' biographies, making them integral rather than peripheral to our understanding of them. Our portraits became not those of simple feminist heroines, but of women rooted in their time.

Since I will be using the discourse of anthropology frequently in this paper, it would

<sup>2</sup> I am indebted to John Lambert for his assistance in portraying an accurate representation of the history of Natal during this time.

<sup>3</sup> The term is Benedict Anderson's from his book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983).

be as well to offer a description of the *preterrain*<sup>4</sup> of each of the women whose texts I shall be examining. I make use of this term from ethnography because the women who write their memoirs indulge, themselves, in a form of anthropological description when driven, as they all are, to send home written pictures of the indigenous people with whom they come in contact.

Catherine Barter (1995:1) begins her memoir thus:

I am a plain woman in every sense of the word: plain in person—as the looking-glass informs me; plain in dress as a matter of taste as well as of principle, for it is hardly a wise policy to draw attention by means of decoration to that which is not in itself attractive; plain in understanding, preferring simple matters to those more complicated; and plain in manner, as I have just cause to know, for the fact that I was ‘brusque’ was told me too often in my childhood to be ever forgotten.

I confess I have a partiality for plain speaking, which, although I have had some acquaintance with the world, has remained with me till the present day; and as the feeling has stood so much wear and tear, I believe it to be genuine.

Catherine is at pains to emphasise the veracity of her story, scornful of embellishment of any kind, as the description of her plain demeanour underscores. The voice here is one that immediately suggests a departure from the norm, and self-consciously announces that we are dealing here with a plain, but unusual, woman. The rhetoric defiantly sets itself against the stereotype of the Victorian woman for whom elegant dress and manners are of particular importance.

As the introduction to *Alone Among the Zulus* explains, Catherine Barter’s narrative is one of the earliest descriptions of travel in the Zulu kingdom and the first known account by a woman. It is an extraordinary story in which a woman travels with her driver on an ox-wagon to rescue her brother from certain death.

Catherine Barter was born in 1818 in Oxfordshire. Her paternal forbears were clergymen providing her with a legacy of institutionalised religion which she brought with her to Natal<sup>5</sup>. The decision to emigrate to the Natal colony seems to

have been a fairly impulsive one, suggested by her brother Charles, to whom she was devoted and for whom she felt responsible. She spent a total of twenty-six years in Natal, though these were interrupted by periods spent at home in England. *Alone Among the Zulus* is set during the first period of her stay in Natal, from 1852-1855 and is largely an account of her travel through Zululand in search of her brother, who was injured while on a hunting expedition. Her novel, *Home in South Africa* is packed with informative domestic details concerning life in Natal. In the years that she spent in Natal, she left a remarkable legacy, having on two occasions ‘adopted’ Zulu children and seen to their education. An unusual feature of her time in South Africa is her determination to learn the Zulu language prior to her arrival in South Africa and her subsequent ability to speak to the people with whom she came into contact. She opened a boarding school in England for the purpose of providing education for African children. Her scheme was to ‘buy’ African children from their parents, take them to England for an education and return them at age 16 so that they could in turn educate their parents. She successfully achieved her aim with Salome Welayo, the daughter of a Zulu man whom she had converted to Christianity. Salome learnt all the accomplishments of a typical Victorian woman, including playing the piano and speaking French. Catherine built a house for Salome and her husband, an Englishman, on her property *Wychwood* in Winterskloof outside Pietermaritzburg, and later transferred this property to Salome’s husband. Salome died in 1895 and was buried at *Wychwood*.

Catherine never married, but saw it as her duty to take care of her brother until he was married, following him to South Africa for this purpose. However, once these duties were discharged and she could safely leave him in the care of his wife, she took up her missionary aims in educating Salome and starting a boarding school. Her text presents the reader with a portrait of a lively, enterprising and ambitious woman.

Eliza Feilden’s *My African Home or Bush Life in Natal when a Young Colony* consists of a series of letters together with sections from her journal intended to interest friends who may have been curious about her life in Natal. The Feildens were well connected, Eliza’s husband Leyland being the son of Sir William Feilden, a wealthy and influential cotton manufacturer who was naturally interested in exploring Natal as a potential area for lucrative farming, and who sent his son to Natal on the *Edward*. Returning briefly to marry Elizabeth Kennedy, the couple sailed in 1852 on the *Jane Morice*, with intentions to make their home in Natal. Leyland soon discovered that sugar was likely to be a more lucrative crop than cotton, but stayed in Natal, at *Sea View*, only four years, before returning to England and living there until his death in 1915. Eliza’s text makes references to his ill-luck in making a success of sugar and other crops but is frustratingly expurgated by her desire not to depress either herself or her family with bad news. We are told of

<sup>4</sup> The ‘preterrain’ is, strictly speaking, the milieu from which the ethnographer departs, or, more loosely, the background of the ethnographer, his/her context. Instead of providing my own background, I prefer to treat the memoirists as the ethnographers and so provide here a brief description of where they come from.

<sup>5</sup> Indeed, *Alone Among the Zulus* was originally published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, and sold at the depositories in Great Queen Street, Lincoln’s Inn Fields.

catastrophes and reversals of fortune, accounts that are cut short with statements such as 'we have had many troubles which I have not liked to write down in my journal, to make it painful to read' (1887:94). Most extraordinary of all is the passing reference to the arrival of a premature child without a mention of pregnancy beforehand (I presume that this is a reference to a miscarriage).

Feilden's text provides details of domestic life in Durban, the centre of which consisted largely of sand dunes and bush, houses of wattle and daub with verandas and thatched roofs. G.C. Cato's store was regarded as the upmarket end of town but there were also busy manufacturers at the corner of Smith and Gardiner Streets. There were no roads and the grandest house, brick with a slate roof, belonged to Henry and Tom Milner. Drifting sand seems to have been the worst problem. Hattersley records that it was not uncommon for the open verandas to fill up with sand blown in by the fierce winds<sup>6</sup>. The text also contains descriptions of social events, trouble in obtaining suitable servants, visits from other colonials and a large section devoted to her neighbour, an elderly woman living on her own.

Finally, Lady Barker, born Mary Ann Stewart in Jamaica (1831) joined her first husband, Sir George Barker in India. After his death in 1861 she married Frederick Broome and accompanied him to New Zealand. Well travelled and used to living in diverse continents, Lady Barker adopts the habit of sending 'letters home' from wherever she finds herself living. After her stay in New Zealand she returned to England where she published eight books. In 1875 her husband was appointed Colonial Secretary in Natal and the family (two sons) spent a year in Natal, a period which forms the basis of the text *A Year's Housekeeping In South Africa*. The book, an account of early Pietermaritzburg, is chiefly a description of the battle to accommodate to a life of dust, mud, snakes and insects while raising children and carrying out the function of the 'lady of the house'. Being the wife of a government man meant that there was no shortage of servants, as experienced by Eliza Feilden, while there is more emphasis on the responsibilities attached to official duties, travels to surrounding areas and entertaining.

In turning now to an analysis of the complex discourses which construct the colonial memoir of Natal, I am indebted to Sara Mills and J.M. Coetzee for their descriptions of the range of discourses available to the colonial writer. Coetzee, in *White Writing*, notes a tendency to provide a catalogue of characteristics intended to denote the differences between the normative white and the extraordinary other. Repeatedly, this 'repertoire of remarkable facts' is presented for our edification within a framework of samenesses in which are identified physical appearance, dress, diet, medicine, customs, habitation, religion, laws, economy, language and character

<sup>6</sup> For this and preceding information about early Durban, see Alan Hattersley's *The British Settlement of Natal* (1950).

(this list is Coetzee's 1988:14, emended for the purposes of this paper). Sara Mills contributes to the idea but takes it further by applying it to women writers. Using Foucault's notion of 'schema', Mills identifies particular textual strategies, available to colonial writers, which colour their descriptions of the strange and exotic. These include a distancing by means of language and an assignation of dirt and disorder to the other. By aligning themselves with this schema, women writers, says Mills, 'assume the powerful textual position afforded by colonialism in much the same way as men do' (Mills 1991:91).

The tendency to catalogue the African according to a list of *samenesses* is vividly apparent in my chosen texts. These moments of anthropological description are interspersed throughout Feilden's letters and journal entries and are intended to inform her family back home:

The Zulu Caffres are really an intelligent-looking race, shrewd, keen at a bargain, cunning and lazy. Our young Caffres save up their wages to purchase cows, and a certain number of cows will buy them a wife. As they grow richer they increase the number of their wives, who do all the work required at the craals, the last or lowest wife, I believe, always taking the hardest work. The man seems to do no work about the craal, so far at least as I have yet learned. They are very jealous of intruders in their craals, which are built (if I may call it building) in a circle, looking like so many bee-hives, with a hole about as large in proportion, through which they creep in and out. Each wife has her own, and each one bears her share of the burden. The men are lazy, self-indulgent fellows. They enjoy their easy state of barbarism too well to become easily Christianised; Christianity being a religion of self-denial and moral restraint, strikes at the root of all their sensual enjoyments.

Christianity says, 'Up and be doing'; but their feelings say, 'Sit still; what good do we get by exertion? We are comfortable as we are here lying in the sun, chewing tobacco; what's the use of making ourselves uncomfortable?' Yet they can work if made to do so, and a white man standing by to see they do not sit down and idle (Feilden 1887:15f).

Eliza Feilden's catalogue is accurate only on the most superficial level. As an anthropological account, however, it does not pay attention to the deeper structures of Zulu culture. Indeed, the Zulus belonged to a homestead economy prior to settlement by the Europeans and housed themselves in *imizi* or small self-contained dwelling places just as Eliza describes them. In fact, the same pattern survives in rural areas at the present time. The central cattle kraal is surrounded by the huts belonging to the wives, dependent relatives and widowed mother of the head. Yet,

there is a strict social division of labour with men responsible for animal husbandry, the building and maintenance of huts and cattle kraals and the digging of grain pits. Women and girls are responsible for agricultural production, domestic labour, thatching huts and carrying water and fuel for fire. In addition, the men made iron and wooden articles while the women made pots and mats. Thus, Eliza's judgement of the men as 'lazy' and 'self-indulgent' is misguided and pays scant attention to social structures.

There are also several markers which situate this passage within a colonial framework: the use of the possessive 'our' in 'our young caffres'; the error in assuming that the women do all the work when the work is strictly differentiated according to gender and the kind of work involved; the crude jibe at the type of rounded hut ('if I may call it building'); and the identification of the Zulu with the bee, not an innocent simile, since behind it lies an implied hierarchy of being situating the English at the top and insects way down. The lowness of the form is further implied by the word 'creep'.

Underlying the passage is the clash of two ideologies: the Victorian work ethic and the African accommodation to white domination. Coetzee devotes a chapter to the subject of idleness in *White Writing* and although his remarks are directed to European attitudes to the Hottentots in the Cape during an earlier period, they have relevance to the Natal attitudes of the 1850s and beyond. Coetzee begins by describing the racist attitude of the observers of Hottentots:

It looks on the Hottentot and sees only squalor, disease, and blank torpor, closing its eyes to the possibility that given a choice between idleness (with accompanying poverty) and the wretchedness of lifelong, manual labour, people may deliberately choose the former. In contrasting inherent European diligence with inherent Hottentot sloth, it seems to forget the history of the early phase of industrialisation in Europe, where it required a reformation of 'character' occupying generations before the labouring class would embrace the principle that one should work harder than is required to maintain the level of material existence one is born into (Coetzee 1988:27).

A further instance of anthropological categorising is the following by Lady Barker:

When a chief or the induna of a kraal passes this way, I see him clad in a motley garb of old regimentals, with his bare 'ringed' head, riding a sorry nag, only the point of his great toe resting in his stirrup. He is followed closely and with great *empressement* by his 'tail', all 'ringed' men also; that is, men of some substance and weight in the community. They carry bundles of sticks, and keep up with the ambling nag, and are closely followed by some of their wives, bearing heavy loads on their heads, but stepping out

bravely with beautiful erect carriage, shapely bare arms and legs, and some sort of coarse drapery worn around their bodies, covering them from shoulder to knee, in folds which would delight an artist's eye, and be the despair of a sculptor's chisel. They don't look either oppressed or discontented. Healthy, happy and jolly, are the words by which they would be most truthfully described (Barker 1894:120f).

As well as being a catalogue, Lady Barker's description is reminiscent of another discourse noted by Coetzee who speaks of the tendency of the colonial traveller to resort to the discourse of the picturesque when describing the African landscape or its people. A particularly good example occurs at a later stage in Barker's text describing her visit to the mission station at Edendale. The reader will notice that the most approving comments are reserved for what Barker (1894:195f) deems to be most orderly, a synonym perhaps for picturesque:

Sitting at the doors of their houses are tidy, comfortable-looking men and women, the former busy plaiting, with deft and rapid movements of their lithe fingers, neat baskets and mats of reeds and rushes .... Fat black babies squat happily in the dust, munching the boiled husk before it is shelled; older children are equally happy cleaning with finger and tongue a big wooden spoon just out of the porridge pot .... No grass-thatched huts are here, but thoroughly nice respectable little houses of adobe brick, nearly all of the same pattern, with vermilion or yellow ochre doors, and all half-covered with creepers. Whoever despairs of civilizing the Kafir need only look here and at other similar stations to see how easily he adapts himself to comfortable ways and customs, and in what a decent and orderly fashion he can be trained to live with his fellows.

The approbatory foregrounding of orderliness here is significantly attributed to missionary (or colonising) influence, and not to the people themselves. Edendale Mission is situated in the text as small enclave in the African bush, a preferential example of the success of the missionary impulse. Further, the description of people as objects of aesthetic pleasure ('fat black babies') is yet another means of creating distance between the colonising observer and the object of the gaze. Similarly, the repeated refrain, running throughout all the memoirs, of the laziness of the indigene, serves the same purpose, establishing a huge gap between 'us' and them.

In the Barker and Feilden texts, the implied reader is an important textual feature. While Feilden is careful not to upset her family in England with too much bad news, Lady Barker seems to be most conscious of entertaining both her received guests and her readers back home. Not only are her descriptions of indigenous Africans tinged with irony, her drawings are likewise verging on caricatures.



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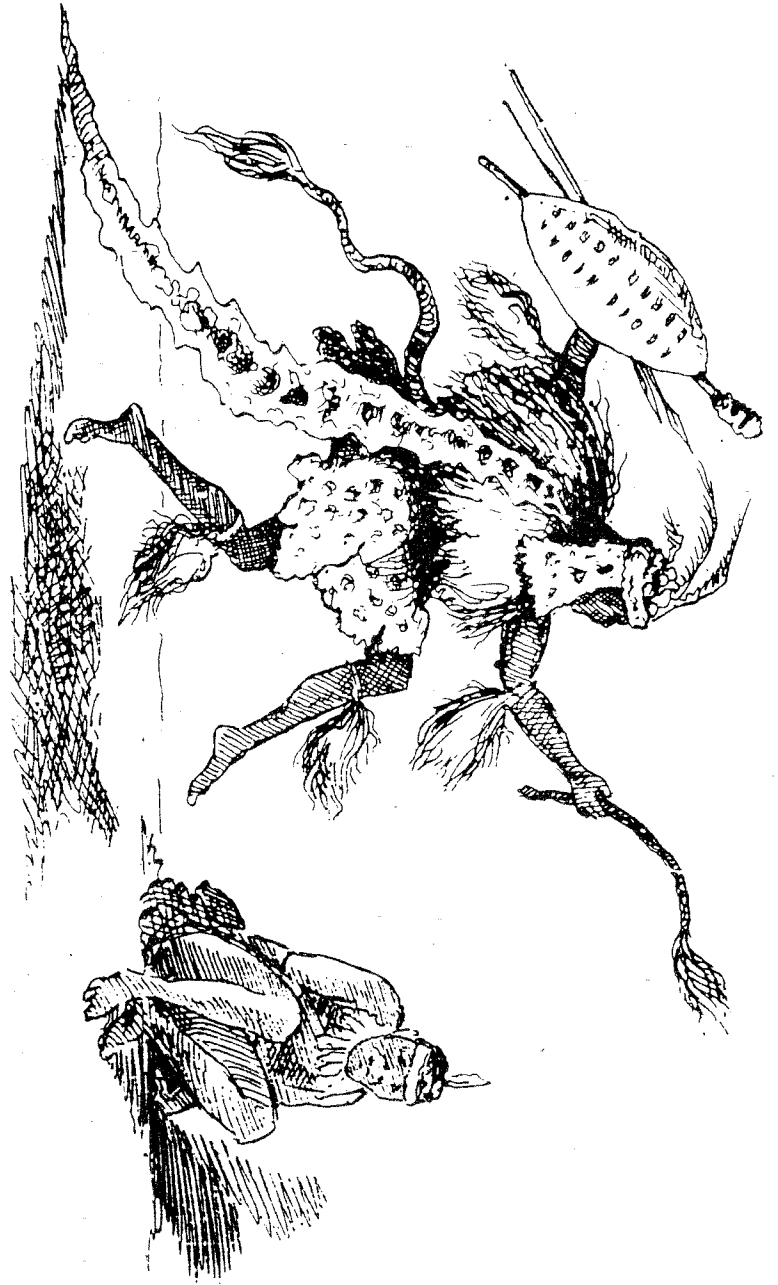


A KAFIR DANDY.





INDUNA AND FAMILY ON THE "TRER."



WITCHFINDER DETECTING A THIEF.



The need to entertain is echoed in a central scene in her text in which she invites the local 'witchfinders' to amuse her guests:

All this time however I am longing to tell you of a famous tea-party I have had here lately. A regular 'drum', only it beat all your London teas hollow because in the corner of my cards were the words, Tea and witches. Now I ask you, could any one wish for a greater excitement than that to enliven a summer afternoon? (Barker 1894:169).

Barker describes in detail preparations for the occasion including the early arrival of the 'witch-finders', 'escorted by nearly the whole black population of Maritzburg'. As the only white person present, Barker expresses a moment of nervousness: 'Remember there is not a white man nearer than Maritzburg, and there is nothing upon earth to prevent any number of these excited, shouting men and boys from walking into my little house, or at least helping themselves to anything off the tea-tables which the servants are beginning to arrange in the verandah' (Barker 1894:171), but it is clear that in reality she feels no danger because, as the white madam, she is in charge, and this description serves the purpose of providing suspense for her implied readers, elevates her courage in their eyes, and suggests the meekness of the indigenous population before the might of the colonial power. When the white guests arrive in anticipation of having their fortunes told, 'their lost trinkets found, and heaven knows what beside' (Barker 1894:172), Lady Barker puts on her official voice and explains that these are not witches but witch-finders and that she does not approve of their practices. The *izangoma* then take the stage:

Grave, composed, erect of carriage, and dauntless of mien, these Amazonian women walked past the verandah raising their hand as the men do with the low cry of 'Inkosi' in salutation (Barker 1894:172).

Barker's prose here is a strange combination of respect and colonial scorn. She is clearly impressed by the stature of the women who act like men but explains how their actions are now unlawful since they contradict British ideas of fair play. She asks her interpreter to explain to the witch-finders that she does not approve of their behaviour and that her curiosity is the chief reason for their being invited:

I begged Mr Y—to explain to them that the only reason I had wanted to see them arose from pure curiosity to know what they looked like, how they were dressed, and so forth; and that I quite understood that it was all nonsense and very wrong, and against the law to do so really, but that this was only a play and a pretence (Barker 1894:173)

Barker's official pronouncements are quite evidently in contradiction to her real feelings. As the wife of a government official Lady Barker is acting in an official capacity and must be seen to be upholding official policy. However, her interest in and excitement about the *izangoma* is tangible, as her description of Nozinyanga suggests:

Conspicuous from her great height, Nozinyanga first caught my eye, her floating helmet-like plume of the tail feathers of the saka-bula bird shading her fierce face, made still more gruesome by wafers of red paint on cheek and brow (Barker 1894:176).

As the afternoon's entertainment draws to a close, the guests grow restless and suggest a final 'game'. One of them has lost a silver pipe-stem, which was highly valued, and asks that the *izangoma* ascertain what it is that is lost and how to find it. The response of the *izangoma*, Nowaruso, is a high point in this text as it is the only time that one of the colonised talks back:

Is this real? Is it a test? Is it but shadow? Do the white chiefs want to laugh at our pretensions? Has the white lady called us only to show other white people that we can do nothing? Is anything really lost? Is it not hidden? It is lost. Let me see what it is that is lost. Is it money? No. Is it a weighty thing? No: it can be always carried about—it is not heavy. All people like to carry it, especially the white Inkosi: it is made of the same metal as money. I could tell you more, but there is no earnestness in this—it is only a spectacle (Barker 1894:183).

This is a wonderful moment in the text. The greater knowledge of the *izangoma* is wholly in evidence here, as is her perspicacity in understanding the intentions of her white audience. They are put to shame by her utterances, which they cannot understand being spoken in Zulu, but since the story is being related at one remove from the occasion, the implied readers are being given a lesson that the guests did not benefit from. The scene is multiply inscribed at this point. The *izangoma* is addressing the indunas (the important men of the tribe) while the white audience watches, unable to understand the utterances. Lady Barker's description fills in the missing meaning for her implied readers in England. Thus the actual audience and the implied audience interpret the event quite differently.

The missing pipe-stem is correctly identified. Lady Barker delivers a 'little speech' of thanks, whereupon the following, translated, speech is given in reply:

Messages were sent to us at our kraals that an English lady who loved our people wished to see us and witness our customs. When we heard these messages our hearts said 'Go to the English lady,' so we have come, and now our hearts are filled with pleasure at having seen this lady, and ourselves heard her express her thanks to us. We would also, on our part thank the lady for her kindness and her presents. White people do not believe in our powers, and think that we are mad; but still we know it is not so, and that we really have the powers we profess (Barker 1894:185).

Significantly, Lady Barker refrains from further comment on her own feelings about the scene. Instead, she describes incidents told to her by 'some of the gentlemen' present about the terrible massacres that resulted from the power of the *izangoma*, thus apparently erasing the effect of the *izangoma*'s final speech.

Catherine Barter's description of the *izangoma* reveals an entirely different register. Barter (1995:43) is careful to remain 'objective', presenting her reader with an almost scientific discourse:

I had heard much in Natal of the manoeuvres of the witchdoctors; but had never had an opportunity of witnessing them so as to understand the principle upon which their alleged discoveries are made.

Continuing in this vein, Catherine describes a healing she has witnessed, but which clearly does not impress her:

The first act of the comedy was now played. The condition of the patient was ascertained. The more difficult part remained—to discover the cause of the illness and its proper remedy. Let not the reader suppose that any knowledge of the laws of Nature or of Hygiene was required to settle this question. The disease must be produced by supernatural causes alone (Barter 1995:4f).

The *izangoma*'s findings are called 'guesses' and Barter proudly informs her reader that she easily conquered an *izangoma* by telling her that 'I was the servant of One far greater than her spirits, and that I knew she could not go on with her (so-called) enchantments if I did not choose' (Barter 1995:45). By using the rhetoric of devout religion (reminiscent of exorcism, holding the cross to the Satanic), Barter aligns herself with the greater force of colonial Christianity. It is clear from Barter's rhetoric that she believes the healing power of the *izangoma* to be bogus, a magic cult vastly inferior to western medicine. However, a scene from a colonial memoir not thus far mentioned, brings Barter's emphatic conclusions into dispute. Marina King, unlike

the other settler women, was brought to Natal at an early age and spent her formative years there. She is more predisposed to be open-minded towards the local inhabitants, and her discourse is less prone to colonial prejudice. She describes a scene in which she is called out to attend to a dying child of a neighbouring farmer. The child is clearly asphyxiating from the effects of diphtheria and King seems unable to save his life. A young Zulu man who is employed as a house servant asks if he may intervene, whereupon he sharpens his knife, collects a reed and performs a successful tracheotomy. King comments that this medical procedure had only just been discovered in England at the time (1880) whereas it had been an ancient medical practice in Africa (King 1935:123).

Much of the interplay between coloniser and colonised in the texts under discussion occurs within a domestic space where colonial women play an important role in shaping attitudes back home as well as influencing the cultural norms in the colony. Insufficient attention has thus far been paid to this significant aspect of colonialism in postcolonial and colonial commentaries. Anthropologist Mary Douglas's theory of dirt and disorder sheds light on the emphasis given to the desire to keep a good house in several of the colonial texts written by women:

As we know it, dirt is essentially disorder. There is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder. Dirt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organise the environment to re-order our environment, making it conform to an idea. It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, above and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created (Douglas 1966:2,4).

Douglas' ideas are useful in explaining settler colonial women's reactions to their environment. Something out of place offends the schema or pattern, which the colonial brings to the new territory. In order to reassert the idea of a system, the environment must be re-encoded according to the old schema. Thus Lady Barker complains on arrival at the Cape, that Table Mountain is too flat—it does not accord with her schema of a beautiful mountain, which is pointed, like the Alps. Barker and Feilden both comment on the incongruence of the habit of the Zulu to don military attire but to wear it according to what is most practical. Thus only the jacket will be worn, revealing bare brown legs, making it cooler and easier to negotiate muddy terrain but clearly offending the English women's idea of what is correct. In this way, the incongruencies of the environment are 'placed' against the context of the old system. As Douglas (1966:37) says, building in a conservative bias brings a sense of confidence:

At any time we may have to modify our structure of assumptions to accommodate new experience, but the more consistent experience is with the past, the more confidence we can have in our assumptions.

In letter after letter, detailed descriptions of the day's menus, troubles with servants, keeping a clean house, the lack of metropolitan luxuries, and the difficulty in keeping up appearances under colonial conditions fill the pages of Feilden's and Barker's memoirs. When we consider that family and home provide the means to maintaining discipline and social control according to Victorian ideology, this seemingly tiresome monologue makes more sense. It is tantamount to an act of survival for 'these unsettled settlers' (Coetzee 1988:4) to maintain the orderliness of hearth and home in this liminal space in which, as Victor Turner (1992:23) suggests, 'the past has lost its grip and the future has not yet taken definite shape'.

We must also remember the particular liminality of the colonial woman who is caught in a dialectic between compliance with colonial ideologies and resistance to imperialist masculine enterprises from which she is excluded. She is in a sense colonised by the ever-present shadow of the metropolis, which she has left, yet partakes in colonising her indigenous servants. The domestic sphere is thus the only space that she can call her own and which is hers to control. Moreover, in matters of domesticity, we observe a fierce dialectic between two differing versions of 'home' as dwelling place. For the Englishwoman (and man), home has four walls and tolerable levels of comfort; it has a garden in which flowers, vegetables and fruit are produced, and it has a border to mark it as distinct from the surrounding wilderness and other people's territories. Most significantly, keeping home accords precisely with imperial values as the following definition of 'a lady' by the doughty Hildagonda Duckitt (1902:71f), suggests:

The meaning of the old English word 'lady' is said to have been 'loaf-giver' implying a person as practical as Solomon's beautiful description (Prov.xxxi) of the 'virtuous woman' whose 'price is far above rubies' and the heart of whose husband 'doth safely trust in her', and of whom it is said, 'she looketh well to the ways of her own household, and eateth not the bread of idleness'.

As we have seen in Feilden's description of the *mnini*, the Zulu has a completely different version and vision of home, which is perceived as a communal space with separation occurring according to gender and rank, and in which cattle are the most important commodities.

Thus, the repeated chorus of references to dirt, smell, disorderliness, unwillingness to partake of European comfort for any length of time and, above all,

the laziness of the Zulu is at odds with the imperative to make a performance of a gendered British identity.

Future investigation into colonial discourse by women could fruitfully engage with other issues such as the shifting nature of the gendered interactions between mistress and servant. Interesting work can be done on the ambiguous relationships that existed between colonial lady of the house and the (usually) male servant. While the memoirs are often filled with grumbling, there is also evidence of strong bonds being formed on both sides, thus upsetting the received versions of the tyranny of the mistress and the resentful servitude of the servant.

In conclusion, looking back over this paper, I fear I have left an overly negative impression of the women settlers I have been reviewing. I have had to read these texts from two positions: a feminist one which admires these colonial women who were strongly spiritual, often committed to improving the intellectual lives of the people they encountered, self-deprecating, compassionate and courageous; the other a postcolonial one, disapproving of racism, noting the lack of knowledge of indigenous peoples, loathing the snobbery and the pretension, wanting to hear the voice of the other. It has been a disturbing and fascinating experience.

English Department  
University of South Africa

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# Douglas Blackburn and the Anglo-Boer War

Elmar Lehmann

## I

Even before the peace treaty of Vereeniging was signed in May 1902, a substantial number of Boer War novels had already been published. Francis Dodsworth's *Gilbert Logan, V.C. A Tale of the Boer War 1899-1900* and Ernest Glanville's *The Despatch Rider* appeared in 1900. In two successive years George Alfred Henty produced *With Buller in Natal or A Born Leader* (1900) and *With Roberts to Pretoria: A Tale of the South African War* (1901), and perhaps, one should not forget that Henty (*The Young Colonists* 1898) and Henry Rider Haggard (*Jess* 1887) had already dealt with the first Anglo-Boer War of 1880-1881, when the Transvaal regained the independence it had lost with the British annexation of 1877.

During and immediately after the second war a flood of diaries and memoirs, reports and histories was published. The English editions of Christiaan de Wet's and Ben Viljoen's war memoirs came out in 1902 and, almost concurrently, in German translations. In 1900 Winston Churchill's reports appeared in book-form under the title *From London to Ladysmith via Pretoria*, and in the same year, the first volumes of *The Times History of the War in South Africa* and of Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Great Boer War* were added to an already long list of Boer War texts (cf. Pakenham 1979:623-632).

Douglas Blackburn must have had an extensive knowledge of the literature of the war, fictional and non-fictional. In many respects his *A Burgher Quixote* (1903) is a 'hidden polemic' in the Bakhtinian sense (Bakhtin 1984:181-204), where the discourse of the novel 'senses alongside itself another literary discourse' (Bakhtin 1984:184). Blackburn's novel is directed against the brand of novels perhaps best epitomised by those mentioned above and also, in Blackburn's own words, by 'the foolishness of the attitude of cocksureness' (Blackburn 1978:23) observable in so many English texts written before and during the war, not least, and perhaps not surprisingly, in Churchill's grandiloquent and self-aggrandising reports. When one looks back upon the Boer-War novels now that the centenary of that seminal event in

South African history is over, one can only agree with one of the earliest reviewers of the novel (*Natal Witness* 4 July 1903), who predicted:

Among the scores of novels written in the late war the *Burgher Quixote* will stand out foremost in its power of literary expression and striking humorous portraiture (Blackburn [1903]1984:xi).

## II

In the 'Author's Note' prefixed to *Prinsloo of Prinsloosdorp. A Tale of Transvaal Officialdom* (1899), Blackburn quotes a lengthy passage from a pre-publication notice in an unnamed Transvaal newspaper, which Blackburn himself probably invented the better to advertise his own qualifications as an expert on the Boer:

The novel is absolutely the first attempt on the part of a qualified writer to depict the Transvaaler [sic] as he is under the new dispensation. Globe trotters by the score have given more or less inaccurate pictures of the Boer on the farm and the veld of Cape Colony, but no one has shown him in the town and in the official ring—the Boer that is destined for a long time to loom large in the public eye at home ... (Blackburn 1899:ii).

Rider Haggard must have been one of those globetrotting and self-stylised experts whose 'frothy nonsense' the really 'qualified writer' such as Blackburn despised and repeatedly denounced in the *Transvaal Sentinel* (Blackburn 1978:11). In 1877 Haggard was a member of Sir Theophilus Shepstone's delegation to Pretoria, which successfully negotiated the annexation of the Boer republic. On the eve of that event he wrote an essay ('The Transvaal'), published in *Macmillan's Magazine*, in which he vehemently pleaded for the annexation of the republic, because, he argued, what the Transvaal needed, was 'a strong government, peace, justice and security', which, for him, only the British could guarantee (Haggard 1877: 78). Immediately after his return to England (1881), his book-length study of *Cetywayo and His White Neighbours* (1882) appeared with a long chapter on the Transvaal, where he severely criticised William E. Gladstone, the Liberal prime minister (1880-1885), whose cowardly South African policy had, in Haggard's view, led to the British defeat in the first Anglo-Boer War and had thus betrayed the great civilising mission of the British in South Africa. This chapter was then reprinted separately under the title of *The Last Boer War* on the eve of the second Anglo-Boer War (October 1899). Blackburn's verdict on Haggard's Transvaal expertise is perhaps best summed up in an article in the *Transvaal Sentinel* of 1896:

To the frothy nonsense talked at the South African Writer's Dinner in London the other evening Mr Rider Haggard the fiction manufacturer contributed more than his share .... Mr Haggard is a very entertaining writer, but when he attempts to discuss serious problems his opinions are worth no more than those of any Tom, Dick or Harry who reads his foreign newspaper with average intelligence. Mr Haggard expressed his desire to see the English flag again floating at Pretoria where, said he, it used to be; but he omitted to mention that the reason it no longer flaunts there is because the British Government proved itself utterly incompetent to do anything in the shape of governing beyond paying the salaries of idle ornamental officials of whom Mr Haggard was one (Blackburn 1978:11).

The 'fiction manufacturer[s]' novel of the first Anglo-Boer War, *Jess*, although certainly not an immediate target of Blackburn's attack, can nevertheless serve as an excellent foil to *A Burgher Quixote*, the more so, because Haggard's romances and political pamphleteering must have been very much on Blackburn's mind during this period (cf. Gray 1984:55-61). *Jess* significantly opens with the Transvaal entering history as yet another of England's 'lusty child[ren]' (Haggard 1877:79), and with Captain John Niel entering the Transvaal as a coloniser. The novel ends, when a completely disillusioned and utterly disgusted Niel leaves the once again independent Transvaal for England. While the historical events between annexation (1877) and independence (1881) are kept in the background, the novel focuses on a duel between two characters, who are clearly meant to be representative. Captain Niel is the perfect, if rather pedestrian English gentleman, not the Allan Quatermain type of hunter-adventurer, but rather an almost domesticated, if certainly highly competent and brave hero; Frank Muller, on the other hand, is (one is tempted to say: naturally) of mixed descent, half Boer and half English: 'You see (says one of the English characters in the novel), you can deal with a Boer and you can deal with an Englishman, but cross-bred dogs are bad to handle' (Haggard 1887:1,69). Muller is the absolute villain of the story, highly intelligent and pathetically superstitious, callously brutal and incredibly ambitious and, on top of all that, he is the richest farmer in the district and a highly influential politician in the republic.

As a lord of misrule and a satanic hero, slavishly followed by a fiendish black servant, Muller represents a loosely-structured and well-nigh chaotic community of independent-minded people against Niel's closely-knit society based on class. He represents anarchy against civilisation, and he stands for the Transvaal's pre- or perhaps subhistoric status against England's high historical mission. Through the transposition of the war events into a duel of representative figures Haggard manages to have the evil powers of anarchy destroyed (Muller is killed, and Niel

victorious), and to blame the English defeats at Laing's Nek and Majuba Hill in January 1881 on the cowardly and corrupt Liberal government at home.

In *A Burgher Quixote* Blackburn, the 'qualified writer', who knows the Transvaal from within, directly confronts and denounces the master narrative of an English high mission, while *Prinsloo of Prinsloosdorp* had done this only indirectly a few years earlier.

### III

... my great object .... is to show how the character of the Transvaal Afrikaner has been influenced for evil by the combined wickedness of the English Uitlander and Hollander ... (Blackburn 1899:vii).

In this way, Sarel Erasmus, the first-person narrator employed by Blackburn in *Prinsloo*, introduces 'the vindication of the character of a father of his country' (Blackburn 1899:v), his eponymous father-in-law, Piet Prinsloo. When Erasmus reappears as the narrator and protagonist of the Boer War novel, *A Burgher Quixote*, he confesses:

Looking back upon my public career, I can now see that often, without knowing it, I was a great and useful agent for bringing together the two races, Englander and Afrikaner .... But while I have just cause for feeling aggrieved at the treatment I have received at the hands of Englanders, it is against my late countrymen that I feel the greatest anger .... The mistakes I have made—and I admit that they are many—will help the world to know the real character of many of my countrymen, among whom I have been a Don Quixote, fighting on behalf of Great Britain against the folly and ignorance that have caused such loss and suffering (Blackburn [1903]1984:14f).

In the three novels, which make up the Sarel-Erasmus trilogy (with the story of a visit to England in *I Came and Saw* (1908) added to *Prinsloo* (1899) and *A Burgher Quixote* (1903), Erasmus's dominant characteristics are his inconsistency and muddled thinking, combined with an almost pathetic and certainly quixotic tendency to interpret whatever happens to him and around him in such a way that it conforms to his prejudices and to the respective roles he believes he is playing at a given moment. The above quoted passages from the narrator's 'Forewords' (sic) to *Prinsloo* and from the opening chapter of *A Burgher Quixote* already clearly indicate that the narrator's self-stylisation as an important agent and competent writer is ludicrously confused and full of contradictions. Whose folly is he talking about, that of his countrymen alone or that of both sides? What are the mistakes he has made,

and what is, in his mind, the real character of his countrymen? If his countrymen have been corrupted by English 'uitlanders' and 'Hollanders' (as Dutch foreigners appointed to senior positions in President Paul Kruger's Transvaal administration were called), and if he has good reason to resent the treatment he received at the hands of both the English and his Afrikaner countrymen, why, we have to ask ourselves, does he side with the British, and does he really? The reader is thus alerted to Erasmus's unreliability as a narrator and his incompetence as a political agent. One will therefore read the novel as a 'double-voiced discourse', defined by Bakhtin (1984:197) as a discourse, in which

... each present, uttered word responds and reacts with its every fiber to [an] invisible speaker, points to something outside itself, beyond its own limits, to the unspoken words of another person.

Making use of the types of 'double-voiced discourse' described by Bakhtin (1984:199), we can classify Erasmus's story as a 'polemically colored autobiography' in the sense that the reader will see through Erasmus's 'word' and not only confront it with the discourse on (the Anglo-Boer) war, but also detect another person's 'word'. Let me illustrate my point. Erasmus not only calls himself 'Don Quixote', but, toward the end of the novel, compares his situation with that of two famous Englishmen:

John Bunyan, Sir Walter Raleigh, and I are striking examples of the blessing that prison-life may become to those who know how to use and value it by thinking out, properly and fully, thoughts that have stayed but a short time in the heart during freedom ... (Blackburn [1903]1984:244).

Bunyan (1628-1688) was persecuted as a religious non-conformist and, while in prison, completed the first part of his famous *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), while Raleigh (1552-1618), allegedly for his part in a conspiracy against James I, was imprisoned (and later executed) in the Tower, where he wrote (the first and only part of) *A History of the World* (1614), which was immensely popular in the seventeenth century. Although the three narrative situations may not be dissimilar, since all three writers are victims of the powers that be, what is highlighted here, however, is the enormous discrepancy between Erasmus on the one hand and the two English authors on the other. Compared with the high seriousness of Christian's allegorical journey to Heavenly Jerusalem in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Erasmus's wavering and blundering seem to be nothing but a parodic replica, and compared with the famous courtier's ambitious and elegant universal history, in which he probably co-operated with some of his most learned contemporaries, Erasmus's narrative is an inept performance. Where Bunyan and Raleigh are in complete control of their material

and competently follow their overall designs, Erasmus seems to be forever out of his depth, not only in every single episode he recounts, but also regarding the structure and purpose of his war memoir as a whole. Insofar as Erasmus, matched against Bunyan and Raleigh, is seen to be ill-equipped and ineffectual, and his narrative is meant to be read as a bungling performance, the reader will assume the presence of another voice, which indirectly, and very often through oblique allusions, puts forward a critique of Erasmus, and of the warring parties.

Imprisoned by the English as a rebel and with all his plans come to nought, Erasmus may still harbour delusions of grandeur, but his naiveté, his would-be cleverness and pitifully limited knowledge characterise a narrator who does not know—and seems to be unable to realise—that he produces a text which constantly ridicules his own, the narrator and protagonist's aspirations. At the same time, and arguably not unlike Jaroslav Hašek's *Good Soldier Schweik* (1923), Erasmus's point of view serves to create a satiric or, to use Bakhtin's terminology yet again, a 'carnivalistic' presentation of the Anglo-Boer War (Bakhtin 1984:122-137), making 'familiar relations strange' (Holquist 1990:89).

With blinkered perspective, Erasmus the narrator tells the story of his war adventures as a series of episodes which invariably follow the same pattern. Like Bunyan's Christian he finds himself among the heathens of Vanity Fair, beset by temptations of all kinds, but unlike Christian he will give in to each and every temptation that comes his way. He believes that he is surrounded by Boers as well as British, whose sole purpose he automatically assumes to be to counteract his grand scheme (i.e. the 'bringing together the two races, Englander and Afrikaner'), and whom he expects to misconstrue his every word and action. The British will even try and imprison him as a traitor, when, toward the end of the novel, he gives himself up to them.

A close look at one of these episodes, the Bokman's Drift adventure (Blackburn [1903]1984:165ff, chapter X) will illustrate the narrator-protagonist's characteristically distorted vision of himself and the resulting 'carnivalistic' and satiric presentation of the war. When the Transvaal's Commandant-General, Piet Joubert, appoints him commandant of a Boer commando, a rather unwilling (because secretly pro-British) Erasmus not only 'learns ... that being exalted does not always bring happiness' (title of chapter VIII, Blackburn [1903]1984:129), but has to realise, much to his chagrin, that it is by no means his military record which induced Joubert to appoint him, but rather Katrina, his much-loathed intended, whose ambition it is to marry a famous soldier and who exerted her influence with the general. But worse is to come. Only when he spreads the news that his commando is 'going to catch cattle and bring in loot' (Blackburn [1903]1984:136), does he manage to find Burghers willing to join him. But here, as ever, Paul du Plooy, the



Sancho Panza to Erasmus's Don Quixote, steps in to console him and to explain to him the hidden meaning of the situation with the help of the Old Testament:

Sarel, you are like Moses with the children of Israel in the wilderness. They are discontented and rebellious, and the false gods they worship are cattle. But I am Joshua, and you know that he was oprecht, and made the paths smooth for Moses (Blackburn [1903]1984:145).

While du Plooy's remark flatters Erasmus, adding Moses to Bunyan and Raleigh as his equals, and likens a famous story to the situation of the Boers, it once again foregrounds the incongruity of the comparison. Erasmus's 'children of Israel' are certainly a sorry lot. Always dissatisfied with their commandant and always quarrelling, they cannot even understand each other so that, more often than not

... there was babel [sic] broke loose, for my Burghers were English, Scotch, Irish, German, Hollander, Danish, Russian, French, Peruvians, and many other nations not found in any postal directory (Blackburn [1903]1984:144).

Worse still, poor Erasmus, who one moment proudly asserts that 'we Boers on commando do not take orders; we call it advice' (Blackburn [1903]1984:136f.), the next moment finds himself in a situation over which he has no control. He has hardly left the laager with his commando, when enigmatic Andries Brink, the 'clever plotter' (Blackburn [1903]1984:150), takes over. Brink follows his own hidden agenda and, whenever Erasmus believes that he has finally detected his 'friend's' ulterior motives, we may be sure that he is in for yet another unpleasant surprise. At Bokman's Drift, Brink single-handedly commandeers Erasmus's commando and traps a transport on its way to the British army. He then manages to escape with the cattle, which he will re-sell to the English, with only the bare promise to share the profit with the burghers or, at least, with his particular friend, Erasmus, a promise he has, of course, absolutely no intention of keeping. The war as a patriotic defence of the Boer republic's independence on the one hand, and as the British civilising mission on the other, is thus reduced to a cattle-thieving expedition.

The assault on the English transport itself is completely in character with the incompetence of the actors involved. It is a veritable feat of military blunders, on the side of the undisciplined burghers as well as the inexperienced tommies. In the end, even Erasmus has to admit that he

... never learned properly how the surrender (of the English) came about, but from what I could see and heard, it was a case of mistakes on both sides (Blackburn [1903]1984:173).

No wonder, then, or perhaps most surprisingly, everybody escapes more or less unscathed, not counting, of course, the few severely wounded and killed 'Kafirs' (Blackburn [1903]1984:173), as Erasmus, in line with common racist parlance, calls the black servants.

The Bokman's Drift episode clearly produces the 'carnivalistic' through intertextuality. Instead of presenting war in the conventional way as heroism with predictable results—or, to be more precise, as British or Boer heroism and British or Boer victories—war is here depicted as rather carefree incompetence with an unexpected, at least an undeserved, outcome. While Henty and Glanville in their novels systematically—or shall I say, desperately—try to shut out or, at least, conceal accidents in the service of the heroism they present, in Blackburn's *A Burgher Quixote* accidents reign supreme, emphasising that victories as well as defeats are nothing but the surprising results of incompetence. Erasmus unwittingly and almost innocently displays the pretentiousness of heroism as incompetence, and *A Burgher Quixote* denounces heroism and the ideology of a high mission, be it in the name of civilisation or of a promised land, as thinly-disguised and rather pathetic (self-) deception on a grand scale.

Even Sarel Erasmus who follows his grand scheme of bringing together 'Englander and Afrikaner' and who, at the same time, allows himself to be manipulated by shady Andries Brink cannot but realise that he is, indeed, easily identifiable as a fence-sitter and a coward, unwilling to fight, yet bent on profit. Not surprisingly, then, Erasmus has to defend himself against the misrepresentations of his fellow burghers who frequently accuse him of being a spy (e.g. early on in the novel in the hilarious episode of the poisoned whisky, Blackburn [1903]1984:39-54), and he must almost constantly try to disguise his pro-British feelings, e.g. as a particularly efficient and brave commandant whose successes, however, are usually prearranged by Brink. All this creates laughter, because the reader is constantly made aware of the processes of 'othering' at work here. Compared with Raleigh or seen in the role of a Moses, Erasmus becomes a pitiable and laughable sight. When we observe him unsuccessfully trying to hide his pro-British feelings and laboriously trying to explain to us why and how he does it, we cannot but see him as a pathetic and ridiculous character. In addition, Erasmus the narrator, always willing to confide in the reader, unwittingly allows us to laugh at his rather threadbare disguise, at his proudly advertised education and his pathetically high ambition.

#### IV

The satire in *A Burgher Quixote* may end here, but there is more to the novel than the comedy of the narrator-protagonist's pretensions and the satire of a war as large-scale cattle-thieving. When Sarel Erasmus likens himself to John Bunyan and Sir Walter



Raleigh, when he sees himself as Christian (*Pilgrim's Progress*) or Don Quixote and, albeit perhaps not fully aware of all the implications, when he accepts being seen as Falstaff (Blackburn [1903]1984:111), we laugh, because we notice the discrepancy between Erasmus and his role-models. But we also realise that Erasmus's pride in his excellent education (he can, after all, read and write and knows English) and his insistence on the important role he has to play in the history of 'Englander and Afrikaner' are the result of a deep-seated uncertainty.

The story Erasmus feels compelled to tell us is a story dominated and permeated by fear, and even he himself has to admit that he 'suffer[s] the pains of uncertainty and hope' (Blackburn [1903]1984:306). In *Prinsloo of Prinsloosdorp*, and much more explicitly in *A Burgher Quixote*, we meet Erasmus the Afrikaner between veld and town, between a rural past and an urban present, between an Afrikaner past of communal independence and a British present of capitalist domination. Erasmus's position of in-between-ness is elaborately delineated through the configuration of characters and the progress of the story. Paul du Plooy, Katrina and Ben Viljoen, in their different ways, represent Afrikanerdom and the past and, one assumes, a lost cause against Andries Brink, who is of course British, and his completely a-moral and a-national capitalist craftsmanship. Bible-reading, sermonising, opinionated, and at the same time eminently practical, Paul du Plooy is the excellent (though at times rather rash) marksman, who manages to push even cunning Andries Brink to the edge of defeat. Katrina, Sarel's intended, will follow time-honoured Boer traditions and in the end marry 'a cousin making his third wife and the stepmother to sixteen children' (Blackburn [1903]1984:343). Finally, although kept in the background, there is Ben Viljoen, the fighting spirit behind the Boer commandos and, naturally, Erasmus's mortal enemy. Erasmus's relationship with these three characters is clearly dominated by fear. He is afraid of du Plooy's endless preaching as well as self-righteous meddlesomeness, although he desperately needs the wily old man's advice. He tries to avoid Katrina's manipulative energy, but cannot really forget her claims on him, while Viljoen's presence and military competence simply terrify him. Although he repeatedly and quite consciously tries to distinguish himself from his uncivilised countrymen (he is the narrator who never lets us forget that he can tell a story in English), Erasmus finds it extremely difficult to extricate himself from his Afrikanerdom. After all, it is only at the very end of the novel that he manages to change sides, without, however, being able to convince the British of his services in their favour. Andries Brink, like Viljoen, terrifies Erasmus, who 'ever felt towards him that meekness one always feels in the presence of strong and masterful people' (Blackburn [1903]1984:302)—a remark which accurately describes all Erasmus's relations with other characters. But while Viljoen's is a force Erasmus can at least understand and, to a certain extent, even evade, Brink is absolutely beyond him and, indeed, remains an enigma right up to the end of the

novel. For all du Plooy and Erasmus know, Brink may as well be an 'oprecht Natal Burgher' as a 'renegade Transvaal Boer' (Blackburn [1903]1984:322,87), and of course, he is neither. Erasmus's uncertainty and fear, then, result from his being displaced. He has left the veld, but has not yet arrived in the town. He wishes to discard his Afrikaner past, but cannot grasp the British present.

In one of those rare moments, when satire abandons its veiled voice and comes out in the open with a more or less direct statement of its true concerns and values, Brink, in a long conversation with an old acquaintance, Mark Capper, the prospector, looks back on his career. Brink confides that he is notorious Sailor Robinson and, under many aliases, has moved from 'illicit diamond buying at Kimberley' to become a 'contractor to the troops in three native wars', a 'slave-dealer, otherwise native labour agent' and, 'grandest of all, purveyor of arms to the native races' (Blackburn [1903]1984:323). With surprising honesty and perspicuity, he sums up what he has brought to South Africa:

Few Boers ever met me without being the worse for it in property and morals, for I helped to sow the seeds of race hatred that has brought about the war, and will end in the absorption of Boerdom. That is where my patriotic British sentiment is fed up. What I don't like is the knowledge that I have helped to spoil a promising race. The Boer today, Mark, is only what men like me have made him (Blackburn [1903] 1984:323f).

It is of course Sarel Erasmus who epitomises Sailor Robinson's 'Boer today', and it is the uniform he buys, which perfectly and tragically epitomises the narrator-protagonist's precarious position of in-between-ness. While he tries to escape from domineering Katrina Erasmus, he falls in love with jilting Charlotte, who is not only Brink-Robinson's Afrikaner stepdaughter, but who also, and characteristically, succeeds where Erasmus miserably fails. She manages to shed Boerdom for England by marrying an English captain. To impress Charlotte, Erasmus buys himself a splendid second-hand uniform which 'had been made for the chief sanitary inspector of Johannesburg' (Blackburn [1903]1984:248). Wearing the uniform 'that would shame a Portuguese field-marshal' (330), Erasmus looks like 'a London postman or a Natal police superintendent' (318), like a 'German or Russian' or even like a 'Japanese attaché', but, he tells us: 'Nobody would take me for a Boer' (327).

While Sailor Robinson successfully and self-confidently hides his identity behind innumerable aliases, Sarel Erasmus, not even really knowing that he disguises himself, uses the uniform to express an identity (the civilised, educated Boer) which simply is not there. Without realising that he has been uprooted, but with all the accompanying fear and uncertainty of uprootedness and in-between-ness, Erasmus as the narrator and protagonist of *A Burgher Quixote* embodies the plot that is outlined

in the Sailor Robinson/Mark Capper conversation: the end of Boerdom which, for Blackburn, came with the second Anglo-Boer War.

## V

Within the specific situation of the early years of the twentieth century *A Burgher Quixote* squarely confronts the prevailing adventure-cum-high-mission type of novel written by English or South African authors such as Henty or Glanville. Against the British imperial voice Blackburn, the 'qualified writer', introduces the voice of the Afrikaner—an Afrikaner, however, who is the representative of an already lost heritage and at the same time the victim of British imperialism represented by Sailor Robinson. In Robinson's perspective, which seems to be Blackburn's, the story Erasmus tells us turns into a plot, the narrative of the demise of Afrikanerdom brought about by British corruption.

Erasmus's 'polemically colored autobiography' does indeed confirm Robinson's interpretation. The comedy of Erasmus and of his illusory hope for a union of 'the two races, Englander and Afrikander' as well as the satirical presentation of the Anglo-Boer war reveal Blackburn's uncompromising attack on British imperialism and radical critique of the (mainly British) fiction manufacturers' war novels. For Erasmus there seems to be no hope, only a future of distorted vision and alienation; he seems to be unable to understand, while the imperialist criminal, despite his occasional perspicuity, seems to be ineluctably chained to the corruption of his own making.

Fachbereich Literatur- und Sprachwissenschaften  
Universität Essen

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Hood, Douglas & Howard.

## **'Let Down Your Bucket Where You Are': A Critique of the Curriculum at the University College of Fort Hare in its Pioneer Years**

**David Burchell**

The originator of the scheme for an African university college, E.B. Sargent, educational adviser to Lord Milner, envisaged the South African Native College, as the University of Fort Hare was originally called, above all else as a central training school for African teachers (Houghton 3 January 1904). He was intent on Fort Hare providing a rather narrowly utilitarian education which would include industrial training as a compulsory component. His overall aim was to create a moderate African elite who would act as the junior partners of colonialism and who would largely fill subordinate positions in a class and race stratified society.

The envisaged curriculum at the College stressed the need for practicality and adaptation to African circumstances. One of the founders, Kenneth Hobart Houghton of Lovedale, openly proclaimed that at Fort Hare the intention was to carry on similar work to that done by Dr. Booker Washington at the African American College of Tuskegee. The only difference was that the new college hoped to provide opportunities for any African student wishing for and capable of profiting from a genuine university education (Houghton 9 November 1910).

The founders, who were mainly connected with the famous Scottish missionary institution of Lovedale, considered themselves realists who had to take into account the tremendous differences between the average European and African student in language, in inherited beliefs, prejudices and instincts, in environment and early upbringing, as well as the position Africans would occupy in society after college. The primary task of the new institution was the restricted one of producing African men, rather than women, of character 'trained to do useful work for their own people and themselves' (*Statement on the South African Native College* 1910). Africans were portrayed at this juncture as being in a transitional stage, caught between barbarism and civilisation, and desperately requiring leaders of their own

race who should be 'morally and mentally as well equipped as possible' (Houghton 12 October 1910). Such sentiments could have been borrowed directly from Booker Washington's educational ideals for African Americans in the U.S.A. They reflect the essentially conservative and evolutionary philosophy of education as well as the sexist bias of the founding fathers; but these men were, for their time, progressive educationalists holding views far in advance of the contemporary European stereotype of Africans. For example, the men who served on the South African Native Commission of 1903-1905 still considered that the main aim of Black education was simply to train Blacks to be useful in the economic expansion of the country. These men rejected missionary education as having made Blacks more aggressive and less docile and as having contributed to the shortage of African labour.

The influence of Booker Washington was clearly evident when Hobart Houghton described the main work of the new college as the training of higher grade teachers not only equipped in the normal professional subjects 'but also in industrial or agricultural work' (Houghton 9 November 1910). This adaptationist ideology was evident in the original intention of the founders to make full use of the land that the Scottish church had granted at Fort Hare for the purposes of an agricultural school where, it was hoped, 'the sons of chiefs and native landowners may get a thorough training in elementary agricultural science' (Houghton 9 November 1910). Booker Washington's aim at Tuskegee was also to train a large proportion of his Black students as teachers so that they could return to the rural areas and show 'the people there how to put new energy and new ideas into farming, as well as into the intellectual and moral and religious life of the people' (Washington 1967:83). As with African Americans, the underlying assumption behind the college's educational objectives was clearly that Africans were agricultural people. Confronted by an expanding population and diminishing land resources, they urgently required more modern but largely rudimentary instruction in farming otherwise they would, it was feared, become an impoverished race (Houghton 12 October 1910).

The founders were acutely aware that a new and 'highly developed' civilisation had impacted upon rural African society with tremendous force and rapidity. Yet Houghton remained confident that Africans had 'sufficient strength to assimilate' the new civilisation in the dangerous period of transition when the two races, Black and White, were being drawn 'nearer to one another before a mutual sympathy and understanding are sufficiently assured' (Houghton 12 October 1910). In such a crucial situation Fort Hare's vital role was to train as leaders African men of wide sympathies, who understood 'European modes of thought' and clearly recognised 'that the interests of either race are inextricably bound up with those of the other' (Houghton 12 October 1910). In this regard he was optimistic that the college would play a unique role in shaping the destiny of the country. Booker

Washington's Tuskegee was pictured as having pointed to the 'solution of the Negro problem there,' and it remained for Fort Hare to perform the same function in Southern Africa even though, he conceded, the problem was 'different and more complicated' (Houghton 1905). Thus at its founding, the movement for a state-controlled African college was explicitly linked to the wider welfare of South Africa and the solution of the racial issue.

As regards the curriculum, the founders were not simply narrowly present minded but envisaged a higher education for Africans which would also assist them in meeting future needs. Moreover, although some differentiation and adaptation was advocated in the early stages, the promoters were convinced that the ultimate standard and aim of African education would be the same as that for Europeans. It was fervently believed that in a multi-racial country 'there cannot with any safety exist two ideals of civilization' (Houghton 1905) as sooner or later they would be bound to clash. As Houghton pointed out, the educational journeys of Black and White must converge in the end and could never remain parallel.

The strong influence of Tuskegee was also evident in the beliefs of the founders that really educated men, if they were to be equipped for their duties as leaders of people regarded as 'a race emerging from barbarism' and if they were to achieve the highest level of usefulness for their people, must be given a carefully planned and progressive course of manual instruction in conjunction with their more literary and academic studies. Reflecting the sentiments of Booker Washington, Houghton spoke of the necessity of training for the hand and eye. The effect of such instruction would, he was adamant, create and strengthen moral character. The promoters were therefore of the opinion that there were certain avenues of study which were of far greater importance in the education of Africans than in that of Europeans. In line with the Tuskegee philosophy of education, the infant college would set out to produce an educated elite who could turn their education to practical use in the daunting task of uplifting their own people. As James Henderson, Lovedale's principal between 1906 and 1930, succinctly stated, they planned an African College of recognised university standing adapted to the special needs of Africans and providing for religious instruction in an interdenominational environment combined with a strong emphasis on industrial training. The college would, he pointed out, possess the right to close its doors to unsuitable applicants. Moreover, the college would enjoy the advantage of being situated in close proximity to Lovedale, a missionary institution which he proudly asserted had 'shaped the ideals of Native education and led in their realization for the last sixty years' (Henderson 14 October 1907).

What the promoters of the college envisaged by 'adapted' education was to provide for existing capacities under existing circumstances with, consequently, more

emphasis on African studies. They considered that this could be achieved if the institution was created along experimental lines. Houghton summed up the situation: While in most countries it is accepted as a guiding principle that education should be framed to meet the social and economic requirements of the people for whom it is intended, Native education in South Africa has not been so dealt with. The same course of instruction, the same system of examination, is devised for both black and white. No account is taken of the difference of language, of environment; of future position in the country. (Christian Express August 1906:174)

The college was launched at a time when a strong segregationist or differentiationist school of thought was maintaining that Africans had mental characteristics which put them apart from Europeans and that therefore the African should be given a totally different education. There was growing support for the theory that the African suffered from 'arrested development' which set in at puberty and was possibly caused by the premature closure of the suture of the skull. Therefore it was contended that at an early age Africans ceased to be educable.

The leading adaptationist at this time, Dr. Charles Loram, did not subscribe to the current theory of 'arrested development', but he warned against forcing the pace in African education. In his work on the education of Black South Africans he spoke of the African as the slower race and cautioned educationists about the dangers of African retrogression. He supported an adapted curriculum for African students, different from Europeans', and stated that in cases where the subjects were the same 'considerably less in the way of achievement must be expected from the slower race' (Loram 1917: 192).

Fortunately, the promoters of the college, with the possible exception of E.B. Sargant, had a more sanguine view of African capabilities. Henderson dismissed distinctions in the performance of Black and White as the result of differences 'in experience, in training and in environment' (Christian Express August 1908:124). He was an optimist and fervently believed that Africans were as capable as Whites provided they were not encumbered with learning through a foreign language. His more progressive educational philosophy required only some adaptation and modification in order to make the educational process more relevant to Africans. He advocated a broadly 'liberal' curriculum for Africans with more emphasis on African languages and cultural values and a syllabus more closely geared to their future in a White-dominated society.

There were significant reasons why the new college had to proceed in small steps and not attract too much attention through spectacular and grandiose visions and demands. The African intellectual was really on trial as the climate of European opinion was not propitious, doubtful as it was about the ability of Africans to undertake any more than elementary studies. Moreover, the government itself was slow in appreciating the social need of the majority of the inhabitants of the country

for an education beyond the mere rudiments. There was in the mind of the European public, Fort Hare's pioneer Principal Dr. Kerr remarked, 'only a limited sense of the duty of the more advanced group in the state to foster the development of the underprivileged' (Kerr September 1961). Apart from the educated elite, Africans as a whole did not at this juncture fully understand the changes in their environment which made customary ideas about the training of the young hopelessly out of date.

As was the case with Booker Washington's Tuskegee College, Fort Hare's founding took place amidst scepticism, pessimism and antagonism. A promising feature, though, was the financial support forthcoming from both the Union government and the British administration of Basutoland, though this was small in comparison to that provided to European tertiary institutions.

The first entrance qualifications for African students were of necessity extremely low. Apart from the matriculated and senior leaving certificate students of the University of the Cape of Good Hope, Fort Hare was also prepared to accept junior school leaving certificates for a period of 5 years, as well as the T3 junior certificate of the Cape education department or a similar certificate (Fort Hare n.d.). Only a few of the first students produced certificates demonstrating two years of secondary instruction. These students were placed in classes preparing for university entrance, while the others set about catching up on the deficiencies in their post primary education or were enrolled for college diplomas in business procedure and agriculture.

In line with the famous motto of Tuskegee, it was very much a case of 'let down your bucket where you are'. As Lennox pointed out, there was an urgent necessity to synchronise the stage of university development with the stage reached by the secondary education system. Moreover, missionary educators had insisted that 'a condition of their approval of the scheme would be that work that could be done at their schools should not be undertaken at the College' (Lennox 7 May 1915).

Fort Hare also had to overcome a fairly prevalent belief that it was a college simply for Cape Africans. Certainly it started out as primarily an eastern Cape college with a strong bias towards the missionary institutions in the region. Of its students in 1919, 18 came from neighbouring Lovedale, 9 from Healdtown, a Methodist institution a short distance away, and 2 from Emgwali institution. Only 2 came from Morija in Lesotho as well as 8 from elsewhere, some of whom may also have been educated in the eastern Cape. Ethnic affiliation also reflected the predominance of the region with 21 students considered 'Fingo', 6 'Coloured', 2 Xhosa, 5 Sotho and only 2 considered Zulu, 2 from Bechuanaland and 1 Indian (Christian Express March 1919:41). So strong was the eastern Cape bias that Africans from Natal actually had to be reassured by government officials that the college did not debar Africans from elsewhere and that, in fact, its facilities were open to all Africans (Secretary of Native Affairs 21 June 1922).

James Henderson, speaking in 1925 at the second graduation ceremony of Fort Hare, said that it continued to develop on a truly African basis, 'wisely adapting its discipline, its methods, its courses to Native circumstances, in level-headed recognition of the social, racial and industrial facts, disagreeable though many of them are, that at present govern our common life' (The South African Outlook June 1925:129). So there was obvious recognition from the outset of the harsh racial stratification in South Africa. The young college was compelled to accept these racial realities if it wished to survive in a difficult and hostile environment.

The education system in any society can perform either a conservative or a progressive function. It can act as the custodian of societal values with the main aim of transmitting traditional values and function therefore as a means through which the political goals and objectives of the ruling class are induced and the educated are domesticated and socialized into acceptance of the dominant norms, or 'it can have the effect of challenging and questioning generally accepted values and lead to contemplation of alternatives and the means to achieve them' (Adam 1971:197). Despite the severe constraints of the time, Fort Hare in its first decades did attempt to create the impetus for reform in a fairly creative, albeit conservative way. The isolation of the college, coupled with the lack of committed involvement from capitalism and, to a large extent, government, actually enabled it to pursue its own line of development.

One of the main educational innovators who influenced Fort Hare's progress at the outset was C.T. Loram who, as already mentioned, was a leading figure in the 'adaptationist' school and a rather inconsistent liberal. In 1917 he remarked that there was 'nothing to prevent the South African Native College from offering courses in higher education other than those examined by the university' (Loram 1917: 305). In fact, he argued that in view of what he termed the agreed unsuitability of the university courses for African students, it should be the aim of the college to avoid the university courses as far as possible until the university system itself embarked on adaptation. He was, however, aware that it was unrealistic to abandon external university control altogether as 'the glamour of the university's certificate had dazzled the African'. His philosophy of education also contained an element of elitism as he remarked that it was important not to follow up the current educational trend and neglect the gifted student in favour of children of average attainments. He was quite convinced that the progress of the African people was largely due to the efforts of their leaders. In fact, he hoped that the talented few would transfer 'the results of European civilisation' to the African masses and help to produce a rapid upliftment of the people (Loram 1917:306).

Loram's concept of African education contained certain progressive elements and his vision was not a static one, as he believed the curriculum should be transformed with the advance and acculturation of Africans. But implicit in his rather

conservative aims was the belief that the education of Africans was not an end in itself but a means to maintain a segregated society. Moreover, his assumptions were affected by his belief that Africans were, and would remain, an almost entirely rural people, despite the fact that, through the destructive impact with Europeans, they had lost the chance for autonomous development. As he perceived matters, because Whites would not willingly abdicate their position of supremacy, Africans were compelled to accept a subordinate role and status (Shingler 1973: 195-7).

Loram was deeply committed to the philosophy of Jesse Jones and the American school regarding adaptation, 'education for life' and the relevance of Black American education for African schooling. His major contribution to Fort Hare's progress was that he helped to focus the attention of the pioneer college upon the realities of the African situation and to relate his efforts to the needs of the people it aimed to serve. Furthermore, his membership of the Native Affairs Commission gave him access to government and other bodies of authority and influence. Consequently 'he was often in a position to present the viewpoint of the College Council in such a way as to gain its acceptance' (Governing Council Minutes 4 November 1931).

Loram backed any attempts to reform African tertiary education at Fort Hare as he cherished grandiose visions of the college becoming a great Pan-African university destined to influence profoundly the future of the entire continent. He saw an urgent need to transform the pioneer institution into the central focus of African higher education. To achieve this, he wanted to force and mould African higher education into a single pattern of adapted education. This was why he supported Fort Hare's efforts to institute a special college matriculation examination as a purely internal examination designed to meet the special needs of future ministers of religion, headmen and chiefs. This course recognised both the limits of the formal education of many of Fort Hare's older students as well as their more mature outlook on life. However the course, which he praised as setting the scene for further adaptation, was actually one which functioned as a substitute in embryo for a liberal arts course as it included subjects such as elementary logic, ethics, psychology and economics. Loram's agitation for an adapted college junior certificate to provide 'focus and objective to the work of African secondary schools' (Loram 7 August 1921) failed to achieve the support of the Fort Hare authorities.

In the 1930s Fort Hare's curriculum and methods were scrutinised in a fairly revolutionary way by Loram and another adaptationist convert, Mary Dick, who was a lecturer at the college. Loram had gained a reputation as a so-called 'native expert' and he was now at Yale University. Dick was considerably influenced by his ideas while completing her bachelor of education thesis on the effect of higher education on race adjustment and race relations in South Africa, with particular reference to the prevailing dilemmas facing the African elite of the college regarding their curriculum and careers.



Mary Dick, like many of the adaptationist converts of that time, considered that the Black American institutions of Hampton, Tuskegee and Penn were of immense interest and importance to educators in South Africa who were dealing with 'the agricultural education of a rural population whether Black or White' (Dick 1934:54). She was of the opinion that Tuskegee and Hampton had the right point of departure as both had focused initially on agricultural and industrial training and only later taken up literary education. But these American colleges had developed in an evolutionary way and she pointed to the need for Fort Hare to offer a bachelor of science degree as Tuskegee was then doing. She also argued for Fort Hare to establish more significant outreach through travelling demonstrators who would venture into the rural areas to provide instruction in what she termed 'practical arts' (Dick 1934:56).

Her overarching critique of the college was that the governing body and the Union government did not have 'any very clear idea of where they are taking the Bantu people' (Dick 1934:38). Instead, Fort Hare was described as being willing to play safe in a quiet backwater of time rather than burning with the fire of a pioneer enterprise. She was convinced the curriculum was not well related to the problem of a nation which she characterised as emerging from dark centuries, 'a bewildered people struggling into all the confusions of our modern life of thought and action'. She castigated the Fort Hare staff for producing the right type of student but with the wrong type of tools to survive in the modern world and, moreover, of failing to give them a clear-cut idea of what it was trying to do for them 'beyond the somewhat vague offer of providing a liberal education of university standing' (Dick 1934:38-39).

Mary Dick's views reflect in the main Loram's critique of Fort Hare. He, too, had on many occasions admonished Kerr for not doing more to adapt education to the current requirements of Africans. Furthermore, by the 1930s he was keen that Fort Hare should also become a fully-fledged autonomous university, as this would hasten the chances of full-scale reform. Though he recognised advantages in the connection with the University of South Africa, he was convinced that the pioneer college was hampered by the examination requirements of external examiners who were, he felt, not as competent as Fort Hare was 'to say which of your people should be given degrees' (Loram 16 March 1934). He considered that Fort Hare should grant its own degrees but still continue to make use of UNISA for exams in such subjects as mathematics and Latin, where the need for adaptation to the needs of the students was not so pressing.

Loram was convinced that there were pitfalls in terms of Fort Hare's stress on examination passes and degrees as an index of achievement. He spoke of the dangers of making Africans 'degree hunters' when the real test of the training given was in the work that the students would pursue after graduation. This concept was

taken further by Mary Dick who spoke of examinations as 'a waste' and to 'no purpose' as well as a 'fetish'. She felt strongly that examinations treat students 'like herds of cattle and don't let them do any individual work', though she conceded that Fort Hare's students would struggle to motivate themselves in a freer environment as they relied at present too heavily on their lecturers as their 'guiding stars' (Dick 21 November 1933). Kerr, fortunately, did not accede to their demands as he believed that, though examinations had deficiencies, 'some kind of test must be maintained or both teachers and taught will sail along on halcyon seas, imagining that all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds' (Kerr 1968: 62). In addition, when one considers that Fort Hare was still under fire from prejudiced Whites who supported theories of 'arrested development' or from those who simply viewed the college as a dangerous and futile experiment, there was a great urgency to demonstrate unequivocally that Africans could reach a competitive level in terms of examination successes.

In later years, Loram went further than mere curriculum adaptation and there were hints that he advocated more Africanisation of the staff of Fort Hare. Certainly in the mid 1930s he envisaged Adams College in Natal with an all-African staff and with Fort Hare's first graduate Professor Z.K. Matthews as its first African head. Loram's rationale behind such a vision was that South Africa needed to learn 'by actual demonstration' that an African could run a collegiate institution (Loram 20 June 1935). Matthews was originally sceptical of Loram's 'vague scheme' and doubted whether he was really sympathetic towards the work of Fort Hare (Matthews 29 January 1934). However, Matthews himself later embraced Africanisation with more positive intent than Loram when he spoke of his vision of the college with an all-Black staff dedicated to the cause of the development of African culture in all its forms and engaged in transforming Fort Hare into the repository of the best in African life (Matthews n.d.).

Kerr and Fort Hare were able to achieve certain modifications to their curriculum from the beginning. For example, an early deputation to the Joint Matriculation Board was able to extract an undertaking that the four main African languages spoken by the students would be retained in the matriculation syllabus (Kerr 1956). Later the college was largely instrumental in obtaining the recognition by UNISA of African languages as legitimate subjects for the B.A. degree. In this regard, once Fort Hare obtained representation on the senate of UNISA, it was able to direct attention to African needs and courses of study. Subjects such as African languages, social anthropology, comparative philology and African studies consequently received greater attention. By the 1940s, UNISA offered an M.A. course in African linguistics, African education and African administration. Fort Hare also received recognition as a centre for the training of teachers for the higher education diploma, a certificate for teachers at secondary schools (Matthews n.d.).

The college was not at the outset represented on the committees of UNISA and so the interests of its students were not originally catered for. Fort Hare students were actually denied the advantage of their college record in the determination of their results. In addition, they were forced to accept arrangements that were of little relevance to them. For example, a course in Anglo-Saxon in the third year English syllabus became a totally unnecessary load and reduced the work to a dull grind. In condemning such an arrangement, D.J. Darlow, head of Fort Hare's English department in the pioneer phase, remarked that the whole aim of the course was 'to develop powers of appreciation and understanding rather than the amassing of knowledge for purposes of examination' (South African Native College Calendar 1927:27), but it was some time before any special concessions were granted to African students in languages.

However, the main thrust of the curriculum in the pioneer phase was towards a traditional 'liberal' orientation. Matthews described the curriculum which he encountered as parochial and not radically different from that of missionary and European high schools (Matthews 1981:71). Contentious subjects such as history were tackled from a Eurocentric perspective and in the 1920s the pro-White bias of the lecturer in South African history obviously disturbed the students, though in this subject as well as geography and botany data from the immediate environment was also included (Kerr 61).

There were a number of constraints on the degree of adaptation that could be attempted. One factor was obviously the subordinate and rather neocolonial relationship with UNISA. In its pioneer days the courses pursued by the students at Fort Hare were determined by lecturers engaged in primarily Euro-centred work with White university students. The external examination system was also far from satisfactory. Consequently, by the 1930s there were those who advocated that the institution should free itself from the yoke of external control in order to develop more fully African educational needs which, according to European stereotyping, were considered to be essentially rural and agricultural (Dick 1934:75).

But apart from the restrictions of its relationship with UNISA, the college authorities were hindered in their innovations by the deep distrust felt by Africans towards any courses especially adapted by Europeans for what they considered were the special circumstances of Africans. Furthermore, there were even prejudices in certain African quarters against African studies. This was evident in the mid-1930s when the Fort Hare department of African studies was founded with Matthews as its first head. At the outset Kerr hoped that the new department would attract both Black and White support, but he was aware of the need to 'strenuously justify its right to existence in the eyes of the African masses' (Kerr 25 July 1935). Matthews himself had no doubts that one of the positive benefits of African higher education was the preservation and development of African culture. He, too, was conscious of the fact

that certain less educated Africans viewed African culture as a myth that existed 'only in the mind of the European who wants to exploit the Bantu for his own benefit' (Matthews n.d.).

Kerr himself, despite his European background, looked forward in the 1930s to a time when Africans would actually demand 'research into Native custom and language, as well as the creation of indigenous prose, literature, poetry, drama, music and art' (Kerr 1935: 14-15). The college considered it of the highest importance that African students should be trained in the scientific observation and reasoned knowledge of their own languages, laws and customs and fervently believed that Fort Hare should be the centre of an African studies museum and library for registering and preserving the results of African research. Unfortunately, by the 1930s African studies was not strong enough at Fort Hare to claim the support of government to the same extent as departments at Cape Town, Stellenbosch and Witwatersrand universities. As Kerr openly admitted, the struggling college lacked the means to advance rapidly towards a more complete Africanisation of the curriculum. He conceded that the slender resources at the disposal of the college did not 'at present allow of any but voluntary and gratuitous service of these higher aims' (Kerr 1935:14-15). Though he believed that there should be no real divorce between students and their traditional culture in the educational process, Kerr was not convinced of the need to adapt the curriculum comprehensively at the tertiary level. He advocated new topics and extensive adaptation only at the primary school level where he felt it was unnecessary to drag African pupils through such history as accounts of the American and French revolutions and narratives of the Napoleonic wars (Kerr 7 July 1938).

The accent on the practical subject of agriculture was seriously hampered by the preconceptions and prejudices of rural students who, like their White counterparts, were seldom very keen on agricultural colleges. They felt that there was 'nothing new and romantic in life on a farm for them', and farm work, Kerr realised, was seen as 'the lot of the rustic' (Department of Agriculture at Fort Hare n.d.).

A further factor retarding curriculum reform was that the changeover to science, agriculture and sociology could not easily be embarked upon while the students who came to the college had been 'grinding away for the past four or five years on such subjects as algebra, latin and others for the matriculation' (Dick 1934:26). Therefore, if a real transformation was to be achieved in the 1930s, adaptationists such as Mary Dick were adamant that change had to originate not at the apex of the education structure, but at high school level. In reality, the period of limited adaptation in the matriculation and school leaving examinations came to an end because, as Kerr pointed out, Africans wished to compete on an equal footing with Whites and even if the curriculum was weighted against them by the language



requirements 'they prefer to have it so rather than to feel that concessions have been made to them on the ground of race' (Kerr 1935:7-8).

Adaptation certainly had limitations and tended to lead to an inferior quality of education for Blacks. As Professor Wandira has commented, it assumed that 'Western concepts of education had to be adapted and therefore it left no room for other choices' (Wandira 1977:19). Adaptation was often imposed by Europeans on Africans according to what they thought was relevant and useful for Blacks. African educationists would soon define other starting points for themselves.

The deficiencies of Fort Hare in meeting the demands for higher status education and the pressure from outside forces such as the government, together with African aspirations and goals, were brought into sharp focus by the failure to create a full medical course in the 1920s and by the suspicion engendered by the introduction of a less ambitious medical aid course in 1934.

In the run-up to the establishment of the college, there had been African agitation for access to the higher status professions of law and medicine. Although at least one of the founders, Henderson, was opposed to the training of African lawyers on the grounds that Africans were generally too litigious, there seems to have been some limited support for a course in medicine 'adapted to native needs and means' (Henderson 1 May 1908). The college promoters were actually enjoined to take steps to secure government recognition for the qualifications of African medical practitioners who should be able to work among their own people.

Later in the 1920s Fort Hare was able to motivate for overseas scholarships for college students to study medicine on the grounds that there was an urgency in satisfying the medical needs of rural Africans in the light of the high infant mortality rates and the prevalence of typhus and enteric which were almost endemic in the Ciskei. They referred to 'a growing desire on the part of Natives to have Native doctors' and that many African young men wished to enter the profession (Overseas Scholarships for former SANC students for medicine and a preliminary medical course at SANC 1921). The Fort Hare community agitated for a full medical school at the college which, they felt, must sooner or later be established. This demonstrated again that Fort Hare's vision of the future went beyond that of the Tuskegee model of low level instruction and utility.

Although full medical training for Africans was first proposed by Dr. James McCord, founder and head of the McCord Zulu hospital in Durban, Fort Hare was instrumental in bringing the whole issue of medical training before the government. What, in fact, brought matters to a head was the application by a Fort Hare student, one Mtinkulu, whose father was a Wesleyan minister, for admission to Cape Town University's medical school (Henderson 30 March 1923). Fort Hare used the racial dilemma to attempt to boost its own status through the creation of a full medical course for Africans. However, the college's agitation for a medical school also

brought into focus its rather isolated and unsuitable environment as a centre for this purpose. It soon became clear that Fort Hare's desire for increased status was nothing but a forlorn hope. It was Dr. Carter of the Rockefeller Foundation who seems to have put an end to the rather naive ambitions of the college when he argued that an efficient medical school must be located at a centre affording good clinical opportunities. The rural environment of the college therefore made it unsuitable for all but the preliminary year (Lennox 19 November 1924). Both Loram and McCord felt that it was premature to think about full medical training for Africans at Fort Hare when there were not more than a dozen matriculants. Loram, in fact, supported the creation of overseas scholarships for medicine (Loram 25 August 1924).

By 1930 the dream of an African medical school at Fort Hare had been abandoned in part as a result of the lack of government support and in part because of its unsuitable locality. However, a golden opportunity had been passed over to have a school either at the college or in Durban as the Rockefeller Foundation had actually agreed to give £70 000 for the project on condition that the Union government provided the funds for its maintenance. The conservative sentiments of the Minister of Native Affairs was that the time had not yet arrived to establish a medical school for Africans (Governing Council Minutes June 1930).

Instead of a medical school, Fort Hare was approached in 1934 by the Union Education Department regarding the creation of a scheme similar to those that had been instituted elsewhere in Africa for training and using subordinate medical assistants (Kerr November 1961). Big business also became involved, with the Chamber of Mines and the Rhodes Trust agreeing to provide finance on the understanding that qualified Africans could be used to their advantage in maintaining the health of African migrants in the mining compounds.

Fort Hare also supported the venture as it hoped to use the new situation to press for expansion in the form of science laboratories, staff and student scholarships. Moreover, Kerr's approval of the medical aid scheme was conditional upon it being accompanied by a government scholarship scheme for the overseas training of students as full practitioners. Kerr was in touch with the aspirations of the African people and was aware that they would not be satisfied with purely second rate medical training. He also backed the scheme because he hoped that it would be a step in the direction of a fully fledged health service for Africans. He was of the opinion that this was not taking place at that juncture because African doctors were not settling down in rural service but preferred opening practices in the crowded locations.

The medical aid course, though it seemed on the surface to be a realistic adaptation to African needs and an attempt to grapple with the problem of creating an effective health service for the more disadvantaged rural areas, enjoyed only lukewarm support from African students. It did not lead to any qualification which

would have enabled them to be placed on the medical register nor did it lead to a degree after four years of study. It therefore failed to carry the prestige attached to other less lengthy courses of study. Facts and figures show clearly that it failed to plug the gap in rural health. Of the 10 who started off the course only 4 qualified in 1939, a further 4 in 1940, 11 in 1941 and 5 in 1942 (Kerr 29 May 1963).

Kerr's original aim in supporting the medical aid course was that Africans could commence medical instruction at a low level and then expand their aspirations and needs so that eventually, in several decades, the small beginnings would have been transformed into 'something equivalent to the usual G.P. course but adapted to our rural conditions' (Kerr 1968:188-189). This again demonstrates the slow, gradualist theory of African development which missionary liberals supported in the inter-war years. Africans had preferably to 'earn their spurs' before they would be allowed to progress to higher status training.

As the college council considered the initial qualification for entry to the course, namely the junior certificate, too low, the course was lengthened. This further damaged the status of medical aid as it 'detracted from the inducement to enrol', and the length of the course now compared unfavourably with the teacher's course in which degrees could be obtained (Kerr 5 January 1969). Because Fort Hare continued to press for a more speedy increase in the number of qualified men and women in order to bring medical help within the reach of the widely scattered rural areas, renewed approaches were made to the Union government and public spirited corporations abroad to interest them in the establishment of a Black medical school in South Africa. Sadly these efforts also proved futile (Kerr November 1961).

The medical aid scheme was castigated by its students as disregarding African aspirations, depriving them of qualified people and as an attempt by the government to protect European doctors. Above all the scheme was attacked as 'a special line' for Africans, and the African public was urged not to support 'differential educational schemes for they invariably mean valueless contrivances for Natives' (*Ilanga lase Natal* 5 June 1937).

The well-known African doctor, Dr. R.T. Bokwe, spoke in similar vein of the fears and suspicions of Africans that a second-rate service was being foisted upon them, though he conceded that by the 1940s African suspicions had been partially allayed by the actions of Witwatersrand University in sanctioning the full medical training of Africans at that institution. Bokwe was convinced that the medical aid scheme for rural health would only afford limited relief and that sooner or later it would be scrapped. He considered that such a scheme lost sight of the whole trend of medicine in contemporary times which laid greater emphasis on preventive medicine than had been the case in the past. He was adamant that the status of trained medical aids would remain dubious and their careers would be a *cul de sac* unless the training led to a full medical course after further study and experience or unless successful

candidates could secure a degree. He concluded that the scheme should be modified into one for training preventive health officers at Fort Hare coupled with the policy of Wits University which was to promote full medical training (Bokwe n.d.).

As an attempt to adapt education to African needs, the medical aid scheme proved a dismal failure. Fort Hare's authorities seemed rather too willing to simply accept what was thrust upon them by the government. As Dr. Gale, the first head of the new department, pointed out, the content of the syllabus should have been 'considerably revised if it was to produce medical aids who would be really effective in advancing Native health' (Gale 21 October 1963). Instead of modifying the content of the course or calling for legislation that would have remedied the situation, the college staff undermined the morale of the medical aid department by openly ascribing the impasse to the prejudice of the medical profession against the professional training and use of Africans. Students, in fact, felt that they had been 'sold down the river' by those whose seniority and greater experience should have caused them to reject the scheme (Gale 21 October 1963).

As Dr. Gale of Fort Hare recollected, there were additional problems facing the qualified medical aids whose certificate entitled them only to enter government employment and restricted them to South Africa. In addition, they could not practise privately as nurses and midwives if they were made redundant or retired. A further restriction in South Africa made it illegal for any unregistered person to perform, for gain, any act which pertained specifically to the work of a medical practitioner. This even included such basic functions as giving injections and using a stethoscope. The upshot was that medical aids had no real status in society and were forbidden to do the very things which in their own and other Africans' eyes 'would have given them at least a quasi-professional status' (Gale 21 October 1963). Instead, they were humiliated and frustrated in their role as doctor's stooges or male nurse aids.

The medical aid controversy is significant in that it further highlighted student perceptions against labouring in remote rural areas under the control of district surgeons who might have been difficult to work with. Fort Harians apparently preferred teaching as they felt that they had more opportunity of being under the immediate control of either other Africans as headmasters or missionary-minded European principals. Graduate teachers also chose high schools in or near large towns. Medical aids thinly distributed over South Africa's so-called African areas would have had only minimal opportunities for meeting together and forming an effective professional association (Gale 21 October 1963).

The secretary of the medical association at the time, Louis Leipoldt, a 'liberal', spoke of the scheme as 'a compromising, humbugging' one (Gale 21 October 1963). Moreover, the whole fiasco exposed government thinking on the educability of Africans. Dr. Thornton of the public health department, the instigator of the scheme, was convinced that it was 'impossible to teach any African even a

matriculated one, in four or five years enough clinical medicine to bring him into conflict with the law' (Gale 21 October 1963). Thornton also subscribed to the old European stereotype that because of 'arrested development' Africans could only learn at half the rate of Europeans. He had been apparently informed that all African doctors in South Africa had taken twice the normal time to qualify. With these preconceptions and prejudices Thornton had intended the medical aids to do only the clinical work which a good nurse could do (Gale 21 October 1963).

As the failure of the scheme became more apparent, there were moves in the late 1930s to restart the whole scheme in Durban. McCord, however, was not keen to duplicate Fort Hare's scheme. There were also suggestions that the course should be shortened to a pre-professional year and three professional years (McCord 5 January 1937). Ultimately, the original course was reviewed by a government commission of enquiry under Dr. D.L. Smit who realised that there was no hope of the law being amended to accommodate the scheme. Consequently it was recommended that the scheme be replaced by one leading to the bachelor of science degree in hygiene to be followed by a year's work in Durban under the department of health (Gale 21 October 1963). It was at this juncture that Principal Raikes of Wits took the revolutionary step, in the context of the time, of admitting a limited number of Africans to their medical school. The effort was backed by the Native Trust, which agreed to provide five scholarships. These proved a great attraction for those Fort Harians who desired free medical education (Kerr November 1961).

There are certainly inherent dangers in a rural university becoming immersed in its own way of living. Ideally a university should be in touch with a large centre of population with its vibrant industrial, commercial, artistic and practical life. Critics like Mary Dick considered that the college was rather introverted and that it had comparatively little influence on the lives of the Africans living in the immediate surrounding (Dick 1934: 60). Moreover, she felt that the college should rectify this by training social and community workers for the rural areas so that African upliftment in health, morality and recreation could be generated by the presence of Fort Hare in their midst. But in reality Dick's accusations regarding Fort Hare's outreach were not entirely well founded. There were various initiatives from the outset to overcome the relative isolation of the college and to transform it from a rather elitist ivory tower into an instrument that could serve the mass of the people. As has been recently pointed out, the greatest modern challenge of the university in contemporary Africa is 'not how to produce expertise for the urban industrial sector, but how best to accelerate the development of the rural sector, the other 80 percent of the nation' (Porter 1973:82).

In 1919 the Fort Hare council appointed a demonstrator in agriculture, the Reverend J.E. East, an African American Baptist missionary, to travel among African farmers in the neighbouring villages to assist in improving their agricultural methods

and stimulate production. He established a Farmers' Association for the encouragement and promotion of mutual aid among the African agriculturalists and stock farmers of the Ciskei. The salary of this agricultural demonstrator was made possible through a grant from the Department of Native Affairs and Agriculture. It was also East who encouraged D.D.T. Jabavu, Fort Hare's famous professor of African languages, to establish a number of African Farmers' Associations. It should also be mentioned that a further point of contact between Fort Hare and a considerable section of the rural population of the Ciskei region was the annual agricultural show, with the local inhabitants actively involved in exhibiting their livestock (Kerr :48, 69-70, 265-266).

In the 1920s Fort Hare organised small groups of European students to pay weekend visits to the college in order to get to know African university students at first hand and to ascertain ways to cement permanent student relationships across the colour line. Kerr promoted these visits because he believed that they would increase understanding between different races in one country and improve race relations. One of the major spin-offs of the contacts was the epoch making European-Bantu conference of 1930, a Christian conference which set out to bring together students and more senior people of both Black and White groups, to confront together through Christian brotherhood 'the needs and facts of our common life and together seek a way out of our difficulties' (Kerr September 1961; Yergan 1930:1).

Kerr showed his progressive educational vision of wider outreach for Fort Hare in 1922 when he spoke of his support for a system of continuing adult education. He referred to a curriculum which would enable those who left without completing their course to return for short terms to the college at intervals or even to study privately or by correspondence in order to make up units in the curriculum which they may not have been able to take during their time at the college (*Imvo Zabantsundu* 14 November 1922:5). This was another instance of the growing sensitivity of the authorities to the special dilemmas facing African students.

Moreover, Fort Hare's Principal felt strongly about the need for universities and colleges to utilise their facilities for the full year and for this reason he initiated a series of vacation schools as a practical experiment in adult education where members of the general public could share in the advantages of the university through extension courses. Many of Fort Hare's vacation schools had an African emphasis and were attempts to interest the public beyond the walls of the college in African studies, which in the 1920s was still in its infancy in tertiary institutions (Kerr March 1961).

What critics of Fort Hare in its pioneer phase tended to overlook were the factors beyond the control of the college which hampered progress. Fort Hare was painfully aware that there was a bottleneck in African secondary education with only a tiny percentage of Africans in any form of secondary schooling. African higher education remained very much a minority problem with the educational apex having

to be created on a very shaky and incomplete foundation. Moreover, government and large corporations had little use for an educated African middle class and as a result Fort Hare was financially starved. Fort Hare graduates themselves faced a very restricted and bleak future in a racially discriminatory society which largely limited African advancement to service amongst rural Africans in the reserves.

The problem of adaptation of the curriculum is that it can easily degenerate into education 'along their own lines' being recommended on the grounds that Africans cannot cope with a full 'White' education, or being justified because it is considered relevant to the needs and interests of the agricultural masses. As Edgar Brookes (1930:44f) remarked, there is the ever-present danger of making 'utility' the test of African education and 'culture' the test of White education.

Fort Hare's students, although supportive of curriculum identity with European colleges, were increasingly critical of certain liberal courses. In the 1930s, for example, there was agitation amongst the student body for a curriculum which was more geared to greater community consciousness, one which would involve the institution more deeply in the social and political issues that affected the exploited of South Africa. As veteran ANC activist Govan Mbeki has related, by 1933 the students had launched a campaign to encourage other students to major in such courses as history, political science and geography as it was generally felt that these subjects had definite activist elements. The majority of students had apparently previously been content to major in courses such as English, psychology and logic and consequently the accusation was made by student leaders that Fort Hare was simply producing 'Black Englishmen' who were rather isolated from the real struggles of the people (Mbeki 1996:1).

Fort Hare in its pioneer phase had avoided the temptation to reduce 'adaptation' to African needs to an easy formula which could be applied to every subject and situation in African education. The institution had progressed further than the Booker Washington ideals in order to provide a broad, liberal education which would ensure its graduates access to the wider dimensions of education in a South African society which was gradually broadening its opportunities for educated men and women. In this regard, one can argue that Fort Hare, though not in the vanguard of progress in the struggle for relevance, did in fact offer a curriculum which embraced a broad spectrum of disciplines, including the more socially pertinent newly emerging disciplines of sociology, social anthropology and psychology (Kerr 1935). What remained a severe constraint on its reform programmes was that as the only African university college in a racially stratified and segregated society it did not enjoy the preferential treatment regarding resources and staff which it so richly deserved.

School of Social Sciences and Development Studies  
University of Durban-Westville

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# Witnessing the Knowable Past: Knowledge, Truth and Humanity in Three Testimonies

Vasu Reddy

## Introduction

If 'history' could be defined as the naming of historical subjects, then what the narrative signals in testimony is the extent to which the speaking subject who is knowable about his or her experience is knowledgeable about his or her past. To be 'knowable' does not necessarily imply the capacity to be 'knowledgeable'. Such a problem may be overcome when we identify a correspondence between the subject who posits this claim in 'telling' or 'writing' and the extent to which it defines its knowing in the conditions it sets up in the narrative.

At the denotative level, knowledge may point to 'facts', 'feelings' and 'experiences' of the subject. Firstly I deploy knowledge as a distinguishing feature in processes of witnessing in the texts by Albie Sachs, Deneys Reitz and Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Secondly I root the analysis in a problematization of the supposed 'truth' claims of each text. Thirdly, I assess some of the 'truth' claims in the texts against the so-called humanizing effects of testimony. Fourthly, the article briefly assesses the notions of knowledge, truth and humanity (concepts central to reading the texts as testimonies) in relation to what I describe as the texts' construction of a specialised version of truth in relation to self and event. The strategy used in analysis is a comparative reading, rather than a separate reading of the three texts.

The texts chosen require some explanation: Deneys Reitz's *Commando: A Boer Journal of the Boer War* (1929), Albie Sachs's *The Jail Diary of Albie Sachs* (1966), and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* (1981). It is not the question of geographical and cultural difference which marks a distinction between the three texts that interests me. Sachs' and Ngugi's diaries both foreground their prison experiences, while Reitz's journal accounts for his role as soldier in the Anglo-Boer War. What all three texts share is not simply a mode of self-narration wherein the 'I' as subject figures the 'experience' of a past; nor do they simply reflect a generic similarity as a species of autobiographical writing. My claim is that all three

texts, despite their generic similarities and/or differences, manifest themselves as testimonies, the theoretical possibility shown by all three texts. I am simultaneously aware that the three texts could be replaced by other texts in order to show that any autobiographical text could be construed as a form of testimony.

The three texts reveal the histories of three subject positions: a historical, a contemporary and the perspective of a non-South African subject in order to contrast it with the experience of Sachs as white prisoner. As will be indicated later on in this article the position of the subjects as witnessing subjects focuses on a particular human condition: Reitz as soldier in the Anglo-Boer War; Sachs as prisoner in the scheme of apartheid South Africa and Ngugi as prisoner in a neocolonial prison in Kenya. For the purpose of this discussion one could identify the subject positions as based on the binary opposition of colonial / neocolonial. Another interesting point of comparison between Reitz and Sachs is their discussion of the Anglo-Boer War, since Sachs analyses his family's ordeal during this war.

The article therefore proceeds from the hypothesis that all three subjects testify to a witnessed account of a real experience. It is in this sense that I am showing they are 'knowable' and 'knowledgeable' subjects. And the distinguishing features of these testimonies are their claims to knowledge, truth and humanity, concerns that advance the witnessed account as a special case of both self and event. I offer a reading of these concerns by borrowing concepts from a broad range of theorists such as Lyotard, Fanon, Foucault, Said, Williams and Felman. For the purposes of this article, I read some of their concepts into the text without fully presenting a detailed model of their work. By using this method, I hope to show what insights the work of these critics bring to an understanding of testimony in relation to these texts. My position in this essay is to argue that autobiographical writing, and especially species which belong to it (such as diaries and the journal in this case) are testimonies. And the way I show this is by reading the concepts of truth, knowledge and humanity, which I take to be defining moments of testimony, into the three texts.

## Knowledge and Truth

When Lyotard (1984:77) identifies in the production of scientific knowledge 'the rule that there is no reality unless testified by a consensus between partners over a certain knowledge and certain commitments' (e.a.) he suggests that testified knowledge is not essentially the 'truth' of the self which develops from a relationship between interlocutor and interviewee (as is the case in oral historical projects). He also distinguishes between 'scientific' and 'self-legitimizing narratives'. The latter for him constitutes not simply an alternative mode of knowledge but essentially one which privileges and legitimizes a 'localized' knowledge. By the latter is meant 'knowledge' which is relevant to the extent that it enhances the possibilities of re-



establishing the 'presence' of an event. What we conceive then are the possibilities that such a partnership presents, which is why it is logical to talk about the knowledge-effects and truth-effects of the testimonies as opposed to the essentialist categories of 'knowledge' and 'truth'.

And here there are two questions to which we may attend in addressing this dynamic. Firstly, if 'knowledge' as I claim is recognised as a marker, then what 'type' of knowledge is constituted in these texts? Secondly, if 'knowledge' is closely imbricated in the notion of 'truth' what would this be, if it is understood in the Barthesian (1990:11) sense as 'the legality of the text'? In a sense questions of 'telling' and 'writing', as an exercise in the retrieval of memory and history imply that the subjects in these texts are epistemologically privileged. It also means that to testify as knowable subjects is to consolidate the subjects' superior knowledge.

In the case of Sachs the 'knowledge' that we (as readers) bear witness to is the following: his political activities as an ANC activist, his professional support as an advocate to members of the banned ANC and South African Communist party, his subsequent detention and the conditions of both the prison and his 'experience'. The latter is significant for it directs us to the 'absolute power' of the prison authorities, the disciplinary regime of the prison, and a more localized feature of the broader state machinery translated as the 'law' as a 'superior power' (152). Sachs' fiction is therefore premised on describing the extent to which his detention, imprisonment and subsequent release represent as Rosemary Jolly (1996:62) would have it in her study on colonization and violence in white South African fiction, as the 'structures of violence, and an attempt to confront these structures'. The anecdotes and a bit of personalised history that Sachs frames, as recounted by the Station Commander in Wynberg, point firstly to the question of his 'relationship' with the latter (who is the focus of part two of his text). The 'history' he recounts in relation to his family, their losses and oppression at the hands of the British in the Anglo-Boer War shows that Sachs considers such information valuable evidence to reinforce the account of his own oppression. Ironically it also points to the contradiction in the actions of the apartheid political system in the wake of the Afrikaners' own oppression by the British. His situation as political detainee is represented in the narration by probing his own consciousness as he informs about his interrogation, his physical and mental battles. His account forces us to recognise that the memory that is 'internal' is 'internal' firstly to the extent that it signals his 'presence' in a confined space (the cell), and secondly, that it is 'internal' to the extent that he is able to externalise it by bringing to the fore the 'evidence' of that consciousness.

If Ngugi's testimony is labelled in broad terms as an account of detention and imprisonment in a neo-colonial and anti-imperialist project, then it stands to reason that his fiction is bent on recuperating the signifiers central to that event. His arrest and the detail that goes with it, ('a yellow Volvo driven by Superintendent

Mburu', 18), the recording of his detention in the Kenya Gazette 6 January 1978 (19), the prison conditions which he describes as 'animal degradation' (104f) and the violation of 'democratic and human rights in prison' (113) point to his status as 'knowable subject'. The 'evidence' in the narrative is his knowledge to which he bears witness. The epistemological basis of his testimony, like Sachs', is borne out of the power that the state wields over him. The latter calls into question the structure of conflict and violence. In Paul de Man's (1979:270) reading of Rousseau's *Social Contract*, particularly his reference to the state (as a defined entity, *état*) and the state as a principle of action (*souverain*) we may read into both the testimonies by Sachs and Ngugi that the power the state wields is one which is linguistically operating here as 'souverain'. In other words, the power that is exercised is one which paralyses Ngugi; and he says, 'one had no power to resist if it was forced on one' (99).

This 'knowledge', which forms the 'evidential' focus in the text, operates to re-produce the 'knowable' subject as knowledgeable. The latter may be hypothesized as the extent to which the subject succeeds in legitimating its position in relation to the 'event' and its description. Such an operation might seem particular to testimony in the sense that the 'knowable' subject labours to 'prove' its past in the narrative.

The 'knowledge' Reitz recounts about his war experiences also operates as the subject's will to explain, to dramatize his position both as a member of a commando in the war effort, and his position as sight-seer with a claim such as 'I personally witnessed' [a range of episodes and events - 162]. This subjectivity that Reitz espouses (like Sachs and Ngugi) suggests that the epistemological underpinning of his telling, such as the skirmishes on the battlefield, is designed to suggest that the 'knowledge' which we read into his account is itself a condition for reasserting the relation between agency, power and struggle.

There are also some revealing 'statistics' which lend a level of objectivity to Reitz's project. On the battlefield Reitz takes notice of a 'French gentleman' (138) and a Jew (234) fighting on the side of the Boer forces, named by the 'knowable' Reitz as evidence of his eye-witness account. By Boer forces is understood the Dutch and Huguenot settlers in the Cape colony, Orange Free State and Transvaal. But Reitz's 'quotation' of these foreign nationals working in tandem with the Boer military opens for his testimony an epistemological significance that suggests, as a historical episode, that the 'discovery' of these subjects is a 'moment' of 'truth'. For the reader this may also signal a moment which occasions an evaluation of the possible significance that Reitz's 'discovery' poses as a way of reading the Boer War as a war fought solely by Afrikaners. An identification such as this opens up a critical space in which the reader is compelled not simply to read the representation of the 'Jew' and 'Frenchman' as allies of the Boer forces, but tempted rather to ask what the knowledge of such an episode poses for the truth claims of his testimony. It might be

the case that Reitz's reference to these allies serves to reinforce the 'truth-fullness' of Reitz's witnessing.

Another issue informing the question of knowledge that could be comparatively illustrated especially in regard to both Sachs and Ngugi's testimonies is the citation of the Bible and Christian imagery. In both texts we read the Bible on one level is the only reading matter for both Sachs and Ngugi as prisoners. On another the 'Bible' takes on symbolic significance: it calls into question the State's religious duty to its prisoners. That 'duty' might be an attempt to 'constrain' their aggression and resistance by providing both Sachs and Ngugi with the Bible.

In Ngugi's text, Christian imagery is used as a vehicle to advance a millenarian belief in a possible political 'freedom' from oppression, one which does not represent his support of a theological understanding of salvation. An example is his deployment of the figure of Lazarus to condemn the corrupt history of the Kenyan neocolony: 'Colonial Lazarus raised from the dead: this putrid spectre of our recent history haunted us daily at Kamiti prison' (63). The biblical figure of Lazarus becomes a symbol of hope and redemption. Gikandi (1995:61) refers to the figure of Lazarus as follows: 'Since the 1920s, the Africanized Christian Churches of Central Kenya used the figure of Lazarus (Lazaro in the Gikuyu bible), as a symbolic—and quite dramatic—site for representing the emotions of loss and the possibility of redemption'. In this sense Lazarus (as knowable figure), is not just a character from the Bible but a cultural symbol of hope which Ngugi valorizes to explore the suffering of oppressed Kenyans in the postcolony.

In Ruth First's *117 Days* (which Sachs refers to), she also captures the significance of the Bible when she states that 'in giving us the Bible, they seemed to think, fulfilled the State's Christian duty to us as prisoners' (66). 'They' in this instance, marked as the oppressive 'other' as the prison officials explicitly cites the linkage between State as *etât* and State as *souverain*. The latter confirms that the 'Bible' only becomes significant in its association with the propagation of the Christian National ethic of the apartheid government when it is actively and judiciously imposed on its subjects.

The 'Bible' in Sachs' text occupies an ambivalent position. He turns to it not by coincidence; in fact it is his only reading material in solitary confinement. In Maitland prison, in a chapter titled 'A Day in my Life' (chapter 6) he reads from the Book of Judges and reads the story of Samson. In his introspection he considers the 'nobility' of Samson even in death and ponders: 'I wonder how it is that so many people find the Bible to be a source of comfort', to which he administers an 'answer': 'Perhaps they are consoled by attributing all the slaughter and pain of human history to a plan of God to test humanity' (65). The thought overwhelms him but the point here is the relationship he identifies between 'pain' and 'suffering' and the possibility that this might be part of a divine scheme. What Sachs reveals in his questioning of

this possibility is a belief that the knowledge he has of 'suffering' is one which is brought about by human 'error'. The next sentence of this passage bears this out: 'I doubt if I shall ever understand how people can be consoled by submission to such a God' (65). For Sachs to submit to 'God' would be possibly to misrecognise that the 'power' that constrains is not a transcendental 'force' removed from people, but one which is 'familiar' and therefore known. In a later chapter, in Wynberg prison, the station commander's knowledge of the Bible inspires him to read a few passages as a matter of curiosity.

In the chapter, 'Convert', he explains: 'It's given me a *new insight* into things I *knew* very little about before, and there are many things I *understand* now which I did not *understand* before' (177; e.a.). The highlighted words indicate a 'knowledge' that the self reveals about 'things' which are not immediately relevant to questions of spirituality. He confesses, in the sentence following his response to the station commander, 'he would not understand me if I told him what my new views were' (177); he thus secures a 'private' thought as a secret best untold. 'Privacy' exists only insofar as he keeps it to himself, but this is an impossibility. As reader I have access to that 'private' thought as he discloses the fact in the narrative. The Bible signifies for him a 'historical record' (178) that 'contains a magnificent truth': 'That the New Testament both in letter and in spirit (apart from the book of Isaiah) does not support apartheid' (178). Apartheid in this sense is the transgression of state doctrine. The Bible for Sachs, initially a 'curious' document, now turns out to be a 'record' that enables him to bear witness to the historical stories that it tells, and its significance is what he wishes to read into his own situation.

Another epistemological axis which is thematized in all three texts is racism. For example, in the disciplinary regime of the prison we identify a form of racism that is symptomatic of the divisions that existed in South Africa. The food prepared for inmates is also 'racialized'. Where the food for white prisoners is prepared by the station commander's wife, the food for non-white inmates is prepared by a black chef working for the prison (chapter 6). It is particularly telling when Sachs congratulates the station commander (Mr. Kruger) at Wynberg prison on his wife's cooking, the former replies 'Ach, it's just *boerekos*' (farmer's food, 51). At the very 'insignificant' level of the production of food the signifier of 'race' becomes symbolic of the social divisions in the prison. And it is not unsurprising that Sachs would explain later in this section that 'everything is *divided* into significant fractions, for these are the dimensions of my world' (53; e.a.).

The 'divisions' that circumscribe the three texts is the operative word. It takes the form of racism, the economic, political and social divisions of the South African and Kenyan context, as well as the physical divisions of the battlefields between the British in Reitz's narrative. In *Commando* the geographical boundaries of the Cape Colony, Orange Free State, Transvaal and Natal demarcate 'territory',



are at best spaces which call into question the 'knowing' past of Reitz. 'Race' as knowable signifier is introduced into the text's economy of signification as his commando prepares itself for the journey to the frontier (ch. 3). At this point Reitz recognises Charley, an 'old native servant' belonging to his family, 'a servant of ours' (20; e.a.) who is also a 'grandson of the famous Basuto chief, Moshesh' (21). The entry of Charley onto the scene turns out to be significant for him: 'he was more than welcome for we could now turn over to him our cooking and the care of the horses' (21). Charley could be theorized here as the 'silent' Other who is present in the commando performing tasks such as cooking, washing and grooming the horses. Later on in the battle at Nicholson's Nek he sees 'a party of Indian *dhoolie* bearers, who brought down some wounded English soldiers' (41; e.a.). 'Dhoolie' could be identified as a morphological variation of 'coolie', a pejorative reference to Indians. Closer to the Tugela Line during another battle the text speaks of the shells as 'little niggers' (*klein kafferkes*, 61), so whenever one came through the air a warning cry would signal 'Look out—a little nigger' (62) and there would be a dive for cover. And whereas Charley is the loyal and 'welcome' native servant, later in the battle at Spion Kop Reitz speaks of 'an old Kaffir servant [who] came whimpering up among us from below, looking for his master's body' (76f). Equally revealing is his description of the Basutos during an attack: 'Fortunately the native is a notoriously bad marksman, for he generally closes his eyes when he pulls the trigger' (205).

In the scheme that Reitz sketches, the text reveals the identity of the white subject against the 'native' and 'kaffir' who is knowable, irremediably Other, and 'degenerate'. Todorov's study, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other* (1984:254) takes up the issue of the Other and he asserts that 'self-knowledge develops through knowledge of the Other'. Reitz's testimony of this 'knowable' past does not appropriate racism; rather, it cathezes some stereotypes to prop-up, regulate, organise and fasten on the *negativity* of the Black man. Though the connotation of 'kaffir' in Reitz's time may have not been as negative as it is today, the significance it opens up for the question of 'race' can not be overemphasized. By anxiously declaring the 'native' as an alien Other of civility, Reitz could be simultaneously (and perhaps unconsciously) disclosing his own racism by affirming his own identity as the 'I' as 'witness'. In this sense the loyal Charley is as much a historical subject of the event as he is representative of the master-slave dialectic that the text opens up. But the operation of 'race' as a difference not to be erased has significance beyond the negativity that it foregrounds. It synecdochically informs throughout Reitz's discourse by specifying personhood through pigmentation by constructing the 'native' as type and therefore subordinated to the 'white' economy of meaning. Charley belongs to the Reitz family as a loyal servant, therefore he is 'possessed', he is his master's asset. And though not immediately relevant we may read into this Fanon's (1991:110) observation in *Black Skins, White Masks* in which he argues

against an ontology of 'race'. He posits a view which foregrounds the structures of imperialism which bring 'racial' discourse into operation, such that 'not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man'. Against this background one could make a case that though Reitz as subject fought as soldier against imperial forces, in his characterization of the 'native' as a negativity, he consequently effects a racist interpretation of the black man. This characterization is not necessarily an 'imperialist' modality but one investing in the mythology of 'racial' superiority.

In extending this point to Ngugi we note that the text's identification and critique of 'race' is founded on the imperium, especially its reference to the writings of the colonial period by Huxley, Blixen, Meinertzhagen, including the treatment of native Kenyans by their colonial masters. This for Ngugi is not simply a historical 'memory,' nor a usable past but a 'knowable' and thus knowledgeable entity. But 'race' in Ngugi's text is closely connected to sexuality. The sexual exploitation of Kenyan women by foreign nationals (especially military and naval officers) is a further indication according to him of the exploitative colonial apparatus. He refers to an incident reported in a newspaper where an American sailor, after sleeping with a Kenyan woman, killed her, and was fined for the act on condition that he would 'be of good behaviour for the next two years' (59). We may read into this a possible relationship that Ngugi wishes to establish between colonialism, racism and exploitation. Colonialism, as a 'knowable' form of domination operates not simply by *misrecognizing the racialized Other*, but by denigrating it, even destroying it. Rather, the colonial authority possesses the power to 'protect' its privileged subjects even when they 'transgress'. And by privileging the 'transgressed' white colonial subject in the case of the American soldier, Ngugi is attempting to establish for us a way of reading the contradictions of the imperial operation, since it marks the very point at which his testimony touches its own 'truth', a concept he explains in the text in analogical terms: 'Truth, a peasant once told me, is like a mole. Try to cover it, and it will still reappear in another place' (118). Ngugi's statement is closely associated with the Foucauldian notion of 'confession' that the 'secret' to be told (exposed?) assumes a 'subject' for its cause and therefore cannot be suppressed or extinguished for it 'reappears' albeit deliberately even when it is assumed to be lost, thereby strategically working against an erasure. Such a procedure might be telling in the sense that this is what could be constituted as the work of testimony.

If 'knowledge' in terms of Sachs, Reitz and Ngugi could be read as the location of subjectivity in the matrix of epistemology, then 'truth' would not be the analogue given its resistance to erasure but the very symptom of the witnessing exercise. Knowledge in this sense may be viewed as a positive (and strategic) link between the *known* and the *knower*, if the former is to be read as *evidence* and the latter as subject because it subjects itself through its ability to know. Knowledge

therefore may be further hypothesized here as an ontological and epistemological positioning which these texts signal in the chronicling of various efforts in an event. At best the subjects that seize upon and exploit the crisis of their 'event' as they strive to maintain themselves by seeking out those aspects and contradictions of the crisis cannot choose not to be read. Sachs, Reitz and Ngugi simultaneously assert knowledge and truth as a 'guarantee' of their texts by marking their positions as contra positive to *silence*.

That these texts call into existence their respective 'events' as a crisis of witnessing, must assure us that we become the very 'belated witness' to a crisis of knowledge and truth. It is in terms of this modality that an epistemology emerges as a *constructed knows*, not as a constative act, but as a performative because it translates the *known* by a received *knower*. And, to characterise the knowledge to which Reitz, Ngugi and Sachs testify and to which we bear witness, is to understand that the narration of their project is dependent on an intersection between knowing (epistemology) and being (ontology) as a practice of writing. If we claim that the subject is fractured and decentred as a result of its transgression, then we may equally argue that the knowledge we see emerge, is transgressive and dissident knowledge as a 'truth' to be disclosed about self and event. Dissident knowledge could be understood in the context of these texts not only as a right to belief, but also as a right to practice those beliefs as a modality of difference which is oppositional. The humanizing truth-effects that the texts project are to be read as a new privilege which they circulate for their subjects.

### Constructing Humanity

'To me it is a wonderful book—wonderful in its simplicity and realism, its calm intensity and absorbing human interest,' writes Jan Smuts, Prime Minister of South Africa (1919-1924; 1939-1948) in his 'Preface' to *Commando*; he adds:

The Boer War was other than most wars. It was a vast tragedy in the life of a people, whose *human* interest far surpassed its military value. A book was wanted which would give us some insight into the *human* side of this epic struggle between the smallest and the greatest of peoples. Here we have it at last (1975:5; e.a.).

In Smuts' note of confidence in Reitz's testimony as an authoritative document of the Boer War (note his classification as an Afrikaner himself of 'Boer War' and not 'Anglo-Boer War'), we may look with a certain curiosity at the status he accords it; enabling us to glimpse a certain species of social and historical relations in the act of

labelling. I shall return to the question of 'authority' and 'status' but for now it is worth inquiring on a productive announcement that Smuts articulates here.

The labelling of Reitz's testimony as a 'wonderful book' in its 'absorbing human interest' may be grasped firstly as a sanctioning by evaluation (and thus judgement), but perhaps also as a codification insofar as it registers that a social and human struggle is at the root of the narrative. It may be that Smuts' approach recognises that the narrative is focused not simply on the Boer War, since that which circulates is not just the 'war' as event, but the way the text speaks to human interests, if by this Smuts intended the 'individual' and his emotions. We may also read into his affirmation another possibility. While it seeks a fuller understanding of the Boer War, it also wishes not to reduce the 'war' simply to its 'institutionalised' place in terms of the narrative. This for Smuts would mean that the question of human interest which he feels the text underwrites is essentially a mimetic, moral and thus humanistic feature of Reitz's testimony. After all, for Smuts the 'human side' of this war is what matters. In this sense Smuts sees in Reitz's account nothing less than an 'authentic' and 'accurate description of life among the Boer forces' (6) in the version of a 'true personal story which is often stranger than fiction' (6). Such a scheme, then, might be one which works against recognising the manner in which the text programmes the notion of 'human interest' where Smuts privileges concrete facts as markers of 'human interest'. Given that Smuts' comments may lend a high-profile sponsorship to the text as a marketing strategy, we may argue that it is framed in terms of a summary rather than as analysis. This, in a sense, ought to suggest that where Smuts 'describes' an effect, the text itself constructs that possibility. But Smuts' comments (interference perhaps?) is significant here. While it is apparent that Smuts signals his 'endorsement' of the Reitz version of the Boer War effort as a conciliatory gesture between two peoples (Boers and the British), it is difficult not to read more into Smuts' strategic agenda. The human in this sense is a 'vehicle' for Smuts which signals also his own political interests. We might also recall that it was Smuts who suggested to Reitz that he remove the 'bitterness' from the original unpublished manuscript (cf. Packenham's introduction 1992). Here we may clearly identify Smuts' tactical manoeuvre to insert a local testimony into the grand narrative of the wider South Africa he was to lead from 1939-1948. In effect, humanity in this sense is clearly imbricated in structures of power, as it is advanced in the Foucauldian project. Power operates here to facilitate testimony, a 'facilitation' which serves to further the interests of Smuts' political aspirations.

Comparison of the three diaries reveals a common set of structures which serve to organise the notion of 'human interests'. This could be described temporarily as the subjects' allegiance to a 'human struggle'. If there are 'interests' that inform these testimonies, it is analogous to a suggestion that the processes involved in witnessing are bent on recuperating also questions of humanism. Smuts' usage of

'human interest' encapsulates two related signifiers: human and emotions. And to this we could add the subject, which would read as follows: the human subject of emotions who determines the dimensions of humanism in the text. A distinguishing bent of these testimonies is its capacity to 'contain' yet simultaneously not overcome the emotion. A further possibility as a comparison could be that Reitz, Sachs and Ngugi are subjects that attempt to transcend the conditions which lead to their suffering. Implicit in the notion of 'suffering' is the assumption that suffering humanizes. In the context of the three testimonies, to recuperate a past is contingent on utilizing it as a basis to appeal to a humanism.

Burdened with suffering either on the battlefield or in the prison, the 'weight' this produces as a 'negating' effect suggests that a concern for human suffering as the subject witnesses and testifies, is about postulating in its memory precisely a *positive* counterpoint to mark 'suffering' as antihuman. I am not suggesting that both 'humanism' and 'suffering' are appropriated; only their effects may be discernible. For when it is claimed that the subjects transcend their suffering by this is not meant a neutralization of personal pain and 'struggle'. The point is that 'transcendence' in the context of these testimonies allows us to view *survival* and the celebration of a *presence* as an antidote to *death* and *erasure*. To survive, is to transcend detention and imprisonment for Sachs and Ngugi, to transcend 'death' on the battlefield for Reitz. In other words, to survive is to celebrate life, to recuperate and unpack what it is to be human. But even more: to bear witness to 'suffering' and 'trauma' is to cast these as oppressive Other, a demon to be dispensed with. Felman (1992) attends to this issue in her psychoanalytical treatment of trauma in Holocaust survivors. But what she does not account for is precisely the extent to which 'suffering' in the psychic structures of the trauma subject of the Holocaust signifies an antihumanism, or for that matter the extent to which Holocaust testimony is predicated on establishing some sort of ethical universal. I state this possibility as I think about the present texts, but to assess the issue at length here does not fall within the scope of this project. At any rate, if I have claimed that Sachs, Reitz and Ngugi are positioned to 'tell', then what they cultivate in the course of the narration are the very effects of that suffering as a human dilemma to be reckoned with.

We may also be in agreement with Said (1991:112) when he speculates that 'human history is human actuality is human activity is human knowledge'. Also when Lukács (1982:335) talked about a 'new humanism' in relation to the historical novel he explained 'humanists' as those who 'start in their writing from a protest against the dehumanizing influences of capitalism'. The three texts proceed from an understanding of the anti-human effects of oppression, through which they have come to be defined. So if we claim that history is not necessarily human or that knowledge is not necessarily human, then we need to evaluate more rigorously what the concept signifies. If Lukács' historical novel mediates a 'protest' as the bearing of witness to

a dehumanizing influence of capitalism (where the latter is not simply a mode of production but a development of meaning), then what is 'dehumanizing' is the extent to which the texts define a sense of humanity as its opposite. We could claim then that under such conditions these texts anticipate questions of humanity in relation to power.

The interrogation, violation of privacy, the disregard for human dignity and the conditions which typify the penal system in which Sachs and Ngugi find themselves, together with the shootings and injuries on Reitz's battlefield, inform the 'human suffering' as well as the suffering of others these subjects bear witness to. In an incident Sachs recalls, which could be defined as the prehistory of his imprisonment, he describes his interrogation in the presence of clients by two lieutenants who ransacked his drawers, searching through his papers and clothes: 'It was particularly hurtful when they untied and examined my briefs, for I felt as though they were violating a privacy between me and my clients' (27). We read into Sachs' protest, which he verbalises as resistance in the next sentence with 'these briefs are privileged', a statement that enunciates his disapproval of the actions by the lieutenants as an 'attack' on his humanity. In other words to violate and invade privacy, which in this instance reads as private property and private space, is at once to disempower Sachs but also to deny him is 'right' to privacy. But there is a more telling revelation in this scene. The actions of the violators reveal in the language (and the emotions) of Sachs' description, acts which are antihuman. In a few sentences earlier, when Sachs says of Lieutenant Wagenaar (in comparison to Potgieter) 'I feel somehow that he is the more human and less cruel of the two' (27), Sachs responds to the organising imperative of humanity, shaped in this instance by invasion and violation. By 'organising imperative' is meant the conditions in Sachs' text which counter the actions of his interrogators, the system they represent, and the 'evidence' that bespeaks in his rewriting of those moments. In another less-explicit retelling, Sachs speculates about his involvement with what he terms left wing politics, where he views 'sacrifice as an intellectual concept relating to the future rather than an ever-present reality' (46). This statement does more than merely acknowledge a political position; it is an acknowledgement on which he predicates an understanding of 'sacrifice' as a humane act. Beyond this, its metaphoric significance allows us to view 'sacrifice' as a symbolic offering of his human(e) services to a political cause. In a later section, in response to the prison authorities' refusal to allow him books, he reinvokes the topos of humanity as a necessary moment which he captures in existential terms. I quote the entire passage:

They deprived me of books just as they *deprived me of human association* so that I would suffer *the torture of inactivity and loneliness*, and so that they could make themselves my sole source of ideas and information. But

now by means of the pages which I hold in my hands I am *restored to mental activity* and, above all, *I resume my position as a member of humanity* (165; e.a.).

This constitutes a face-making moment as Sachs feels fractured and fragile in the face of an isolated cell with no books to read. The mode of the narrative is confessional, suggesting that writing for Sachs is therapeutic. It is largely through the template of the 'I'-they' difference that he is able to posit his desire for human contact: 'I want people, not ideas, the living, not the abstract' (165). Where Sachs needs people, books and intellectual stimulation, Ngugi desires 'freedom' from prison (167), and Reitz on the other hand expresses a desire to reunite with his family (325).

Returning to Sachs. In the above passage Sachs wishes to measure his own humanity and lack of human association against the machinery of the penal system and its officials. Not only is the choice of adjective, verbs and nouns appropriate (deprived, suffer, torture, inactivity, loneliness) as paradigmatic units of 'suffering' they signify writing as a therapeutic practice for Sachs. But in the scheme of the narrative they also describe his 'suffering' and 'loneliness' in the cell as the dehumanizing effects of an oppressive Other. The latter is figured as opposite in Sachs' dehumanizing treatment in terms of dominance and submission, implying again that the 'power' that circulates over Sachs is meant to injure his human potential. The signs that clamour toward this signification ('deprive' and 'torture') suggest that 'they' operate to subjugate and disengage, to erase 'human association'. The units of 'suffering' further confirm the criminal status accorded to Sachs, a consequence of his transgression, and the price he pays is imprisonment. We ought to reconsider the possibility that when Sachs says 'I want people' he might be thus speaking to what Auerhahn and Laub (1990:446) postulate as testimony's desire to 'resurrect an empathic tie'. And where this notion is theorized in the oral project as a dialogic structure that apostrophizes interviewer and interviewee and the community that invokes an absence, we could argue that the desire for human association in Sachs' text is only a theoretical possibility. Given that Sachs as subject could be likened to the oral project's expository agent who 'determine(s) the production of history as narrative (of truth)' (Spivak 1988:283), we may hypothesize in this instance that to desire human association is firstly a recognition that the subject 'lacks' it. Secondly, the desire for association participates in precisely the same practice of resurrecting an 'empathic' structure. To associate with another human is to enter logically into 'contact' with feeling. Where in the oral project the expository agent acts as a delegate or guarantor in both the prehistory and posthistory of the narrative, Sachs conflates this responsibility as guarantor of his narrative. This conceptualization also opens the possibility for rethinking the reader (as witness), not

as a distant Other but rather as the 'belated witness', the 'person' who might be that 'abstract' figure of human association that Sachs desires: 'I must work on this idea of writing about detention one day to someone who will understand my feelings' (63).

Comparatively speaking, where Sachs' text urges toward 'human association' in its predominantly introspective and confessional modality, Ngugi pointedly focuses on a critique of the dehumanizing aspects of prison conditions by attending to the imperial history of Kenya. Ngugi's narrative mode is deliberately transgressive, and questions of humanity occupy an ambivalent position in his text. He too identifies in the monotony of prison life his human potential to resist: 'the human mind revolts against sameness' (7). To lay bare an antihumanism stems from his recreation of an 'inhumane' past to an indictment of politics in terms of the power exercised over him and his citizens in his search for 'human solidarity' (21). And the space of the prison, characterised by a 'smell' he describes as 'a permanent heavy pall of perpetually polluted air' signals unhealthy living conditions and a bad hygiene as well as a lurking sense of death. Related also is the absence of privacy as a result of the constant surveillance by the warders. But more revealing in his recall of the disciplinary regime is the animal motif he utilizes to critique the inhumane treatment of prisoners. He invokes an old saying, 'when a cow is finally pinned to the ground and tied with ropes to a slaughterhouse it cannot refuse to be slaughtered' (104). He defines the locus of prison oppression as a 'slaughterhouse' that 'butchers' its subjects as a way of eradication. By 'pinning' to the ground is meant both the power to destabilize and thus the capacity to de-humanize the 'biological' ground of humanity. For example, detainees were chained during medical treatment, during family visits in front of spouses and children (99) and he includes a letter written by detainees outlining these problems (125).

It seems the prison set-up is characterised as disruptive, regressive, falling short of a human element: 'A narration of prison life, is in fact, nothing more than an account of oppressive measures in varying degrees of intensity and one's individual or collective responses to them' (100). Here Ngugi is very aware of the 'prison' set-up in neocolonial Kenya as a critical, assertive and contradictory public space. But in advocating as the 'oppressive measures' which structure and disavow the prisoner, he also raises questions about the postponement of a 'human' element which conflicts with strategies of surveillance, discipline and power. 'Oppressive' suggests a metonymic relationship with suffering and persecution bearing upon the prisoner as accused subject. To 'oppress' would entail to subjugate by 'cruelty' and force in the manner of denying the subject free will, and freedom is understood only in relation to its opposite: non-freedom. Ngugi claims that 'the very act of forcible seizure of one's freedom for an indefinite period' (100) is 'in itself torture'. He also says that 'all other forms of torture, not excepting the physical, pale besides this cruellest of state-inflicted wounds upon one's humanity' (100), is a strategy to lay bare the

responsibility for those actions with which the state as sovereign limits the 'freedom' of the subject. The signs that circulate ('forcible seizure', 'torture' and 'state-inflicted wounds') suggest an antihuman practice.

What is important for Ngugi (like Sachs), is an understanding of what it is to be human. This is the case when he explains the welcome given to him by fellow inmates who recognise him as a 'hero' in the struggle: 'There's a fellowship which develops among people in adversity that's very human and gives glimpses of what human beings could become, if they could unite against the enemy of humanity: social cannibalism on earth' (118).

This above exchange reflects a concern with morality, specifically also in its naming of 'human' and 'humanity' as that which is to be distinguished from 'social cannibalism'. What is significant in this discourse is its metaphoric allusion. If 'social cannibalism' is a sign of a neocolonial oppressive politics, then its denotative significance, which suggests a savage and inhuman cruelty, takes on more importance in the context of the text as it foregrounds the anarchy which works against Ngugi as prisoner. Ngugi's text seems to me to be deeply associated with his declared intention to posit himself as human (humanist) subject caught up in a power dynamic that he 'experiences' as violent and anti-human.

When we turn from Ngugi to Reitz we find a less explicit mediation on this subject. The construction of a humanist trajectory occupies a space not in terms of the 'human interest' that Smuts refers to, but in the way Reitz defines his own conception of humanity in relation to his description of situations and events as a spokesperson for an anti-imperialist 'campaign'. His text gestures towards explaining not simply a witnessed account of the suffering of Boer forces, but also a recognition of humane moments displayed by the British forces. This might be read as a conciliatory gesture quite unlike what Ngugi advances. For the latter, the desire is to lay bare the dehumanizing effects of colonialism, and the very modality of his representation is characteristic of a transgression that seeks primarily to fasten on past violations. For Reitz, however, his energy is directed toward explaining the conditions prior to the build up to the war which he views as 'inevitable', and questions of humanity are registered in the reproduction of 'war' as it operates on the battlefield. In the context of Reitz's text, a projection of a humanist agenda would seem to operate in relation to the manner in which the British forces practice warfare. To stake the claim that war is inhuman is to state the obvious. But to explain the manner in which it is effected enables us to 'see' its inhuman(e) side. The loss of life, the merciless killing and tactics that relate to denouncing the enemy carries with it an inhumane logic whether it emanates from the Boer or British forces. The resistance to the pressure of the British and Boer forces in the context of witnessing brings us to Reitz's interest in epitomizing those differences which testify to the war effort. The 'on-scene' descriptions about personal losses, food shortages, starvation, lack of

ammunition, horses, clothing, the destruction of livestock by British forces and 'the death-roll among women and children, of whom twenty-five thousand had already died in the concentration camps' (322) secures a necessary relationship to his text as it alludes to the inhumanity not of the British forces but of the war prerogative itself which he labels as 'universal ruin' (322). By this is meant the question of a 'universal' that Reitz attempts to establish, an issue worth examining in relation to two central passages:

Amid all the cruelty of farm-burning and the hunting down of the civilian population, there was *one redeeming feature*, in that the English soldiers, both officers and men, were *unfailingly humane*. This was so well known that there was never any hesitation in abandoning a wounded man to the mercy of the troops, in the sure knowledge that he would be taken away and carefully nursed, *a certainty* which went far to soften the asperities of the war (169; e.a.)

The British, with all their faults, are *a generous nation*, and not only on the man of war, but throughout the time that we were amongst them, there was *no word said that could hurt our feelings or offend our pride*, although they knew that we were on errand of defeat (318; e.a.)

The trope of humanity as a necessary moment in Reitz's text pinpoints an imperative to universalize 'ruin' (if the latter is to be understood as inhumanity) as that which he identifies as recognisable by the actions of the British forces. Reitz's use of the word 'redeeming' has an added significance here: it confirms his interest in the narrative to use it for purposes of reconciliation. The effect of focusing on this issue might lend a moral framework to his text. This identification shows Reitz not as the determined soldier representing Boer interests, but as a subject positioned in retrospection, working towards identifying in the crisis of war, a humanist logic. Because the function of war is to reveal the force of power between opposing forces, the result being a privileging of the triumphant, the humanity which Reitz brings into purview is one which attempts to establish that 'ruin' (if it is synonymous with suffering) as a humanist response to that struggle.

This humanist trope might allow us to see a type of humanism constituted by all three texts as a way of possibly suggesting in Lyotard's (1991:1) observation that 'humanism administers lessons to 'us'(?). And though the question mark occasions doubt as to whether such a possibility could be concretized, it nevertheless allows us to view the texts as products in a crisis of witnessing which steer the subject towards a humanist conception of both 'event' and 'self'. For if these texts are to be read as testimonies it may be claimed that the subjects who bear testimony play on precisely

questions of a humanism in order to advance and project their experiences onto the 'belated witness'. Like the testimony of victims of apartheid at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings suggest that a survivor's 'loneliness' proceeds from separation, where the desire to re-establish a dialogue with a 'humanized executioner' emanates from a survivor's loneliness, we find in the case of these texts, humanism operates as an important modality of the testimony. To evoke the conditions which give rise to the witnessing subject is to appeal to a unique human relationship of each subject: Sachs as prisoner in the scheme of apartheid South Africa, Reitz as soldier in the Anglo-Boer war and Ngugi as prisoner in a neocolonial prison in Kenya.

## Conclusion

If humanism is to be understood as a developed sense of learning, then the epistemological axis that frames these subjects is what is at stake in the witnessing exercise. The key signifier in this process is 'humanity' which Raymond Williams (1983:148) explains as a cluster to which belong 'a complex group of words' such as human, humane, humanism, humanist, humanitarian, all of which signal toward 'specializations' of the root word man. For to talk about a 'humanity' in these texts, is to simultaneously identify and read in each case an opposition to what is animalistic. The latter is most apparent in Ngugi. And yet in all three texts humanism might be the constative epistemological mode while the very identification and construction of a humanity may be read as a performative, for it establishes the subject as a structure, one which is invented in the nature of the discourse by organising 'self', 'other' and 'event'. Could it be the case then that these texts, underpinned by a humanism, advance a humanist logic of a witnessed crisis in a case of the self and event as grand narrative?

Also, it may be the case that there are benefits for the subjects in this process, a process in which Reitz's, Sachs' and Ngugi's living to tell the tale of their suffering in war and imprisonment, is a case which might be therapeutic as an exercise to 'heal' the self. First, the texts, in the humanist sense in which they are enunciated, are possibly therapeutic for a 'community' to remember its past. Second, in telling the tale, it is also the case that the authors desire to tell the price each has paid for the suffering each has endured in a political cause. And third, the further profit for Reitz, Sachs and Ngugi is the extra benefit that the reader (and witness to the subjects' constructed event) becomes a 'belated witness' to the authors' knowable and human past. In each case the critical question has often to do with the subjects' insistence that their suffering is a unique case.

University of Natal (Durban)  
Departement van Afrikaans en Nederlands

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## Afrikaans Theatre: Reflections of Identity

Johan Coetser

### Introduction

Afrikaans drama and theatre have repeatedly been associated with major historical events in South Africa. Examples are the Great Trek (1838) and the South African War (1899-1902), the growth and decline of Afrikaner nationalism and the legitimisation of apartheid (1948), the democratic change of political power in 1994 and the reaction of Afrikaner<sup>1</sup> society to these changes. The analogy of theatre presenting a reflection of society's ills and greatnesses does indeed apply to Afrikaans theatre. Themes in plays, not necessarily part of the canon, bear testimony to this fact.

These reflections include refractions of identity. As such perceptions of identity link inexorably to the remembrance of past events and to expectations of what the future may hold. 'We are', stated Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee (1998:i) in the introduction to their book *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa*, 'as yet unable to judge which memories and ways of remembering will come to dominate in South Africa in the future'. The uncertainty surrounding the question of remembering may therefore explain the proliferation of publications on this theme (Suleiman 1999:v). A recent example is the publication of a two-part history of Afrikaans literature, titled *Perspektief en Profiel/Perspective and Profile*, edited by H.P. van Coller (1998; 1999).

In this essay I shall focus on representations of identity in Afrikaans theatre. Key ideas relate to notions of *historical continuity* and *identity*, concentrating on *gender*, the ideology of *Afrikaner nationalism* and *ethnicity*. The essay will display a

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<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the main attribute of an Afrikaner is that the person speaks the language of Afrikaans. Depending on one's ideological frame of reference, the idea frequently includes allusions to ethnicity or race. Consequently many Afrikaans-speaking persons do not consider themselves Afrikaners. Which meaning is intended in this essay must be deduced from the context in which the word is used.



double focus. Initially the discussion aims at identifying dominant themes associated with identity formation in Afrikaans theatre. The following part traces the fashion in which the identified themes have informed Afrikaans plays written over the past three or four decades.

### Historical continuity and identity

Critics generally agree on the importance of themes associated with gender and ethnicity in Afrikaans theatre during the 1980s. H.J. Schutte (1994:41) points out the historical importance of these associations:

*In die Afrikaanse drama van die tagtigerjare is daar twee sake wat in die soeklig kom: die bevryding van die vrou en, binne die toenemende rassekonflik, die Swartmens se stryd om gelykwaardigheid in die Suid-Afrikaanse samelewing. Hierdie tweeledige stryd wat in die jare tagtig kulmineer, is nie iets wat skielik gebeur het nie, want dit het 'n lang aanloop (e.a.).*

Afrikaans dramas written during the 1980s spotlight two features: the liberation of women and, against a backdrop of increasing racial conflict, black people's struggle for equality in South African society. Culminating in the 1980s, this dual struggle did not occur suddenly, *because it had a lengthy introduction*<sup>2</sup>.

Schutte (1994:53) adds that the most prominent feature of Afrikaans dramas written during the 1980s, was the deconstruction of the notion of *Afrikanerskap* (being an Afrikaner), especially the subversion of the traditional father-figure, or patriarch, in plays such as Pieter Fourie's *Ek, Anna van Wyk II, Anna van Wyk* (1986).

In the play Senior, the family patriarch, opposes his daughter-in-law, Anna, after it became obvious that she is an epileptic. He replaces her with a woman who could be the daughter-in-law he really wants. In the final scene Anna apparently murders him, but the Voice in the auditorium assures the audience that Senior had died earlier. Depicting Anna as Senior's victim and as a victim of the values embedded in the society he represents, raises the audience's sympathy for her and diminishes this patriarch's stature.

The need to subvert the role of the father in Afrikaans plays could be related to a major event in Afrikaner history, i.e. the South African War (1899-1902). This war was not simply a conflict between two Boer (Afrikaner) republics and the British

Empire. In the end it escalated into a melting pot from which a transformed South African society emerged. Before the war agriculture dominated the Boer republics' economies; after the war South Africa experienced the advent of mining and capitalism, accompanied by gross urbanisation of its largely rural population<sup>3</sup>.

During the first half of the previous century Afrikaner ideologues such as Gustav Preller realised that urbanised poor-white Afrikaners were being integrated into a colourless poor-class and that they were losing their identity as Afrikaners. He and other Nationalists mobilised Afrikaners along the line of race, emphasising ethnic differences, their subjugation by British imperialism and the hardships wrought upon Boer women, children and the elderly in British concentration camps during the war. The plight of women, the young and the elderly—and their heroic behaviour under trying circumstances—would subsequently become dominant themes and identity markers in Afrikaans theatre<sup>4</sup>.

While in every day life the economic consequences of the South African War undermined the traditional role of the father as the breadwinner and head of his family, Afrikaans playwrights initially maintained his position in the family, even in the face of the hardship women and children had to endure<sup>5</sup>. However, from the 1950s onwards playwrights such as W.A. de Klerk, N.P. van Wyk Louw, Pieter

<sup>3</sup> Cf. T.R.H. Davenport's *South Africa: A Modern History* (1989) for an overview of the period, especially Chapters 8 and 9. Chapter 8 covers 'The Breaking of Boer Independence, 1850-1902', and Chapter 9 'The Shaping of a White Domination'. Of importance during the pre-War years was the discovery of vast deposits of gold in the Transvaal Republic from 1870 onwards, and the participation of black troops on both sides of the conflict during the War. The discovery of gold and the consequences of war propelled both races towards the burgeoning metropolis of Johannesburg, often living as neighbours in the same suburbs.

<sup>4</sup> The point needs to be emphasized that this overview is greatly simplified. See, for instance, T. Dunbar Moodie's *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid, and the Afrikaner Civil Religion* (1980) or Dan O'Meara's *Volkskapitalisme: Class, Capital, and Ideology in the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1934-1948* (1983), among others, for a more nuanced overview of the formation of cultural markers during the period. Isabel Hofmeyr (1987) convincingly points to the role language and literature played in constructing Afrikaner identity.

<sup>5</sup> Exceptions are the texts written by members of the KWU or Klerewerkersunie, a union for workers in the clothing industry that came into existence during the late 1920s of the previous century. Members of the KWU wrote plays largely depicting family and working life from a female perspective (Coetser 1999b).

<sup>2</sup> All translations are by the author of this essay, except if indicated differently.

Fourie, Reza de Wet and André P. Brink in their texts increasingly redefined the role of the patriarch<sup>6</sup>.

An example of a play depicting heroic behaviour under trying circumstances, is Horatius's *Mag is reg/Power Justifies*. The characters are presented without nuance, and they are clearly mouthpieces for the playwright's ideology. In the play Sannie, Lenie and Hester—loved ones or wives of Boer fighters—are interned in a concentration camp. They suffer extreme hardships, such as humiliation by compatriots who have joined the ranks of the enemy and who were charged with their keep. Sannie's daughter, Ellatjie, dies of deprivation caused by hunger, cold and disease. However, when one of the joiners approaches Hester, she still sees fit to scold him for denouncing his identity as an Afrikaner:

*Van al die veragtelike dinge is dit die meest veragtelike ding; en van 'n boer konstawel met 'n kakiepakke wil ik geen weldaad ontvang nie, al moet ik liever sterwe* (Horatius 1917:49).

Of all things despicable, this is the most detestable; from a Boer constable clad in a miserable khaki uniform I'd rather receive no favours. I would rather die.

When playwrights use characters to voice their own political and other ideologies in plays, and when ideologues such as Preller become involved in cultural production, it is obvious that culture is the result of a process involving socio-semiotic signs and codes, ultimately representing a secondary modelling system (Lotman & Uspensky 1978:212)<sup>7</sup> based on the ability of language in plays to create virtual social realities, i.e. possible worlds (Elam 1980:Chapter 4).

Following Yu. M. Lotman and B.A. Uspensky (1978:212) this has a number of consequences, of which the most important is that culture is a social phenomenon.

<sup>6</sup> Plays by these dramatists will be examined further on in this essay.

<sup>7</sup> Preller's—and subsequent Afrikaner ideologues advances towards the formation of a particular brand of Afrikaner cultural *volks* identity (identity of the people)—corresponds with Joris Vlasselaers's (1993) description of identity formation in the Flemish community in Belgium. Gerrit Olivier (1992, especially Chapters 1 to 3) draws our attention to the influence of German philosophy at the end of the nineteenth century on the inception of Afrikaner nationalism. Olivier focusses his study on the literature, philosophy and politics contained in Afrikaans author N.P. van Wyk Louw's writings. Combining Vlasselaers's and Olivier's ideas seems to suggest that the specific process (cf. Lotman & Uspensky 1978) of Afrikaner identity formation is not uniquely characteristic of the cultural history of South Africa.

Structurally culture is part of a number of discourses associated with a particular cultural group. Through these dialogues culture renews itself, resulting in remembrance becoming part and parcel of it. In its turn memory broaches the question of longevity which, according to Lotman and Uspensky (1978:223), is '... evidently connected with the dynamism of the social life of human society'. Bearing on contemporary Afrikaner society and Afrikaans theatre, the question translates into concern about the viability of, or even concern about, the continued existence and growth of Afrikaans theatre.

Although quite a number of Afrikaans drama scripts, especially cabaret, were written and performed in recent years, very few were published (Louw 2000). Temple Hauptfleisch (1996:115) has, correctly, asserted how '[f]undamental to canonization and literary history' the publication of play texts is. The similarities between the current situation in Afrikaans theatre (following the democratisation of South African society in 1994) and the situation at the beginning of the previous century (after the conclusion of the South African War in 1902) are obvious. Similar to the situation at the beginning of the previous century Afrikaans theatre is increasingly being limited to events with a distinct Afrikaner ambience. Examples of events are arts festivals such as the KKNK (Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees/Little Karoo National Arts Festival) or the annual arts festival presented in Potchefstroom.

Although remembrances of the South African War informed many Afrikaans plays written decades after the event, few texts were written, performed or published in South Africa during the war (Coetser 1999a). Most theatrical activities then took place in Boer POW camps abroad and, following John L. Comaroff and Paul C. Stern (1995:5), displayed a constructionist view of Afrikaner identity, i.e. a '... collective consciousness ... as a response to (historically specific) practical circumstances on the part of a given population'.

In summary, roughly until 1920, Afrikaans dramatists, ranging from Harm Oost (*Ou' Daniel/Old Daniel*, 1906) to Melt Brink (*Die verlore seun/The Prodigal Son*, 1916), wrote plays similar to Horatius's *Mag is reg*. Almost all of these plays depict the evils and consequences of the South African War. Were it not for this war and the intervention of ideologues like Preller and of intellectuals such as Nico Diederichs and Geoff Cronjé (Olivier 1992:18 *et seq.*), Afrikaans theatre probably would not have taken the route it did. Themes originating from this period came to dominate the process of literary identity formation for the remainder of the century, at the same time testifying to a shifting cultural hierarchy within Afrikaner society (cf. Lotman & Uspensky 1978:215). These themes relate to gender, nationalism and ethnicity in Afrikaans plays.

## Gender

Themes associated with gender are prolific in Afrikaans theatre. Examples concern:

- the depiction of the notion of the *volksmoeder* (mother of the nation);
- the extension of that idea;
- and the representation of (other) gender issues relevant to contemporary Afrikaner society.

Shifts in cultural hierarchies involving the notion of the *volksmoeder* are evident when one compares texts written before 1920 and a recent play such as *Nag, Generaal/Good Night, General* (1991) by Reza de Wet.

### (a) Depiction of the notion of the *volksmoeder*

In Horatius's play *Mag is reg* (1917), for example, Sannie, Lenie and Hester are modelled according to the ideal of the *volksmoeder*. This '... involved the emulation of characteristics such as a sense of religion, bravery, a love of freedom, the spirit of sacrifice, self-reliance, housewifeliness ... nurturance of talents, integrity and the setting of an example to others' (Brink 1990:280). Afrikaner women, '... had a purifying and ennobling influence on their menfolk; they would sacrifice much for their families and were loyal housewives and tender nurses, earnest in prayer, sage in advice, with a great love of freedom and steadfastly anti-British ...' (Brink 1990:281).

Magda, the main character in de Wet's *Nag, Generaal*, contrasts sharply with the female characters in *Mag is reg*. In *Nag, Generaal* the scene is set in a stable. Magda's husband, the Boer general mentioned in the title, is severely wounded. She is indifferent to her husband's suffering. Motivated by the fact that he forced their son into battle where he subsequently perished, she defies the *volksmoeder* stereotype. She is not a 'tender' nurse having 'a purifying and ennobling influence' on her husband (Brink 1990:281, quoted in the previous paragraph). Naas, a herbalist side character, and not she, takes care of the general's wounds.

### (b) Extension of the notion of the *volksmoeder*

An extended interpretation of the notion of the *volksmoeder* may be found in another recent play, Deon Opperman's epic *Donkerland/Dark Land* (1996). The extension involves including persons of colour in the plot. *Donkerland* is a representation of Afrikaner history covering the period 1838 (when the Great Trek commenced) to 1996 (two years after the first democratic elections took place). In the part covering the South African War, the playwright confronts the audience with a reversal of stereotypical roles associated with the *volksmoeder* in plays such as Horatius's *Mag is reg*. One should bear in mind that Afrikaans playwrights initially avoided the

politicisation of the *volksmoeder* along racial lines, thus Opperman's treatment of this figure denotes a significant deviation from tradition.

In the play Anna remains loyal to Afrikaner sentiments regarding war. However, she falls in love with an enemy soldier, John Walsh. Exhibiting characteristics of a *volksmoeder*, she maintains:

Jy't [John Walsh] jou mense en ek het myne. 'n Vrou kan nou wel nie 'n geweer dra nie, maar sy kan 'n wond verbind; 'n honger maag voed; 'n ontnugterde soldaat weer moed inpraat. Engeland se mans gaan teen die Afrikaner veg, maar die hele Afrikanervolk—man, vrou en kind—gaan teen die Engelse veg (Opperman 1996:58).

You [John Walsh] have your people and I have mine. A woman may not carry a rifle, but she can care for the wounded; feed a hungry person; encourage a despondent soldier. England's men will be fighting against the Afrikaner, but all of the Afrikaner people—men, women and children—will be fighting against the English.

Following her father's example in retaining her cultural identity, she insists on speaking Afrikaans: '*In ons huis sal ons Afrikaans praat [as ons trou]*' / 'In our house we shall speak Afrikaans [if we marry]' (Opperman 1996:55).

Anna's involvement with an enemy soldier reflects a similar plot in an earlier Afrikaans play, that is J.F.W. Grosskopf's *Oorlog is oorlog/War is War* (1927)<sup>8</sup>. The main difference between Grosskopf's and Opperman's plays is that *Donkerland* offers a more subversive interpretation of the *volksmoeder* idea. Opperman's further inversion includes the involvement of white male characters with black females, thereby introducing an ethnic or racial theme to the play which is absent in Grosskopf's *Oorlog is oorlog*. Ironically Meidjie, an Afrikaans word

<sup>8</sup> In the play an English officer, Cuthbert, arrives on a farm accompanied by a prisoner of war, an Afrikaner by the name of Jan. Rachel was previously romantically involved with Cuthbert, but she now has a relationship with Jan. Grosskopf reduces Rachel's conflict to the question whether she would take a knife and cut Jan loose, enabling him to escape and kill Cuthbert. She pushes the knife within his reach and symbolically leaves the room. Her decision involved more than a choice between two enemies: she had to choose between her word of honour (not to release Jan) and loyalty towards her own people, and the enemy (represented by Cuthbert). As a *volksmoeder* she chooses loyalty towards her people, although she sacrificed her own happiness.

meaning *black servant*, in the beginning of the play becomes the biological mother of successive generations of the family De Witt (meaning *the whites*).

The play takes reversal to its logical conclusion in its closing, in which brother and sister Arnold and Mariaan part from the farm and each other. The farm, Donkerland (meaning Dark Land), would be returned to Meidjie's descendants. In the grim words of the narrator:

*Die wiede van Afrika draai stadig ... stadig, maar so seker soos die dood, en eendag ... ééndag sal daar net 'n verbrokkelde stapeltjie klippe oorbly, getuie van 'n klein strepie mensdom, verlore in die gras van Donkerland* (Opperman 1996:157).

The wheels of Africa grind slowly ... slowly, and sure as death, and one day ... one day all that will remain, will be a small heap of broken rubble, testimony of an insignificant humanity, lost in the grass of Donkerland.

Apart from 'Donkerland' a number of Afrikaans plays, also written during the second half of the previous century, reflected events taking place in society. These plays demonstrated the extension of gender issues, such as the theme of the *volksmoeder*, by extending references to political practices and ethnic emotions. The construction of political and ethnic borders formed a cornerstone of Afrikaner nationalism and became the founding principle of the ideology of apartheid. It permeated all areas of society, touching on the most intimate relationships between persons. An example of this particular form of gender *cum* political extension may be found in *Die verminktes/The Maimed* (1960 and 1976, revised) by Bartho Smit.

*Die verminktes* is a play of love transgressing the ethnic boundaries constructed by Afrikaner society. Frans Harmse is the extramarital child of an Afrikaner Nationalist senator from a woman of mixed descent, who falls in love with his adopted white sister (Elize). In the end the father verbally castrates Frans, with the result that he regresses to a situation of subordination and marginalisation, which in the text is signalled by his use of a patois form of Afrikaans<sup>9</sup>.

The plot in André P. Brink's *Die jogger/The Jogger* (1997) mirrors Frans and Elize's relation in *Die verminktes*. In *Die jogger* Killian (whose name may be construed as *Kill Ian/Jan*), previously a colonel in the security police, is defied by his daughter Ilse and her husband Nico. They leave him isolated in a mental hospital where he is tormented by memories of past injustices perpetrated against her and 'the enemy', represented by Vusi's tongue which is kept in a bottle. In the play the tongue

becomes a stage metaphor representing the people of colour maligned and 'silenced' (eliminated) by Killian.

Ilse and Nico's departure may be interpreted as the final breaking from *patriarchal power* and *Afrikaner nationalism* in this text. Killian represents the Afrikaner, and Noni, the psychiatric nurse, the forgiving black female voice who reverses the *volksmoeder* stereotype in serving as a caring and forgiving mother of the future nation. This interpretation is suggested by her name which may be associated with the Afrikaans word 'nonnie', meaning *an unmarried girl, without children*. Regarded as an allegorical character, Noni fulfils a similar function as Meidjie in Opperman's *Donkerland*. She symbolically becomes a mother of a new nation in which the idea of a racially exclusive *volksidentiteit* (identity of the people) is refuted.

Should one, in summary, contrast plays such as *Mag is reg* (Horatius 1917) with *Die verminktes* (Smit 1960/1970), *Donkerland* (Opperman 1996) and *Die jogger* (Brink 1997), it becomes obvious that Afrikaans theatre has completed a cycle that initially involved a constructionist mechanism of identity formation. During the earliest phase (represented by *Mag is reg*) the deliberate involvement of ideologues gave Afrikaner identity, as has been indicated earlier in this essay, a constructed social bias involving gender<sup>10</sup>.

However, in *Die verminktes*, *Donkerland* and *Die jogger* constructionism has been extended to a social psychological study of identity, that is a sophisticated form of primordialism. This view, explain Comaroff and Stern (1995:5), 'presumes a prior cultural sensibility, a well of latent sentiments, a shared heritage; a primordial infrastructure, as it were, from which appropriate signs and symbols, political practices and ethnic emotions, may be extracted when the situation demands it'. In Horatius's time a primordial infrastructure existed but it did not have the same magnitude and content as the infrastructure from which Opperman, for example, drew his inspiration for *Donkerland*.

### (c) Other gender issues in contemporary society

Since the 1970s, as Pieter Conradie (1996:71-72) has argued, Afrikaans women writers have contributed to the redefining of identity. Relevant to this discussion is the importance he assigns to the role of 'the husband as the head of the family' (in the 1970s), a 'highly personalised' presentation of racial, gender or class conflict (in the 1980s), and 'opposition to patriarchal oppression' and 'postmodernist tendencies' breaking down 'barriers created by patriarchal sexual/ textual division' (in the

<sup>10</sup> This view does not exclude other influences up till 1920, such as the consequences of the South African War on Afrikaner society.

<sup>9</sup> This summary follows the 1970 version of the text.

1990s). Although Conradie's frame of reference is primarily works of prose, plays do fit in with this pattern. However, one should bear in mind that both male and female playwrights touch on gender issues in their dramatic presentations of both hetero- and homosexual relationships.

Although Afrikaans gay theatre is not a common phenomenon, suggestions of gayness to varying degrees may be found in plays by Hennie Aucamp, such as *Sjampanje vir ontbyt/Champagne for Breakfast* (1988) or *Punt in die wind* (1989). 'Punt in die wind' is an (untranslatable) Afrikaans expression, with a slightly mischievous sexual association.

Both plays display characteristics of Aucamp's cabarets, of which he himself has stated that the most obvious features are sentiment, eroticism and the use of satire (Aucamp 1977:2). Nevertheless, in both plays lightheartedness and humour mask a number of serious issues. These reflect homosexual life and identity but also address topical issues such as racism in gay communities. In *Sjampanje vir ontbyt*, which is about Daan and Terry's champagne breakfast for their gay friends on Christmas Day, Kas, for instance, declares: '*Ons wil graag met die Kaapse susters affilieer, maar nét op blanke grondslag*' ('We would like to affiliate with our sisters from the Cape, but only if they are white') (Aucamp 1988:30).

Louw Odendaal (1998:174) correctly asserts that *Sjampanje vir ontbyt* is characterised by:

... 'n ambivalente, tragikomiese stemming waarin die vermaaklike, maar ook die patetiese van hierdie karakters se lewens na vore kom. Hulle is gevat, maar daarin ook 'tewerig' en as sodanig uiters kwesbaar en uitgelewer aan gewetenlose uitbuiters.

... an ambivalent, tragicomic mood that emphasises the humorous but also the pathetic sides of these characters' lives. They are witty and at the same time 'bitchy', and therefore extremely vulnerable and exposed to merciless opportunists.

A number of Afrikaans plays, written mainly since the 1980s, address gender issues 'which [are] relative to the historical moment with its specific necessities'<sup>11</sup>. In this regard Cheryl Walker (1990:27) draws our attention to the importance of 'the domestic' as a site generating subordination, such as one may find in plays by Corlia

<sup>11</sup> Ecker (1985:21) contrasts 'feminist' with 'feminine': 'The second [term] demands reflecting on the first. It takes the complications of subjectivity in account, and feminist investigations of aesthetic theory necessarily aim at a critique of traditional assumptions'.

Fourie (*Moeders en dogters/Mothers and Daughters*, 1985b; *En die son skyn in Suid-Afrika/And the Sun Shines in South Africa*, 1986; and *Leuens/Lies*, 1985a) or Reza de Wet.

In Reza de Wet's play *Mis* (1993a), for example, the mother, Miem, and her daughter Meisie make a living by selling manure<sup>12</sup>. Miem's husband, Gabriël, permanently stays in the loft, and everything he needs must be hoisted up to him. His excrement is lowered in a bucket. Seven years back he entered the loft and has since stayed there, because he could not come to grips with the consequences, financial and other, of the economic depression for himself and his family.

The similarity between his name and the name of the archangel is not coincidental. After seven years his wife and daughter still serve him as diligently as they probably would have served the archangel. Various stage props indicate his presence. The bucket used to remove his excrement stands under a table and his hat still hangs behind the door.

Miem and her daughter are practically prisoners of poverty and domesticity. Both of them, and a spinster visiting, would value (other) male company. The playwright manipulates their situation by introducing a blind constable to guard them against an unknown danger everyone associates with a visiting circus. In the end de Wet introduces elements of fantasy to the play: the constable miraculously turns out to be a magician, and he lures Meisie away with him. This is ironical because it was his duty to see to the safety of the women and to prevent young girls from disappearing, as had previously happened.

This play seems to suggest that the only way Meisie can escape from the bondage imposed by a situation of domesticity is by means of fantasy. Similar themes emerge from the remaining texts in the anthology of which *Mis* forms part, that is *Mirakel/Miracle* (de Wet 1993b) and *Drif/Causeway* (de Wet 1993c).

An interesting feature of Afrikaans theatre, as is the case in *Die jogger*, is that the patriarch is frequently portrayed as a military person, commonly a general, thereby emphasising the mythical power and influence of the father (cf. W.A. de Klerk's *Die jaar van die vuur-os/The Year of the Coming of the Ox* published in 1952, N.P. van Wyk Louw's *Die pluimsaad waai ver/The Plume's Seed Blows Far* which premiered in 1966, or Reza de Wet's *Nag, Generaal*). *Nag, Generaal* and Charles Fourie's *Don Qxubane onner die Boere/Don Qxubane among the Afrikaners* (1994) take the process of demythologising the patriarch even further. In *Nag, Generaal* the wounded general, Magda's husband, is portrayed as a dribbling,

<sup>12</sup> 'Mis' is another Afrikaans title/ word that is difficult to translate into English. In Afrikaans the word refers, among others, to manure, even Gabriel's excreta, a religious mass or a misunderstanding. All these shades of meaning are present in the play.

powerless individual left to the mercy of his wife. In Charles Fourie's *Don Qxubane onner die Boere* the protagonist (Don Qxubane) should be played by an actor of colour. In his quest for his beloved Gracie, Don Qxubane reaches a country town in which rightist political sentiments reign supreme. The playwright presents the white, Afrikaans-speaking male characters as dumb nit-wits (cf. the side characters Otto and Worsie) or as less than brainless chickens (Andreas). Andreas endeavours to use Don Qxubane to further his own political ideas, but in the end Don Qxubane exposes him as the racist hit-and-run car driver who killed Gracie's mother in a car accident.

In all of these plays gender identity is treated as an ideological construction, or social myth, and a result of shifting historical continuances inherent to Afrikaner society. 'From the perspective of gender', stated Myra Jehlen (1990:265), 'identity is a role, character traits are not autonomous qualities but functions and ways of relating .... Connoting history and not nature, gender is *not* a category of human nature' (e.i.o.). Leading Afrikaans playwright Reza de Wet (1995:90) goes one step further:

I don't agree with categorising people. It falls into the patriarchal trap of needing to define and separate. If you accept divisions then you are accepting those structures. I believe to become psychically androgynous is the answer. And this categorising seems to work against it.

Ultimately plays such as *Donkerland*, *Die jogger* or *Don Qxubane onner die Boere* endeavoured to correct the perception that Afrikaner society would remain untouched by the flow of time<sup>13</sup>. They were, in fact, a testimony to the changing face of Afrikaner identity.

### Afrikaner nationalism and ethnicity

In an essay written mainly during the first half of the 1960s, Bartho Smit (1974:81) pointed out that many (cultural) critics until then accepted that reality is an objective, unalterable fact, and that plays should directly reflect the relation between theatre and reality. According to Smit (1974:96) the opposite actually applied. What they regarded as an unalterable fact, was really mankind's play with fellow humans, continuously changing attitudes and personas. Smit (1974:108-110) contends that theatre unveils this game in which confrontation and confusion act as two sides of the

same coin simultaneously representing the formation of a new paradigm with its own set of identity markers.

Following up on Smit's argument it is possible to distinguish three phases of renewal in Afrikaans theatre since the 1960s:

- During the first phase (roughly until 1976) no major changes occurred. Compared to plays written and performed after 1976 Afrikaans theatre mirrored and mildly<sup>14</sup> challenged society.
- In the following phase (1976 onwards) theatre sought to unmask society and its individuals more deliberately.
- During the final phase (roughly 1990 onwards) theatre invoked a quest for an adequate thematic form involving a broader world view that tentatively moved away from its early limited focus on identity formation.

One should bear in mind that Smit's argument and my extension of the ideas contained in his essay (Smit 1974:81-120) follow a systems approach, implying that once a cycle of renewal has been completed, a new cycle may overlap with the previous phase to varying degrees.

#### (a) Phase 1 (roughly until 1976)

Being the first and therefore perhaps the most seminal play unveiling the playwright's 'game' with Afrikaner society, in this way contributing to the demise of apartheid, is N.P. van Wyk Louw's *Die pluimsaad waai ver* (published 1972; see Smit 1974:96)<sup>15</sup>. The importance of *Die pluimsaad waai ver* relates to its interrogation of perceptions of Afrikaner identity which, at the time of its first performance in 1966, were accepted without question. The plot plays against the backdrop of the South African War, portraying characters representing ideas which were prevalent at the time. Both grandfather Visser (representing internationalism) and Jan (representing the

<sup>14</sup> This was partly due to the system of censorship imposed by government. See my discussion of Smit's play *Putsonderwater/Well without water* (1962) further on.

<sup>15</sup> To this title one may, among others, add plays by Pieter Fourie, Deon Opperman (*Môre is 'n lang dag/Tomorrow is a Long Day*, 1986, and *Stille nag/Silent Night*, 1990), Pieter-Dirk Uys (a prolific satirist who debuted in 1979 with *Die Van Aardes van Grootoor/The Family Van Aarde from the Farm Grootoor*), Adam Small (*Kanna hy kê hystoel/Kanna's Homecoming*, 1965) and *Krismas van Map Jacobs/Map Jacobs's Christmas*, 1983), or Peter Snyder (*Political Joke*, 1983).

<sup>13</sup> For an overview of socio-political changes between 1956 and 1979, see Chapters 15 and 16 in Davenport's *South Africa: A Modern History* (1987). Significantly, Chapter 15 is titled 'Internal Combustion, 1956-64' and Chapter 16 is called 'Modification and Backfire, 1964-78'.

renegade) contest the idea of Afrikaner identity presenting itself as an undivided, monolithic unity in which all Afrikaners are loyal to *Afrikanerskap*.

*Afrikanerskap* finds its expression in the idea of a *volk* (or nation), and it is with this idea that the opening line links: 'Wat is 'n volk?/What is a *volk*?' The narrator, an old woman, immediately replies that a *volk* consists of persons of different persuasions, thereby implying that the concept accommodates internationalists (Visser), renegades (Jan), *bittereinders* or diehards (General de Wet) and true patriots (President Steyn).

The play also contests the idea that Boer soldiers, the Afrikaners, were invincible. In the public debate following the premiere of the play, Louw was severely scolded for his portrayal of Boers fleeing from the enemy<sup>16</sup>. This is the old woman's description of their flight:

... ons het begin hardloop as die kakies net êrens gesien word,  
Ja, dis waar. Ons moet dit weet, ons moet dit weet:  
ons was bang, lafhartig, met elke smadelike woord wat ons taal besit.  
Generaal De Wet het tevergeefs met die sambok sy mense probeer  
terugslaan.  
As hy op een plek keer, dan vlug hulle op 'n ander.

....  
Ons het gevlug en gevlug.  
Ons was bang.  
Ons was op ons velle versot (Louw 1972:46).

... we fled the moment we noticed the enemy.  
Yes, this is true. Let it be known, we must know it:  
we were afraid, cowards, every dishonourable word in our language.  
General de Wet tried to turn his fighters back with his sjambok, in vain.  
The moment he stopped them, they bolted from another position.

....  
We fled, and kept on fleeing.  
We were afraid.  
We were in love with our skins.

Furthermore, the play expressed admiration for the courage displayed by the enemy in battle, specifically the Scotsmen Wauchope and Hannay. He aired his sentiments at a time when, according to critic Aart de Villiers (1973), few persons could accept

that a Boer could display a 'spot of blackness' and someone English 'a small splash of whiteness'. It is significant that de Villiers's words, written seventy years after the event, reflected the idea that Wauchope's and Hannay's descendants, the English-speaking part of the population, remained to some Afrikaners 'the enemy'. For Louw in *Die pluimsaad waai ver*, this slanted view of ethnicity was part of Afrikaner identity.

To Louw's implied criticism of Afrikaner identity in the 1960s one could add plays by the influential Afrikaans playwright, Bartho Smit (e.g. *Putsonderwater/Well without water*, 1962)<sup>17</sup>. Smit veiled his criticism in near-allegorical mode. This was necessary because South African literature at that time was reeling under a system of censorship that entertained no criticism against the social and cultural *status quo* imposed by the predominantly Afrikaans-speaking state. As a consequence performances of a number of his plays in South Africa were cancelled before opening night (for a short synopsis see Hosten & Visser 1999:578-580).

*Putsonderwater* plays in an imaginary desert hamlet with the same name. All the characters have allegorical names: Maria (Mary, the teenage protagonist), Seun (Son), Jan Alleman (Joe Everyman), Koster (Sexton), Sersant (Serjeant, representing the enforcement of law), Dokter (Doctor, representing medicine) and Dominee (Reverend, representing the church and faith). Maria is expecting a child (symbol of the future) but no one is prepared to accept the responsibility for fathering it.

Although Smit emphasises that *Putsonderwater* depicts Western man's (in the play represented by Maria<sup>18</sup>) religious crisis, it is also possible to interpret the characters as representations of Afrikaner social institutions. In this interpretation Smit implies that Afrikaner society is unwilling to accept responsibility for the future. Sersant, Dokter and Dominee would prefer a continuation of present life in *Putsonderwater*. Due to Maria's pregnancy and her increasing distrust in the promises made to her by the 'institutions' (represented by Sersant, Dokter and Dominee), this was no longer possible.

<sup>17</sup> To Smit's name one may add the names of André P. Brink (e.g. *Die verhoor/The Trial*, 1970) or P.G. du Plessis (e.g. *Plaston: DNS-kind/Plaston: DNS Child*, 1971).

<sup>18</sup> Although it is possible to equate Maria to Mary, the mother of Jesus, this analogy will probably break down for a non-Christian audience or reader. Also compare the following didascaly at the beginning of the text: 'Hierdie stuk is 'n poging om die geloofskrisis van die Westerse mens uit te beeld. Wie daarin 'n aanval op die kerk of die Christendom sien, vertolk dit verkeerd'. (This play tries to depict Western man's religious crisis. Anyone inferring an attack in the text on Christianity, is missing the [this] point).

<sup>16</sup> Although he veiled his words, this included a public reprimand from the then Prime Minister, Dr. H.F. Verwoerd (Pelzer 1966:673-674).



**(b) Phase 2 (1976 onwards)**

During the second phase Pieter Fourie, among others, confronted Afrikaner society with his interpretation of identity formation in plays such as *Ek, Anna van Wyk* (1986) and *Die koggelaar/The teaser* (1988). Reza de Wet complemented him with *Diepe grond* (1986), *Drie susters tweel/Three Sisters Two* (1996) and *Yelena* (premiered in 1998 at the Standard Bank National Arts Festival)<sup>19</sup>. Although not as ardent, Fourie's *Die koggelaar* enjoyed a reception that reminded one of the furore N.P. van Wyk Louw's *Die pluimsaad waai ver* caused. The play would have premiered in 1987 with the Performing Arts Council of the Orange Free State, but they postponed its first performance for two years following protest from members of the public and a parish of the Dutch Reformed Church in Bloemfontein. Obviously, as H.J. Vermeulen (1996a:58) points out, some Afrikaners were uncomfortable with their mirror image in the play.

At the time, South African society—and Afrikaner society in particular—was in disarray: 'The rending apart of Afrikaner politics and culture brought the Afrikaner's whole *Weltanschauung* in crisis. The socio-psychological effects of this crisis were *inter alia* disorientation, uncertainty, anxiety and fear of the future' (Vermeulen 1996a:57). Vermeulen examines the play from a Lacanian perspective<sup>20</sup> and concludes that '*Die koggelaar* reflects this [the Afrikaner's] predicament in the psyche of the protagonist Boet Cronje' (1996a:59). The plot concerns Boet Cronje, an Afrikaner farmer. He experiences a series of tribulations: drought, the death of his son (his successor) in an accident, and the realisation that a worker of mixed descent on the farm is his half-brother. He murders his family and shoots himself in an empty farm dam, justifying his behaviour by claiming that God had teased him.

Following Smit (1974:96), Fourie in this play *unmasks* a number of cultural (master) symbols associated with Afrikaner mythology, which are contracted in the persona of Boet Cronje. Some examples are the notions that whites are superior to

persons of colour, that South Africa belongs to whites, and that South Africa is an agricultural country and all Afrikaners are farmers at heart. (See also Coetser 1991:47.) A central symbol is the notion that Afrikaners enjoy a special relationship with their god/God, which explains the prominence the text accords to the Lacanian idea of the *father*.

In the play physical drought becomes a metonymic representation of psychic drought within the Afrikaner. Events that relate to this idea are the misuse of nature (over-grazing his land and over-using an animal, the stud ram Knaplat), disregard for the feelings of Anker (overt racism dehumanising his half-brother), rejection and humiliation of his wife (Anna) and, in the end, the annihilation of himself and his family.

Following Freud one may state that the physical drought initiates events that lead to the development of a fully-fledged psychosis in Boet (*cf.* Coetser 1991:45). Because of the interconnection of the *personal* and the *collective unconscious*, the physical drought becomes a dramatic metaphor for the figurative drought of the community Boet represents.

*Die koggelaar* consequently offers an alternate view of markers that are closely associated with Afrikaner mythology and identity. Fourie's Afrikaner is not steadfastly religious, a custodian of the land he inherited from his ancestors, a caring husband respecting women. His wife is not the traditional *volksmoeder*, and he is not a person who can persevere under all circumstances.

**(c) Phase 3 (roughly 1990 onwards)**

According to Hauptfleisch (1997:12) theatre in South Africa—and he includes Afrikaans theatre—entered the age of post-colonialism after 1990. During this period the process of unmasking Afrikaner identity in plays continued, accompanied by even more dramatic changes in their social and political positioning. The changing post-colonial context demanded a re-examination of the content and presentation of Afrikaans theatre as a reflection of identity.

In this regard Breyten Breytenbach's play *Boklied: 'n Vermaaklikheid in drie bedrywe/Goat Song: An Entertainment in Three Scenes* (1998) seems to suggest a radical break from its predecessors:

*Dit dui 'n nuwe rigting aan: elitisties, abstrak, intellektueel, maar ook robuust, anarchisties en surrealisties .... Dit versteur al die bekende bakens in die Suid-Afrikaanse teaterlandskap* (Van Vuuren 1998/1999:46).

<sup>19</sup> Perhaps Ms. de Wet's most well-known play is *Diepe grond*. Both *Drie susters tweel* and *Yelena* (unpublished) relate to plays by Chekov in such a way that one is tempted to derive similarities between their plots and the South African political situation (Coetser 1998). Ian Ferguson (1997:321), on the other hand, finds similarities between the Prozorovs and Jewish prisoners: 'Although the Prozorovs disappear down a derelict Russian garden, stripped of its birch trees, carrying bundles of clothing to travel (as Jewish prisoners would travel some twenty years after them) in cattle trucks towards an unknown hell, they do exhibit, even in their foolishness, a kind of courage. Perhaps that is all anyone can ask, or offer, in times of discontent'.

<sup>20</sup> Vermeulen (1996b, 1996c) follows a similar approach in his analyses of Fourie's *Ek, Anna van Wyk*. He aptly names the second article (1996c), 'The Lacanian Gaze, Pieter Fourie's *Ek Anna van Wyk* and the Afrikaner Psyche in Crisis'.

It points to a new direction [in Afrikaans theatre]: elitist, abstract, intellectual, but also robust, anarchistic and surrealistic. It challenges all known beacons in South Africa's theatre landscape.

Most characteristics which Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins (1996) identify as characteristic of post-colonial dramas are present in *Boklied*. These include the reciting of classical texts, simultaneously involving canonical counter-discourse, the enactment of ritual and carnival, the representation and reinterpretation of post-colonial histories, the dramatic creation of a language of resistance, and the foregrounding of body politics.

In the play a few bygone actors gather in an enclosure. The enclosure may represent a jail, an institution for the mentally disadvantaged or even an unused theatre. The actors gather here regularly, away from 'normal', everyday life outside. It is suggested that the play takes place during a time of crisis or anxiety, perhaps during war, subdued insurrection or simply famine (cf. the 'Recommendations for Performance in No Man's Land' on pages 5 and 6 of the published text). The 'Recommendations' also indicate the presence of ritual, which, according to Gilbert and Tompkins is a strategy generally employed in post-colonial plays. Another is the re-enactment and embellishment of intertexts. Apart from a number of contemporary, mainly Afrikaans, references, Helize van Vuuren (1998/1999:44-52) points to the allusion to Aristophanes's *The Frogs* and *The Birds*, and to Rimbaud's *Une saison en enfer/A Season in Hell*.

Some elements in the text directly relate to issues about Afrikaner identity. The list of *dramatis personae* invokes the question of ethnicity, for example, calling for parts to be played by persons of colour. Ritsos, a freedom fighter, ironically retorts:

*Dit is duidelik dat ek altyd van 'n minderwaardige ras was. Ek kon nie my opstandigheid begryp nie. My ras kom net in opstand om te plunder .... Die enigste slim ding om te doen, is om pad te gee uit hierdie kontinent waar malheid die miserabele mense as gyselaars aanhou* (Breytenbach 1998:47).

I have always been associated with an inferior race. I could not understand my own revolt. The only reason for my race's revolt is to plunder .... The only intelligent thing remaining, is to leave this continent, where insanity keeps miserable persons hostage.

The greatest significance of this complex text is the fact that it moves away from and reinterprets traditional cultural identity markers such as religion, language and social

customs, linking them to the personal of playwright and poet Breyten Breytenbach<sup>21</sup>. As such, it places Afrikaans theatre and Afrikaner identity against the backdrop of increasing globalization. Disregarding an organic approach defined by the interests of a group, the identity of the individual has become paramount.

## Conclusion

The first performances of Breytenbach's *Boklied* at the Little Karoo National Arts Festival (Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees or KKNK) caused a furore. To some members of the audience the performance was difficult to follow. They could not recognise the intertextual references to, among others, Aristophanes's or Rimbaud's writing. Another reason was that the text called for an actor to appear on stage with a naked behind and a feather between his buttocks. This offended part of the audience.

Both reasons serve as an indication of nonalignment by the audience with the performance and the ideas the text conveyed<sup>22</sup>.

Apart from the involvement of the audience, the association of sponsors with the KKNK should also be taken into account when considering the changing identity of Afrikaans theatre at the end of the previous century. The main sponsor of the event is Naspers, a conglomerate of major publication houses in South Africa. Naspers's involvement with the KKNK and similar ventures<sup>23</sup> make sound financial sense. The festivals offer publishers the opportunity to introduce and sell their publications.

However, as playwright Charles J. Fourie (2000) pointed out, not only financial benefit may be accrued from these festivals:

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Van Vuuren (1998/1999:50): 'Om by 'n enigins koherente lesing van *Boklied* uit te kom, is dit belangrik om *Breytenbach se oeuvre en die outobiografiese gegewens van die digter* mee te lees' (To arrive at any understanding of *Boklied* whatsoever, it is imperative to read the play along with *Breytenbach's oeuvre and the autobiographical details of the poet*; e.i.o.).

<sup>22</sup> It must be noted, however, that, after the reaction of the first audiences, subsequent performances were immensely popular. The initial reception may, ironically, serve as an explanation for this turn in popularity.

<sup>23</sup> According to Jan-Jan Joubert (2000), writing for the Afrikaans Sunday newspaper *Rapport*, Naspers is the main sponsor of the Aardklop Festival (Potchefstroom), Rapport Festival (Windhoek, Namibia), Sarie Festival (White River) and the Gariep Festival (Kimberley). Spin-off festivals are the Kollig Festival (Durban) and Raisin Festival (Upington). Jacques Dommissie (2000), again writing for *Rapport*, even suggested the possibility of an arts festival to be held in London.

Arts festivals like the KKNK in Oudtshoorn ... offer some relief for independent theatre groups to stage their work, but with Standard Bank recently announcing their withdrawal as a sponsor [from the Standard Bank Arts Festival in Grahamstown] after 25 years, one fears the worst for the lifespan of these festivals. Perhaps they are too dependent on corporate sponsorship that mask hidden economic and political agendas.

The scenario invoked by Fourie reminds one of Isabel Hofmeyr's (1987) argument regarding the definitive role played by Afrikaner money power, the Afrikaner press and publication houses in shaping Afrikaner culture, literature and identity during the first half of the previous century. There are, however, a number of important differences between the context of the premier of *Boklied* (1998) and a play such as *Ou' Daniel* (1906). Most differences relate to the opposition of globalization (individualism) and the social engineering of Afrikaner (group) identity (Comaroff & Stern 1995). As indicated by Bartho Smit (1974) this mind shift started in the 1960s, and in Afrikaans theatre took the form of revising existing motifs that serve as indices of identity.

In conclusion, the most prominent motifs in Afrikaans theatre since 1960 relate to the depiction of persons of colour, gender and the deconstruction of social myths. These plays testify to the influence of social, political and historical processes that may be equated to reflections in a mirror. However, just as Plato's metaphoric polished copper mirror was unable to present a lifelike image of its society, Afrikaans plays could merely present a broken image of the processes involved in society and poorly reflected in the art of theatre.

Furthermore, Afrikaans playwrights added to the process by creating texts that questioned the power of the father and extended the notion of the *volksmoeder*. This process confirmed that the portrayals of *Afrikanerskap* and Afrikaner mythology in plays are social constructs and therefore subject to deconstruction and reconstruction.

Afrikaans Department  
University of South Africa

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## 'Sparks of Carnival Fire': Alan Paton's 'The Quarry' (1967) and the Bakhtinian Carnavalesque

Jean-Philippe Wade

### Carnival

In William Plomer's (1980:12) novel of 1926, *Turbott Wolfe*, Wolfe, soon after arriving in South Africa from England, visits Dunnsport, where he comes across 'Schonstein's Better Shows' fair, managed by Mr Judy Franke whose wife, we learn, was 'barefaced by day and barebacked by night'. Her husband—notice his name, in a gender-reversal, is 'Judy'—is similarly defined in terms of his flagrant sexuality: 'he wore no underclothing but his socks and a silk shirt' (12). In scenes described as 'ribald' and resounding with 'bawdy laughter' we are introduced to the fair itself with its 'extraordinary mixture of races':

Round us as we talked circulated a crowd of black, white and coloured people: English, Dutch, Portuguese, nondescript were the whites; Bantu, Lembu, Christianized and aboriginal, Mohammedan negroes were the blacks; and the coloured were all colours and races fused. It came upon me suddenly in that harsh polyglot gaiety that I was living in Africa; that there is a question of colour (12-13).

In a swing-boat he notices a white man and black woman kissing.

What Turbott Wolfe comes across is a carnival of racial and cultural hybridity, against which is measured the hideous racism and cultural isolation of the colonials he would subsequently encounter, like the Rev. Fotheringhay who is satirised as being 'stranded on the rock of his own consciousness in that bewildering sea that life is in modern Africa' (22-23). In the spirit of that glimpsed carnival, Wolfe will himself engage in cross-cultural activity—he, for example, spends time with the local people 'working out Lembu folk-tunes' (17)—and help set up the 'Young Africa' movement whose central policy is the promotion of miscegenation as

'the only possible way for Africa to be secured to the Africans', through the creation of a new hybrid 'Eurafrican' people.

It is this liberatory usage of carnival imagery—here appearing for the first time in South African literature—as theorised in the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin who was a radical populist democrat, that will be examined through a reading of Paton's allegorical 'The Quarry', which is almost certainly his most anthologised—and well-known—short story. Subsequent to—and in the light of—the literary analysis, a re-reading of the South African liberal tradition and its usefulness for a post-Marxist politics will be discussed.

For Bakhtin, carnivals can be traced back to European antiquity. They blossomed as public spectacles during the Medieval period and the Renaissance, until they were undermined by the emergence of Modernity, whereupon the 'carnival sense of the world' migrated into literature, particularly the novel. Carnival for Bakhtin was seen as a utopian 'loophole' in reality, a temporary semiotic subversion of ruling class power and the naturalising ideologies that sustain it. Vigorously populist, carnivals were an 'escape from the official way of life' (Bakhtin 1984b:8), revealing, in their strategies of satire and mockery, the 'joyful relativity' (Bakhtin 1984a:160) of all social structures, and hence gesturing towards the 'world's revival and renewal' (Bakhtin 1984b:7) in a spectacle of libertarianism: 'They were the second life of the people, who for a time entered the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance' (Bakhtin 1984b:9).

'The Quarry' is based upon a real event that happened in the 1950s. This is Paton giving an account of it:

A small black boy finds himself marooned on a quarry-face, and is brought to safety by a brave white man, who is greeted on descending by a great crowd, mostly Indians and Africans, who cry out to him, 'Thank you Sir. God bless you, Sir. White man, God bless you' (Paton 1975:139).

Paton was clearly moved by the untypical behaviour of the participants: a white man helping a black child, a black crowd finding something to thank a white man for. But we also notice the flagrant paternalism of the event, which is most probably the reason why Paton significantly altered it in the story by reversing the racial identities of the two main figures: a black man now rescues a helpless white boy. This role reversal will, as shall be seen, be central to the story.

The story opens with the following:

Everywhere the city was driving back nature, to the South and the West and the North. Only the East was safe, for there lay the ocean. Skyscrapers stood

on the places where elephants had crashed through the forest. Hippopotamus Pool was a city square full of the smell of buses, Lion's River ran down a straight concrete channel into the Bay. (1970:13)

It is a (romantic) opposition between the City and Nature: the 'city' is seen in alienating terms, as an ineluctable force beyond human intervention, imposing a bleak regimentation upon the variety, freedom and nobility of nature. It has expelled 'life', which marginally survives, we next learn, in Mitchell's 'Quarry', which alone had 'resisted the march of the city' (13). This opposition—in Bakhtinian terms, between 'centripetal' (centralizing) and 'centrifugal' (dispersing) forces—is, of course, a little allegory of post-Sharpeville 1960s South Africa, the 'city' as the apartheid regime, in that period basking in the triumph of its defeat of the popular democratic forces, able now to impose its (in textual terms) 'un-natural' political will on the South African people ('nature') without serious opposition. 'The large green pigeons have long since gone', writes Paton, perhaps referring to the imprisonment or exile of the mass democratic political leadership; only the 'very small fish' remain behind to resist the 'march of the city'. It is the resistance of these 'small fish' in a marginal space outside the hegemonic order that the story will celebrate.

A white boy called Johnny Day has ambitions to do the apparently 'impossible' and climb the dangerous quarry face, at the bottom of which is a 'serious' and 'official' notice that reads: 'No Climbing, By Order', to which the text adds: 'Only whose order it was, no one knew' (13). Here we find the inscrutable mystery of power, naturalised by its elevation beyond human authorship.

Johnny begins climbing, and soon attracts an anxious 'Indian man' who begins imploring him to return, warning him of the severe dangers, but of course Johnny ignores him, and soon there begins to assemble a very anxious 'growing crowd (of over a hundred) of Indian men and women and boys and girls, and African men from the factory' (15) ... 'a crowd of every colour and class and tongue, bound all of them together for these moments by unbreakable bonds, to a small white boy' (17). Against the rigidities and divisions of apartheid dogmatism, people come together in a shared concern for another human life:

There they stood, shoulder to shoulder, ruler and ruled, richer and poorer, white and black and yellow and brown, with their eyes fixed on a small piece of whiteness half-way up the quarry-face, and those of them that knew a thing or two knew that the boy was in a position of danger. (17)

It is perhaps something of a little joke of Paton's that the boy gets stuck and becomes helpless and frightened when the trail, which had until then been 'half-right' in direction, shifts to 'half-left'. The isolated white defier of authority cannot move to

the left on his own to persist in his defiant courage. The crowd, passive spectators to this defiance, emit a 'growl ... of defeat and frustration' (18).

It is when an African man, Thomas Ndlovu, goes to the rescue of Johnny that the mood of the story suddenly alters from acute anxiousness to that of raucous celebration, from the 'vertical' movement of the climb to the 'horizontal' axis of a popular and populist gathering:

What had been a tense and terrifying affair had become a kind of festival. Jests and laughter had replaced groans and sighs ... (18).

This 'festival' has remarkable affinities with the characteristics and significance of the medieval European carnivals as analysed by Bakhtin.

For Bakhtin, the carnival was marked by the breakdown of the division between spectators and participants: 'Carnival is a pageant without footlights and without a division into performers and spectators. In carnival everyone is an active participant, everyone communes in the carnival act' (Bakhtin 1984a:122). Similarly, in the story, the gathering crowd transforms from being anxious spectators of the boy's climbing to active participants in a festival of their own making. Moreover, for Bakhtin—and for the story—such events are inherently populist, the people's defiant celebration outside of 'official' culture. For Bakhtin, such carnivals take place in 'islands' outside of 'official' space and time, and of course the quarry, still untouched by the advance of the 'city', is just such a space.

Thomas Ndlovu, who rescues Johnny, is the catalyst to transform the occasion into a carnival. For Bakhtin, the 'primary carnivalistic act is the mock crowning and subsequent decrowning of the carnival king ... and he who is crowned is the antipode of a real king, a slave or a jester' (Bakhtin 1984a:124). Thomas is this carnival clown, the 'herald of another ... nonofficial truth' (Bakhtin 1984a:93):

Then he started his climb, amid a new noise of laughs, cheers, approval, and advice. Thomas soon showed himself to be vigorous and unskilled, and his friends below, who had been so anxious about the first climber, made jokes about the second. As for Thomas himself, whenever he had bought off what he thought a piece of good climbing, he would turn to the crowd and raise his clenched fist, to be greeted by cheers and laughter .... Thomas, with intention somewhat foolish, climbed flamboyantly and wildly, shouting encouragement in English to the small boy and exchanging banter in Zulu with his friends on the ground (19).

We notice that, while he is the hero—or king—of the hour, this clown with his exaggerated movements and banter with the crowd, also manages to caricature his

own heroic identity. He parodies the 'monolithically serious' (1984a:124f) face of authority.

According to Bakhtin, the carnival was a subversive temporary 'suspension' of normal 'repressive and 'ideological' apparatuses and the class relations they function to perpetuate, to produce through 'carnivalistic mesalliances' a 'new mode of interrelationships between individuals' (Bakhtin 1984a:123), where, as Simon Dentith (1995:68) puts it, 'the high, the elevated, the official, even the sacred, is degraded and debased, but as a condition of popular renewal and regeneration'.

The laws, prohibitions, and restrictions that determine the structure and order of ordinary ... life are suspended during carnival: what is suspended is hierarchical structure and all the forms of terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette connected with it—that is, everything resulting from socio-hierarchical inequality or any other form of inequality among people (including age). All distance between people are suspended, and a special carnival category goes into effect: free and familiar contact among people .... People who in life are separated by impenetrable hierarchical barriers enter into free familiar contact on the carnival square (Bakhtin 1984a:122f).

In Paton's story, as has been seen, 'a crowd of every colour and class and tongue' (17) dissolves those apartheid-enforced divisions and inequalities to celebrate 'free and familiar contact'. To this extent, Paton's festival is, as Bakhtin put it, a 'parody of the extracarnival life' of apartheid South Africa, which is also seen in the range of role-reversals enacted. In this 'inside out' world, whites are vulnerable and helpless; a black man is the hero and goes to the rescue of his erstwhile white oppressor; Indians and Africans similarly show concern for a white person; Thomas Ndlovu tells his erstwhile white 'master' to get the police; while the police are momentarily seen to be helping people instead of oppressing them.

Graham Pechey (1989:43) captures the full import of these events when he argues:

Any sociopolitical project of centralisation or hegemony has always and everywhere to posit itself against the ubiquitously decentralising (centrifugal) forces within ideology. 'Carnival' is the name Bakhtin gives to these forces in so far as they find expression in consciously parodic representations across a range of signifying practices.

Thus, by means of this 'contrapuntal juxtaposition' (Danow 1991:48) of centripetal and centrifugal forces, Paton's festival becomes a fully-fledged semiotic defamiliarisation of (or a 'gay loophole' within) apartheid ideology, and a central



aspect of this is the disruption of one of ideology's main mechanisms: the naturalisation of the social order it serves. If, as Bakhtin argues, the 'serious aspects of class culture are official and authoritarian: they are combined with violence, prohibitions, limitations and always contain an element of fear and intimidation' (Bakhtin 1984b:90), then this carnival celebrates the 'laughter of all the people' (Bakhtin 1984b:11):

Liberating one from fear ... with its joy at change and its joyful relativity, is opposed to that one-sided and gloomy seriousness which is dogmatic and hostile to evolution and change, which seeks to absolutize a given condition of existence or a given social order (Bakhtin 1984a:160).

This is what Paton writes of the arrival of the police (notice the 'ambivalent' laughter):

The arrival of the police was greeted with good humour, for here was an occasion on which their arrival was welcome. Words in Zulu were shouted at them, compliments tinged with satire, for the crowd was feeling happy and free (20).

A ribald, positive, laughing, ironic defiance, feeding off this renewed sense of the relativity of all power and social reality, which is developed in the final paragraph:

Thomas ... led the small white boy to the notice board which said, NO CLIMBING, BY ORDER. What he said, no one heard, for it was lost in an outburst of catcalls, laughter, jeering and cheering (21).

Here is the positive defiance of authority, with the people no longer afraid of its mysterious omnipotence, but instead they have sufficient confidence to jeer at it. Incidentally, Bakhtin traced the genealogy of carnivals to 'ancient pagan festivities, agrarian in nature' which were connected to 'moments of crisis, of breaking points in the cycle of nature or in the life of society' (Bakhtin 1984b:9), such as the middle of winter. The festivities would therefore celebrate 'moments of death and revival'. In this regard, Paton's story takes place on the day after Christmas, which can itself be traced back to pagan seasonal festivities, and which, of course, precisely celebrates the death of the old and the birth of the new, and is itself written within the 'crisis' of a monolithically dominant apartheid regime.

Bakhtin argued that, in carnival's independent articulation of a radical anti-hegemonic populism that reveals, as Eagleton (1981:148) puts it, 'the "fictive" foundations' of social formations and the contingent open-endedness of social reality,

carnival is a 'temporary transfer to the utopian world' (Bakhtin 1984b:276), a 'true and full, though temporary, return of Saturn's golden age upon the earth' (Bakhtin 1984b:7f). Paton's story is precisely this—a 'utopian' affirmation of a democratic world without inequalities or racism that self-consciously knows itself to be 'unreal', a moment outside of the real time and space of its present. In that 'granite' period of the post-Sharpeville 1960s, of extreme oppositional powerlessness and quietism, Paton emphasises those vital humanist principles in the small victory of his narrative. The utopian gesture is precisely determined by its political context: liberal utopianism is a salvaging of an affirmation of political principles where more practical political practices are impossible.

In this regard it is apposite to refer briefly to a talk Paton gave at Wits University in 1968 called, 'Why we must go on dreaming'. In the following passage, Paton is referring specifically to what were once called the 'Liberal universities', but his argument has every relevance to 'The Quarry':

Now I shall examine another view ... that to pit the force of an ideal or a principle against raw and sometimes ruthless political power, is quite fatuous; that the only thing to pit against political power is another political power; that you must quit your ivory tower and get down there into the arena and play the game of power.

But there are times when you cannot get down and play the game of power, because you have no steed, no armour, no lance. The only thing you have is your belief, and the only thing you can do with your belief is to affirm (Paton 1975:201).

What is very interesting about 'The Quarry' is that, in the face of an intransigently totalitarian state apparatus, liberalism, traditionally associated in South Africa with a timid constitutional reformism, takes a radical populist turn, much like Johnny Day, who, to continue his defiant ambitions, must turn 'slight left', but cannot do it on his own. What saves Johnny are the masses.

Something of this tension within Liberalism emerges in the 'Introduction' to *A Century of South African Short Stories* (1978) by Jean Marquard, which includes Paton's 'The Quarry'. After warning us to avoid 'political' readings of fictional writing, Marquard offers her own political analysis of 'The Quarry'. The 'benevolent behaviour of the crowd', she writes—and she means by implication any crowd of people—is a hopelessly unrealistic portrait, nothing short of 'miraculous' in its dreamy 'optimism' (34). For the liberal Marquard, crowds are by definition malevolent, threatening, barbaric, a 'mob'—the implicit conclusion being that only the solitary individual can be trusted to act responsibly in a civilised manner. This

fear of the masses and mass political mob/ilisation are interestingly absent in Paton's story.

In the dark years of Stalinism, Bakhtin drew upon a long history of resistant 'folk-humour', and of a literature 'carnivalised' during Modernity by the migration of carnival motifs into it. But Bakhtin also has the 'historical memory' of the 'carnival' of 1917 to feed upon, and, in a similar way, Paton had the 'carnival' of the politically heteroglot and struggling 1950s to draw upon, an 'existential heteroglossia' (Clark & Holquist 1984:301) so manifestly opposite to the politically 'silent' 1960s, that migrated into his short story, 'The Quarry'.

## Liberalism and Post-Marxism

In their book, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (1985), Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe develop an anti-teleological 'post-Marxist' discourse where Marxism is freed from such essentialist concepts as 'classism': 'the idea that the working class represents the privileged agent in which the fundamental impulse of social change resides' (177), and where the notion of democracy—so lamentably absent from 'actually existing socialism' in the 20th century—is of central liberatory importance. For Laclau and Mouffe, the 'democratic discourse' of the French Revolution—speaking of equal rights and popular sovereignty—ushered onto the world stage a new 'social imaginary' of equality that potentially challenged all forms of inequality, including economic inequality (154-156). Nineteenth century Europe saw the 'articulation' between democracy and liberalism, with its 'discourses of rights' and liberty, to produce a liberal-democratic discourse. For Laclau and Mouffe it is this language of liberty and equality that offers the potential for the radical transformation of modern societies, a 'deepening of the democratic revolution' to sectors of the social from which traditional liberalism has remained aloof: 'The task of the Left therefore cannot be to renounce liberal-democratic ideology, but on the contrary, to deepen and expand it in the direction of a radical and plural democracy' (176) that would ultimately lead to the self-regulation of civil society.

From this perspective, left-wing perceptions of both socialism and liberalism are transformed. The centrality accorded to the 'democratic revolution' leads to the conclusion that 'socialism is one of the components of a project for radical democracy, not vice versa' (178), and that

It is not liberalism as such which should be called into question, for as an ethical principle which defends the liberty of the individual to fulfil his or her human capacities, it is more valid today than ever (184).

Indeed, further support for this view is found in Terry Eagleton's *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (1990), where he argues that 'Marx does indeed possess an "absolute" moral criterion: the unquestionable virtue of a rich, all-round expansion of capacities for each individual' (223). A 'communist ethics', however, emphasises that 'we should foster only those particular powers which allow an individual to realize herself through and in terms of the similar free-realization of others' (224). The indebtedness of these ideas to liberalism is clear.

Such a reading by Laclau and Mouffe enables both liberalism and the socialist project to be re-conceptualised: if the latter must now answer to the imperatives of an endlessly unravelling social democratization, then the former is no longer merely the antagonist of liberation but a valuable resource—as in South Africa with its trenchant defence of civil and human rights—upon which more radical libertarian claims can be developed.

Allied to this project is a revisionist understanding of ideologies, in that they are no longer seen as essentially bound up with (the interests of ) a particular social class. Instead, ideologies have no necessary 'class belonging' (Mouffe 1979:195), but can instead be re-articulated—as with the discourses of 'democracy' or 'nationalism'—by different social groups and thus re-accented in line with different social and political interests. The contemporary task is to appropriate the discourse of democracy to give it a radical inflection.

Liberalism in South Africa has had a long history, beginning with 'Cape liberalism' instituted by the British following their Second Occupation of the Cape in 1805, and characterised by the abolition of slavery and Pass Laws, the ending of discriminatory legislation, a qualified non-racial franchise for men, the freedom of the Press, and eventual representative government. The greatest victory for liberalism was witnessed in 1994, with the establishment of a non-racial and non-sexist constitutional democracy in South Africa. However, through the course of the 20th century, which saw the increasing oppression of the black majority, Liberalism was seen by the Left—Marxists, and later, Black Consciousness intellectuals—as a superannuated, largely white middle-class and reformist response to segregationism and apartheid that was hopelessly compromised by the colonial and capitalist parameters of its ideology. Liberalism, it was argued, sought to de-radicalize black political aspirations by preaching moderation, patience and gradualism in a context that demanded radical political opposition.

Much of this critique is of course accurate, although it does not take into account the extent to which black political organisations such as the African National Congress appropriated a great many liberal themes such as democracy and civil and human rights (as can be seen in the Freedom Charter)—and indeed it is difficult to describe the present ANC government as anything other than a liberal democratic entity. What this demonstrates is Laclau and Mouffe's argument that ideologies have

no inherent 'class belonging', that they, like liberalism, can be appropriated by other social forces and in the process be 're-articulated' to be given a more radical political inflection.

This is in part a discussion about means and ends: the ANC was struggling for a non-racial democratic society, but, unlike traditional liberals (the argument goes), was willing to countenance radical means to that end: mass mobilisations, working with trades unions, and the armed struggle (hence its alliance with the South African Communist Party), that ensured its mass black political base.

However, there is also a danger here of caricaturing 'white liberalism'. The Liberal Party itself (1953-1968) was not simply a 'white' organisation: indeed Douglas Irvine (1987:119) points out that by 1961 the 'majority of delegates to the party's national congress were African', and it is often forgotten that in the 1950s the Liberal party was the only party in South Africa with a non-racial membership—the ANC was open only to Africans, while the non-racial SACP had been outlawed. The Liberal Party was also not wholly a parliamentary, constitutionalist movement operating lamely within the system: liberalism was transformed by the political momentum of the 1950s, turning to what Irvine (1987:120) describes as 'nonparliamentary political activity' and playing important roles in the Boycott Movement (both in South Africa and abroad), participating in illegal marches, etc. This important radicalization is well captured in Alan Paton's novel, *Ah, But Your Land Is Beautiful* (1981), which can be read as a political history of the 1950s, and in particular of the Liberal Party, of which Paton was a key figure (he was elected the party chairman in 1956, and two years later became its president). A further index of this move to a more radical and populist liberalism is the party's abandonment of a qualified franchise in favour of a universal franchise in this period—the articulation of a proper democratic liberalism. Indeed, in 1961 some Liberal party members established the African Resistance Movement which was committed to acts of violent sabotage.

My argument then, following those of Laclau and Mouffe, is that one cannot dismiss the writings of liberalism *in toto* because the discourses of equality, liberty, and civil and human rights are too important for any liberatory project to be airily (or shrilly) rejected as part of the fabric of a discredited 'white liberalism'. Rather, these discourses need to be appropriated and 're-articulated' to suit more radical democratic claims, and in this light there is much to learn from the history of South African liberalism, including the great many fictional writings produced by it. The radical populist democratic discourse of 'The Quarry'—a discourse favoured by Bakhtin and Laclau and Mouffe—opens up such a space of contemporary appropriation.

Centre for the Study of Southern African Literature and Languages  
University of Durban-Westville

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# Fictions of Home and (Un)belonging: Diasporan Frameworks in Michelle Cliff's *Abeng* and Zoë Wicomb's 'Journey to the Gifberge'

Miki Flockemann

She was at that point at which some children find themselves, when to move forward would mean moving away (Cliff 1984:76).

Perhaps it's a dream, wishing to belong  
(Wicomb in Hunter 1993:87).

The prologue and epilogue framing Rosemary George's *The Politics of Home* (1996), claim provocatively that 'All fiction is homesickness', and 'All homesickness is fiction'. This highlights the notion that home is not a real place as much as it is an imagined one; moreover, it is the desire for that always deferred location that shapes and is shaped by fiction: as George puts it, 'fictionality is an intrinsic aspect of home' (1996:11)<sup>1</sup>. While fictions of exile—whether exile is chosen or enforced—have traditionally focused on the cultural alienation and personal isolation resulting from such displacements, a powerful counter-trend has emerged which balances this sense of unbelonging against a kind of 'newness' that is made possible through such translocations.

This notion is succinctly expressed by two recently published works by writers who, while both born in Africa, are very differently situated in terms of their relationship to Africa as 'home'. Speaking of his first novel, *Abyssinian Chronicles* (2000) Moses Isegawa who grew up in Uganda in the 1970s, says that his move to Holland where he has been living (by choice) for the past fourteen years enabled him to recognise that, 'It marked a break and a new beginning. It was my road to Damascus experience. A writer needs the shock of newness to wake him up' (*Mail &*

<sup>1</sup> A similar point is made by Salman Rushdie in his *Imaginary Homelands* (1991).

*Guardian* July 7 2000:9). Closer to home, Rob Nixon, who left South Africa for the United States to escape conscription into the Apartheid army, claims in his marvellous memoir, *Dreambirds* (1999), 'Every migration is an opportunity and a kind of death. The new world may be rich and strange, but you're somehow weightless in it' (1999:102). Both comments point to the 'opportunities' resulting from leaving home. However, a more complex relationship between home, (un)homeliness and fiction than that expressed by Isegawa and Nixon is explored in coming of age narratives by women writers from South Africa and the African diaspora who confront a conflicted situatedness within broader race/class discourses. For instance, representations of 'leaving home' offer an enabling 'deterritorializing' of given female subjectivities for writers like Zoë Wicomb who left South Africa for the United Kingdom in 1971 (though returning for a period between 1991-1993) and Jamaican-born Michelle Cliff who currently lives in the United States. By teasing out the intertextual relationships between Cliff's *Abeng* and Wicomb's *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*<sup>2</sup>, I hope to show how such a comparative reading offers scope for a reassessment of selected South African texts such as Wicomb's within a diasporan framework, especially in relation to the construction of subjectivity. In other words, Wicomb's work should be more broadly contextualised than has generally been the case in much criticism of her work.

Michelle Cliff and Zoë Wicomb have commented similarly on their genesis as writers. Cliff draws on experiences not unlike those that Wicomb attributes to Frieda Shenton's development from childhood to young womanhood in the context of apartheid racial dichotomies in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*. Indeed, Cliff claimed kin with Wicomb during a symposium held in Seattle in 1990 on the critical relationship between imaginative writing and the political and social institutions that shape the writer's daily experience. Cliff (1999:66) began her presentation by quoting Wicomb:

Her words move me; they are connected at base with how I have felt about language and writing. She (Wicomb) says:

*When I think about my own process of writing, the fact that I did not write for years and years, though I wanted to, it has to do with a sense*

<sup>2</sup> Wicomb's new novel *David's Story* (2000) has just been published locally by Kwela Books. Other stories published in anthologies include 'In the Botanic Gardens' (in *The End of a Regime. An Anthology of Scottish-South African Writing Against Apartheid* 1991), and a story which 're-visions' Sarah Gertrude Millin's *God's Stepchildren*; 'Another Story' (in *Colours of a New Day: Writing For South Africa* 1990). Her latest story, 'N2', appeared in *At the Rendezvous of Victory and Other Stories* (1999).

*of confidence. Unless your daily transaction with words is successful, unless words work for you, unless when you speak there are results, you're not going to have the confidence to use language.*

She speaks for me, another 'coloured', from another end of the Empire (1991:66).

At the same symposium, Wicomb (1991:16) said:

What I consider to be of importance is to find one's voice and to value writing as a process of discovery, rather than focusing on the product.

As suggested in the epigraphs above, one important aspect of 'finding one's voice' concerns the function (and fiction?) of home and the sense of (un)belonging or unease, and the way these contribute to the experience of coming of age in different geo-political contexts.

This raises a number of questions: first, in view of the current preoccupation with the performativity of identities, how does the representation of this experience provide scope for exploring 'strategies of selfhood'; secondly, to what extent are these strategies determined by a problematic relationship to 'blackness', and finally, how do place and travel serve as ways in which to engage with 'newness'—both in terms of individual identity and broader socio-political transformation? While accepting that development is a relative concept and that theories of development generally have a specific class, history and gender emphasis, Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch and Elizabeth Langland argue that literature, and especially the novel of development, 'offers the complexity of form necessary to represent the interrelationships informing individual growth' (1983:4). Of interest here will be the way these fictions of development by Cliff and Wicomb encompass representations of both individual psycho-social development as well as an awareness of broader political processes.

Karla Holloway claims that textual practices, particularly figures of language, are expressive of both cultural and gendered ways of knowing as well as of framing that knowledge in language (1992:1). Her argument for a discrete (essential) tradition of 'blackwomen's' writing which privileges African descent is problematic in relation to South African writers who might claim a mixed cultural and linguistic heritage, including indigenous Khoi/San, African, Asian, and European heritages. Nevertheless, the textual strategies Holloway identifies, namely 'revision', '(re)membrance' and 'recursion' can provide a useful framework for analysis. For instance, by revision, she refers to the way Western literary traditions are 're-organised' in ways that undermine cultural hegemony, and this is a significant aspect of the fictional strategies used by Cliff and Wicomb.

Common to these strategies is the significance of voice which, according to Holloway, reveals an 'inner speech' which is at the same time expressive of a communal voice. This she associates with African oral, mythic, as well as call and response traditions, referring to these as 'speakerly' rather than the more typical 'writerly' texts associated with a predominantly male Western literary tradition (1992:75)<sup>3</sup>. The function of narrative voice in both texts will thus be of special interest. A question remains: are the textual strategies involving 'voice' and 'revision' here indicative of what Holloway sees as a discrete 'blackwoman's' literary tradition, or does this point to a more broadly based intertextuality involving, for instance, minorities, displacements, and even aspects of youth culture, which go beyond, but do not diminish, the boundaries of a discrete African heritage? I do not intend taking issue with Holloway's cogent argument that echoes of original cultures persist in syntactic (grammatical) and cultural (metaphoric) dimensions and that there are areas of linguistic and cultural interaction. My focus, however, is on aspects of what will be described as a diasporic literacy that is not confined to these legacies<sup>4</sup>.

Common to both Cliff's and Wicomb's texts are descriptions of literal and figurative journeys which provide scope for exploring the strategies of belonging or, as Wicomb suggests in the epigraph above, a dream of belonging. Both texts describe the development of the young female protagonist in relation to her developing awareness of her dual position 'both outside the dominant values and inside the society that lives by them' (Gardiner 1989:112)<sup>5</sup>. The inside/outside dialectic established in these texts serves as a variation of the 'privileged vantage point' inhabited by diasporic subjects referred to by Paul Gilroy (1993:111) where the negative meanings of unbelonging are reconstructed—in this case the sense of unbelonging being intertwined with the protagonist's feelings about her 'mixed' and (en)gendered heritage. In turn, Wicomb's and Cliff's texts problematise the homogenising effect of the category 'black' when used to refer to women whose geo-political, cultural and class affiliations, as well as their personal experience of blackness, differ widely. The terms black, coloured, creole and even white should

<sup>3</sup> Using Henry Louis Gates's discussion of the characteristics of 'speakerly texts' in which there is an attempt to produce the illusion of oral narrative, Ashraf Rushdy (1992:567-597) draws attention to the dialogical relationship between teller and listener established in the 'speakerly text'.

<sup>4</sup> For further discussion of such oral and literary legacies see also, Gay Wilentz (1992), and Barbara Christian (1980). For a discussion on recursive strategies, see Carol Boyce Davies (1996).

<sup>5</sup> Judith Kegan Gardiner draws on Rachel Blau DuPlessis's (1987) discussion of women's '(ambiguously) non hegemonic status'.

thus not be read as referring to stable categories here—hence the omission of capitals and inverted commas.

The diaspora or the dispersal of peoples is commonly associated with slavery, forced resettlement, exile and migration. However, rather than focusing on the familiar crises of alienation and globalisation, my concern is with what diasporan theorists have termed the 'in-between spaces' opened up as a result of the diasporic experience which can provide in Homi Bhabha's terms 'the terrain for elaborating strategies for selfhood—singular and communal' (1994:1). Although concerns have been expressed about the 'masculinist' aspect of such diasporan frameworks (De Loughrey, 1998)<sup>6</sup>, I will argue that the 'strategies of [gendered] selfhood' explored in these texts can be useful to the current preoccupation with identity politics and discourses of 'new' South African nationhood. This is particularly so in view of debates on the relationships between diversity and democracy, the difference between nation as unifying metaphor, and nationalism as exclusive ideology (see Mattes, 1997). At the same time there are often stark differences in the way a diasporic sensibility is experienced by differently situated people. For instance, Dorothy Driver (1993) notes that through being disenfranchised and forcibly dislocated from their homes, black South Africans have long been in a state of internal exile, situated almost in a diasporic relationship to 'home' within the homeland. Moreover, as a result of apartheid's ideological obsession with 'pure belonging', the waves of forced removals, illicit border crossings, military invasions and migrant labour have, according to Rob Nixon, resulted in a 'sprawling diaspora of guerrillas, refugees, and exiles, who had to piece together the most ironically hybrid identities on foreign shores' (1994:5).

*Abeng* draws on Cliff's own childhood in Jamaica and traces the coming of age of Clare Savage—the name suggestive of her mixed (Amerindian, Caribbean, African, European) parentage. In turn, this provides scope for exploring the complex history of Clare and her family, which is also the history of Jamaica. The dialogic, 'speakerly' narrative employed by Cliff enables her to describe Clare's development against the broader socio-political context. Sections of narrative, focalized through

the experiences of the pre-pubescent Clare, are contextualised by snatches of traditional songs, historical narrative and the life stories of individual family members. We are told repeatedly that Clare becomes 'a visualiser rather than an analyzer' (76) of what is happening to her and around her; for instance, she observes the traces of past histories such as the burnt hut of Mma Alli who aborted the mixed-up foetus 'conceived in buckra [white] rape' (35), though at this stage Clare does not recognise that it was her own paternal colonising ancestor Justice Savage who was responsible for both the rape and the burning. This focus on visualising rather than analysing can be seen as an integral aspect of Cliff's revisionist strategy. The novel ends when Clare is twelve and entering womanhood, which in her case also involves separation from motherland when she is sent to school in the United States.

Commenting on her fictional Clare Savage during a conference on Caribbean Women Writers in 1988, Cliff describes her as a colonised child who also represents 'a crossroads character': 'She is a light-skinned female who has been removed from her homeland in a variety of ways and whose life is a movement back, ragged, interrupted, uncertain, to that homeland' (1990:265). The novel plots Clare's development, how it is shaped by her relationships with Boy Savage, her bigoted *buckra* father, and Kitty Freeman, her 'black and white' mother, who 'came alive only in the bush' (49). In addition, there is her rural grandmother, Mattie, and also her country friend Zoe (sic) whose development to some extent mirrors and contrasts her own. The life of the colonised child is bound, we are told, by the personalities, needs and desires of their parents, 'which is of course nothing new—only something which makes resistance very difficult, and may even make a child believe that resistance is impossible or unnecessary' (49). Apart from familial relationships, there are also the constraining institutions of church and school which act as agents of colonial control: 'For that is what she had been taught. She was a colonized child, and she lived within certain parameters—which clouded her judgment' (76).

Similar constraints binding the parameters of colonised childhood are explored in Wicomb's *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*. In the first story, Frieda Shenton, growing up as coloured South African in rural Namaqualand, hides under the kitchen table during times of family tensions—such as the arrival of the English-speaking white man for regular inspection of the gypsum mine: 'At an early age I discovered the advantage of curling up motionless in moments of confusion, a position which in further education I found to be foetal' (1). However, her vantage point is not as safe as she had assumed for her mother's surveillant eye is fully aware of her child's position, as she whispers her suspicions about the 'play-white' coloured driver from Cape Town to her motionless child under the table. To her captive daughter she utters injunctions about the need to speak English, the language of civilisation, and cautions against speaking Afrikaans, not because it is the language of the oppressor, but because it is associated with 'uncouth Boers' and lower class

<sup>6</sup> This diasporic consciousness has been explored extensively by Bhabha, Stuart Hall and Gilroy. However, referring to masculinist aspects of diasporan frameworks such as Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*, Elizabeth DeLoughrey (1998:206) says that while these are 'crucial for their dismantling of (often colonial and pedagogical) nationalisms the focus on the movement of peoples across the Atlantic can be prematurely celebratory considering how gender and class inform and define transoceanic travel'. While mindful of this, I will show how the two texts under discussion point to an emancipatory discourse in spite of the engendered constraints referred to.



coloureds like the Dirkses. Her final admonishment: 'And don't think you'll get away with it, sitting under the table like a tame Griqua' (9) is interesting in view of the way her husband's people—we discover in a later story—initially looked down on her because of her own Griqua heritage<sup>7</sup>.

Apart from a common concern with the processes of colonised girlhood and the strategies of selfhood which are informed by internal journeys within the motherland and across the Atlantic, both Wicomb's and Cliff's works manifest a self-conscious network of intertextual cross-references with other writers. This intertextual cross-referencing strengthens the argument for a re-contextualisation of Wicomb's writing within a diasporan framework. Commenting on the diversity of cultural influences she has been exposed to through her experience of exile from South Africa in the UK, Wicomb says that deracination or hybridity need not be pathologised: 'indeed they are conditions that are essentially me and must be accepted and embraced as such' (1994:575)<sup>8</sup>. In terms of literary influences she refers to Toni Morrison in particular, but also to Bessie Head, and the epigraphs to Wicomb's collection are from the South African poet Arthur Nortje, who died in exile, and George Eliot. Another literary presence that can be traced in the book is Hardy, whose fictional landscape evokes the England Frieda longs to escape to at certain moments, while at the same time forewarning of the insidious discrimination she will be exposed to there. In *Abeng* these cross references are more direct, and as I shall show, there are deliberate echoes of scenes from Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* which also establish a dialogue with Rhys's text and its exploration of the trauma of 'un-belonging'.

For Cliff's fictional Clare Savage, separation from home is prompted by several parallel incidents. During her childhood she undertakes a number of internal travels when in her school vacation she is sent to live with her maternal grandmother,

<sup>7</sup> The Griqua who have recently achieved First Nation status at the United Nations, are descendants of interrelationships between the indigenous Khoisan, ex-slaves and settlers. There have been several land claim cases involving the Griquas in post-election South Africa. In July 1998 the Griquas became South Africa's newest First Nation, having been awarded this status by the United Nations. 'First Nation status has so far been awarded to the San, Khoi and Griquas in South Africa, and to the Australian Aborigines, the natives of Greenland and several indigenous American peoples' (Heidi Clark *Mail & Guardian* 31 July 1998:40).

<sup>8</sup> A similar point is made by Desiree Lewis in her discussion of hybridity and identity in relation to South African writers, Wicomb and Richard Rive. Lewis (1999:5) discusses the need to rescue the concept of hybridity from notions of contamination, noting that identity is always a process of negotiating available fictions rather than 'discovering a final fullness within them. See also Wicomb (1998).

Mattie, who lives in St Elizabeth, 'a parish in the deep country' (12). During this visit, she experiences the pain of exclusion for what appears to be the first time. This happens when her cousin Joseph suddenly abandons her when his half brother Ben arrives and the boys go off together on a secret mission to fry and eat the testicles of the freshly killed hog; a slaughter in which they participated, but which she was excluded from, being a girl. Like the episode in Wicomb's story where Frieda hides under the kitchen table, the boys are aware of Clare's presence, but carry on with their task as if she were invisible. When she keeps begging them to tell her what they are doing, feeling the 'so important need' to be able to 'join in', she hears in patois the prohibition she had heard many times before, but recognises now for what it signifies:

Dis sint'ing no fe gal dem.

Why not?

Is jus no fe gal pickney, dat's all.' She had heard this before—spoken in different ways (57).

What Clare understands here—and this epiphany is experienced somatically as a physical pain—is not only her gendered exclusion from the boys' activity, but also her racialised and class-based in-betweenness which affects her relationships with the country women. Later that same day, 'Lying in her bedroom watching the women at this remove, Clare felt separated from them' (61). Aware of her dual heritage, she feels the tension of shifting alliances expressed in shades of colour, kinds of English as well as physical markers of race and class. 'The Black or the white? A choice would be expected of her, she thought' (37). Her father insists that as she is his daughter she is white, and must therefore have the blackness bred out of her, but at the same time Clare has moments when she experiences a pre-oedipal longing for merging with her coloured mother—interestingly this is projected as a 'dream' and is associated with her trips to the country with her mother who sings a traditional lament as they cut through the bush (54).

Paralleling the exclusion from the hog-feast is the incident that marks Clare's literal expulsion, first from the country area and later Jamaica itself, when she secretly takes the gun and ammunition from her grandmother's home and goes out with the intention of killing Massa Cudjoe, the rogue pig haunting the countryside. Accompanying her somewhat reluctantly is her friend Zoe who later says that the only reason she came along was because she wanted to protect the foolish town girl buckra from herself. This event is another milestone in Clare's coming to consciousness, as she is forced by Zoe to recognise the differences between them. After Zoe manages to talk Clare out of her hog-slaughtering, the two bathe in the stream, and lie together naked on the rock in a moment of what Clare assumes is



girlhood intimacy—both potentially erotic and emotional. But this is shattered by the arrival of a cane cutter who stares at the naked girls; Clare's fear of the male intruder is expressed by adopting her most imperious buckra English voice and pointing the gun at him, and then accidentally firing a shot which kills Miss Mattie's prized bull. While proving that she can 'join in' and do things a boy can, Clare's impetuous action results not just in exclusion, but in her expulsion when her grandmother says she never wants to see her again: 'A beautiful pickney who was mean inside', scolds Miss Mattie, linking Clare's embodiment of perceived gender and race transgressions as causes of her shameful wickedness: 'No good a-tall, a-tall. A girl who seemed to think she was a boy. Or white. She would surely end up at the Alms house in Black River or worse in her ways' (134). In fact, a choice is made for Clare when she is sent to spend the rest of the vacation with the white lady, Miss Philip, pending her parents' decision about her future—which in effect entails her departure from Jamaica to go to school in the US.

As mentioned earlier, there is network of intertextual cross-referencing in both Wicomb's and Cliff's works, and this invites a framework for reading certain incidents. For instance, in Cliff's second novel *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987) which is a sequel to *Abeng*, Clare returns to Jamaica where her political involvement results in her violent death when she is finally burned into the Jamaican landscape in a hail of bullets. This is described as a liberatory death that is reminiscent of the death of that other white creole, Antoinette Cosway, in Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*: there are a number of deliberate revisionings of scenes from Rhys in *Abeng* as well<sup>9</sup>. Apart from the textual references to Rhys in her novels, we saw that Cliff also relates her own situation as writer to Wicomb's, and like Wicomb, she also dedicates *Abeng* to the memory of Bessie Head. Also, Clare identifies with the diary of Anne Frank, sensing, or 'vizualising', rather than articulating the connection between the Holocaust and Middle Passage. Like *Wide Sargasso Sea*, *Abeng* ends with a dream: in this case it is a dream in which Clare throws a stone at her black friend Zoe in a scene reminiscent of Tia's throwing a stone at Antoinette Cosway during the riot at Coulibri in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. From this revisionary dream, we are told, the older Clare comes to understand more clearly the nature of the relationship between white creole and black Jamaican, and this enables her to undertake the act of 'healing' Zoe whom she had damaged. However, this knowledge has not yet been fully realised at a conscious level for the novel ends: 'She was not ready to understand her dream. She

<sup>9</sup> Cliff says that Bertha Rochester of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is the ancestor of Clare Savage. Of the ending of Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* she says that 'while essentially tragic', the ending completed the triangle of her life, from island to the States, back to the island: 'In her death she has achieved complete identification with her homeland. Soon she will be indistinguishable from the ground' (Cliff 1990:265).

had no idea that everyone we dream about we are' (166)<sup>10</sup>. We are reminded that, 'In her love for Zoe, Clare knew there was something of her need for her mother. But it felt intangible and impossible to grasp hold of' (131); at the same time, this 'need' is of course also linked to Clare's sense of un-belonging as Jamaican white creole, of being, as Cliff puts it elsewhere, a 'crossroads character' (1990:265).

Wicomb's *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* has been described as a short story cycle which not only exposes the master narrative of apartheid, but also meditates self-reflexively on its own fictionality (Marais 1995:32). More commonly, it has been read as another revisionary *bildungsroman*, or, more specifically, a *künstlerroman* (see 'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Coloured Girl', Viola 1989). The first six stories/chapters deal with Frieda Shenton's childhood and young adulthood in South Africa as she moves between her home in rural Namaqualand and Cape Town; the last of these, 'Home Sweet Home', is set shortly before her departure for England. The next three deal with return visits to South Africa, while the last story ruptures the apparently realist text and its chronology by resurrecting the dead mother in what Wicomb describes as a 'metaphor for returning: it's a homecoming, in both the physical and another sense' (in Hunter, 1993:91). This, in turn, results in a reassessment of Frieda's relationship with mother and with motherland.

In this final story of Wicomb's collection, 'A Trip to the Gifberge', Frieda undergoes a journey within a journey as it were, from Britain back to Cape Town, and from Cape Town to her mother's home in Namaqualand, and then deeper inland to the Gifberge, the place of her mother's Griqua ancestors. The mother's comment on the Gifberge: "'So close to home", she sighs, "and it is quite another world, a darker, greener world"' (176) seems to mirror, inversely, Frieda's longing for the 'idyll of an English landscape of painted greens' (74) during the trauma of her abortion before Frieda's first departure for England, described in the title story. The contrast between a 'greener world' and the present environment is developed further when the mother says, 'We know who lived in these mountains when the Europeans were still shivering in their country. What they [the Europeans] think of the veld and its flowers is of no interest to me' (181). According to Wicomb, the last story breaks the silence that has existed between mother and daughter, and by implication between Frieda and her motherland. Separation is still there, represented by the fenced off section of the mountain that prevents Frieda and her mother from having a free view of their home from the top of the Gifberge. However, referring to Frieda's return, Wicomb says that there is 'also somehow a space that has been created *through her absence*' (e.i.o.; Hunter 1993:91), and it is this 'space created through absence' that

<sup>10</sup> According to Belinda Edmonson (1993:180-191), it is only through this dream that Clare can uncover the brutal power relationship between Clare and Zoe's close friendship.

can be seen as offering scope to contemplate 'newness' when Frieda is forced to recognise the position from which her mother speaks, even if she cannot agree with what she says.

Frieda's mother situates herself carefully in anticipation of her daughter's visit. She carries her heavy chair some distance from the house which is located on the very edge of the coloured township—just as the mother distances herself from her coloured in-laws—so when Frieda first sees her, she is seated in such a way that her head appears to be framed by the mountains. The mother is firmly located in her world, and in control. However, the mother as she appears in this story is very different from the mother of the earlier stories of Frieda's childhood, who prepares Frieda so diligently and relentlessly for her perceived duties in society, just as her father conditions her for assimilation into the coloured middle class. Here the mother distinguishes herself as English-speaking Griqua in contrast to the Shentons whom she describes as 'Boerjongens' (Afrikaner country bumpkins) (165). The conversation is tense, dominated by the mother's anger at the 'terrible stories' the daughter has been writing from England, most especially the title story of the collection which deals with abortion. The mother accuses her of writing about a world she 'knows nothing about', and insists on their taking a journey up the Gifberge the following day. In the course of this journey, an uneasy truce is achieved as the verbal battles revolve around knowledge and identity.

The physical markers of identity that feature so strongly throughout both *Abeng* and Wicomb's collection—hair, nose, eyes, skin and language—surface again but are curiously displaced by the landscape. On her arrival Frieda gives her mother the bunch of proteas she herself was given on her arrival at the airport by Aunt Cissie. Her mother rejects the gift, standing the bunch upside down like a broom, preferring a living protea bush which she intends collecting from the mountain to plant in her garden. When Frieda sneers at this apparent veneration for the despised South African national symbol, the mother retorts:

Don't be silly; it's not the same thing at all. You who're so clever ought to know that proteas belong to the veld. Only fools and cowards would hand them over to the Boers. Those who put their stamp on things may see in it their own histories and hopes. But a bush is a bush; it doesn't become what people think they inject into it. (181)

Paradoxically, the mother does not extend this to the daughter's 'bush' of hair which has throughout the collection served as one of the most tortuous markers of both racial and gender identity. When Frieda expresses Black Consciousness-informed views about her hair that approximate to the mother's views on the protea, the mother still questions, 'And you say you're happy with your hair? Always? Are you really?'

(178). This shifting perspective is a crucial aspect of Wicomb's fictional strategy, where meaning is a process of 'discovery', represented through an interplay of voices which offer multiple perspectives and refuse an authoritative account of identity.

The apolitical mother has a perspective that is not available to the educated Frieda. There are interesting parallels between these generational battles over knowledge—where the apolitical mother/grandmother's knowledge calls into question the younger woman's experience of the world—and the relationship between Clare and her rural grandmother, Miss Mattie, who is also so firmly located in her world. In Wicomb's story, it is the fiction itself which achieves an acknowledgement and balance between opposing views. In constructing a position from which the mother can speak, Wicomb has to kill off the father—just as previously she had killed off the stern mother, who in her childhood, appeared to represent colonised subjecthood in her admiration for things English. After her trip to the Gifberge Frieda appears to 'visualise' herself in relation to this newly discovered world of her mother, and traces a line from the stars, 'down to the tip of the Gifberge, down on to the lights of the Soeterus Winery. Due South' (181); linking the bitterness of 'gif' (poison), and the sweetness of 'soet'. At the suggestion of a homecoming the mother equates Frieda's 'terrible stories' with her unhomeliness: 'But with something to do here at home perhaps you won't need to make up those terrible stories, hey?' (182).

Wicomb has generally been acclaimed as offering a new, 'post-protest' voice articulating the formation of South African coloured identity (see Sicherman 1993; Gaylard, 1996), while according to Driver (1993:11), 'Wicomb's recognition of the politics of representation and the intersubjectivity of representation, places her work firmly at the vanguard of new South African writing'. This is significant in view of the fact that while Wicomb has clearly drawn on her own experiences, she insists that the text should not be read as autobiography. Driver makes the point that Wicomb's emphasis is not on the affirmation of identity, whether coloured or Griqua, but rather on the subversion and interrogation of identities. In a piece titled, 'Tracing the Path from National to Official Culture', Wicomb draws on some of the concepts of minority literature outlined by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari<sup>11</sup>. Deleuze's theory of deterritorialization, which is based on his analysis of Kafka's texts, has been appropriated by a number of critics, not only in relation to the deterritorialization of dominant languages, but also the displacement of peoples,

<sup>11</sup> As summarised by Abdul JanMohamed (1984:298), the features of minority literature include the articulation and bringing to consciousness of 'those elements ... that oppose, subvert, or negate the power of hegemonic culture', as well as the celebration 'of marginality in its specific manifestations without fetishizing or reifying it'.

identities and meanings. According to Wicomb: 'the concept of deterritorialisation seems to me a useful one to apply, not only to literary but to all cultural practices in the new emerging South Africa' (1991:249). Wicomb's awareness that 'affirmative statements about our undervalued culture require thoughtful negotiation with negative stereotypes' (1991:246) points to a negotiated rather than authoritative or essential meaning. It can be argued that the 'newness' of the approach critics have ascribed to her work is located in the way the narrative voice incorporates diverse perspectives and this too involves a 'negotiation with negative stereotypes'.

Here Wicomb's text operates differently from others along the Caribbean creole continuum which make use of code-switching and dialect as markers of difference which, as W.D. Ashcroft points out, function not only at a linguistic but also at a political level (1987:117). Wicomb herself has noted the difficulty of not having access to the kind of dialect speech community that Afro-Caribbean writers can draw on. The problem runs deeper though, as suggested in the title story of the collection when, in response to the apparently 'absurd' question, 'You're not Coloured are you', Frieda answers, 'No' (78)—and recognises that the abortionist's 'blindness' to her racial identity was caused by her 'educated voice'. She contrasts herself to her white lover Michael: 'I have drunk deeply of Michael, swallowed his voice as I drank from his tongue. Has he swallowed mine? I do not think so' (78). Comparing her technique to that used by Morrison, Wicomb comments that she attempts in her use of language to give commonly held associations 'a new slant, a new accent' (in Hunter, 1993:88). Driver comments perceptively on this aspect of Wicomb's achievement when she notes how an 'arch' tone is constructed as a distancing device that keeps the anger and grief that permeate the collection at bay. Driver describes this strategy as follows—and it is interesting to note the way she links this with Wicomb's extension of literary realism:

Although Frieda Shenton herself can be arch, archness is a quality of the writing rather than simply of the narrator's consciousness. . . . Archness is a tone constructed in the writing, then, representing itself through a variety of means, the most important of which are, first, the incorporation of multiple perspectives in the text which are hereby given more weight than they would be if they were simply reproduced in dialogue, and second, the use of wit and wordplay. (1993:7)

This is an important distinction for, as Driver suggests, the voices heard in dialogue are then returned to the narrator's consciousness, and thereby construct a complex perspective, offering scope for a negotiation of meanings rather than final judgement. This is similar to the dialogic strategy used by Cliff in *Abeng*, where Clare 'visualises', rather than analyses. While in some of Wicomb's earlier stories the distancing effect of the 'arch tone' was used indirectly and 'returned to the narrator's consciousness', or was used to distinguish between a younger experiencing and older narrating self, in this final story the arch tone is matched by the mother's own and

functions more overtly in a dialogic context.

I suggest that it is precisely that 'space' that is created at the intersection of contesting ideas such as expressed in the discussion between mother and daughter in 'A Trip to the Gifberge', that draws attention to the potentially emancipatory discourse that is made possible through the displacement and 're-territorialization' of 'given' identities. These displacements resulting from travel provide the 'opportunities' referred to earlier, for possible re-definitions of self in relation to mother/land, while at the same time refusing the fixing of familiar binaries. The killing off of the father and the resurrection of the mother in Wicomb's anthology can then also be seen as providing such 'opportunities'. But one needs to ask at this point how this is related to 'finding one's voice'? In apparent confirmation of the resurrected mother's injunction about home and the 'terrible stories' Frieda has been writing about her life, Wicomb claimed in 1990 that: 'The book came out of intense homesickness. I couldn't write about Britain. It is a problem not having lived in South Africa for so long and yet not being able to write about anything else' (in Hunter, 1993:87). This relationship to fiction and homesickness and the need to 'leave home' is also alluded to by Caribbean writer Caryl Phillips who comments on his constant travelling between St Kitts and Britain: 'Out of the tension between these two places is spun this thing called literature' (1989:49), while South African writer and political activist, Lauretta Negobo says that initially when she went to Britain from South Africa, she was struck by 'a beautiful feeling of release. For the first time I was just me. I wrote what I liked' (1985:81). Interestingly, lamenting her absence from South Africa during the 1994 elections, Wicomb commented that her intense longing to be home and to be participating in that nation-building moment temporarily displaced all her theorising about home and nation in terms of Benedict Anderson's 'imagined community' (1994:575), where the concept of nation is a unifying metaphor that shapes and is shaped by a community's shared sense of belonging. This in turn seems to bear out Rosemary George's claim that 'All homesickness is fiction; and, conversely, all fiction is homesickness', which introduced this discussion.

George notes how 'home' has been equated with nation but also with self. Yet home is also a fiction, a desirable space: 'Home is also the imagined location that can be more readily fixed in a mental landscape than in actual geography' (1996:11). As mentioned previously, Deleuze and Guattari's suggestive concept of linguistic deterritorialisation has been appropriated by a number of critics, including Wicomb, who refers to its usefulness for cultural practice in post-election South Africa. Caren Kaplan states that when home is identified as a domestic, female space, the process of 'leaving home' has a gendered significance. Again drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, Kaplan refers to the way deterritorialisation (which includes the displacement of peoples, language and identities) and the process of defamiliari-

sation, can open up the possibility of imagining alternatives: 'This defamiliarisation enables imagination, even as it produces alienation, 'to express another potential community, to force the means for another consciousness and another sensibility' (1990:358). In travelling between centres and margins, says Kaplan, this kind of writing can be seen as an expression of 'both deterritorialization and reterritorialization' (1990:358).

It seems then that the condition of 'unhomeliness' (with the concomitant Freudian unease associated with the term), can be a pre-requisite for the processes of deterritorialisation. Wicomb's comment that 'home is an ambiguous site where you belong and feel comfortable but where you also encounter revulsion and horror—this horror being equated with the fact that it is comfortable at home' (1994:575)—is perhaps best illustrated in the story 'Home Sweet Home' which marks the end of the first phase of Frieda's life in South Africa. Here the comfort is suggested in the food her father lavishes on her, while the 'revulsion' is conveyed through the platitudes and homilies she is assailed by, expressing values that Frieda already feels utterly alienated from. Similarly, in *Abeng* Clare compares herself to Anne Frank, and experiences her 'crossroads' situation and the implications of her mixed heritage as a feeling of profound 'unease':

But she was a lucky girl—everyone said so—she was light-skinned. And she was alive. She lived in a world where the worst thing to be—especially if you were a girl—was to be dark. The only thing worse than that was to be dead. She knew the composition of her school and the constraints of color within. An unease seemed to live in a tiny space for her soul—for want of a better word—and she was struck by what she told herself was unfairness and cruelty while at the same time she was glad of how she looked and she profited by her hair and skin. (77)

Like Clare, Frieda has to leave home to experience the emancipatory 'space through absence'. As Kaplan puts it: 'What we gain [by leaving home] is reterritorialization; we inhabit a world of our own making' (1990:356)<sup>12</sup>; this emphasis on fictionality is significant in view of Wicomb's irritation with anthropological or sociological readings of South African fictional texts which place them in the category of 'life stories' which appear to be representative of various South African social realities.

<sup>12</sup> Kaplan's (1990:365) expression, a 'world of our own making', draws on Minnie Pratt's injunction to Western, middle-class women to embrace the concept of leaving home as a move towards establishing a 'coalition of identities' amongst differently situated women.

A comparative exploration of Cliff and Wicomb's texts shows how the contradictions resulting from intersecting systems of knowledge and values offer glimpses of the construction of 'possible' alternative subjectivities in a variety of ways. For instance, after her revelatory dream about hurting and healing her friend Zoe at the end of *Abeng*, Clare, in the absence of anyone to talk to about the dream, does not simply visualise or observe her own dream, instead, she translates the dream experience by writing about it to herself; and in the process constructs an alternative way of seeing herself in relation to others: 'Her diary was on her lap, and she was writing about what she had woken up to' (165). On the other hand, while Wicomb initially claimed that she writes because she did not have a voice with which to speak, she has since revised this by saying, 'you can write yourself out of or into anything' (1994:574), indicating that writing itself can be a self-affirming and even transformative act—even if this transformation has not yet been translated into social action.

Department of English  
University of the Western Cape

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# Malawi's Marginalisation of Indigenous Languages in Literary Publications

Themba Moyo

## Origins of the post-colonial language policy and its practice

For more than forty years now Malawian political history has largely been determined by the policies that the former head of state, Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda, instituted, followed and enforced. His dictatorial rule (1964 -1994) was characterised by promoting Chewa<sup>1</sup> matrilineal social structures which he saw as crucial for the control of land and inheritance. He claimed that his was a social structure that had suffered from benign neglect under the British rule. He revived the concept and institution of the *mbumba*<sup>2</sup> and appointed himself as *nkhoswe*<sup>3</sup> number one. Dr. Banda became the anointed 'brother' who assumed the role of a mediator between sisters and brothers, and the one who took over the responsibility for his sisters and especially daughters. The Chewa concept of motherhood, further, formed the base of the 'four corner stones' of his rule: Unity, Loyalty, Obedience and Discipline. It bears noting that his views and this approach was purely for egotistical reasons—to boost and advance his own image and aspirations. Women were forcibly mobilised to

<sup>1</sup> Chichewa was regarded as a minority dialectal variant of Chinyanja (Mchombo 1998) spoken in central Malawi. Another main dialect spoken in Malawi is Chimang'anja spoken in the southern region. Chinyanja is thus a common name of the same language spoken also in Zambia and Mozambique. In Banda's era he elevated Chichewa to a language, whereby it attained national status and symbolism. This was from September 21 1968.

<sup>2</sup> *mbumba*: In a matrilineal culture these include sisters and their daughters where the brothers to the sisters are the custodians of the entire family.

<sup>3</sup> *nkhoswe*: Normally this is the name given to a brother or *ankhoswe*, i.e. brothers to sisters. The brothers assume custodianship and responsibility of the sisters and their daughters, particularly in marriage arrangements. One brother would thus be a *nkhoswe* of one sister, another brother for another sister, etc.

purchase *kanga*<sup>4</sup> material, which carried a portrait of the life president himself, as the women's league uniform. The president's portrait in *kanga* materials would be carefully positioned on the women's breasts. With this, the gyrating queens came to dance for him as their *nkhoswe* number one and his role as patriarch was set unhindered. This demonstrates Banda's bizarre aesthetics but also how he expropriated the Chewa values along with capitalist advertising conventions to boost his dwarf image both at home and abroad as a popular head of state. The result was a personality cult. He claimed to rule on behalf of the women whose custodian and protector he said he was, but in the process exalted his image as the *Ngwazi*<sup>5</sup> and the lion of Malawi.

His dictatorial rule 1964-1994 promoted Chewa values and its language which placed other languages and their cultural values on a path to total extinction, particularly in the print media. For functional purposes both at home and internationally he adopted the English language and its values and showed a strong passion for classical languages. For him, one was not educated without gaining a knowledge of Greek, Latin and French. 'His Excellency, *Ngwazi* Dr. H. Kamuzu Banda was a leading advocate of French as a modern language as well as Greek and Latin, from which French is derived' (*Daily Times* of May 1990). Phillip Short (1974) has described him as 'a child of two worlds'. We assume that these worlds are the African and the European, where the latter came first to him. Through his fragmentary language policies this meant that Malawian organic literature became fundamentally subverted as a result of the diglossic and hegemonic use of English and Chichewa only as the languages in which writers could see their works published.

Malawi's language policy rested on two ideologies of tribalism and regionalism, which were given to exclusivism and discrimination (Chirwa 1994/5:95). This was effected in the guise of nation-building and national unity. These might be considered as purely rhetorical goals. Through the exaltation of the president's ethnic dialect into a symbolic national language (in accordance with the president's wishes to exalt his own dialect, Chichewa), the language policy adopted a supremacist view of the Chewa language and its culture, in which eight other indigenous languages were relegated to the margins. These included Chitumbuka,

<sup>4</sup> *kanga*: A colourful java-printed material depicting colourful African images. In many African countries, some *kanga* materials have featured a country's head of state's portrait. In Malawi, several selected materials featured Banda's portrait which women were forced to acquire and to wear when they had to gyrate for him at his political rallies to boost his dwarfish image.

<sup>5</sup> *Ngwazi*: The word refers to one who has fought and won a heroic battle or battles. Banda 'attained' this title for liberating Malawi from colonial rule. He claimed to have achieved this single-handedly.



Chinkhonde, Chinyakyusa, Chilambya, Chitonga, Chiyao, Chilomwe and Chisena. The first five are spoken in the northern region where Chitumbuka has emerged as the regional *lingua franca*. Chichewa with its various dialects is the dominant language in the central region. Chiyao, Chilomwe and Chisena are languages spoken in the southern region, along with Chichewa which is also largely spoken in the south, but here it is commonly known as Chinyanja of the Chimang'anja dialect. The approximate proportions of the Malawian population that use different languages are open to question as to the precision of such figures, but may prove useful as a rough guide. (See figure below).

#### Estimates of the number of Malawians who understand Chichewa

Author	Speakers of Chichewa
Knappert (1998) .....	83%
Morrison et al (1989) .....	60%
Katzer et al (1989) .....	>30%
In Tadadjeu (1977).....	77%

(Cf. Matiki 1998:13)

As is evident in these statistical differences, there is no agreement among scholars on the number of people who understand Chichewa (Matiki 1998:13). The northern region has more than six languages, of which Chitumbuka is the regional *lingua franca*. Chiyao, too, has a considerable number of speakers, largely in the southern region and some also in the central region, along the Salima-Chipoka lakeshore corridor. Chiyao is particularly widely spoken in the densely populated districts of Machinga, Mangochi, Zomba, Chiradzulu and the Blantyre rural district. The two languages, Chitumbuka and Chiyao, could thus be seen as languages of wider communication, regionally, than other languages spoken within their respective regional communities. Banda did not allow linguistic surveys to be carried out during his rule, presumably for fear of true revelation of how languages ought to be determined at both regional and national levels for use.

The 1966 statistics which attempted to give estimated population figures of speakers per language were based on a population census count rather than on a sociolinguistic count. This explains why many scholars have viewed such figures as skewed and therefore treated them with caution. There is clearly a diverse ethno-linguistic composition of the country, despite the claim Banda made that the Chewa of the central region, from which Banda himself came, constituted the country's majority tribe (Chirwa 1994:99). This claim has 'no demographic or ethno-linguistic validity' (Africa Watch 1990:57) as there is no 'dominant linguistic group' (Chirwa 1994:99). The statistics provided in the 1966 census count could therefore be viewed as having been skewed to salvage a set political agenda. It seems that Banda saw the

introduction of Chichewa as a national language as part of the attempt 'to promote the idea that Chewa culture was synonymous with Malawi' (Africa Watch 1990:35). This indicates 'the degree to which the regime was bent on regionalistic and ethnic particularism' (Chirwa 1994:104).

Anyone who expressed ethnic identity apart from the president himself was condemned as a 'tribalist', bent on undermining the 'four corner stones' of the Malawian Congress Party. Everyone was thus expected to rally behind the strong leader, the 'father of the nation'. Expression of one's ethnic identity through one's language use on official platforms was regarded as a sign of disloyalty to one's nation and to the head of state personally.

Chichewa as a language symbolised Malawi and Malawi was synonymous with Banda. By promoting his own tribalism he denounced it in others (Vail & White 1989). The elevation of the Chewa language and its culture, through which the citizenry were to identify themselves nationally, was the worst example of a language policy marked by linguacentrism of the hegemony of the English-Chichewa diglossia alone.

#### The origin of indigenous literature in print

Christian missionaries started literary production in the written mode in indigenous Malawian languages in the nineteenth century. The missionaries, as forerunners of British administration and business enterprises, realised that to achieve their evangelising mission they had to educate the natives through their indigenous languages first. After this they were exposed to English to improve their knowledge of the language and their prospects of employment. Converts were also taught skills such as carpentry, hospital assistantship, bookkeeping and clerical skills. This was part of the proselytisation process, where schools were set up and the Christian converts made to learn the 3 Rs—i.e. Reading, Writing and Arithmetic.

The intention was that such activities could bring light to a country that was described to have been in darkness, as was the rest of heathen Africa. In the quest to bring this light, the Scottish missionary, David Livingstone, persuaded his British compatriots and investors at Cambridge University to direct their attention to Africa and in particular to Southern Africa. He had further advocated the colonisation of countries such as Malawi through the 'Three Cs': Commerce, Christianity and Civilisation. Apart from the presumed initial goal of missionising, these three Cs became the main catalyst in the globalisation of European capitalism. It bears noting therefore that the colonising mission had to be mediated through the 3Rs.

In the process of making the converts literate through Christian literature, the first printing house, the Hetherwick Press, was established by the Scottish missionaries at Blantyre Mission in 1884. The missionaries thus became the first to



develop vernacular languages through the work of this press. Vernacular languages such as Chinyanja (this was the original name of the language before it was changed to Chichewa on 21st September, 1968) and Chitumbuka, which were the country's two main languages for early instruction and mass communication, had their grammars and dictionaries codified, along with the production of their orthographies.

Mphande (1996) has argued that while the colonisers condemned indigenous cultures as heathen and therefore marked them for destruction, the irony of this colonial situation is that they (the colonisers) deemed it necessary to 'civilise' the natives in their own locale through their own cultural expressions. The purpose of this was to create an overarching image of a national culture which, through indirect rule, would facilitate the proselytisation of the different native peoples.

With this kind of ideology it is not surprising therefore that the origin of the pioneer Malawian writers in indigenous languages tended toward Christian moralisation. The literature that was first published was largely dependent upon biblical stories and traditional life. The mission schools encouraged the first African converts to write stories about the joys of conversion in their indigenous languages (Mphande 1996:93). One such leading convert of the Presbyterian Scottish mission in Malawi, Charles Chidongo Chinula, for example, translated John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* into Chitumbuka. Hetherwick Press subsequently published it in 1932. A considerable number of Christian nativity plays and morality tales were also translated into indigenous languages.

Other publications which were marked by biblical and traditional life could be seen in the titles of early Chinyanja novels and plays. These included *Kaziatape* (*Tale Teller* 1950) by E.W. Chafulumira and *Mkazi wacimaso-maso* (*Zomfula the Unfaithful Wife* 1959), by Jacob Zulu. Again the basic aim of this literature was to convert natives to Christianity but also to help them assimilate European values and aesthetics. The agenda then primarily signified the British intention 'to align culture as a critical axis in their colonising mission' (Mphande 1996:92).

Another fundamental way in which the missionaries and the colonialists achieved this was also through appropriation. For instance, indigenous cultural forms of expression, particularly song, were incorporated into the Church of Scotland practices. In the production of this literature that was printed through missionary efforts

many songs and other forms of cultural expressions were appropriated by the Christian missionaries, 'exorcised' of their pagan traits, and reconstructed in accordance with English prosody melody. They then were reissued as church hymns, with little regard by them to whatever had once regulated their prior use. Ingoma war songs thus found their places alongside popular English melodies in church hymnals (Mphande 1996:93).

Chingoni<sup>6</sup> and later Chitumbuka in northern Malawi were creatively employed in songs of well-known African tunes, which were subsequently sung in churches. This obviously suggests that the missionaries saw flavour in African songs which they converted into church hymnals.

### Language as a social badge

Language is not just a code. It becomes a marker of individuals' identity. Communities which cannot express themselves through the written word in their own languages will remain virtually rootless with little else to leave behind for posterity. While we recognise the economic argument that writing in the language of power, English, brings in income in the form of royalties that accrue to such authors through a wider readership, some literary works would still need to be expressed in local languages that carry a unique flavour in their idioms and other forms of proverbial expression. Such features give the readers and the community at large their identity. It bears noting, as Njabulo Ndebele has argued, that 'Tolstoy did not write in English. Nor did Ibsen, nor Thomas Mofolo. Yet their works are known the world over' (cited by Lindfors 1989:50).

### Statistical information on published works in indigenous languages

The marginalisation of Chitumbuka from 21st September 1968 together with the rest of Malawian indigenous languages by government policy which permitted only Chichewa and English to be used as languages for literary publications, meant that other indigenous languages were reduced to oral languages of the home and ethnic identity only. Writers and other folklorists, for example, could only write their works in their minds only or tell such tales orally in their languages to their folks in their homes but not through the state-owned Malawi Broadcasting Corporation's (MBC's) literary programmes or through the publishing houses. This restriction was applied until 1994.

<sup>6</sup> The original Chingoni was a dialect of isiZulu which came into Malawi with the arrival of the Nguni settlers, of Zulu, Swazi and Xhosa stock in the nineteenth century. Chingoni today refers to the Chitumbuka dialect spoken in Mzimba as the original Chingoni is obsolete. It has been submerged into Chitumbuka. A little of it, however, is still spoken in Mpherembe area in Mzimba. It is also used in *izibongo* (praises, particularly of chiefs etc.) and *zithakazelo* (clan praise names).

Kamwendo (1998) has reported on a survey conducted by the Writers' and Artists Services International (WASI). The survey showed that between 1900-1988, only 42 literary works were published in Malawi, in the three languages, in the following order: English as the most frequent, followed by Chichewa and Chitumbuka. Most of the publications in Chitumbuka were published in the period before Malawi attained her independence. Here the Livingstonia Mission made a significant contribution to the encouragement of the language and growth of the secular literature in the language (Kamwendo 1998:34).

What we note is that literary works remain non-existent in the other indigenous languages such as Chiyao, Chisena and Chilomwe, and so on. These languages are clearly viable languages in the areas where they are spoken, and texts in these languages would thus command considerable readership. 'One therefore cannot talk of a novel in Chiyao, a short story anthology in Chilomwe or a collection of poetry in Chisena in Malawi' (Kamwendo 1998:34). While this is the case with non-existent published works in the marginalised languages, Timpunza-Mvula (1995) noted that there was an unequalled growing body of literature in Chichewa, which included essays, poems, plays, newsletters, books and novels. This increasing volume of literature might seem to imply that Chichewa, 'was the only authentic literature of national importance' (Timpunza-Mvula 1995 in Kamwendo 1998:34). Timpunza-Mvula (1995) further noted that it was unfortunate that there was no corresponding literature in any other languages. The only publication of note in Chiyao was *Cikala ca Wayao* by Johanna Abdallah. Kishindo (1994:132) has noted that the foreword to the book hailed it as an indispensable text for anyone who wished to understand the dynamics of Yao society in historical perspectives. But this was more than a historical text. It also told of the cultural outlook of the Yao.

The general picture then of published works in Malawian indigenous languages is one that Kamwendo (1998:34) has referred to as a 'literary drought' largely as a result of the skewed language policy that the Banda regime pursued.

### Problems in the development of the orthography and grammars of indigenous languages

While Chichewa has undergone considerable development in its grammar and orthographic principles through the Chichewa Board established in 1972, its progress has been hindered by the absence of a long-awaited dictionary. From 1972 to 1995, when the Board was being dissolved, this had still not been published. Its absence posed problems for budding writers who may have waited to use it in writing. With regard to other indigenous languages, hardly anything had been done in the way of codifying these languages in grammar books and dictionaries.

However, preliminary efforts made by missionaries in the development of indigenous languages need to be commended. Edward Steere published *Collections for a handbook of the Yao language* as long ago as 1871. Two decades later this was followed by Alexander Hetherwick's publication of *A Handbook of Yao Language*. George Meredith Sanderson, who had studied Chiyao as it was spoken in Nyasaland, published *A grammar of Chiyao* in 1922 and *A Dictionary of the Yao Language* in 1954. Sanderson's work is widely acknowledged to be definitive and authoritative (Kishindo 1994:132). Bishop Frank Thorne had expressed regret that the language had 'not been recognised as one of the official languages of the protectorate' in view of its musical nature, and the virility and interesting nature of the Yaos. Nevertheless in the period between 1964-1994 the language was not recognised as a suitable and potential vehicle of literary expression and publication.

It is interesting to note that Timpunza-Mvula (1992) sympathised with the post-colonial government's institution of monolingualism through the promotion of Chichewa as the language through which different ethnolinguistic groups would express and identify themselves. He then claimed that there had not 'been any antagonism to Chichewa language policy' which he 'ascribed to the charismatic and pragmatic leadership of Dr. Kamuzu Banda and the people of Malawi' (Timpunza-Mvula, 1992:40). But he was a little naive in not recognising how the populace was coerced into accepting Banda's language and cultural policies through political repression. And it bears noting that while there was no overt challenge to the established policies, this did not mean that covert resistance was absent. 'For instance it was not uncommon for non Chewa speakers to speak the language deliberately badly, trivialise its cultural traditions, or downplay its importance in schools' (Chirwa 1994:106). This reaction could have only been intended to reflect dissenting views of exclusivist linguistic policies which allowed the use of only one language for official purposes.

Three years later, however, Timpunza-Mvula came to recognise the detrimental effects of the use of Chichewa as the only indigenous language for use in published works, when he came to note that 'one would assume that Chichewa is the only authentic literature of national importance' (Timpunza-Mvula et al in Kamwendo 1998:34).

With regard to Chitumbuka, the other indigenous language employed in print, very little was published on the description of the language. The missionary Walter Emslie published *Notes on the Tumbuka Language as spoken in Mombera's Country* in 1891 (the year the country became a British Protectorate) and a *Table of Concords and Paradigm of Verbs of the Tumbuka Language as Spoken in Mombera's Country*. In 1911, Donald Mackenzie published *Notes on Tumbuka Syntax*, which was another minor work (Kishindo 1994:134). Dr. Emslie's *Introductory Grammar of the Tumbuka* (1913) was more substantial than his earlier

work. It was, however, not until 1952 that William Turner published the *Tumbuka-Tonga-English Dictionary* which could have gone some way toward assisting writers in their writing. With the outlawing of Chitumbuka as a viable *lingua franca* for the northern people in 1968 through a presidential decree, all hopes of literary growth through published works in the language were shattered. In schools and in publishing houses, written books were removed. There was no evidence of the language in print—i.e. with the exception of those who still had Bibles and hymns printed in the language. However, it did not only remain a powerful language confined to a specific region, but was also used by speakers in the other regions.

The same exclusivist language policies lamentably contributed to the literary drought in post-independent Malawi. Children who were born after 1964 were referred to as 'the born-frees', since they were born after the country had attained its independence in 1964. They were therefore believed to have been liberated in all respects. However, their access to literary works for knowledge and also for enjoyment purposes was ironically severely restricted as they could obtain only works written in English and Chichewa. These were also the only languages they were allowed to speak in public places and at school.

I witnessed an interesting conversation, which exemplifies the destructive effects of this language policy. A grandmother, speaking Chitumbuka, asked her granddaughter (who was in standard eight): 'Ka mukusambira nkhuni?' meaning, 'Where do you go to school?'. The granddaughter, being fluent in Chichewa and not in her mother tongue, only picked up the word 'sambila'. In Chitumbuka in this context the word means 'to attend school' but in Chichewa it means 'to swim'. The answer the grandmother received was, 'Timasambila ku lake.' The answer was obviously in Chichewa. This is a code-switched sentence, meaning, 'We swim at the lake'. To a further inquiry made by the grandmother, 'How do you spell Ekwendeni?' The grand daughter spelt it as 'Equenden'. Ekwendeni is the name place of her maternal grandmother and her mother. The girl's error was understandable given that she had never seen the Chitumbuka orthography anywhere, at home or at school, and therefore only used her ingenuity to spell it along the lines of English or Chichewa, the only languages she knows.

The point here is that there are a considerable number of young people, as well as adults, born after 1964, who have never seen or read any literary works in their respective indigenous languages or indeed works in other languages other than Chichewa or English, with the possible exception of the Bible and hymns, some of which could have survived extinction after the 1968 decree. These suppressed languages include Chilomwe, which is rarely spoken (see Kishindo 1994), Chisena, Chitumbuka and Chiyao, all of which are languages that are widely used and therefore deserve to be developed and employed in literary works.

## The impact of censorship laws on publications

In Malawi the Censorship Board's members were appointed by the president and were entirely of Chewa origin. Its infamous Censorship and Control Entertainment Act (1972) had a tremendous impact on what could be viewed, performed and published, either in English or in Chichewa. This became the government's main weapon in the control of access to knowledge and information produced within Malawi and elsewhere. The Censorship Board, through its enactment of this Act, prohibited publications which it deemed as 'prejudicial to public security' that would 'undermine the authority of, or the public security or confidence in the government and promote ill-will among the inhabitants of Malawi' (Mphande 1996:99). The act further decreed that any work of art or book could be censored if it was deemed to be indecent, obscene, offensive or harmful to what it claimed to be public morals. The total effect was that such measures brought about stagnation in literary publications where budding writers were left with no foundation to build on and no framework within which to work out their own artistic destiny. Furthermore, its vague phraseology meant that there would always be a way of controlling what was published within the country. This led to a situation where there was virtual total control of access to alternative published literatures in indigenous languages. What the government feared most was 'seditious' literature that would influence Malawi's population to become revolutionary.

Punishment for writing or live performances of what the Censorship Board construed as seditious works was imprisonment without trial or recourse to any form of justice. This can be exemplified by the arrest of the academic and poet, Jack Mapanje, in September 1987. Banda arrested him for writing poetry in English which the government concluded was seditious. He was only released after being in jail for four years without any form of hearing or trial.

The existence of the Censorship Board made writing in both indigenous languages and English a risky business, and it was because of the risks involved that writers were denied their right to give a measure of elegance to their own indigenous languages.

The institution of these authoritarian measures had an inimical effect on indigenous literature to some considerable extent. Even through the sole indigenous language of publication, the Chichewa syllabi in schools remained stifled as a result of government control. Jolly Max Ntaba laments the implications of this:

The most important question is: how can the youth be interested in reading about Malawi culture in a novel when there is no Malawian novel among their prescribed books in their classroom?

I will repeat if it only to bore the reader: it's even sadder to note that in schools

no Malawian novel has yet found its place—whether at primary school, Junior Certificate or Malawi Certificate level. This fact alone ... portrays the much hated ugly impression (Ntaba 1984:06).

Ntaba, a prolific novelist and a short story writer through the medium of Chichewa, further criticised the Censorship Board as he observed that '90% of the creative writers' materials was being rejected by the censors as there was clear evidence that 'there was [a] deliberate attempt to discourage writers' and this situation was made worse by what he referred to as 'political opposition in the guise of literature' (Ntaba 1984:8f).

It bears noting that Jolly Max Ntaba's books written in Chichewa had secured a more stable market in Zambia. His last two novels were not even available in bookshops Malawi. The fact that publications were confined to English and Chichewa for over thirty years has meant that publishing houses and sponsors of writing competitions could have developed interest in only these two languages.

For over six years (1981-1988) I participated and chaired the 'Writers' Corner', a literary programme, in English, in which literary works are critiqued every Sunday evening on the national radio. 'Theatre of the Air' which features drama is another popular programme in English. The two literary programmes for radio in Chichewa are 'Nzeli Nkupangwa' (which largely focuses on poetry and short stories) and 'Mlakatuli' (which is purely devoted to poetry in Chichewa). Even after the 1996 reviewed language policy was adopted in which five other indigenous languages (namely, Chitumbuka, Chiyao, Chilomwe, Chitonga and Chisena) were elevated to official status, programmes devoted to creative works have not been featured in these other languages.

Generally, writers have held negative attitudes towards literary works published on air or in text in indigenous languages. This has largely been based on economic reasons as there is little income in the form of royalties that accrue from such efforts. Added to this is the notion that to publish works in English indicates that the author is knowledgeable, whereas to publish in an indigenous language is equated with backwardness. Publications in English have thus given these artists more prestige than their fellow artists published in indigenous languages. The impact of this ideology has caused the number of publications in Chichewa to dwindle while the rest of the indigenous languages were long relegated to oblivion. Kamwendo (1998:37) has noted that it is 'unfortunate that thirty years of independence have not freed some Malawians from linguistic imperialism or linguistic chauvinism.' There is

a tendency to degrade local languages and exalt foreign languages, especially English, the language of the former coloniser.

The *Malawi News*, a weekend edition of *The Daily Times*, which was owned by Banda and his lifetime companion, Miss Cecelia Kadzamira, further controlled people's access to literary works as it largely carries stories in English, but concedes about two and a half pages in Chichewa. *The Weekend Nation* has only four out of its usual 16-17 pages devoted to Chichewa. In a country with already a low level of literacy, literary publications in English have further limited the amount of knowledge and sheer enjoyment of literary works that can be accessed by the masses in their own languages. In all there are five Malawian newspapers, all of which largely employ English, with the exception of the *Malawi News* and the *Weekend Nation*, both of which grant a few pages in Chichewa. There are no newspapers that use other indigenous languages apart from Chichewa.

Written publications in English which have placed Malawian leading writers into wider international readership, earning more prestige than those published in indigenous languages, have included Joe Mosiwa's *Who Will Marry Our Daughter?* Lupenga Mphande & Anthony Nazombe's (eds.) *Namaludzi*; Anthony Nazombe's (ed.) *The Haunting Wind* (1990); Lupenga Mphande's *Crackle at Midnight* (1995); Jack Mapanje's *The Chattering Wagtails of Mikuyu Prison* (1993); Frank Chipasula's *Whispers in the Wings* (1991); Tikambe Zeleza's *Smouldering Charcoal* (1992); and Chimombo's *Napolo Poems* (1987) among others.

Many of these works published in English were the result of efforts of the Writers' Group founded in April 1970 by a group of six students at the main campus of the University of Malawi, Chancellor College. Most of the initial manuscripts discussed in the Writers' Groups' sessions appeared in English in the University's literary publications, *Expression*, *Expression Supplement*, *Soche Cedar* and *Odi*.

While budding writers were indoctrinated to write in English, they were also made to 'imitate English literary traditions that seemed calculated to make them into Black Wordsworths, Black Shakespeares, or Black Eliots' (Mphande 1996:90). Mphande (1996:90) further cites Ken Lipenga, a writer in the English medium, who noted that there was a compulsory reading list in the English Department of the University of Malawi, which Lipenga described as having been calculated to ensure that even after the attainment of independence in 1964, the perpetuation of colonialism continued through cultural dependence. What we observe here is that some indoctrination of the writers' minds operated through the Western canon through the English language, where little attempt was made to establish a more liberating and distinctively Malawian literary tradition, even through the medium of English itself. This then impelled these budding writers further away from ever writing in their own mother tongues.

Even if some would have attempted to work in the vernacular, the problem was further compounded by the prescription that the only alternative was Chichewa. Publishers, too, have exploited this situation because their only consideration is the money to be generated from publications in English. Even where the works published have been of mediocre quality these have been promoted as long as they are in the economically 'correct' medium.

### Future prospects

We have noted above that with the language policy review of 1996, the present government elevated five other indigenous languages, in addition to Chichewa, to official status. A directive was made by the Ministry of Education that with effect from the 1997 academic year, mother tongues would be employed as instructional languages in early education from grade 1-4. From a psycholinguistic perspective this heralded hope that more learners would gain more knowledge through the languages of their homes or in those languages in which they would have attained proficiency in reading and writing. This would thus enable them to learn more effectively. With regard to literary publications, linguistic liberalisation meant freedom of expression for all which would presumably see more literary works published in indigenous languages. Besides, there was hope that this would also go some way toward improving the standard of literacy in the vernaculars generally.

After the first democratic elections in Malawi in 1994, a considerable number of newspapers flourished but these were again largely published in English. The only newspaper that published in Chichewa, the only vernacular used by a newspaper, was the *Malawi News*. It was much later that the *Weekend Nation* followed suit. This flurry, however, soon withered, perhaps as publishers saw little economic gain even if they published in English. One of them, *The Democrat*, has since become a fortnightly paper and not a daily paper. The two main dailies—both in English—remain *The Nation* and the *Daily Times*. 'Despite this linguistic liberalisation, the Malawian writer and publisher remain glued to two traditional languages, i.e. English and Chichewa' (Kamwendo 1998:35). No one has dared to write in either Chitumbuka or Chiyao, which are both languages which—in the absence of reliable linguistic surveys—we assume are widely spoken in the country along with Chichewa. The three indigenous languages, Chichewa, Chitumbuka and Chiyao, are far more widely used among the masses than English. The notion of linguistic liberalisation has not yet found root in Malawi as pride in the use of other vernacular languages has not arisen in many. This pertains to readers as well as writers.

It also bears noting that since the official recognition of the five other indigenous languages the general public has vehemently complained through the

press, that the elevation of these languages to official status and particularly their use as instructional languages in early education will lead to the lowering of standards in English. Yet again we see that English is valued more than vernacular languages in terms of its economic cachet. Furthermore, it reflects the élite's view of English as the language of power: educational, economical and social.

There seems to be little harm caused in publishing in a global language such as English, if the intention is to project and promote a pan-Africanist image of global significance. Writers such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986:72) have, however, appealed for the decolonisation of the writers' and readers' minds from what he has described as 'the Western imperialist linguistic bondage.' He has argued that the development of languages of the supremacist powers such as English should not be at the dire expense of regional languages.

It seems it would be a worthwhile effort to develop indigenous languages, not only for literary consumption, but also so that they can be utilised and function to their fullest capacities for different purposes if their grammars are described and their orthographies developed. It is heartening to note that the Centre for Language Studies in Malawi has been established in place of what used to be the Chichewa Board. It has made an effort to develop a more comprehensive language policy for the country and has already embarked on the harmonisation of orthographies of varieties of languages and not just of Chichewa alone. This is in the recognition of the fact that there is a need for the preservation and celebration of the linguistic and cultural pluralism that characterises Malawi as a multilingual state (Mchombo 1998:41).

### Conclusion

Six years after the first democratic elections, after more than thirty years of dictatorial rule, the use of other indigenous languages on the radio is token. The languages elevated to official status are only heard in the ten minutes' news slots allocated for each. The hegemony of Chichewa continues along with that of the most powerful language, English. The rhetoric supporting the recognition and preservation of all other languages and cultures through their use in published literary works does not imply the desire to implement a pragmatic language policy, just as the mechanism of absolutist control of the censorship laws remains intact as they have still not been repealed in Malawi; the political structure and bureaucracy still retains Banda-ism.

Little has changed in the country, let alone the thought of encouraging writers to publish in their respective indigenous languages. Here the government of the day will need to consider a bottom-up approach that has to be initiated by the civil society where the indigenous languages in these communities are used. This is in the hope that they can also be employed in literary works, even if published on a small scale.

With the dawn of the democratic era in May 1994, everyone was looking forward to the new political and linguistic restructuring which would move toward a genuine linguistic pluralism, in keeping with the notion of democracy, through egalitarian linguistic use. The institution of monolingualism at the indigenous level and bilingualism at the national level, in literary publications, in a multilingual state cannot be seen as desirable for socio-cultural, linguistic, literary diversity, political access and the development of the country as a whole.

Department of Linguistics  
University of Zululand

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# South Africa within Global and Post-Apartheid Constraints

Sinthe Qono

## Introduction

The aims of the African National Congress (ANC) in the South African government (hereinafter referred to as government) are more complicated than they used to be as a freedom movement, i.e. between 1955 (the year of the establishment of the Freedom Charter) and 1990. Economic-political shifts in the international balance of forces have imposed this complication. The organisation is now torn between its policies and principles before 1990 and this new situation. As anti-apartheid activists, a clear statement was made that the anti-apartheid struggle could not be separated from the struggle for socialism. The ANC's former hopes of introducing some degree of socialist-orientation in its socio-economic developmental perspectives have been shattered with the retreat of global socialism.

Government's current growth, employment and reconstruction (GEAR) programme is being shaped by local big business and current global corporate dictates. This means that South Africa must structure its economy in such a manner that it would become increasingly accessible to international capitalism. Prices must be right, i.e. exchange rates, interest rates, wages, etc. must attract foreign investment. In this paper I wish to argue that South Africa, as well as the rest of the developing world, have no other choice but to embark on a capitalist path of development at this point in time. The National Democratic Revolution (NDR) (see page 19), if taken seriously, could assist in reducing the negative impact of corporate globalisation. The NDR requires the political will of politicians to implement it.

## The globe

Globalisation refers to the increasingly shrinking and competitive world we live in, explained, broadly, by three key factors: first, communication and its ensuing logistics make it possible for people and products to be transported quickly to any corner of the world. This facilitates the global production and distribution process.

Next we have financial settlement systems, modes of payment and account settlement, facilitating the enormous growth of international business, trade and investment. Third, contributing to the shrinking of the world and international competition are the multinational corporations (MNC). These are major companies in controlling positions over one or more industries with subsidiaries in many countries. The MNCs wield enormous economic power, lose their national identities and pose a threat to smaller companies, particularly in the developing countries. Added to these three factors, is a complexity of other phenomena such as international courts, peace moves and treaties, environmental issues and arms control, which are included in the concept of globalisation (Meloan 1998:34).

There is no question as to whether South Africa should be part of the global process or not. The country is steeped in it! Foreign intervention and colonialism had started the process. Whether global trade has intensified recently is debatable:

[T]he second half of the 19th century saw levels of world trade and investment at least as high as they are today. Even at the end of the 1990s capital transfers represent a smaller share of industrialised country economies than they did in the 1890s, and exports account for a share of gross domestic product (GDP) comparable to that of 1913 (Nayyer 1997:13).

On the other hand, as mentioned above, technological advances in communication have changed the face of the globe:

[I]f the scale of today's globalisation cannot be so easily distinguished from that of previous eras, its character is very different. According to one neat description, globalisation describes capitalism in the age of electronics. The development of new technologies - especially communications technology - is largely responsible for making possible modern production and distribution on the global scale (Davis 1999:37).

Up to the 1930s, South Africa was only an exporter of raw materials, especially based on mining. Thereafter it began a trade policy based on import substitution industrialisation financed by the country's mining exports. This policy grew steadily (11.5% in 1980, 12.5% in 1985, 22.0% in 1990 and 28.2% in 1993), contributing to the growth of local industry (Isaacs 1997:69).

There are two contrasting schools of thought on the question of globalisation: one that demands a just order sensitive to the specific, less advantaged position of the working (urban and rural) class world-wide, as well as the developing countries in general, contrasting with that of the elitist position of corporate



globalisation. The latter is represented by Mike Moore, Director-General of WTO (World Trade Organisation), who defended multi-national institutions:

Imperfect as these institutions are, they're the best we've got to improve human living standards. At the same time, the WTO cannot and should not be blamed for everything that is wrong in the world (WEF [World Economic Forum] Report: 2000).

This means that there is an attempt to put a human face on corporate globalisation. This contrasts sharply with the rest of my discussion.

Anti-corporate globalisation activists from around the globe send delegations to protests at international corporate meetings. At the end of November and the beginning of December 1999, protesters outside the meeting of the WTO in Seattle received harsh treatment from police. Their treatment is reminiscent of that of communists outside of the former socialist countries and of anti-apartheid activists inside South Africa. And protesters against the meeting of the Bretton Woods institutions (the World Bank and International Monetary Bank) of 16 - 22 April 2000 were arrested in Washington D.C. A statement by seventy of the male protesters indicates their medieval treatment:

Over the past five days we have been shuttled through the D.C./Federal judicial system. Despite the relatively trivial charges that most of us received ('crossing a police line', 'parading without a permit', or 'incommoding') and our shared decision to remain silent when asked to identify ourselves, we were subjected to a series of 'divide and conquer' tactics, both psychological and physical. We were denied contact with our lawyers for consecutive periods of more than 30 hours at a time; left handcuffed and shackled for up to eight hours; moved up to 10 times from holding cell to holding cell. Many of us were denied food for more than 30 hours and denied water for up to 10 hours at a time. Though many of us were soaking wet after Monday's protest, we were refused dry clothing, and left shackled and shivering on very cold floors. For no apparent reason, some of us were physically attacked by U.S. Marshals; we were forcefully thrown up against the wall, pepper sprayed directly in the face, or thrown on the floor and beaten. At least two individuals were forced against the wall by their necks in strangulation holds, with threats of further violence. This sort of violence was perpetrated against at least two juveniles in order to separate them from the large group (Albert: sysop@zmag.org).

One would expect this treatment in a developing country under a dictator-

ship. Such feudal values would not be surprising since feudal relationships still exist in all developing countries. What the USA marshals told protesters and the way the justice system worked in this instance are synonymous with tyrannical one-party states:

The U.S. Marshals told us that we would be going to D.C. Jail, where we would be raped, beaten and given AIDS or murdered by 'faggots' and 'niggers'. Chief Judge Eugene Hamilton, in a shocking violation of legal ethics, appointed public attorneys for each member of our group and ordered them to post our bonds while we were still in the D.C. Jail, expressly against our wishes and best interests. In fact, though we asked repeatedly for our own lawyers, we were assigned public defenders who consistently acted in the interests of the prosecution. All of this came after the excessive violence used against peaceful demonstrators in the streets of Washington. Violence perpetrated by police included running people over with police motor cycles, clubbing, beating, pepper spraying, tear gassing, trampling with horses, and systematically fabricating scenarios to legitimize police actions in the eyes of the public (Albert: sysop@zmag.org).

This is frightening for South Africans, particularly to those who experienced such treatment not very long ago, during the apartheid era. And it is disturbing to South Africans in the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) who align themselves with the protesters. The increasingly close ties with global corporations, including those based in the USA, could erode the tolerance which government has towards the trade unions and the SACP.

While global capitalism achieves great strides in infra-structural development, impacting on the social and economic lives of peoples, particularly in large cities, the system continues to breed gross inequalities in sub-Saharan Africa. Little has changed since the beginning of the 20th century after the colonial and imperialist powers had completed the territorial division of the world among themselves. Profits from the colonies, particularly Asia, were in the region of \$2,000 million annually the year before the First World War and up to \$4,000 million just before the Second World War (Ulyanovshy 1978:27). Today, the drain continues. Since 33 of the 48 least developed countries (LDC) are in Africa, the statistics below referring to the poorest are all in Africa. According to the UN, the past three decades has seen increased polarisation in wealth distribution:

According to UNDP's [United Nations Development Programme] 1996 Human Development Report, in 1993 only US\$5 trillion of the US\$23

trillion global GDP were from the developing countries even if they accounted for nearly 80 percent of total population. The poorest 20 percent of the world's people have seen their share of global income decline from 2.3 percent to 1.4 percent in the past thirty years. Meanwhile, the share of the richest 20 percent has risen from 70 percent to 85 percent. This doubled the ratio of the share of the richest over the poorest - from 30:1 to 61:1. The assets of the world's 358 billionaires (in US dollars) exceed the combined annual incomes of the countries with 45 percent of the world's population. The gap in per capita income between the industrial and the developing worlds tripled, from \$5,700 in 1960 to \$15,000 in 1993. Between 1960 and 1991, all but the richest quintile (of the world's people) saw their income share fall, so that by 1991 more than 85 percent of the world's population received only 15 percent of its income - yet another indication of an even more polarized world (Castells 1998:80).

This means that the LDCs have little hope in our current world order and this is compounded by the fact that this hopelessness is reflected throughout the world. In the industrially developed countries, the gap between the rich and employed, that is between the upper and middle classes, is widening. The so-called Newly Industrialised Countries (NIC) of South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong, also known as 'Asian Tigers' or 'first tier NIC's', have seen drastic negative changes in their economies in the 'nineties. The 'second-tier NICs' - Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and China - have experienced similar downturns. The 'emerging economies' of India, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina and South Africa still have large parts of their populations falling into the LDC categories.

Policies of the WTO and Bretton Woods institutions intensify global constraints. The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of the latter expects governments of the developing world to cut expenditure particularly in health, education and other developmental programmes (despite a contrary claim), with a concomitant acceleration of privatisation and the elimination of tariff protections for industries in developed countries. The conditions contained in the SAP encourage the devaluation of currencies and the removal of foreign exchange controls. They promote cash crop farming, which causes much environmental and economic damage to rural populations. Besides contributing to rising income and wealth inequality, the SAP has caused per capita income to plummet, particularly in Africa. These Banks (which were initially instituted to rebuild Europe after the 2nd World War), claim that they make decisions on the basis of pure economics. This is capitalist economics. Attributive to this system is the insistence on free-market zones and economies. (For example, when a left leaning government took over in Chile in 1971 through democratic elections, the World Bank stopped all loans. After a military coup in

1973, the Bank resumed loans to the neo-liberal economy despite the country's tyrannical military dictator. In Nicaragua, after the 1979 revolution, the same policy was implemented by the Bank. Other reasons for the SAP stem from the above-mentioned claim: the Bank require cuts in government subsidies, government-run services and government spending on social welfare because this would eventually lead to the privatisation and commercialisation of state enterprises. By and large, the devaluation of currencies benefits developed countries.

South Africa borrowed heavily in the 1950s and 1960s from the World Bank. However, since 1967 there were no more loans for the country. Apartheid South Africa also had a long-standing relationship with the IMF, which had pumped billions of dollars into the economy. Both the World Bank and the IMF have been preparing for a re-entry into the country with resistance from the SACP and trade unions in the South African Trade Union Co-ordinating Council (SATUCC). During the transitional period - 1990 to 1994 - 30 research teams were sent into the country by the World Bank and the IMF designed the value added tax system in 1993 together with granting a loan of \$850 million to the transitional government. Another loan from the IMF is in the pipeline with resistance, again, from the SACP and SATUCC (Isaacs 1997:130-140).

Many developing countries must pay huge percentages of their national budget to foreign creditors. Twenty percent of sub-Saharan countries' export income is being paid to lending institutions and countries. Much of this is classified as odious debt. (These are debts created by dictators, leaders who have used the money for personal use and for unsustainable projects. The apartheid debt is also odious debt, which South Africa pays back.) Recently, the IMF has come up with a debt-relief programme, first called the Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility (ESAF) and then changed to Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF) after it was criticised for poor management. The World Bank's Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) Initiative operates together with the PRGF and has already proved inadequate because only 15 countries will see some benefit. An analyst from the United Kingdom for Jubilee 2000 (an international movement lobbying for debt cancellation), Joe Hanlon, explains:

Of the \$207 billion HIPC country debt, approximately \$100 billion is not being serviced - mainly with the agreement of the IMF and World Bank. This means the Bank and Fund have already admitted that this money will never be paid. So the \$100 billion now on offer is only equivalent to the money that it is already accepted will never be paid - in effect this much debt can be written off without real cost since it would never have been paid.

Compounding the problem, the price of receiving debt relief under the PRGF/HIPC program is implementing a carefully supervised structural adjustment program for three years, even though structural adjustment programs worsen poverty (Albert:sysop@zmag.org).

This further confirms the Bank's and Fund's commitment to pure capitalist economics. However, it is not feasible if debt cancellation is sought out of context, because countries are still faced with the same problem after re-borrowing. Equitable co-operation on regional and global levels must follow. The poorest countries in the world account for 0.4 percent of world trade and this trade decreases. Export earnings for developing countries could increase by US\$700 billion per annum, raising their GDP by approximately 12 per cent, if industrialised countries opened their markets. This constitutes 10 times what the developing countries receive in aid (*Mail and Guardian* 12-18/11/99).

This is a lesson for South Africa who has approached the World Bank for a R1.2 billion loan to revamp public hospitals; this will be discussed in July 2001 by the Bank's board. The Bank is quoted as saying:

It is anticipated that this will be the first of a series of future World Bank involvement in the sector (*Umsebenzi* 09/00).

South Africa's borrowing contradicts the country's commitment to the national democratic and developmental state. The Bank is keen to lend to South Africa because the country is paying back the apartheid debt. In its 1999/2000 budget, R48.2 billion was allocated for servicing South Africa's debt. This renewed borrowing can be avoided. Malawi, one of the LDCs, with an overall debt of R12 billion, was in a position to reject an offer of a loan of R240 million for the country's AIDS programme.

However, relatively, South Africa's foreign borrowing is at a low level as indicated below:

With foreign borrowing of less than 5 per cent of its total debt, the government has ample scope for further borrowing overseas. Add to this the fact that the government is a significant borrower in the local capital market, and its partial withdrawal could have downward pressure on domestic interest rates. Such a result would have a favourable impact on both the treasury costs and the broader macroeconomic framework (Abedian 1998:289).

Grouping of countries together into economic blocks or regional trade blocks is a key

feature of global trade. Currently the three major trade blocks are the European Union (EU), the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC). These blocks wield much political power as well as compete for more and more control over the global economy. Within the context of this global trade, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), of which South Africa is a member, and other African trade and regional blocks play insignificant global trade roles. These blocks work in the interest of corporate capital and against the interest of workers. In the case of NAFTA (of which Canada, Mexico and the USA are members), trade agreements have led to job losses and a decline in living standards for all workers in the block.

In fact, the overall global organisation governing world trade is the WTO. Its predecessor, the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT), was formed in 1948. South Africa was a founder member and is now a member of the WTO. The 127 member states belonging to the WTO, together with the 28 now applying for membership, account for more than 90 per cent of world trade. The GATT was less formal than the WTO, which has permanent status and sets rules on international trade. This is a significant shift and one which displeases workers world-wide since the organisation's policies are based on neo-liberalism and closely aligned to the Bretton Woods institutions. Countries not belonging to the WTO fall by the wayside.

In terms of the Marrakesh Agreement signed between member states of the WTO in April 1994 in Morocco, the clause calling for trade in intellectual property rights and in investment measures is particularly disturbing and begs the question: What kinds of 'dangerous' priorities are we talking about? Consider that the WTO's rules that deny Third World nations the right to have automatic licensing on patented but absolutely essential medicines. So, for example, even when African nations currently ravaged by diseases such as AIDS acquire the scientific and technical means to manufacture drugs to save millions of lives, the WTO's first concern is the protection of the patents and profits of powerful drug companies.

The WTO defines itself as a 'trade' organisation, which is incapable of pursuing social goals, such as extending the rights to freedom of collective bargaining to Third World and poor workers. Thus when an authoritarian regime markets clothing and athletic shoes that were produced by child labour under sweatshop conditions, the WTO claims that there is nothing it can do (Marable: sysop@zmag.org).

However, supporters of the agreement (including the World Bank, corporate business and the WTO leadership) highlight the following:

\* It has been estimated that global income will be \$500 billion greater in the year 2005.

\* Trade of developing countries will expand by 14%.

- \* Consumers will benefit through being able to buy cheaper imported products manufactured with low-cost labour.
- \* The profits of major companies will rise (Isaacs 1997:82).

The critics of the agreement—unions, consumers and non-governmental organisations and Sir James Goldsmith of the European Parliament - agree that both rich and poor countries alike will have to enforce the same international rules and disciplines. They argue that governments will lose \$750 billion in the form of revenue over five years, and that, as subsidies are lifted, world prices of traded food will rise by 10 to 15 per cent and the disadvantaged will be the 110 countries in the developing world which are the net importers of food products. Furthermore, job losses and retrenchment will be rife and not least, the agreement will further compound the already existing tough competition between companies of different countries and between workers of and within different countries (Isaacs 1997:82/3).

South Africa, a signatory to the Marrakesh Agreement, agreed to the following:

- \* About 12 800 tariff lines will be rationalised into no more than 1000 lines.
- \* By 1999, industrial tariffs will be cut on average by about 33% in five equal annual stages, starting 1 September 1995.
- \* The clothing and textiles and auto industries will have a period of 8 years to reduce tariffs in these industries.
- \* Agriculture has six years to drop tariffs by an average of 36% and must abolish all quotas immediately.
- \* The General Export Incentive Scheme (GEIS) will be phased out by 1997 (Isaacs 1997:82).

The government's intention was to foster international competitiveness so that companies could specialise in order to produce cheap quality products. However, the concerns of the critics are real and of pressing relevance. The world needs a global trade regulator, but not one having the agenda as that of the WTO.

### **Post-apartheid South Africa**

Like the rest of Africa, South Africa bears the brunt of corporate globalisation. It is an African country, in that it is no more a first world country serving about five million people. It now serves all 40 million of its population. For a new democracy, this is a daunting task. It has to change existing structures, very imperialist in nature and with little competitive indigenous capitalism, to structures that would serve the interests of 60 percent of the population living below the breadline. Besides the

inequalities facing the country, South Africa has moved from a sheltered apartheid economy to a global one. This restructuring is a costly economic and social exercise. In industrialised countries, at the end of the 19th century, the now enfranchised working class used their vote to pressurise their governments for greater equality. This was done through the extension of the welfare state. South Africa did the same, but those who benefited from it still live below the breadline. There isn't enough to go around in order to satisfy the basic needs of the previously disadvantaged population. The government is, however, still under pressure. On the basis of both race and class, therefore, many commentators expected that the ANC would be under pressure from its constituencies for redistribution: along racial lines, from white to black, and along class lines, from rich to poor (Natrass & Seekings 1998:33).

To remedy South Africa's post apartheid government's inability to satisfy the necessity for employment, housing, education, health care and welfare, as fast as the poor demand, is a problem that will require the redistribution of wealth. In order to achieve equality government will have to embark on a full-scale nationalisation programme which is not possible in today's global economic climate.

President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa together with ministers had made several visits to the USA and Europe in the first half of year 2000, urging these countries and international trade and lending institutions to create a more just and equitable world order. In the USA May 2000, he proposed the following three recommendations:

Trade rules, which work to the disadvantage of developing countries should be renegotiated; the debt burden of poor countries had to be reconsidered; and ways had to be found to make international financial institutions play a genuinely helpful role, rather than a misguided and damaging role in helping poor countries to restructure their economies (Sunday Times 20/5/00).

Hence government is mindful of global constraints and, at the same time, responds to demands for the country to be more competitive globally, correcting a distorted market, enskilling people, addressing the wage gap, finding agreement between government, business and labour. This is not an easy task given the constraints imposed by global neo-liberalism. President Mbeki's recommendations impinge on the conditions set out by the IMF, World Bank and WTO and it is at the level of these organisations that South Africa must influence such recommendations.

There are criticisms from almost all ideological positions of government's alliance with international capitalism. Government's task to win over international business is difficult. Who wants to invest in a country which has a developed working class, when there are many spots world-wide where labour is almost free? Unlike industrialised developed countries, in which every country wants to invest, South

Africa still does not have the capacity to make use of global markets. It cannot use the latest technology as effectively and efficiently as the developed countries which have the necessary base and infra-structure. Although the South African labour force knows and fights for its rights, it is not skilled enough to keep in touch with latest innovations, to apply them and to adapt swiftly to the ever changing technology. Neef (1999:ix) emphasises this swiftness:

Never before have so many knowledgeable workers been given such good tools and such rewarding incentives to create new and innovative products and services. More is known and being learned every day than was every known or learned before. And more things are being invented, altered, and eliminated more quickly than ever before

Alliance with capitalism is simply government's GEAR programme which is fiscal discipline through deficit reduction, continued liberalisation of exchange controls, accelerated reduction of tariffs, tax incentives, labour market reform and government's privatisation programme. There is also concern that foreign direct investment (FDI) had plunged four times lower in one year (1997 to 1998) and it is feared that it has something to do with the never ending activism of the working class. What is then to be done with these politicised and organised workers? An indirect answer was given in 1998 by the ANC's Firoz Cachalia of the Gauteng provincial legislature:

Contrary to the conventional wisdom that the alliance between governing party and trade unions limits economic growth, there is considerable evidence that such relationships make growth possible through wage restraint (*Business Report* 14/12/99).

In other words,

Discipline the unions and move ahead with large-scale privatisation to attract FDI and keep domestic big business interested. The resultant in-flow of capital will then provide the platform for developing the economy. Everything else will follow (*Mail and Guardian* 7 – 11: 3/4/00).

Such an assertion would be difficult to implement. The working class gains and South Africa's constitution, one of the finest in the world, would have to be thrown out of the country's history. The thrust of the NDR would be in serious jeopardy. However, when the Ministry of Public Enterprises released its document entitled 'Policy Framework: An Accelerated Agenda towards the Restructuring of State

Owned Enterprises' in August 2000, reactions to it were interesting. The Unions had mixed opinions from confusion to opposition to privatisation. The opposition parties, coming from an opposing ideology to that of the Unions and the ANC-led government, said the document was vague and timid, and that market forces would certainly not approve. Both the working class and their employers opposed the document, but for different reasons.

Any successful state must have a strong nation-wide civil society. The largest and most prominent ones, that of COSATU, NACTU and SANCO, were at the forefront of the internal struggle against the apartheid system. Being at the forefront, these labour and civic organisations mobilised millions of the oppressed, exploited and unemployed masses nation-wide. They were an extremely powerful and committed force persisting against the odious crime against humanity. Having such a goal, these organisations found it relatively ideologically convenient to unite the masses. To sustain these large group formations within conditions of the post 1994 status quo is not possible. A different political environment now exists with no common enemy.

Today post-colonial governments have to manage their economies and the resultant social movements to revolve around the inherited colonial and apartheid cities. This dilemma of including non-capitalist economic and social movements into the capitalist colonial cities continues to exist in African states. A further dilemma is that the colonial capitalist cities were never and still are not indigenous capitalist cities. Capitalism is not inherent in indigenous economies in the developing countries. Multi-national companies exist in most cities of the world, but in industrialised developed countries, such as the USA and western Europe, they exist side by side with local capitalism. In post-apartheid South Africa, this problem is compounded by the need to remove 'homeland' structures. While this involves mainly civic structures, it is a sizeable drain on the economy. These underlying, basic problems are reflected in the implementation and representation of the policies, particularly economic, of the ANC-led government.

### Black capitalist class in South Africa

Let us look at the call for the encouragement of a 'black capitalist class' in South Africa. Today's political climate, both global and national, does not offer any serious alternative to the power of the USA and western Europe and their international financial and trade institutions. Under such constraints it is hardly possible to achieve equity and development. A black capitalist class would be inevitable. Since the trade unions were the vanguard of change, what alternatives are there for the unions to continue this tradition? Engaging with capital is not a new strategy employed by unions and communist parties. It has been, for some time, common practice in

Europe. Hence in South Africa, the process is being led by the trade unions themselves. A R400 million fund called Infra-structural Development and Environmental Assets (IDEAS) has five COSATU and two NACTU affiliate unions in partnership with Old Mutual Asset Managers. The Unions operate within an assortment, Unity Incorporation under the banner of Setting Financial Service was launched in October 1998 (*Sowetan* 5/5/00). Leading trade communists and trade unionists such as C. Ramaphosa, J. Naidoo, J. Modise, M. Maharaj and J. Matlati have entered big business.

Having stated above that the emergence of a black capitalist class would be inevitable, E. Harvey, a freelance writer, goes to the extent of saying such a development is a myth:

Black capitalism has arrived too late on the stage of capitalist economic development in this country to become and sustain itself as an independent and powerful entity within the economy and pose any serious challenge to or replace the domination of white monopoly capital. While history before 1994 was not on its side it appears that subsequent history is not either (*Mail and Guardian* 11-17/2/00).

In support of this premise, the concentration and centralisation of South African capitalism is quoted, whereby 'five white companies controlled between 65% and 70% of assets on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE)' after the country's 1994 elections. 'White monopoly capital' excluded 'the development of a black capitalist class'. Basically the discussion is the same as the above-mentioned post-colonial dilemma. The pre-1994 'capitalism' in South Africa benefited a small proportion, approximately six million, of the population.

It was and is mainly monopoly capital which built South Africa's infrastructure. If monopoly capital is here to stay, how does the rest of the population, excluded from it and excluded from democracy, grow or develop? With the money system, the stock exchange and the country increasingly becoming globalised, what route of growth or development will the excluded take? How and to where do the disempowered move from weaving baskets, making clay pots and bead products? When will gender imbalances start disappearing? When will the gap between cities and rural areas close?

### The excluded

Will the new USA-Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) of 2000 make a difference to the economies of Africa? The main aim of the Act is for African companies to apply for preferential access for their products after their governments

have been cleared on their human rights credentials. The process of application is complex: products must be classified into categories; each product must comply with original rules applicable to their product classification; products must have a certain percentage local content and this varies in each category. D. Newman, partner at Deloitte and Touche, an international company responsible for trade and industry solutions, believes Africa is not taking advantage of the Act:

To be eligible for preferential access, individual African countries must first apply for it to allow the US government to check on their human rights credentials. SA has duly applied. Thereafter, companies and industries must formally apply, and this process is already underway (*Sunday Times* 30/7/00).

Will the excluded join sub-Saharan Africa in its decline and its political economy, which is dependent on international aid and foreign borrowing with its concomitant mass starvation, unemployment, gender imbalances and diseases? The two figures below compiled by the UN compare sub-Saharan Africa, the excluded, with the rest of the world.

Per capita GDP of developing economies, 1980-1989.

	Annual rate of growth of per capita GDP (%)				Per capita GDP (1988 dollars)			
	1981-1990	1991-1995	1995 a	1996 b	1980	1990	1995 a	1996 b
Developing economies	1.0	2.9	3.3	4.0	770	858	988	1028
Latin America	-0.9	0.8	-0.9	0.075	2148	2008	2092	2108
Africa	-0.9	-1.3	0.0	1.5	721	700	657	667
West Asia	-5.3	-0.6	0.4	0.25	5736	3423	3328	3335
South-East Asia	3.9	4.0	5.0	6.0	460	674	817	865
China	7.5	10.2	9.1	8.0	202	411	664	716
Least developed countries	-0.5	-0.9	0.4	1.75	261	249	238	243

Source: UN/ DESIPA



**Value of exports from world, less-developed countries, and Sub-Saharan Africa, 1950-1990**

Region	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990
<b>Billions of current dollars</b>					
World	60.7	129.1	315.1	2002.0	3415.3
LDC's	18.9	28.3	57.9	573.3	738.0
SSA	2.0	3.8	8.0	49.4	36.8
<b>Share of LDCs (%)</b>					
World exports	31.1	21.9	18.4	28.6	21.6
<b>Share of SSA (%)</b>					
World exports	3.3	2.9	2.5	2.5	1.1
LDC exports	10.6	13.4	13.8	8.6	5.0

**LDC's, less-developed countries; SSA, Sub-Saharan Africa**

Source: UNCTAD 1979, 1989 and 1991

While Castells (1998:83), referring to the above tables, argues that structural, social causality underlines this historical coincidence, I would add to this my argument: that Africa was 'introduced' to monopoly capital when it was structurally not prepared for it. Africa had not reached the advanced stage of capitalism when the colonialists started establishing themselves on the continent. It is difficult to pinpoint exactly at what stage African towns were founded since much of the history, culture and economy was destroyed. What is certain is that vast areas were and still are at the communal stage. Feudal, and in some areas slave relationships, are also predominant. (The same applies too much of Asia and South America. Values which were dominant in European feudalism still exist in Europe the form of religion and royalty.) Africa's problems, today, of still grappling to come to terms with capitalism are compounded by the nature of the new global order.

Could the answers to the plight and rescue of South Africa's 'excluded' be found in the policies of the ANC-led government? Could they trigger a ripple effect into the rest of Africa and save the continent? Socio-economic exclusion is not static. It shifts, sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse. Those socialist-orientated countries, aligned to socialism when it existed from the 'sixties to the end of the 'nineties did experience a shift for the better. Tanzania, in this period, had almost solved its illiteracy problem. Between 1975 and 1980, primary schools, clinics and little shops sprung up in rural Mozambique. Now that there is no socialist-orientated developmental route, with the retreat of socialism at the end of the 'nineties, these gains have regressed. The National Democratic Revolution (NDR) can only be

possible within the context of such a developmental route. This term was coined during the era of socialism in eastern Europe. V.I. Lenin, the first leader of the former Soviet Union, together with other Marxist theoreticians, referred to the underdeveloped countries which were economically aligned to the socialist countries as countries which could engage in a national democratic path of development. These countries did not have the pre-requisites for a socialist state.

### The National Democratic Revolution

The NDR, as its name suggests, is a revolutionary solution to the problems of the developing world. The term revolution refers not to an event, but to a process. The NDR is not used by all developing countries but is, in abstract, applied by those countries engaging in its terms as explained below. Is such a solution possible within the confines and constraints of global capitalism? The ANC/SACP's thinking on the NDR in South Africa is as follows:

Basically, the 'national' in the NDR has, itself, referred to three different but interrelated realities: the first, and most important, dimension of the 'N' in NDR is the conviction that the central question of our struggle is to address the national oppression of the majority of our people. The 'N' in NDR has also always been understood to refer to the critical task of nation building. The 'N' in NDR has also always had an external reference: the need to win, defend and nurture the capacity for national self-determination in the face of colonialism and neo-colonialism (*Umbrabulo* 1999).

The basic features of this process are consistent struggles for political and economic independence against neo-liberalism. It is the struggle for the implementation of broad democratic rights and freedom, and above all, a land reform policy.

#### The 'democratic' in the NDR:

Since at least 1955, the ANC has defined democracy more broadly to include not just basic citizenship rights, but also the far-reaching democratisation of the social, gender and economic spheres (*Umbrabulo* 1999).

Having one of the best constitutions in the world, which includes having a Gender Commission and enacting very progressive laws, is not enough. Civil society must engage in this democratisation.



The 'R' in the NDR:

We have, as a movement, spoken of a national democratic revolution basically to underline two points: that all of the above 'N' and 'D' objectives require a fundamental change in the power equation in our country; and that the process of realising the 'N' and 'D' objectives is itself a fundamental change in the power equation (*Umbrabulo* 1999).

Crucial subsequent discussion is the thinking on power, i.e. its transformation and power as self-empowerment. This is crucial for developing states since empowering just the leadership robs that country of high priority development.

Key to the NDR is the South African working class. Even more crucial is class struggle and the socialist revolution. The working class may fight for better wages and conditions, but these could be reformist. For class struggle to become truly revolutionary requires that there should be revolutionary organisation. It requires that there should be a sense of purpose within the class waging that struggle (*The African Communist* 2000).

## The Alliance

The Alliance (ANC, SACP and COSATU) theoreticians, hence, view the NDR as a process of struggle with the long term perspective of attaining a socialist state. For this process to continue uninterrupted, it is necessary that the ANC wins every round of national elections. Losing just one will have serious negative repercussions for the process, especially at this early stage.

On the one hand, we have the concept that the Alliance is intact. At the same time, at all levels, great concern is expressed about job losses, privatisation, the downgrading of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). The SACP and COSATU are critical of government policies and confusingly enough, government is critical of labour and itself. A comment by the reporter which accompanies the *Sunday Independent* interview with the Minister of Finance, Trevor Manuel, says of the Minister:

He was particularly scathing of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) for its attempt to launch 'job creation marches' against the government.

Manuel also criticised aspects of the new labour legislation, the jobs summit and the National Economic Development and Labour Council (Nedlac). And he hinted that he had reservations about the effectiveness of the Reserve Bank's interest rate policy and the department of trade and industry's small business promotion activities (8/1/2000).

Manuel continued with his criticisms, stating that labour laws enacted in the interests of workers lack efficient means of successful implementation; how does one deal with bad organisation among workers and business? Although significant changes have been made for farm workers, farmers have displaced families in preference to the possibility accommodating illegal immigrants; moreover, tightened labour laws will mean more people of the lower stratum will 'get squeezed out'; finally, crucial for job creation is not legislation but a conducive environment for small business.

It is difficult to interpret such outbursts, in which a key member of the government is critical of his own government. As Minister of Finance, Manuel must have been part of all the policy-making process of which he is now disapproves.

It is also problematic to reconcile the NDR with the ANC-led government's GEAR programme which clearly has a capitalist orientation. It requires that the Alliance clearly spell out the stages of the NDR, especially the economic programme. The NDR might not have kick-started for the millions living below the breadline, but the country has come a long way from the revelations of the apartheid state's hit-squad member Eugene De Kock, the discovery of the South African Defence Force's covert enforcement of homosexual soldiers to become women, and the entire apartheid system, to recent legislation which protects human rights in laws such as the Employment Equity Act, the Sexual Offences Act, the Domestic Workers' Act and the Skills Development Act.

## Conclusion

The situation in which South Africa finds itself today is not an isolated one. Africa and the rest of the developing world are engaged in intensive privatisation. Job retrenchment occurs throughout the world. Small companies continue to be disadvantaged by the powerful MNCs. It is also a difficult transition for workers and trade unions around the world, a transition from having two global systems to one capitalist system. The rapidly changing nature of labour through the proliferation of technology - one of the effects of which is the individualisation of labour - compounds the working class struggle. Trade unions, globally, are divided on what form the international working class struggle should take, so much so that their power base and that of socialist parties have declined in the post dual system period. The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) held its conference in April 2000 in Durban, South Africa. During the cold war the ICFTU had aligned itself with the capitalist countries and stood in opposition to the now-defunct World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), aligned to socialism. Some affiliates or members of WFTU have now joined ICFTU and pressure was put on the latter, at the

Durban conference, to be less reformist, and on both sides, to put aside ideological differences and unite against the onslaught of corporate globalisation.

Differences aside, the fact remains that there is no alternative to the ANC-led government as far as the Alliance is concerned. In the present economic global climate, if any one of the alliance members had to go it alone, or any left the party, it would do the same as the present government. The oppressive and exploitative system responsible for colonialism, imperialism, slavery and genocide continues to exist. The socio-economic and political decline of those countries affected negatively by this system will continue until this system is replaced by an egalitarian world-wide system which will put an end to the exploitation and oppression.

Department of Public Relations and Journalism  
ML Sultan Technikon

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# Literary Prospects in 'Post-Apartheid' South Africa<sup>1</sup>

Jabulani Mkhize

In his 'Jerusalem Prize Acceptance Speech' of 1987 J.M. Coetzee (1992:99) lamented:

South African literature is a literature in bondage, as it reveals itself in even its highest moments shot through as they are with feelings of homelessness and yearnings for a nameless liberation. It is a less than fully human literature, unnaturally preoccupied with power and torsions of power unable to move from elementary relations of contestation, domination, and subjugation to the vast and complex human world that lies beyond them. It is exactly the kind of literature you would expect people to write from a prison.

Coetzee's contention here seems to have been the extent to which apartheid determined (in the sense of putting limitations to) South African cultural production resulting in a literature that was not just apparently oblivious to this country as part of a global community but was also, in some instances, a literature of binary oppositions, a kind of literature that Njabulo Ndebele has called 'the spectacular'. This position was in line with Coetzee's interest in the '(post) colonial condition' of the South African situation as exemplified in his works as well as in his extra-fictional statement: 'I'm suspicious of lines of division between a European context and a South African context, because I think our experience remains largely colonial' (Coetzee 1978:23). Whether this line of division will continue to exist in post-apartheid writing remains to be seen.

J.M. Coetzee was, of course, not the only commentator critical of South African writing in the last years of apartheid. Lewis Nkosi's scepticism of South

African writing, albeit with a somewhat different emphasis from Coetzee's criticism, is well known. Writing in 1965 Nkosi wondered 'whether it might not be prudent' for Black South African writers 'to "renounce" literature "temporarily" ... and solve the political problem first' (1979:222). He was objecting to what he saw as a lack of experimentation on the part of these writers whose techniques, he argued, were closer to journalism than creative writing<sup>2</sup>. Nkosi went on to advocate the experimental line of modernism as a remedy that would rescue black fiction from the straightforward documentary realist narrative. The argument was reiterated in 1985 ('Black Writing in South Africa') and again in 1987, but this time it was extended to include white writers. 'White literature' like 'black literature', Nkosi pointed out, was faced with a 'crisis of representation'. Although he commended most white writers for their 'experimentation with technique' he accused some of them of being too 'keen to tell us what it is like to be oppressed rather than what it is like to do the oppressing!' (Nkosi 1987:51). In the case of black writers the problem was pretty much the same: not only were they still harping on a 'single epic theme' of apartheid but they were also faced with 'a crisis of how to forge new instruments of representation out of tired and old realistic forms' (49). For Nkosi (as well as Coetzee), then, the political conditions in South Africa adversely affected not only the content of local literature but also, in some cases, its form. The question that arises for a contemporary student of literature, however, is whether the eradication of apartheid, which began with the 1994 elections, will free South African literature from 'bondage'.

Or, to put it differently, now that 'the political problem' Nkosi was referring to has been 'solved', which direction is South African literature likely to take? Are South African black writers likely to turn away from the realist tradition and become more 'experimental', embracing (post)modernist strategies to interrogate and problematize the new South African reality or is the social realist mode likely to retain its dominance albeit for the purposes of offering different discourses from those that counter-discourses to apartheid 'demanded'? Now that the politics of oppositionality have been displaced by 'the rainbow nation' how are writers who have seen themselves (and have indeed been regarded) as representatives of the 'masses' likely to deal with the predicament of the role which has been constructed for them? These are some of the issues that this paper attempts to address. As can be expected, this paper is speculative, taking into account the fact that one cannot predict with certainty the trend that 'post-apartheid' literature will follow in the remote future. The speculation will, nevertheless, be based on some recently

<sup>1</sup> The focus of this paper is on South African literature written in English. I wish to thank my colleagues, Sikhumbuzo Mngadi, Thengani Ngwenya and Shane Moran for their encouraging comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Herein lies the difference between Nkosi and Ndebele's arguments, for Ndebele does not seem to look beyond the realist tradition in his postulation of writing that has a transformative impact on the reader's consciousness. Nkosi's later publication of a post-realist novel, *Mating Birds*, is thus not surprising.

published literature as exemplary of possible future trends. If the focus of this paper is mainly on black South African writing it is because the question: what will writers write about after apartheid? has, as Ndebele points out, always been 'thrown at black writing' (Ndebele 1992:25). The focus on black writing does not, however, preclude my reference to white writers.

Now, it might be asked how anyone writing at this particular juncture in the history of the country could still use such (outdated and discredited) racial categories as 'black South African writing' or 'white writing'. The fact of the matter is that while the construction of an ideal South African nationhood, which is currently in process, enables us to talk of a South African literature, we are still confronted with the problem of what Ndebele has called 'the impossibility of arriving at a timeless tradition of South African literature' (25). The question then, is whether the attainment of political freedom necessarily resolves this problem. The term 'post-apartheid' itself does not seem to provide any answers. For the 'post-apartheid' of the title does not really imply a complete break with the past but is somewhat suggestive of a convergence of the 'residual' and the 'emergent'<sup>3</sup>. Graham Pechey's conception of the term, although it pre-dates the 1994 elections, seems pertinent in this regard. According to him post-apartheid is,

a condition that has contradictorily always existed and yet is impossible of realisation: always existed, because apartheid, as a politics of permanent and institutionalised crisis has from the beginning been shadowed by its own transgression or supersession; impossible of realisation, because the proliferating binaries of apartheid discourse will long outlive any mere winning of freedom (Pechey 1994:153).

As can be inferred, there is no question here of conflating the 'post-apartheid condition' with what Ndebele has identified as 'South Africanism as a hoped for national attribute' (1994:24). Instead, there is in Pechey's definition an acknowledgement that 'the 'post' in 'post-apartheid' will remain problematic'

<sup>3</sup> I am using these terms in the sense in which they are used by Raymond Williams: 'The 'residual', by definition, has been effectively formed in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present. Thus certain experiences, meanings, and values which cannot be expressed or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practiced on the basis of the residue – cultural as well as social – of some previous social and cultural institution and formation .... By emergent, I mean ... that new meaning and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationship are continually being created' (1977:122f).

(Degenaar 1992:12)—the key statement here is Pechey's: 'the proliferating binaries of apartheid discourse will long outlive any mere winning of freedom'. The use of these terms of reference ('white writing' and 'black writing') here is, therefore, informed by this recognition rather than any (mischievous) attempt to undermine South Africa's 'imagined community' which goes by the term 'Rainbow Nation'.

Furthermore, the fact that for political as well as aesthetic reasons black writers and white writers in this country have adopted different formal traditions in their works (with the former steeped in realism and quite a number of the latter experimenting with form by adopting modernist strategies of dealing with 'reality') cannot be wished away. The result was that the terms 'white writing' and 'black writing' have, over the years, had another connotation other than the division of literature into racial categories according to its producers. For this reason Ndebele's contention that, 'With the "Other" having attained their freedom, "white writing" ... like apartheid, may become exhausted' (1992:25) needs more rigorous attention. With the end of apartheid 'white writing' might, of course, lose the moral high ground bestowed on it by apartheid discourse as well as the 'cross-border readers'<sup>4</sup> but this does not necessarily denote its exhaustion. For example, one could argue that, with the new government in place, white writers have other options: they could, for instance, shun politics in their writing or produce works which valorise the 'Rainbow Nation' because of its accommodation of (white) minority interests or, alternatively, take the lead in writing a literature of disillusionment if the present government falls short of their expectations. The possibilities are too numerous to mention. The point at issue, however, is that regardless of what they write about, their experimentation with form might still distinguish their writing from that of black writers. For this reason it is perhaps pertinent to ask with Pechey a crucial question with regard to post-apartheid writing: 'Does post-apartheid writing, then, bifurcate into a modernist or post modernist white writing on the one hand and a neo-realist black writing on the other?' (1992:165).

Judging by the literature that has been produced thus far, as well as the comments of some South African writers recently, one is inclined to answer this question in the affirmative. Firstly, it is an open secret that white writers such as Breyten Breytenbach, J.M. Coetzee, Andre Brink and Menan du Plessis have, in the past, embraced modernist or post-modernist techniques in their works. Even Nadine Gordimer, conventionally regarded as a realist in the Lukacsian sense, has been shown to have made a shift, especially in her latest works which endorse self-reflexivity and postmodernism<sup>5</sup>. Ivan Vladislavic, a relatively new voice in South African fiction and, arguably, a leading writer in post-apartheid 'white writing',

<sup>4</sup> The term is borrowed from Lewis Nkosi. For more clarification see Nkosi (1993).

<sup>5</sup> See Dominic Head (1994), especially chapters 5 and 7.

provides a good indication that this trend is likely to continue in the near future. In a recent interview with Shaun de Waal, Vladislavic makes clear his commitment to the 'power of the imagination' and 'invention' and his scepticism towards the realist mode:

It's possible to engage deeply with your social reality without producing realism.... I think there's a case to be made for the work of fiction as a highly designed imaginative structure, with a more complicated relationship to its context than realism usually allows... . Something has always puzzled me, though I understood where it came from, was the stress locally that the best stories were out there, that writers just had to put themselves in the right position and they'd find them.... But looked at in another way writing is precisely about invention.... That's what fiction is about (de Waal 1996:3).

Such a commitment in theory is, interestingly, compatible with his practice; read, if you like, his latest collection of short stories, *Propaganda by Monuments* (1996), especially the metafictional 'Kidnapped', where one gets a clear sense of fiction-writing as fabrication.

In a provocative essay Kenneth Parker bemoans the way English South African writing has tended to avoid 'engagement with narrative techniques aimed at disrupting our habitual perception of our world whereby we might see that world from a different perspective and in a different light' (1994:3). In a similar vein, Benita Parry (as if in a rejoinder to Parker) identifies some of the strategies that could serve this purpose in her critique of resistance literature:

The fantastic and the fabulous, the grotesque and the disorderly, the parodic reiteration or inversion of dominant codes, the deformation of master tropes, the estrangement of received usage, the fracture of authorised syntax: these are amongst the many textual procedures that can act as oppositional and subversive, and without directly illuminating the struggle or ostensibly articulating dissent and protest (Boehmer 1993:15).

Whether one refers back to Vladislavic's earlier story (1999), 'The Prime Minister is Dead'; or, in the latest collection, to 'Alphabets for Surplus People'; or, perhaps even more significantly, the title story, 'Propaganda by Monuments', where he exploits the carnivalesque genre of 'menippea' (Bakhtin 1984:114) in the unfolding drama of Boniface Khumalo's pursuit of his dream of importing a statue of Lenin for the purposes of 'tourist attraction' (Vladislavic 1996:37) to his Atteridgville's V.I. Lenin Bar and Grill, there is no doubt that Vladislavic makes effective use of these strategies of subversion to disrupt our sense of reality. As de Waal correctly observes

in relation to the 1996 anthology: 'Here are ... meta-narratives that glory in their own fictionality, delighting in playing with plot or language, but which also cast an oblique gaze on our polity' (1996:3).

What is the situation with regard to Black writers? As can be expected, there has been (since 1990) a proliferation of interest amongst writers and critics alike on the prospects for post-apartheid writing. Although the critical essays that have been published so far are not necessarily confined to black writing they shed some light on what some commentators think about the possibilities for the future of literature in this country. For example, A.E. Voss, writing in 1992, argues for 'the continued vitality of prose fiction (perhaps even simply the realist novel) within the whole range of the writing of texts' (Voss 1992:1-2). In a rejoinder, John Degenaar, concedes that 'there will be examples of realist novels in the post-apartheid era' although he is sceptical of realist narratives in so far as they serve as 'legitimations of nationalism' (Degenaar 1992:12). For him, nationalism is a myth that has to be debunked. In a 1991 paper appropriately entitled 'The Renewal of South African Literature', Andries Oliphant argues for the freedom of writers to explore a wide range of themes in which various dimensions of human experience are accommodated. He then goes on to discuss a wide range of possibilities for post-apartheid writing—ranging from ecologically sensitive to gender conscious literature, as well as carnivalised forms of literature, amongst others (Oliphant 1991:32—34). The question of gender also forms the central thrust of Kenneth Parker's 1994 paper, 'In the "New South Africa": W(h)ither literature?': '...one prediction about the future of literature in the "new South Africa" is clear: that to write the nation there is the need to en-gender the languages' (1994:6).

Recently the National English Literary Museum has published a collection of interviews with selected black writers entitled *Reflections: Perspectives on writing in Post-apartheid South Africa* (Solberg & Hecksley 1996). The significance of these interviews lies in the extent to which they render visible the divergent views that these writers have, not only on some of the themes that warrant attention in post-apartheid South Africa but also, in their conception of their (new) responsibilities as writers. To provide but a few examples, Sindiwe Magona in *Reflections* emphatically argues that if the new government does not deliver, there will still be room for 'protest' writing (Solberg & Hecksley 1996:99). This view contrasts very sharply with Mongane Serote's plea for writers to attempt to bridge the gulf between the expectations and perceptions of ordinary people, on the one hand, and the reality of the processes of decision-making in government, on the other, by assessing the situation objectively (65 - 67)—a subject position that could (justifiably) be construed as symptomatic of his present status as a member of parliament. Nonetheless, it is arguably Mbulelo Mzamane, in his role as a literary historian, who

provides a more perceptive response to the crucial question: 'What do you see by way of new trends in black South African literature' (80).

Mzamane's illuminating response deserves much closer attention in so far as it provides some predictions which I also share on the possibilities of black South African writing. Drawing on 'post-colonial' African literature, Mzamane identifies a number of possible trends that this literature could follow. The first one is what he calls, 'honeymoon literature', a literature of celebration that is underpinned by a feeling of euphoria. This type of literature is best exemplified, according to Mzamane, in the theme of reconciliation that has been prominent at the Grahamstown Arts Festival in the past few years. Indeed, it could be argued that not only drama but also fiction could serve as fertile ground for textual production that attempts to promote this theme. The best example in the case of fiction is Sipho Sepamla's latest fictional work, *Rainbow Journey* (1996), which picks up the theme of reconciliation without necessarily resorting to the political. Sepamla's protagonist, Beauty, and her new lover, Karabo, vow to build a 'monument of reconciliation' (173) and 'forgiveness' as a way of burying the past which involved Beauty's love affair with Karabo's father culminating in the latter's death. One could also get poems which celebrate the 'miraculous' emergence of a new South Africa by valorising the 'Rainbow Nation'. Mzamane is nevertheless quick to point out that 'honeymoon literature' in South Africa, like in other African countries, will not survive for long but will lose momentum in a few years (Solberg and Hecksley 1996). What Mzamane does not say, however, though it is a prominent feature of 'post-colonial' African literature which he uses as his model, is that 'honeymoon literature' could, depending on the performance of the government, soon be superseded by a literature of disillusionment. As a matter of fact, there are already pointers to this direction in Kaizer Nyatumba's narrative of the future, 'The Night the Rain Fell', where the protagonist, Skilpad, a former freedom-fighter-turned-beggar, who has lost faith in the 'new' South Africa, laments:

A mere five years after they formed the new government, and they have already forgotten those who fought and won the war for them. They live in big houses, drive their big cars and want people like me hidden from the public eye (Nyatumba 1995:31).

Fred Khumalo's poem, 'My revolutionary friend', critically examines the role of the emergent class that is now in government:

Hmmm! My revolutionary friend has changed  
... and you know what?  
He who once inspired us the masses  
to drink from the chalice of brotherhood

has turned his back on the neighbourhood  
now shares wine and caviar with the upper class...

See him cruising by in his German vehicle  
a real uppity Untouchable  
Remember when he favoured liberation before enlightenment and  
education?

... Of reconciliation he now preaches  
the Rainbow Nation dream he embraces  
yet daily we watch with growing envy  
as he swims in the aromatic gravy.

... He chants 'Uhuru! We've won our Uhuru!'  
We can only marvel at our fat Bhululu  
He pays no heed to intimations of a new revolution.  
After all he is the ultimate epitome of revolution (Khumalo 1996:125).

One only hopes that it will not come to a point when one can agree with the reading of the South African situation provided by Farida Karodia's narrator in *Against An African Sky* (1995):

The whites have returned to their complacency, secure in the knowledge that they are still a dominant group. Now that the election is over, life has ostensibly returned to normal .... The rules have changed, but the game goes on as before. The election was merely a hiccup. (3)

For, if anything, such a reading clearly implies that one is dealing here with a neo-apartheid situation rather than a post-apartheid condition<sup>6</sup>. Should the government be

<sup>6</sup> In a 1996 essay Mzamane raises similar concerns. The passage is worth quoting at length: 'There is in South Africa an unspoken, uninterrogated assumption that we have entered a new "post-apartheid" era .... With the best will in the world, it is difficult to see in South Africa today a post-apartheid society. We must admit that it is too early yet to speak meaningfully of a post-apartheid South Africa. On the contrary, the many faces of neo-apartheid South Africa stare at us everywhere we go. The faces of the new parliamentarians defending their six-figure salaries with the same zeal with which they once condemned the apartheid gravy train: the face of the new provincial MEC (Member of the Executive Council) arriving at a funeral, not in a chauffeur driven Mercedes but on a helicopter .... South Africa is at the crossroads towards a neo-apartheid or a post-apartheid dispensation. There can be no foregone conclusions yet' (Mzamane 1996:17f).

seen as failing to rise to the occasion in terms of meeting people's expectations, however, this kind of literature is likely to flourish.

Mzamane also hints at the possibility of a resurgence of previously untold stories from the apartheid past. Although Mzamane does not elaborate on this aspect of his argument it would appear that his recent collection, *The Children of the Diaspora and other stories of Exile* (1996a), as well as some of the stories in Gomolemo Mokae's *Short, Not Tall Stories* (1996), belong to this category. Some of these 'untold stories' might also be presented in the confessional mode of autobiography or new journalism. One also hopes that the predominance of the truth and reconciliation theme in the country in the period of transition would prompt some writers to produce works that revisit the struggle for liberation even if for the purposes of demystifying it in the same way that Pepetela (his pen name) does with the Angolan struggle in *Mayombe* (1983).

Mzamane's third claim, namely, that there is likely to be a shift from a literature of the spectacular to a more introspective literature in which issues that have, hitherto, been glossed over will be examined, is also pertinent. This immediately brings to mind most of Kaizer Nyatumba's stories in his latest collection, *In Love with a Stranger and Other Stories* (1995), especially the story, 'In Happiness and in Sorrow' in which the previously unexplored theme of homosexuality in the black community is examined from the perspective of a woman who loses her gay husband to another man. In this text, marked by an effective employment of strategies of 'narrative seduction', one gets a clear insight into the woman's feelings as her suspicions that her husband is gay are confirmed, and this leads to the break-down of the marriage.

No-one, however, provides a good example of this shift more than Mandla Langa, who, unlike Serote, his fellow writer and comrade in the ANC, 'has chosen to make the writer rather than the politician his primary identity' (Gevisser 1996:16). While Langa's novel, *A Rainbow on the Paper Sky* (1989), has all the ingredients of the tradition of 'spectacle', his post-struggle narratives in the collection *The Naked Song and Other Stories* (1996) are firmly grounded on the aesthetics of the 'ordinary' advocated by Ndebele. Where *A Rainbow on the Paper Sky* was characterised by partisanship and the certainties of the narrative voice, the stories in *The Naked Song* are remarkable for their introspection, the maintenance of a critical distance and a cautionary voice. Without really 'casting stories at the fragile glass of democracy', Langa's text cautions on a number of issues, including 'the tendency in many convocations of the good and the great to inculcate a state of amnesia in the name of reconciliation' (Langa 1996:68,76). As Gevisser (1996:16) correctly observes:

Langa is the first South African writer to give literary voice to the trauma accompanying the return from exile and the transition from 'struggle'

consciousness into that void where your own beliefs and desires, rather than those of the movement define you.

The significance of Langa's stories in *The Naked Song*, then, lies in the extent to which they are indicative of the fact that the shift from the spectacular to 'a literature of interiority' is not just the result of cultural interventions of people such as Ndebele and Albie Sachs, amongst others, but is also an inevitable product of the changed political realities which demand, *inter alia*, the satisfaction of a readership with different expectations from that of the apartheid era.

As can be seen, Mzamane's predictions are quite convincing. However, as I read Mzamane's response to the question posed I could not help noticing that, apart from the point he makes about the shift from the literature of spectacle to 'a literature of interiority' or a literature informed by the aesthetics of 'the ordinary' (to use Ndebele's term), Mzamane is silent on the possibilities of whether one might see any other changes in literary form. In fact, the discussion of form in all the interviews is conspicuous by its absence. Could it be that this conspiracy of silence on the question of form is premised on a tacit approval, on the part of these writers, of modes of representation that are underpinned by mimetic assumptions of transparency which have thus far dominated South African literature written by blacks? Whether this is indeed the case remains unclear<sup>7</sup>. What is clear, however, is that what we are getting at the moment and what we might continue getting (if Mzamane's predictions are accurate) are 'writings which put in a different content in recycled containers' (Parry 1993:12). Mzamane's own narratives of exile, Sepamla's *Rainbow Journey* and Chris van Wyk's first novel, *The Year of the Tapeworm* (1996) which seems to bring back the consummate skills associated with the entertaining fiction of writers of the 'Drum generation' of the 1950s, are but a few examples of the continued predominance of the realist tradition in black writing. Even Nyatumba and Langa's texts, grounded as they are on the aesthetics of the 'ordinary', do not really move beyond the confines of realism despite their obvious commitment to interiority in character portrayal<sup>8</sup>. For as de Waal points out, 'the "rediscovery of the ordinary" can only really happen in a realist text, a text in which the writer has assumed the task of transmitting the world

<sup>7</sup> Curiously, the only interviewee who touches on the question of form, Ari Sitas, admits to having 'a stylistic problem with a lot of South African realists at this moment' (Solberg & Hecksley 1996:39).

<sup>8</sup> The same could be said of Langa's latest novel, *A Memory of Stones* (2000), as well as Mongane Serote's latest work, *Gods of Our Time* (1999), which reads like a sequel to part two of his first novel, *To Every Birth Its Blood* (1980). Rather than picking up the modernist experiment that part one of the latter novel would seem to be a product of, it represents a deindividuation of the heroic function.



to itself' (1996:3). Indeed it would seem that even in 'post-apartheid' South Africa, black writing has not escaped the tyranny of 'narrativity'.

This raises another question, the question of why black writers have preferred the realist mode of writing and have not turned to modernist strategies of dealing with reality. Undoubtedly, realism's tendency to 'minimize the relative boundaries between literature and "ordinary" social discourse' (Eysteinsson 1992:195) has a great deal to do with it. Narrativity has, therefore, been the basis on which the assumption that literature should be accessible to the 'masses', whose ideological assent these writers attempted to gain, has been based. Logically, modernism has been rejected precisely because 'its proclivities ... seem bound to go against the notion of narrativity, narrative progression, or storytelling in any traditional sense' (187). Simply stated then, literary modernism's rejection of narrativity has been perceived by black South African writers as a strategy bent on mystifying information—modernist techniques of writing are, according to this argument, élitist, a luxury that black writers who had a political responsibility to the masses could not afford<sup>9</sup>. The rejection of modernism by these writers can thus be seen as a denunciation of the very 'difficulty and complexity with which modernist texts confront their readers, denying them the relative straightforwardness of plot and exposition' (Stevenson 1992:216). Hayden White (1987:14) has convincingly argued that narrativity, be it in fictional storytelling or factual writing, is indissolubly linked to 'the impulse to moralize reality'. In the case of South African writing this compelling desire 'not only to narrate but to give events an aspect of narrativity' (4) was underpinned by a necessity for the articulation of a political morality against apartheid. It was thus not surprising to find an abundance of constructions of 'fictional worlds that are thoroughly conditioned by the politics and the values of their authors' (Stevenson 1992:217) in order to gain ideological assent.

Now that the political situation has changed one wonders why black writers do not produce texts that bestow on the readers the freedom to produce meanings rather than to become mere consumers. But to pose such a question is to tip the scales in favour of modernist techniques of writing and, by implication, to suggest that realist texts have served their purpose and are, therefore, no longer worthwhile in post-apartheid South Africa. Moreover, this argument carries with it the assumption that all readers are critical readers who are prepared to engage with the challenges that (post) modernist texts provide. The reality is that not all readers are trained to deal with the intellectual demands of such texts. As Jon Thiem points out, in post modernist texts there is, apart from the 'popular code', 'a whole range of

<sup>9</sup> This recalls, albeit with different implications, Brecht's association of 'realism' with the concept of the 'popular' in the well-known politics vis á vis aesthetics debate of the 1930's.

experimental techniques and postmodern philosophical issues [which are] less popular and adapted to serious readers [and] other writers [so] there is always the fear that the mass public will apprehend only the popular code and therefore read the work in a distortive and reductive way' (Zamora & Faris 1995:244). To say this is not to underrate the potential of the 'masses' who have been claimed by these writers as their 'virtual' readers. The truth, however, is that a large proportion of the so-called 'masses' in South Africa is a 'non-reading population' (Vaughan 1990:197). To write in a second language is to alienate this constituency even further. The problem would be further compounded when the 'masses' not only have to grapple with the problem of language but are also expected to contend with anti-realist games in a text.

Furthermore, to produce such texts authors themselves have to be readers of these texts in order to be able to master the technical skills involved in using (post) modernist strategies of writing<sup>10</sup>. Although there are writers who are well qualified to do this, it is apparent that there is some unpronounced resistance to this direction<sup>11</sup>. This resistance on the part of the writers should not, however, come as a surprise, for it could be argued that the South African socio-economic situation does not as yet warrant an abandonment of the enlightenment project. For one thing, while South Africa has, as it were, 'jumped' (or was it pushed?) onto the bandwagon of 'globalization', in this country (unlike other 'postcolonial' countries elsewhere), 'the hegemonic narrative of the nation has [not yet] been unseated' (Pease 1997:1) but is still an ideal everyone is striving towards. In this regard, one is inclined to concur with Nkosi's argument that it is perhaps premature to expect black South African writers to 'become post-modernists before they have brought to completion their modernist agenda' (Nkosi in Attridge & Jolly 1998:85). For these reasons it is clear that realist texts are likely to retain their value in South African literature. The transformative power of the reader's consciousness, however, does not seem to reside in modes of narration that accept uncritically the transparency between the signifier and the signified. This is not to suggest that it can be found only in modernist ('writerly') texts in which, according to Parry, the reader is 'resituated as interrogator rather than recipient ...' (Parry in Boehmer et al. 1993:17). It has also been shown

<sup>10</sup> Vladislavic, for example, recalls that when he started writing in the 1970s he was reading a lot of post-modernists such as Donald Barthelme and Kurt Vonnegut, Etienne Leroux, Breyten Breytenbach and John Miles.

<sup>11</sup> I have in mind here, amongst others, writers such as Nkosi, Mzamane, Ndebele, Zoë Wicomb and Oliphant, who are not only writers but are also academics well-versed in literary theory. Of these writers, Wicomb and Nkosi (in *Mating Birds*) seem to be the only ones moving towards this direction. See Kenneth Parker (1991) for more on this point.

that magical realist texts have a potential to textualize the reader by transporting him/her into their extraordinary fictional worlds, and, in this way, transform his/her consciousness<sup>12</sup>.

At the Zabalaza Festival in London in 1990, in a session entitled 'Towards Post-apartheid Culture' Andries Oliphant suggested that writers should 'reinvent traditional forms of literature' by incorporating 'the aesthetics of orality' in writing (1993:137). In a similar vein, Mandla Langa talked of the need for writers to exploit the folklore, myths and legends of South Africa as part of the creation of a new aesthetic. Citing 'the whole of Africa as a source of inspiration', and using Gabriel Okara of Nigeria as an example, he suggested: 'Black writers have to create a space for themselves where they appropriate skills and [are able to] be as daring as possible' (142). One writer who has done precisely that and, in my view, very successfully, is Zakes Mda in his novel, *Ways of Dying* (1995). Mda's approach is likely to appeal to other black writers who are no longer satisfied with mimetic modes of representation which rely solely on verisimilitude. Instead of confining his text to 'the ordinary', Mda moves to the extraordinary by gesturing towards magic realism by giving us a text which straddles the world of the living and the world of the dead, thereby blurring boundaries between fact and fiction. There is in this text a juxtaposition of the fantastic and realism as exemplified in historical incidents such as the so-called 'black on black' violence and 'moments of inventions' in Noria's interaction with the spirits as well as the 'resurrection' of her son, Vutha. Perhaps more significantly, the text employs the oral tradition of story-telling methods by using a communal narrative voice:

We know everything about everybody. We even know things that happen when we are not there; things that happen behind people's closed doors deep in the middle of the night. We are the all-seeing eye of the village gossip. When in our nature the storyteller begins the story 'They say it once happened ...', we are the 'they'. No individual owns any story. The community is the owner of the story, and it can tell it the way it deems it fit. We would not be needing to justify the communal voice that tells this story if you had not wondered how we became so omniscient in the affairs of Toloki and Noria (Mda 1995:8).

Ross Chambers argues that 'one of the important powers of fiction is its power to theorise the act of storytelling in and through the act of storytelling' (1984:23), a point that seems apt here. Briefly, this 'metacommentary' or foregrounding of narrators, it could be argued, gives Mda's work a metafictional dimension that

<sup>12</sup> See John Thiem (Zamora & Faris 1995:235-247).

provides this magical realist text some room 'in the postmodern house of fiction' (Faris in Zamora & Faris 1995:175). By tapping into the oral tradition in order to produce a magical realist text, Mda seems to be following the direction of Ben Okri's *Famished Road* (1992)—a path which some black writers in this country might take instead of the modernist options. Mda may not have escaped from the tyranny of narrativity; however, by gesturing towards magical realism, *Ways of Dying* could be read as 'clearing space' for black post-apartheid writing<sup>13</sup>.

To come back to the initial question, I hope to have amply demonstrated that the eradication of apartheid has offered and (will continue to offer) new possibilities—both in terms of content and form—especially for black writers whose writing, Ndebele argued, was hitherto locked in the rhetoric of protest. The bifurcation between white modernist or post-modernist and black neo-realist writing, as has been shown, is, nevertheless, likely to continue unabated for quite some time in post-apartheid South Africa. If there ever will be an encounter between black writing and the postmodern, however, it might well be through magical realism<sup>14</sup>. Whether there will ultimately be a convergence between black and white South Africa writing in the immediate future remains to be seen. In the meantime, it will continue to be the subject of debate among critics and cultural workers alike whether this 'diversity' should inevitably be regarded as constituting the very essence of post-apartheid South African literature.

School of Languages and Literature  
University of Durban-Westville

<sup>13</sup> Mda continues this trend not only in *She Plays with Darkness* (1995) but also in his novella, *Melville 67* (1997), as well as in his latest publication, *Heart of Redness* (2000), a novel which has parallels with Jordan's *Wrath of the Ancestors* (1980), not just in thematic terms but also in its use of the oral tradition method of storytelling. In this latest novel, Mda employs historiography to create a fictionalised version of the story of Nongqause in juxtaposition to a contemporary (post-apartheid) situation. Another writer who seems to be following this trend is Achmat Dangor in his latest work, *Kafka's Curse and Other Stories* (1997), especially in the novella that gives the title to the collection where the oral tradition of storytelling is blended with a dialogism that gives a voice to the women to speak, thereby resulting in a production of a truly polyphonic work in Bakhtinian terms.

<sup>14</sup> However, the fact that Mike Nicol's *This Day and Age* (1992) seems to be a precursor to magical realism in South African writing in English would seem to suggest that a possible point of convergence between white writing and black writing might well be through this form of writing.

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# 'Who am I?' Thoughts on Fabricating the Body in Postcolonial/ Post-apartheid South Africa<sup>1</sup>

Gerrie Snyman

## 1 Fabricating the body

Racial and gender discrimination has always been based on the ontology of race and gender. From recent public debates (the controversial anti-rape advertisement of Charlize Theron, the position of women in some Afrikaans churches within the Reformed tradition and the accusation of racism within the media) it appears as if that very ontology is still firmly in place, albeit, in some instances, in a reversed situation. The danger lies in a tendency to perpetuate the very frameworks which are being rejected, to come full circle. During the past three centuries, the racial (European) and gender (male) gaze on the body 'invented' the African as a dangerous individual and the female as a lesser human being. In turn, as if in a gesture of retaliation, the African and female gaze on the European in Africa and on men, can 'invent' a personality that is perceived as a source of danger, corruption, alienation, in short, a menace to racial harmony and gender equality (cf. Butchart 1998:126).

This article focuses on the notion of the fabrication of the Other. The word 'fabrication' suggests that, in one's mind, one forms a picture of what the other person is. Because one sees the other person as a body, it is easy to regard those attributes attached to the other as ontological features. The moment one starts thinking in terms of ontological features, the fabricator exercises a power over the fabricated.

By the term 'Other' is meant people with whom we interact and with whom we share space and time, in other words, anyone crossing our paths in a direct or indirect way at any moment in history. In this regard, the article takes its cue from Emmanuel Levinas' idea of the encounter with the other person as Other. It is an

encounter between an individual (called a 'self') and another person (called an 'Other') where that other person demands from the individual not to be killed (cf. Levinas 1985:89). Our recent past, characterised as an encounter filled with hate, violence and disdain for people whose bodies differ in terms of gender and race, has shown how futile this demand actually is. In our public debates in the aftermath of this past, we not only struggle to overcome our disdain for each other in terms of our racial categories, but within particular communities (for example, a church community) the lessons learnt in terms of racial discrimination are simply not conveyed to issues such as gender discrimination.

The issue to be discussed is the ethics of our fabrication of the Other. It concerns not only how we perceive other people, but also those reasons why we perceive people in the way we do. The article starts with a brief discussion on cultural rootedness of the fabrication of the body. It then proceeds to the issue of power in the fabrication of the body by questioning an ethics of reading the Bible which sent many a battered woman to an untimely death. Recognising the effect of one's fabrication of the body of the Other, the article explores two instances where the fabrication of the body has serious repercussions:

- (a) the sexed body in the church (the role of women in church structures, specifically in the *Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika* [RCSA]) and the sexed body in Hollywood (implied by the controversial anti-rape advert by Charlize Theron); and
- (b) the South African Human Rights Commission's (SAHRC) inquiry into racism in the media.

The article argues that the current debate leaves a person as an Other without any moral claim inasmuch as the body is constructed in ontological terms, resulting in a Foucaultian gaze that is so consumptive that it leaves the Other totally incapacitated, as was the case under colonialism. In this essay I opt for a view that sees the body of the Other in terms of a performance rather than in terms of ontology. With the help of Levinas' conception of ethics and responsibility, I argue for a look that respects the complexities of the individual in global society. Levinas' notion of responsibility is linked to Joe Teffo's interpretation of *Ubuntu*. Gender and race are social constructs by which each person tries to make sense of the presence of the body, and Levinas' idea of responsibility suggests that the gender and racial gaze should not become all-consuming.

## 2 The defining, defined and definite body

Randall Bailey (1998:77), an Afri-American scholar from Atlanta (USA), argues that unless one is aware of one's own cultural biases and interests in reading a text, one

<sup>1</sup> This is a revised version of a paper given at the annual meeting of the New Testament Society of South Africa, organised by the Rand Afrikaans University on the RAU Island, April 2000.

may be enticed to adopt another culture which could be diametrically opposed to one's own health and well-being. According to him, this is exactly what happened with the reading practices of African people: they have accepted the reading strategies that support the ways in which whites read texts, resulting in a reading process that he deems detrimental to the African well-being (1998:78). In this regard he finds the Pauline fabrication of the bodies of those who dared to differ from him (Paul) very painful. Paul depicts his opponents as sexually undesirable persons, so that the readers of his letters would distance themselves from these opponents. In his opinion, the Pauline strategy of sexually labelling dissenters (Ephesians 4,19; Galatians 5,19 and Romans 1,26-27), that is, as practitioners of sexual taboos, is a linchpin in the discourse on black people in the USA, or in Western culture. Bailey (1998:78) says:

We have been the victims of the use of sexual innuendo. We have been described as being more sexually endowed and active than whites. We have been described as having more voracious sexual appetites than they, and because of this, we have been described as 'animal like'.

The accusation of a predominantly Western approach has also been levelled towards current South African biblical and theological scholarship. The idea that our scholarship is too closely tied up with European and North-American scholarship to be labelled 'African' in any meaningful sense of the word, has been echoing in certain South African circles since the early 1990s (cf. West 1997:101, Deist 1994). The idea, moreover, is usually reinforced by visiting European and North-American scholars whose expectations are frustrated when they do not find a deliberate 'African' slant in Euro-African scholarship. Yet, in this labelling process the term 'African' mostly eludes definition. It is to be expected that whatever would be regarded as 'typically' African, would reinforce an African stereotype.

The situation of cultural stereotyping is not unique. The Palestinians face a similar dilemma. Christian Palestinians are expected to be more Islamic, because many European scholars regard Palestine as a Muslim country. The Palestinian Christians are regarded as 'latecomers'. Much of the Western Christian support for Israel is based on the assumption that the Jews have a right to their country. Compared to this Jewish right, Palestinian Christians are regarded as intruders, although their presence dates from apostolic times!<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Naim Ateek (1992:131) is of the opinion that Palestinian Christians are penalized by Western Christians because they have accepted the Messiahship of Jesus. But for Christian Arabs, Palestine is their homeland (1992:140). They had no part in the anti-Semitism in Europe, yet they feel they are paying the price for European atrocities (Ateek 1992:146).

Most Europeans currently living in South Africa do not do so by choice. We are here because of the colonial and imperial tendencies of Europe which have unfolded since the seventeenth century. To Europe we will forever be a reminder of their fabrication of the African body, a gaze that led to an industrial revolution in South Africa, although resulting in an exploitation of mineral wealth, a dehumanisation of people, and a destruction of African traditions. With the last visible vestiges of European power now gone, how does one negotiate the European presence in South Africa? Will it be similar to the European fabrication of the African body, as Alexander Butchart claims in a prize-winning study on the European construction of the African body? He says:

So, just as the African personality has coalesced under the earlier regime to invent the African as a dangerous individual, it was now the personality of the white man that was the source of danger, corruption and alienation (1998:126).

Butchart vividly portrays how Western socio-medical science constructed the African body, from the establishment of a refreshment post at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652 to the final years of the apartheid regime in 1990. Each period reflects a temporal specificity that produced the doctor and, in turn, the human body as its object (Butchart 1998:18). What is of major concern to Butchart (1998:180), is the methodological configuration of the colonialist gaze on the foreign body. It is a configuration steeped in objectification, reification, stereotyping, prejudice and positivism. The African body is simply an external body, stripped of any interest or ideology. He says (1998:180):

Hence, as a tactical complex within the force field of disciplinary power, the affinity of the South African socio-medical sciences with methods devoted to stripping away veneers of interests, motives and ideologies mutates into a machinery of production that sustains the material matrix of the corporeal and the social as parts of an objectively given external reality.

Racial and gender discrimination is only possible as long as the reification of the body and the social as parts of an objectively given external reality are being upheld. As long as the methodological configuration of the colonial framework holds its intellectual power, racial and gender discrimination will persist.

Ideally, in the post-colonial condition, the previously colonised actively confronts the colonial master's dominant system of thought in order to lay bare its lopsidedness, inadequacies and unsuitability for the now liberated oppressed (cf. Sugirtharajah 1998:93). However, given the power of the methodological

configuration of the colonial master it seems as if the former colonised constructs the former colonial master along the very lines of the objectivistic framework that was vehemently opposed in the past.

Racism and sexism are based on the ontology of race and gender. In the face of post-colonial criticism, which is a process of a cultural and discursive emancipation from the dominant imperial political, linguistic and ideological structures, it appears as if the fabrication of each other in our minds remains very much based on the same kind of ontological thinking.

Bailey warns against the use of the dominant force's reading strategies, as this merely perpetuates oppression and enslavement. But what if the dominant force is overturned and its reading strategies are turned onto its own members by the former subjugated masses? It may be sweet justice, but if that dominant ideology once caused enslavement and oppression, in future there will yet again be no escape from the latter. My fear is that this might currently be happening in South Africa within the debate about racism and gender issues, because the paradigm of objectivism (the framework on which apartheid was based) is still prevalent. We are still constructing images of each other as Other without taking responsibility for our constructions. It is a situation where the command 'thou shalt not kill' proves to be futile (cf. Levinas 1985:89). It is a situation where disdain for the Other is perpetuated through the discourse, sometimes deliberately, sometimes inadvertently, as is illustrated by the traditional understanding of 'turning the other cheek' in the next section.

### 3 The battered body

In a *Semeia* volume exploring the notion of the Bible and ethics of reading, Danna Nolan Fewell and Gary Phillips (1997:2) recount the following anecdote which forcibly illustrates the need to take responsibility for the result of one's actions (here the action constitutes a reading of a biblical text that could have a detrimental effect on others):

The ... story ... took place in an Introduction to the Bible class (the basic introductory Bible course) at Perkins School of Theology. The class was studying the institution of the *lex talionis* in Genesis 9:5-6 and Jesus' variation on the law in Matthew 5:38-39. The question was posed: If the *lex talionis* were a law meant to constrain violence, was Jesus' admonition to turn the other cheek meant to function the same way? An affirmative answer led to the next question: Does 'turning the other cheek' actually constrain violence? One after another some twenty students agreed, 'Yes, by turning the other cheek, one refuses to respond to violence with more violence and

this violence is constrained.' This refrain echoed around the room until finally a woman, who had in her C.P.E. training [continuing professional education] dealt with many battered women, spoke up and said, 'You people are so naive. This text has killed more women than any of us here would care to count'.

Traditionally this 'hard saying' of Jesus is thought to describe a course of action in the face of an unprovoked assault that kindles immediate resentment and retaliation (cf. Bruce 1985:68-71). It is argued that this saying counteracts the law of retribution found in the Old Testament. Instead of retaliation, Jesus is thought to have said that one should not retaliate at all. Add to this a particular understanding of Romans 13 that allows a ruler to use violence in order to enforce obedience.

It is in the domestic scene that such a traditional understanding wreaks havoc. In this scene, the husband (understood to be the head of the household) will have so much power that he practically has power over life and death. In households, domestic violence is usually the result of family subordinates questioning the activities of the dominant father. Thus, if a household is structured along the lines of a hierarchy where the husband is the head, and the rest of the household mere subordinates, violence might be an acceptable way to maintain order. It is in this sense that the 'turning of the other cheek' becomes problematical, because violence is not stopped. Women and children are usually at the receiving end.

Milavec (1995) argues that this saying of Jesus (turning the other cheek) could have had a very significant function in the life of those who entered the Jesus movement<sup>3</sup>. The abusive behaviour that the members of the Jesus movement experienced, corresponds to the examples of resistance explained by Matthew and Luke. 'Turning the other cheek' could happen in the following context: The son becomes a member of the Jesus movement and the father wants him to withdraw. When all arguments fail, the father backhands his son, an act that finally erodes the filial bond between father and son. The son then literally turns the other cheek and indicates to his father that his attempts to shame his son into servility have failed. Wink (1991) suggests that the act breaks a cycle of humiliation with humour and ridicule, exposing the injustice of the system. It recovers for the poor, the

<sup>3</sup> In the early days of the church, the formation of the Jesus movement proved quite disruptive within Judaism. It disturbed family bonds, so that brothers, sisters and parents did not want to sit with the family member who had become a member of the new sect. In some cases it meant that the livelihood of a family was endangered. A similar situation is described in the Didache, a document purported to be the teaching of the Lord by the twelve Apostles to the Gentiles.



marginalised, and the subordinate some measure of initiative that can force the dominating group to see the oppressed in a new light<sup>4</sup>.

The traditional understanding of Matthew 5:38-39 creates a false consciousness when it is proclaimed that turning the other cheek will stop any violence. I say 'false consciousness', because the traditional understanding of this text is shaped by a dominant patriarchal society whose public transcript will underscore male domination and violence, if necessary. In his book *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, James Scott (1990:4) argues that a public transcript is usually produced in close conformity with the way the dominant group or ruling elite would wish to have things appear. Thus, if a particular male domination seems to be intolerant towards female disobedience of any kind, in terms of a traditional understanding it would mean complete subordination of women, even in cases of violence. When the public transcript is defined by male superiority<sup>5</sup>, one can expect the dominated to be forced to accept the exertion of 'sovereign power', even over their bodies.

In his book *Discipline and Punish* (1977) Foucault identifies two systems of power:

- (a) sovereign power with the king as the major locus of power; and
- (b) disciplinary power that focuses on people's bodies as points of articulation of disciplinary strategies.

Sovereign power exists to the extent that it is visible to those over whom it is exercised. In monarchic times, sovereignty had to be observed, either in pomp and ceremony, or in its marking of the body of the criminal in the process of punishment. Vestiges of this kind of power can still be seen in the way people talk about power: it is something to be seized, something which can be overthrown, resisted or succumbed to. Power is equated with force, which coerces, constrains, represses, blocks or negates (cf. Armstrong 1987:68). The traditional understanding of 'turning the other cheek' reflects this kind of power when referring to domestic relationships

<sup>4</sup> Gerd Theissen (1992:130-156) situates the Matthew text in the aftermath of the Jewish War (after 70 CE) when the Jews were struggling with the Roman military force. Milavec's proposal (1995) makes more sense when he argues that the consequences envisioned by the text of Matthew are too mild for the aftermath of the Jewish war. In the case of life-threatening events, the inclination would be to flee rather than to physically resist. Milavec (1995:135) argues that Theissen has been influenced by the tradition of nonviolent resistance.

<sup>5</sup> This is the case with the King James Version where Matthew 5:38-39 in particular makes Jesus authorise monarchical absolutism (cf. Wink 1991).

where the husband is thought to have 'power' over the woman, because he is the 'head' of the household. 'Head', in terms of the story worlds of the Bible, should be understood in the way power was exerted over people, by kings, dictators and despots. In most of these cases power was quite authoritarian. Hence the authoritarian father figure in the household.

Foucault defines disciplinary power<sup>6</sup> in terms of a prison, the 'Panopticon', that consists of a circle of cells with a tower in the middle from which prison wardens can freely gaze at the prisoners (1977:200). Since the guards gaze at the prisoners, the guards remain faceless, hidden behind shutters. They do not represent the king, as they themselves are monitored by their superiors in the prison hierarchy. In a hierarchy of automatised and disindividualised power (1977:202), movement is limited by the gaze of an other. It is a power that manifests through relationships of observation.

The anecdote of the woman counsellor illustrates how oppressive and negative a public transcript can become when the effects of a particular reading are ignored. According to Scott (1990:71), the dominant ideology conceals or misrepresents aspects of social relations that would be damaging to the interests of the ruling elite. If the traditional understanding of Matthew 5:38-39 is defined by a male class (this would not be far-fetched, given the dominant power of men within the church) it is possible that the effect of their reading would not come to their attention that easily. And take note, it is a woman who made the class attentive to the destructive effects of the traditional understanding.

The woman's gaze on a traditional reading of the Bible, questioning its truth, throws a disciplinary gaze on our Bible reading, petitioning us to think about the kind of body we are constructing to receive that other blow. She asks for a surveillance of the body, in order to see the effect of power on that body. By merely stating the fact that the traditional reading of Matthew 5:38-39 has sent many women to their death, she made visible the object (who is supposed to turn the other cheek) as a target of violent power.

<sup>6</sup> Butchart (1998:30) draws the following comparison between sovereign and disciplinary power: Where sovereignty exerts control through violence and restraint, discipline does so through surveillance alone. Where sovereign power requires the visibility of itself, the unseen force of discipline makes visible the individual as object, effect and target of power. Where sovereign power emanates from a central point, disciplinary power is relational and distributed into each body and every gap between bodies. Where sovereign power is sporadically eclipsed and restored, discipline functions constantly and automatically through recruitment of the individual and the social as its relays. Where sovereign power destroys and conceals beneath its weight, disciplinary power creates and illuminates its points of articulation in the objects, effects and knowledge it sustains.

To the woman counsellor in Fewell and Phillip's anecdote, the traditional understanding of Jesus' saying is laden with political repression and demagoguery that causes the victim of domestic violence to collude with her own oppression. The counsellor expresses 'disciplinary power' in Foucault's sense. She advocates resistance and not merely the resistance of violence. She draws her audience's attention to the consequences for the female body of the exertion of sovereign power. She asks, in effect, whether the traditional understanding of 'turning the other cheek' can be valid if the consequence is death. In other words, the question is: how ethical is a particular reading of the Bible if it condemns people in abusive relationships to death or subjects people to inhumane life conditions, as was the case under apartheid?

The anecdote illustrates the consequences of failing to ask ethical questions concerning the public transcript that has become so all-consuming that it denies the Other a distinct identity. Such a totalisation<sup>7</sup> occurs whenever one knows what the other is about before the other has spoken. It is a denial of the otherness of the other, as is illustrated within the gender realm and the race realm in South Africa. It is to these two realms that the discussion will now give attention, illustrating an absurdity to which gender stereotyping may lead as well as the paralysing effect of racial stereotyping.

## 4 The sexed and raced body

### 4.1 The sexed body in the church and in Hollywood

In January 2000, at the National Synod of the *Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika* (Reformed Churches in South Africa—RCSA) the RCSA reaffirmed<sup>8</sup> their 1988

<sup>7</sup> I follow the general trend of Levinas' philosophy (1969) in this regard. In his philosophy, totalisation refers to that act whereby one consumes something so that nothing is left over. It is a total consumption. Anytime one takes the person in one's idea to be the real person, you close off contact with that person.

<sup>8</sup> *Beeld* reported (cf. Jackson 2000a:12) that these churches did not see their way open to regard 1 Timothy 2:11-13 as a discourse determined by time (*tydsgebonde*). Paul's beliefs that women should refrain from speaking during worship, from opening up themselves for learning and from being allowed to exercise power over men, are regarded as having validity (cf. Potgieter 2000:10). Although it was said that women would not be allowed to hold official positions (elder, deacon and minister) within the church, the Synod decided to do more research regarding the role of women in the church. It seems that the question was: Now that the door has been closed to women who wish to become elders, deacons or ministers, what should their role be in a male dominated church (cf. Jackson 2000c:9 and 2000d:13)? It was requested that women serve on this research panel. For a discussion on the public debate about the position of women in the RCSA prior to the Synod's decision, see Snyman 1999.

decision that women would not be eligible to serve in the office of a minister, elder or deacon. This decision was based on what they believed to be biblical evidence. In a certain sense they are correct: in the Bible stories and events referred to in their decision, women play a minimal role in management affairs. The patriarchal nature of ancient Israelite and early Christian societies made it impossible for women to play a significant role in the structures of decision processes. The societies' male hierarchical structure has found a resonance in the churches' religious structures. But this does not mean 'the Bible is right'<sup>9</sup>.

A small follow-up report by Jackson (2000b:6) illustrated the banality of the churches' decision with great acumen. In Philipvale, a small town near Philippolis in the Northern Cape, a minister worked and succeeded in getting enough people to re-establish a church that had ceased to function. The only problem was that there were not enough men around to become elders and deacons. The question before the Synod was whether the establishment of the new congregation should be postponed indefinitely, or whether women could be appointed in the offices of deacons or elders. The Synod answered that there could be no congregation when there are no competent men to fill the offices.

Although many other things happened at the Synod (cf. Vergeer 2000:6), the scope the daily newspaper *Beeld* gave to the problem of gender inequality in religious structures illustrates the importance prominent societal institutions attach to the problem of discrimination. *Beeld* even went so far as to suggest ways to alter Synod decisions (cf. Jackson 2000d)! In a male-dominated structure knowledge of how to change a decision is not that easy to find, because that knowledge is guarded by the men to whom women would have to turn to if they wanted to know how to change things.

The strength of male hegemony in the church is illustrated by the weak response *Beeld* received from female readers. Of the two who wrote letters to *Beeld* during the Synod, only one was a member of the RCSA. She (Van Dyk 2000:16) was very disappointed and expressed a concern that there would be no future generation

<sup>9</sup> In a previous article I argued that to regard the Bible as prescriptive in its entirety is equal to embracing violence as biblically prescribed. I argued that once the pattern of a holy text has been established and bathed in divine authority, it only takes a small step towards subjugating other people as Israel once did (Snyman 1999:392). I believe this is currently happening to women within the RCSA. When the subjugation of women and their relegation to the margins takes place in the Bible, is it morally correct to do likewise in the 21st century? Although the RCSA Synod may argue they have 'biblical proof', it does not mean that the ideologies and ethics of ancient Israel and the early Christian church, as they are embedded in the biblical texts, are suitable to life in a society far removed in time, culture and place.

within the RCSA as the younger (female) members would seek greener pastures. Another, Büchner (2000:8), who is not a member of the RCSA, asked how long women would accept this open discrimination while they were offended as human beings by having their voices silenced. Two months after the Synod the editor of the women's magazine of the RCSA, *Die Gereformeerde Vroueblad* (cf. Venter 2000:3), published a subversive answer to the continuing exclusion of women from the power structures of the RCSA. Demanding not to be left out in the decision making process, she actively encouraged women to make their voices heard.

The absurdity of the ruling that no church is possible without men in leadership positions becomes clear when one relates these events to another discourse that put South African men in the dock, namely the anti-rape advertisement by Charlize Theron, a South African actress who found fame in Hollywood in films in which her nudity and on-screen sexual exploits raised many an eyebrow.

The text of the radio as well as the television advertisement that she recited was as follows:

Hi, I'm Charlize Theron. People often ask me what the men are like in South Africa. Well, if you consider that more women are raped in South Africa than in any other country in the world; that one out of three women will be raped in their lifetime in South Africa; that every 26 seconds a woman is raped in South Africa; and perhaps worst of all, that the rest of the men in South Africa seem to think that rape is not their problem; it is not easy to say what the men in South Africa are like. Because there seem to be so few of them out there.

The advertisement places the South African male in a very tight spot. The Advertising Standards Board found the advert to be discriminatory on the basis of gender. It was felt that it casts half of South Africa's males as rapists and the other half as men condoning rape.

On the Woza-website on the Internet, there was a lively discussion about this advert. Most of the respondents were women, and because they are the usual victims of rape, they did not express any concern about the advert's alleged stereotyping of men. Most of their complaints were aimed at the American accent of the South African-born Hollywood star. Very few regarded Theron's performance as ironical in the sense that the films in which she performed could be regarded as a champion of rape in itself, given Hollywood's own cheap portrayal of sex and violence.

Only a few of the men who participated in the discussion thought that the advert was inoffensive, arguing from the perspective of the deed and its effects. The majority, however, contested the portrayal of the male as a rapist. They argued that

there are men who respect women, and that silence on the issue of rape does not necessarily mean one condones rape. They objected to being labelled as uncaring and to being relegated to the status of common criminals.

For the sake of the argument, let us consider the possibility that the advert is right, namely that there is a link between men's attitudes towards rape and the aspect of their gender. What significance would that give to the Synod's ruling that the presence of men is a prerequisite for the establishment of a church? If male presence is a prerequisite for the creation and functioning of church structures, and if men are regarded as potential rapists, is the unintended consequence not that a church can only exist when the possibility of rape is present? After all, it is men who rape and the Synod made a decision that a church can only exist when men are available to fill the posts of deacon, elder and minister. The reasoning sounds absurd, but the situation nevertheless remains a possibility.

However, behind the RCSA's view on women and the anti-rape advert's view on men lies a gender gaze that has become so all-consumptive that the Other that is totalised by the respective gazes, barely escapes. Within the RCSA, the patriarchal structure reflected in the Bible is used as an argument, so that pious women have no choice but to collude with their own oppression. After all, the Bible tells them so. In the anti-rape advert, the rhetoric provided by a female gaze on men incapacitates men because no matter what men may do or say, they seem to be guilty of rape.

These gazes, in fabricating women and men as Other, create a relationship of power through which a certain ideology can be put forward with very little resistance. This is what rhetoric is about: fabricating the Other in order to create a relationship of power by which the Other can be subordinated to the ideology one expresses. In the male fabrication of women, women are left out of power structures because it is regarded as the will of God. In the female fabrication of the male, the latter is scape-goated. In both instances, the Other is left without any defence. In this way the Other is silenced, a strategy successfully employed in the current debate about racism, introduced by the SAHRC's inquiry into racism in the media<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> As I revised this paper (November 2000), in one week, several racist incidents were reported: the dog attack of the SAPD on illegal immigrants (read white policemen versus Mozambicans), a so-called exclusivist retreat in the Free State that would not allow a black man on its premises and chased him away like a dog, a fatal shooting incident at Unisa where a black employee (reportedly endangering the lives of his compatriots) was shot by a white policeman. Racism is alive in South Africa, but I do not believe it is unidirectional. If racism concerns one's construction of the other person as Other, it is multi-directional. But nevertheless, the events described above make one hang one's head in shame.

#### 4.2 The racist body

The Human Rights Commission received a request from the Black Lawyers Association and the Association of Black Accountants of South Africa to conduct an inquiry into what they believed to be racism within the media. Two reports were commissioned, one by an independent researcher, Claudia Braude (1999)<sup>11</sup>, and another by the Media Monitoring Project (1999).

The Braude report states that the research into racism in the media was designed to do the following:

- \* to test possible continuities between explicitly race-based white-supremacist narratives of South African society in transition and their counterparts in the context of the mainstream media;
- \* to reveal possible racist assumptions operating in ways that might not be immediately visible on the surface of the text, but might nonetheless rely on racial shorthands for their explanatory power (Braude 1999:8).

Braude (1999:15) claims to have used two theoretical paradigms in her 'cultural studies' approach:

- (a) the way media creates a reality and a symbolic order; and
- (b) the way social power is maintained through racial discourses within this symbolic order.

She wanted to test whether and how the media functions as an ideological agency that plays a central role in the maintenance and reproduction of racial or class domination and social inequality. She also wanted to inquire into the role the media played in the consolidation and fortification of the racial values and attitudes of its media members. In other words 'to consider both the extent of racism in the media itself, as well as the way the media frequently serves as a communication about racism' (Braude 1999:16).

Reading through her report, I was reminded of the timely warning of stereotyping in a book exploring a cultural studies perspective on the production of meaning (Exum & Moore 1998). One of the problems detected in a cultural studies approach is the effect the individualism of contemporary Western culture has on characterisation. Margaret Davies (1998:415) warns of the danger of breaking down characterisation into a single dominant trait. Arguing that this boils down to stereotyping, Davies (1998:415) cautions that any attempt to discuss cultural aspects

<sup>11</sup> The focus here falls on Braude's report because her findings and presuppositions have had a significant impact on the public debate.

of life necessitates a reflection on those details or possible generalisations that are difficult either to define or to encompass.

Stereotyping in contemporary culture is found primarily in popular fiction, radio, television and newspaper presentations of social and political groups. It is society's way of talking and thinking in order to clarify experience (Davies 1998:430). Although useful in learning to make initial distinctions, Davies contends that one should recognise its limitations and guard against rigidity. Individualism requires a kind of justice that gives a just appreciation of individual complexities.

In the past, failure to give justice to individual complexities has led to the stereotyping of other people, giving rise to anti-Semitism and European racism. However, notwithstanding Braude's complaint about the racial stereotyping of black people in the media (which she presupposes from the outset as being owned by 'white supremacists'), her own portrayal of this 'white media' results in a stereotyping from which one finds it difficult to escape. Her failure to define her understanding of racism, added to her continuous reference to the media as owned by white supremacists, linked, moreover, to an inclination to find any evidence that would support a prejudice and combined with her stereotyping of newspaper reporting (as if every white journalist in any circumstance shares the desire to promote white supremacy), together suggest the formation of a possible racial stereotype. Her failure to take into account the complexity of individualism and heterogeneity in the press, and her resulting subscription to an implied definition of racism that is group based, actually reinforce her perceived stereotyping of the media as consisting of white supremacists.

Howard Barrell (2000), political editor of the *Mail & Guardian* newspaper, explains as follows the dilemma she creates in her study: There are two races, the one black, the other white. Each of them has its own racially determined language, art, religion, view of history. Anti-racism is the belief that these two groups are equal. Racism is the belief that the white group is intrinsically superior to the black group. In these terms, racism is something that is acquired over centuries. It manifests itself in overt bigotry as well as in unconscious attitudes that have seeped into white consciousness over years of white domination. The latter is very hard to recognise<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> Braude's report was not well received within some parts of the media. Mike Robertson (1999), editor of the *Sunday Times*, described the report as 'a staggeringly inept hodgepodge of confused thinking, pseudoscience, half-truths (sic), distortions of facts, and, in some instances, wholesale departures from reality'. The brouhaha overshadowed an accompanying report by the Media Monitoring Project which challenges the media's harmful portrayal of both black and white people. Moreover, Robertson sees in the MMP a redemption in that it recognises the difficulties of defining and identifying subliminal racism.

Barrell argues that Braude's understanding of racism allows the existence of exclusively black structures. Although racially discriminatory, they are not deemed racist because the latter is only possible in the context of white superiority. Racism can only happen amongst white people. Moreover, Western culture is infected by a belief of the innate superiority of white culture<sup>13</sup>. Even when one is unaware of this infection, people belonging to the Western culture are unconscious or subliminal racists. Hence Braude's research into traits of 'subliminal racism' and her understanding of a photo in *The Star* of June 25, 1999, depicting Maribou storks at a refuse container in Kampala, Uganda as an example of subliminal racism.

This photo was a front page photograph of two birds under the title 'Trash for two'. The caption read as follows: 'Pavement café ... a pied crow and a Maribou stork, a bird commonly seen on the streets and pavements of Uganda's capital, Kampala, are seen keeping a proprietary eye on a city refuse container whose scraps keep city birds like themselves on the wing.' Braude (1999:136) read this photo in the light of the previous day's headline in *The Star* concerning a decaying infrastructure and the limited availability of refuse bags.

Hence the following reception:

<sup>13</sup> Max du Preez (2000:20), a vociferous anti-apartheid voice in the eighties, argued that the HRC has shot itself in the foot by issuing summonses to the editors in order to ensure their participation in what he described as a witch-hunt and the most embarrassing *faux pas* since 1994. Barrell (2000) argues that the outcome of the debate about racism in the South African media will depend on who becomes master of the word 'racism'. In his submission to the HRC he argues that if the HRC follows a definition where only white people are racists, the HRC will be bound to conclude that the SA media is racist to the extent that it has white members of staff. Then there need not be any obligation to show that an act or utterance by a white member of the media was racist in intention or result, because as with the doctrine of original sin, it is already present. There is only one conclusion: racists are sending out racist messages which are received as racist messages. It was to be expected that the SAHRC would find racism in the media. Although it states that the SAHRC found no evidence of the mainstream media indulging in blatant advocacy of racial hatred or incitement to racial violence (2000:89), it nevertheless concludes that: '[t]o the extent that expressions in the South African media "reflect a persistent pattern" of racist expressions and content of writing that could have been avoided, and given that we take seriously the fact that many submissions complained that such expressions cause or have the effect of causing hurt and pain, South African media can be characterised as racist institutions .... This finding holds regardless as to whether there is conscious or unconscious racism, direct or indirect'.

This is a 'city refuse container' exposed and open to the elements, including people together with disease-carrying birds—a less than hygienic or aesthetic sight. The caption has another dimension. These are not just birds. One is 'a bird commonly seen on the streets and pavements of Uganda's capital, Kampala.' What is this bird doing on the streets of Johannesburg, one might well ask? The caption suggests that the bird is enjoying the benefits of Johannesburg's decaying infrastructure under budgetary constraints. 'City refuse container' becomes a visual shorthand for an Africanised CBD; and the Maribou stork a shorthand for Africa within Johannesburg, for the perceived change from first-world to a third-world city in which hawkers line the pavements referred to in the caption, their persons and refuse adding to the city's detritus. As such, the bird does not only enjoy the detritus of a transformed city; but also, paradoxically, the economic benefits which the city has to offer—in this, like many people who come to the city, both rural South Africans and immigrants from other parts of the continent in pursuit of an economically viable life. As such, the photograph integrates anxieties about decaying urban infrastructure with fears of incursions from Africa.

On the face of it, it is an imaginative *allegorical* interpretation of a caption and photograph in a newspaper based on a recurring theme reported that week in the paper. The validity of Braude's interpretation of the photo and the caption rests upon the link she draws between the birds and African people and the refuse container and the city of Johannesburg. Her allegorical analysis is built upon a text-immanent investigation of the photo in terms of other texts within the newspaper, read with a presumption of what the white supremacist editor had in mind.

An allegory assumes two levels: the concrete narrative level and the moral, spiritual and psychological ideas behind the concrete narrative. However, to function as an allegory, there should be a clear link between the two levels. The allegorical is part of the structure of the work and not something added to the interpretation (cf. Malan 1992:8). Unfortunately, Braude provides no other support for her decision to make these two comparisons underlying her allegory. She assumes that race determines culture and texts. Thus, the photo and caption had to have a racial content, which she constructs as being present in the mind of the white editor—the Other—who she, by definition, deems a racist.

It should be noted that criticism of the report never denied the existence of racism in the media. The problem is the way in which Braude perceived the 'Other'. On the one hand, she appears to presume the existence of exactly that which she wanted to demonstrate: racism in the media (cf. Van Niekerk 2000) and on the other

hand, her demonstration results in a kind of stereotyping of the antagonists. Barrell (2000) observes:

A critic may conjecture—though never prove, because he or she has no gift of insight into another's mind—the presence of cultural and other subjective judgments in a particular story or media product. But the attribution of motive to the writer of such a story—unless it is blatantly rhetorical in tone or contains hate speech—is still more dubious.

Juxtaposed to her own hidden definition of racism, is the definition that would turn her latent understanding of racism into racism itself! If racism is the belief that races have distinctive cultural characteristics determined by hereditary factors and that these characteristics endow some races with an intrinsic superiority, the depiction of a certain group of people as unable to escape their culture's construction of themselves as superior, constitutes an act of racism. Racism, after all, links to race rights and privileges over which one has no say. Except that by Braude's definition—and this is a very common position—only whites can be racist.

## 5 The effect of moral power

In its editorial on the findings of the SAHRC on racism in the media, the *Mail & Guardian* slammed the report as an instrument which merely rationalised its members' rush to moral judgment (Editorial 2000:24). It is as if the entire process of the SAHRC's inquiry effectuated a moral distinction by defining racism as inherent to Western culture in general. Only when one defines racism as 'an ideology, a system of social, economic and political power structures that perpetuates and justifies itself by creating racist stereotypes and fostering attitudes of racial prejudice' (cf. Kritzinger 1999:4) can the racist body become a performance which one can change. Similarly, in the Theron anti-rape advert a moral distinction was created between men and women: men are, in principle, rapists. Only when one sees the current gender roles as belonging to a patriarchal mind-set, can gender identities be conceived as changeable constructions dealing with social reality. But race and gender are still regarded as ontological features from which one can only escape through death.

The dilemma posed by the moral power referred to above reminds me of the catch-22 situation in which Jean Valjean, the main character in Victor Hugo's novel-turned-Broadway-musical, *Les Misérables*, finds himself. Realising that his antagonist, the prison warder Javert, has arrested the wrong person, Valjean confesses that he is the man Javert is looking for, namely prisoner 24601. Valjean is

in a difficult position. If he does not confess, another innocent man goes to prison in his place. And if he talks, he unmask himself. This is his song:

He thinks that man is me  
He knew him at a glance  
That stranger he has found  
This man could be my chance  
Why should I save his hide?  
Why should I right this wrong  
when I have come so far  
and struggled for so long?

If I speak, I am condemned.  
If I stay silent, I am damned.

I am the master of hundreds of workers.  
They all look to me.  
Can I abandon them?  
How would they live if I am not free?

If I speak, I am condemned.  
If I stay silent, I am damned.

Who am I?  
Can I condemn this man to slavery?  
Pretend I do not see his agony?  
This innocent who bears my face  
who goes to judgment in my place?

Who am I?  
Can I conceal me for evermore?  
Pretend I'm not the man I was before?  
And must my name until I die  
Be no more than an alibi?  
Must I lie?  
How can I ever face my fellow-men?  
How can I ever face myself again?  
My soul belongs to God, I know  
I made that bargain long ago



He gave me hope when hope was gone  
He gave me strength to journey on.

Who am I? Who am I?  
I am Jean Valjean.

And so, Javert, you see it's true  
That man bears no more guilt than you!

Who am I?  
24601!

Valjean takes up the moral question concerning the mistaken identity. He has to decide what his responsibility is (à la Levinas) by looking the mistakenly identified man in the face as the Other. By keeping quiet, Valjean will remain a free man, but he will also be sending an innocent man to prison. By speaking out, the other man might become free again, yet Valjean will once more be subjected to Javert's assault on his body in the nineteenth century penitentiary:

If I speak, I am condemned.  
If I stay silent, I am damned.

Valjean felt himself totally incapacitated, a feeling one has in the light of the Theron anti-rape advert and the SAHRC's findings of racism in the media. What kind of defence is open in the face of an Other whose gaze is so consumptive that it leaves one totally incapacitated?

Barrell (2000) argues that Braude's kind of definition leaves one with only three kinds of white people: overt racists, racists who have acknowledged their guilt and unconscious racists who continue to deny their racism. Behind the gaze on men or white people as the Other, there is a tendency to take total control of the Other which would deny them any autonomy. Here is a nifty power play playing itself out: if race (and gender) determine culture and intellect, even though the cultural products are equal, there is still a moral distinction:

- \* a male lacks a moral claim to equal treatment because of his perceived refusal to acknowledge the problem of rape (in fact, his refusal is a recognition of guilt);
- \* a white person lacks a moral claim to equal treatment because of his or her racist past.

In both cases, one's rapist or racist inclinations should be acknowledged. There is no escape. The Other is castrated. In Foucault's Panopticon, power has become efficient. The 'white' Other is fabricated by the 'black' self in order to establish a relationship of power by which the Other can be subordinated to the ideology the self expresses. In both discourses, the Other (men and white people respectively) are scape-goated and left without any defence. In this way they are successfully silenced.

Butchart (1998:114) points out how the Carnegie Commission that looked into the problem of 'Poor Whites' (1928-1932) objectified the black body of the African as a source of corruption (black peril) and the white body of the European as a victim whose Protestant work ethic was thought to be seriously undermined by what was regarded as the coarse and careless African. With it came a language of government that could manage racial distinctions and cultivate a culture of difference.

If one understands how someone's gaze can fabricate a body and how a group of people with political power can formulate a policy to enact their own fabrication, the question of responsibility arises. It is not a mere question of exercising the right to fabricate on account of being the major political force, or a case of correcting historical imbalances, but a question of how to constitute the face of the Other without reducing the Other to nothingness—a nothingness which results in a total omission and forgetfulness of women in religious sects by excluding them from power structures. Levinas' notion of ethics and responsibility towards the Other may be of some help.

## 6 A body with a face

To understand Levinas, one has to grasp two terms central to his thinking: the 'Other' and the 'self'. In terms of any social engagement, two persons are involved. From the perspective of person A the 'self' is person A and person B plays the role of the Other. From the perspective of person B, the Other is person A and the self would be person B. The Other is always that person with whom one engages in a particular situation. Levinas' questions concern the responsibility of the 'self' towards that other person.

That other person (the Other) is not incognito. The Other has a face. It is not a face hidden behind the anonymity of race or gender. In *Ethics and Infinity* (1985:83ff—his most accessible text) Levinas argues that one meets the face of the Other in its utter nakedness and destituteness. The face is exposed, menaced, as if inviting one to an act of violence, yet simultaneously, forbidding one to kill. According to Levinas, the first word of the face is 'Thou shalt not kill', because the Other is perceived as a stranger in the world of the self, a foreigner in one's country,



someone completely out of place. It is a person essentially without familial ties, like a widow or an orphan, vulnerable and alone in the world.

In the gender/racial panopticon, the inmates are viewed as belonging to a group under observation. They are perceived as having certain similar features. Are these features ontologically determined, i.e. inherent to the group, or are they constructions in the minds of the observers? From Levinas' point of view, knowledge of other persons is not ontological, but rooted in ethics. The ideas one has about other people are not representations of something outside of one's being. It is not a discovery one makes, but rather an invention of the mind, because, as Beavers<sup>14</sup> (1990) puts it,

[A]nytime I take the person in my idea to be the real person, I have closed off contact with the real person; I have cut off the connection with the other that is necessary if ethics is to refer to real other people. This is a central violence to the other that denies the other his/her own autonomy.

Levinas calls this violence 'totalisation': It is a denial of the other's diff-

<sup>14</sup> I owe my current understanding of Levinas' ideas to Beavers (1990 & 1995). Levinas' work is incredibly difficult, especially his book *Otherwise than being or beyond essence* (1981). Davis (1996:70) argues that many features of Levinas' textual practice seem calculated to disorientate the reader. 'To put it plainly, the difficulty of Levinas' prose is not simply a product of the philosophical complexity of what he has to say. Meaning is endangered by a practice of writing that eludes ready comprehension.' (Davis 1996:73). And, 'The difficulty of the work and the problems of understanding that it poses are not tangential to the point; they are the point. Interrogating Levinas' text becomes a process of self-interrogation, as local problems of understanding confront the reader with more fundamental questions: "What does Levinas mean by responsibility?" slips into "What is my responsibility, how am I responsible for my neighbour?" The reader makes the text, and in the process makes herself' (Davis 1996:91). Similarly, my understanding of Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977) is directed by Armstrong's (1985 & 1987) interpretation as well as Butchart (1998) who relies on Armstrong's representation. At this stage, my own reception of both French authors is quite naive and very superficial. Postmodernism necessitates a disclosure of the contexts which have a bearing on my thinking. Moreover, it also urges me to pin down my ideas and not to wait until I have digested the entire spectrum of ideas about Levinas and Foucault. My impression is that within a modernist paradigm I would not have been able to say anything unless I was totally sure and absolutely certain about my 'facts'.

erence and the otherness of the other. In the gender/racial panopticon such totalisation occurs whenever the other is limited to a set of rational categories, be they racial, sexual, or otherwise. Whenever someone knows what the other is about before the other has spoken, that which is essentially 'other' is reduced to someone else's consciousness. The other is reduced to 'sameness' (Levinas 1985:91)<sup>15</sup>.

However, the reduction to sameness, or the non-recognition of autonomy constitutes exactly the accusation levelled at the media: The lack of individuation in the news affirms a racist tendency in newspapers read and owned by white people. Beavers (1993) says the following about the media in the USA:

So, here we are in the 'real world' of the Six o' clock news where reality is defined by the known. This knowledge consists primarily of the totality of representations presented by the media. These representations are of others without their otherness. Their stories are depersonalised by an interpretative transformation into a language that all can understand and no one can question. They become known to us, but without the responsibility that comes with face to face confrontation. I may see the face of the other on television, but I know simultaneously that the other does not see me, and this means that I face a person for whom I am no longer responsible. The Other has been handed down over to me murdered by a society of anonymous individuals each of whom in his/her anonymity is freed from a responsible relationship, the Other has been defaced.

But maybe what is regarded as 'racism' in the so-called 'white media' in South Africa is simply the problem of anonymity bestowed on reports about people in a global society where a faceless populace is controlled by an equally faceless media. It is simply a feature of the modern nation state whose pooling of resources results in massification and de-individuation. Facelessness is clearly the order of the day. Or should one rather argue that facelessness can result in situations where racism can be experienced? This seems to be the position of the SAHRC. In Theron's advertisement the facelessness is acute: as a media product everyone is able to see

<sup>15</sup> One can argue that Braude drew her conclusions after the media as the Other had spoken. However, the 'media' does not consist of a singular individual. Although Braude came to an understanding after she had read newspapers and listened to the radio, she never intended to look at the individuals who produced the media articles or broadcasts. In fact, it would have been impossible. Her endeavour to link newspaper reports and photos to authorial intent fails, because it is not possible to read someone's mind on the basis of a text alone.

her face, but she was looking into the lens of the camera and never saw the eyes of her audience<sup>16</sup>.

The problem underlying the debate about the role of women in a church like the RCSA is that women are being defaced by an equally faceless Synod. According to what is referred to as 'presbyteral' church law, once the Synod is dissolved nothing exists and the dominees and elders disappear behind the lines of a faceless membership. It is easy for a meeting consisting only of men to make decisions about women when they are not obliged to look them in the eye. With a membership of fewer than 100 000, facelessness is not the result of massification, but of ideology divinely sanctioned.

Regarding the complaints about racism in the media, the SAHRC's various reports on racism in the media, the media's reaction to these reports, the uproar about Charlize Theron's anti-rape advert and the reaction (albeit very low key and small) to the absurd resolution at a RCSA Synod, indicate that we are dealing with an Other that is reduced to something the Other refuses to be reduced to. We are dealing with an 'Other' who is essentially alone in the world, leading an independent existence and wishing not to be totalised or reduced to sameness.

Although the self and the Other are alone in the world, both preserved as independent and self-sufficient<sup>17</sup> (Levinas 1981:27), each can only exist because of the other one. Levinas' problem consists in constructing a relation between the two, allowing both to retain their independence, for when one constructs a relation, the nature of the relation is such that the moment the Other is brought into the sphere of the self, the self reduces or deletes the otherness of the Other (cf. Davis 1996: 41).

The self would want to enjoy the Other, but cannot because the Other resists the self's consumption (cf. Davis 1996:43). It is in the sphere of this tension created by the possibility of becoming absorbed in each other, and the paradox of a relation where each should retain its separateness, that Levinas suggests the ethical moment. It is not a doctrine of moral norms or principles, but a radical obligation which infuses every act of critical thinking (Phillips & Fewell 1997:4):

<sup>16</sup> The question arises whether the media would be able to individuate at all. We are dealing with an audience whose extent enables the existence of the media. Were the audience small, the media as we know it would not be able to exist.

<sup>17</sup> The self has its own economy. It lives from the world (Levinas 1981:112) that is fully available to the self and ready to meet the needs of the self and fulfil its desires. Levinas calls this 'enjoyment' (1981:113): It is a process by which the self makes itself at home in a world where otherness is not a threat to be overcome, but a pleasure to be experienced (1981:119).

[W]e are obligated—before we think, before we critically analyze or conceptualize—to something / someone other than ourselves. And it is in the face of the Other (the one who escapes any horizon or conceptual scheme I might wish to impose upon it) that the experience of this obligation to be responsible for the other is concretely and practically discovered. In the face, the look of the eye, we meet responsibility.

The encounter, or rather, the mere possibility of an encounter with the presence of the Other, questions the independence or separateness of the Other. In the face of the Other the self experiences a vulnerability (because the Other can hurt you) and a proximity (defined by Levinas (1981:85) as '[s]ignifyingness, the-one-for-the-other, exposedness of self to another, it is immediacy in caresses and in the contact of saying'). This experience demands a response. Levinas understands this response as a responsibility for the Other: 'a responsibility for what is not my deed, or for what does not even matter to me; or which precisely does matter to me, is met by me as a face' (1985:95).

Meeting the face is not a perception of the face, but an indication of the presence of the infinite that cannot be reduced to a representation. In this proximity, says Levinas (1985:96), the self is responsible for the Other without even having taken on responsibilities in his or her regard: The responsibilities of the Other is incumbent on the self. It is a responsibility for the Other where the self is responsible for the responsibility of the Other. Responsibility is the tie with the Other. But Levinas is only concerned with the self in the face of the Other. The responsibility of the Other towards the self is his or her own affair. Responsibility is not a reciprocal undertaking (1985:99).

Responsibility implies an imperative force by the Other to put oneself in his or her place, not to appropriate one's own objectivity, but to answer the need of the Other, to supply for his or her want with one's own substance. In other words, to give sustenance to the Other (Lingis 1981:xxii). Levinas calls it substitution: to be for the other person. Being in the place of an Other means to be in the place of an other as a hostage for the Other (cf. Levinas 1981:127). The self is defined by the Other and to kill the Other would destroy the very origin of the self's responsibility.

## 7 Responsibility in an African context

How is one to conceive of Levinas' notion of responsibility in Africa, when wars continue to ravage the African continent?

On 23rd March 2000 the 'CNN African Journalist of the year' awards were

given out<sup>18</sup>. The Free Press-Africa award went to Sorious Samura of Sierra-Leone, who faced the guns of his own country in his quest to record the civil war where children are drugged to kill and rape their mothers. In his speech, as reported by Dube (2000a:4), he said that Africa is a continent of both bad and good, ugly and beautiful. However, the story he (Samura) is forced to tell, is that of doom, because the ugly rears its head more frequently in Africa.

Levinas' notion of responsibility for the Other reminds one of 'Ubuntu' and the phrase '*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*', meaning a person is a person because of other people, or more simply, I am because you are. It looks as if both Levinas and the notion of Ubuntu embrace humanism. It also looks as if both assume respect, or rather, treatment with dignity and empathy<sup>19</sup>. Levinas' ethics or responsibility for the

<sup>18</sup> According to reporter Pamela Dube (2000b:3), the awards ceremony enabled African journalists to come of age and to take their rightful place in a world obsessed with all that is Western. The awards symbolise the wish of Africa to tell her own story, over against the West's distortion of the African story. Dube's evaluation represents a stream of thought that only an African can have an understanding of what Africa is all about. In other words, understanding and knowing the Other is closely linked to one's presence in a context. It is a presence not simply of being there, because then anyone would do. No, it is a presence with a particular ontology: birth, citizenship, and race. Of Jaques Pauw, who won the African Journalist of the year award with Brian Hungwe of Zimbabwe, Dube says: '[B]ut being well-resourced does not mean the West has an understanding of what Africa is all about.' Pauw—whom in terms of the Braude report would be labelled a white supremacist because of his face—argued that, being African, he and his team were cultured enough to understand the intricacies of a civil war on the continent. The problem Dube had with him, was his admission that he had resources and facilities which his fellow Africans did not have.

<sup>19</sup> Broodryk (1996:36) argues that 'Ubuntuism' is not that unique when compared to certain ideologies. He says that if 'unique' means unusual, incomparable or extraordinary, Ubuntuism seems not to be unique. Ubuntu does not exist only in one culture; people of all cultures and races can have what he calls 'this magic gift'. The qualities of Ubuntu can exist in each person. Currently, Ubuntu appears to be South Africa's quest to dignify African culture, especially in management and business circles (cf. Lascaris & Lipkin 1993:45-47). Makhudu (1993:41) has argued, however, that although other cultures have philosophical concepts similar to Ubuntu, no other culture approaches the all-pervasive aspect of Ubuntu as a living process of co-operation of humanhood. Louw (1998) argues that Ubuntu sees the human being as 'being-with-others' as well as what 'being-with-others' should be all about. He sees Ubuntu as a distinctly African rationale for relating to others.

Other is not 'out there', but, like Ubuntu, exists the moment the face of the Other appears. The proximity of the face commands a responsibility for the Other. Similarly, Ubuntu seems to cause people to act in a way they intuitively know to be right. It is not something they choose (Boon 1996:33).

Joe Teffo of the Department of Philosophy at the University of the North (1997:106) defines Ubuntu as one of those modalities of the spirit pertaining to human beings which manifests a people's humanness, understanding and existential peace. Teffo's thinking on Ubuntu that is based on his reading of the French philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre (Levinas' tutor), is, to my mind, the closest one can get to a correlation with Levinas' concept of the Other.

In an earlier essay, Teffo (1996:101) uses the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre to elucidate the problem of the mind of the Other within the context of African philosophy. Teffo argues that the other is seen not as the Other, but as an other with certain inherent racial limitations. In very broad terms, Teffo holds that in Sartre's mode of being in the world there are the 'they-group' and the 'us-group'. The they-group treats the us-group as instruments to achieve their goal within a context of master and slave. In the South-African context, this modality has certain consequences. To Teffo, two different modes of being in the world were impressed upon society: a 'they' and an 'us' experience, which he respectively labels being-white-in-the-world and being-black-in-the-world. Whilst he argues that the latter mode implies experiencing oneself as a problem, a non-being in the eyes of the non-black, the SAHRC's inquiry certainly succeeded in rendering the continued presence of the vestiges of the Western culture as being-white-in-a-world-of-blacks problematical.

Teffo contends that the black consciousness philosophy can be instrumental in overcoming the dichotomy of being-black-in-the-world and being-white-in-the-world in order to enable the emergence of the new colourless person<sup>20</sup>. He regards the body as the bearer and medium through which the totality of human experience can be articulated in order to underline the wholeness of human life. In fact, he argues (1996:103) that wholeness is the hallmark of an African perspective on life in

<sup>20</sup> Kritzinger (1999:23) echoes the same longing for this colourless person. He regards race as a way to describe social reality. He says that the elevation of biological differences between people into matters of anthropological significance lies at the heart of perpetuating racism. To him, the terms 'white' and 'black' describe significant patterns of privilege and disadvantage. He says: 'I would agree with Robert Sobukwe and others that if we are to use the term 'race' at all, we should use it to refer to the human race as a whole.' Kritzinger (1999:24) aims at going beyond white and black to an inclusive African identity or a set of open and flexible African identities in which there is a free cultural interchange.

its totality. This wholeness is the link to Ubuntu: 'Humankind is a communal being, and s/he cannot be conceived apart from his/her relationship with others.' (1996:103). Ubuntu is therefore a unique interdependence of persons for the exercise, development and fulfilment of their powers. A person is not defined by a set of properties or features, but by the relationships existing between him/her and others.

It is this idea of a person defined by his or her relation to an Other that opens new possibilities for the African concept. Although my reception of Levinas into an African concept of Ubuntu is at this stage preliminary and tentative, it seems to me valid to assert that both define the human being in terms of a relation rather than in terms of ontology. Nonetheless, they are not the same, because they are manifested in two different cultures. I suspect that Levinas' idea of the Other is very open: The Other can be everyone. Although the Other has a face, that face is rather vague because the self does not look the face in the eye, since that would mean that the Other became consumed in the gaze of the self.

Teffo is influenced by Sartre, whereas Levinas follows a route somewhat different to that of Sartre<sup>21</sup>. However, Teffo seems to widen the scope of Ubuntu. Traditionally, Ubuntu is limited to the tribe or clan that constitutes the corporate identity of the individual. He (1996:103) contends that every person, every individual, active and passive, joined from above to the ascending line of his or her ancestry and sustaining below the line of his descendants, falls within the ambit of Ubuntu. Humankind is a communal being, and s/he cannot be conceived apart from his/her relationship with others, says Teffo (1996:103).

The line, as described in terms of ancestors and descendants, indicates the possibility that Ubuntu and the Other can be limited to the hereditary line. What happens when someone from outside this line of ancestors and descendants enters into the community? In underpinning the problem of racism inherent in the narrow function of Ubuntu, Teffo argues that Ubuntu reaches beyond the mere clan or tribe. When Ubuntu is implemented in a very narrow sense, he judges it as 'black racism'. Ironically, it is a position he, as a black consciousness philosopher, takes in against the kind of thinking behind the Braude report! He (1996:103) says:

This debate can be taken a step further, to include black racism. All too often the black oppressed of Africa, in an attempt to affirm themselves, do so in the negative. In their rejection of white racism, many of the oppressed

<sup>21</sup> Sartre argued that the fundamental nature of human relations was conflict and Levinas argued that the face to face encounter is more or less pacific, because the revelation of the face is essentially non-violent (cf. Davis 1996:48). I think Sartre's focus on conflict gave Teffo the impetus for his assertion regarding being-black-in-the-world.

epitomize the very racism that has harmed their own dignity and sense of worth. Racism is racism, it knows no colour and, like a two-edged sword, it cuts both ways. As fellow human beings we must affirm ourselves in the universal sense. This ultimately implies respect for oneself and for other human beings.

## 8 Conclusion

Sugirtharajah (1998:94) states that the imperialiser and the imperialised are inevitably locked together. The focus on gender and racism is part of the re-examination and re-assessment of Western values. We are in a process of renewed perception, in a changed location regarding power. But it should go beyond what Sugirtharajah (1998:94) refers to as essentialist and contrastive thinking. The categories of 'us' (African culture) and 'they' (Western culture) or women versus men perpetuate the killer gaze of the past. We are reminded that we indeed fabricate each other in our meeting of one another. The question is how we proceed in our fabrication. Levinas reminds us of the ethical moment in the meeting of the face of the Other. And Africa provides that prospective common meeting ground. It is possible that the West and Africa are not all that far removed from each other.

The body is an interpretive category, but not in the sense that behaviour and thoughts can be linked to a specific gender or racial category. Gender and race are social constructs by which a person tries to make sense of the presence of the body when meeting that body as a face. Levinas' idea of responsibility for the Other (without demanding reciprocity) suggests that our gaze dare not be all-consuming. The Other is not our prisoner, and will always try to avert or frustrate the gaze out of fear of being reduced to nothingness by its absolute otherness. In our debate about gender inequality and racial discrimination we are reminded that our gaze of the Other in this regard can never be final.

Meeting the Other means seeing the Other in its destituteness, exposed and menaced, yet simultaneously realising one's own limits and freedom. And our relation to the biblical text? The text is an Other which demands not to be reduced to our sameness. It is, after all, an ancient text that needs to be read against its ancient contexts. And when we, as scholars or ministers, interpret this ancient text for others, those Others retain their absolute otherness. They cannot be reduced to obey the whims of ancient patriarchal society.

Department of Old Testament  
University of South Africa

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## On our Moral Responsibility for Past Violations

Wilhelm Verwoerd

### 1 Introduction

Who is morally responsible for the politically motivated actions of Eugene de Kock and co.? Who shares in the evil embodied by 'Prime Evil'<sup>1</sup>? How far do blame and the obligation to make amends extend beyond those who directly bloodied their hands in the service of the white South African state: to other members of the security forces? the political leaders and policy makers at the time? National Party supporters? 'ordinary white citizens' who voted for and/or benefited (materially) under successive apartheid governments? their children who continue to benefit from unearned past privileges? These are some of the important questions highlighted by the work of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)<sup>2</sup>.

In this article I want to respond by arguing that moral responsibility for the gross violations of human rights exposed by the TRC does indeed extend, in varying degrees, to—at least—those whites who voted for apartheid governments and their children today. I also want to defend the thesis that the acknowledgement of this shared responsibility is a crucial building block on the road to reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa.

In this process I hope to clarify some of the confusion that characterises debates on these matters, such as the equation of the notion of 'shared moral responsibility' with the problematic imposition of 'collective guilt'. This clarification will help me to make sense of my own sense of responsibility—as an ordinary, young, white, Afrikaans-speaking South African—for past human rights violations committed by apartheid state agents<sup>3</sup>. This argument is furthermore intended as a

<sup>1</sup> Nickname for and media image of Col. Eugene de Kock, former commander of the notorious Vlakplaas security police hit squad.

<sup>2</sup> For more detail on the origins, objectives, structure and work of this commission, see the TRC Report.

<sup>3</sup> For a narrative, autobiographical exploration of these issues see Verwoerd (1997).



challenge to the widespread, troubling tendency captured in the words of the South African political satirist Pieter-Dirk Uys:

'You are responsible,' the commission will thunder. That's us, the people, the 'you'. And they're probably right. And yet, how can we whites be guilty of anything if we were all anti-apartheid? I haven't met anyone lately who had anything to do with those years of oppression. The white policeman says he fought the system secretly. The black teacher insists he subverted the bad policies with a smile. The Indian doctor swears he sewed up broken terrorists with love. The coloured journalist admits to quoting banned words with guts .... Of course they did. After all we were all in the Struggle!<sup>4</sup>

I find this reluctance on the side of many to share the load of responsibility understandable, though deeply problematic. The portrayal of the TRC process in the mass media, and to some extent the TRC itself, contributed to this 'I-did-not-have-anything-to-do-with-apartheid oppression' syndrome. Robbins argues that all too often the public presentation of the perpetrator of 'gross violations of human rights' conformed to the Hollywood notion of white South African policemen, portrayed as 'evil-looking Nazis with thick Afrikaans accents'.<sup>5</sup> The outcome of this focus on the outrageous—such as Western Cape Security Branch policeman, Jeffrey Benzien, demonstrating his notorious 'wet bag' method of torture to the Amnesty Committee—has undermined the ability of ordinary, law-abiding South Africans to see themselves as 'represented' by those who the TRC defined as perpetrators.

Another source of the tendency to deny responsibility is to be found in discussion of responsibility in the context of past gross human rights violations; typically, this conjures up images of a Nuremberg type Tribunal, raising threatening questions such as who are the guilty, who should be punished, and how severely? Answers to these questions tend to be heavily influenced by the criteria employed in the criminal justice system, namely the reliable establishment of an individual actor's direct causal relation to the harm under consideration and the presence of criminal intent.

However, these questions and answers make it too easy for many people to deny responsibility. When causal connections are not clearly visible or indirect and when it seems plausible to claim 'but I didn't know', it becomes rather tempting to see only clean hands—except of course for the few 'bad apples' / 'rotten eggs' like

<sup>4</sup> Writing about his 'Truth Omissions' play in which he attacks the hypocrisy of guilty parties before the TRC, *Sunday Times Metro* March 3, 1996:9.

<sup>5</sup> *Cape Times* 6 August 1997.

the De Kocks and Benziens of this world<sup>6</sup>. My concern about this denial of responsibility is captured in a parable told by an African participant at a TRC public meeting on Reconciliation:

There were two boys living opposite each other. John stole a bicycle from Tom and then after a year John came to Tom and said: 'Tom, I stole your bicycle and what I need now is reconciliation'. Then Tom looked at John and said: 'Where is my bicycle?' He said: 'No, I am not talking about your bicycle now, I am talking about reconciliation'.<sup>7</sup>

The point is that without a sincere acknowledgement of responsibility, 'reconciliation' becomes a dirty word. If responsibility for wrongs is not taken, a request for forgiveness becomes an insult added to the victim's injury. If John clearly acknowledged that it was wrong to steal Tom's bicycle and that he, John, was the thief, and that he was sorry about what he did, and if John furthermore coupled this making of moral amends with a clear commitment to making practical amends—in this case involving at least returning the stolen bicycle—only then would it have been appropriate for Tom to forgive, and for the two boys to reconcile<sup>8</sup>. In the context of the TRC process a widespread denial of any obligation to make amends becomes particularly problematic since the granting of amnesty to direct perpetrators removes victims/survivors' right to seek redress through the courts. Those who had already suffered so much under apartheid had to swallow the bitter pill of hated former security policemen such as Benzien, Hechter, and Cronje receiving immunity from criminal and civil prosecution. These security policemen claimed in public that they did what they did so that ordinary white South Africans could sleep peacefully at night and enjoy their privileges during the day (Krog 1998). However, the typical response from these white South Africans today is to wash their hands in shocked innocence, or to withdraw, again, behind a cloak of convenient forgetfulness.

What makes the scapegoating of these agents (and the general absence of whites from TRC activities) so harmful to the reconciliation process is that we are not merely dealing with the stealing of bicycles. To quote the above-mentioned participant again:

<sup>6</sup> See contributions by Pumla Gobodo and Chief Mabizela in Verwoerd and Mabizela (2000).

<sup>7</sup> Transcript of TRC public meeting, UCT, 24 January 1997, p 41.

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed discussion of the 'promise and pitfalls of apologies', see Govier and Verwoerd (2001).



Now we are talking about the survivors of apartheid. Our brothers and sisters have passed away, and now one will come and say 'I killed your brother. What I need now is reconciliation'. The problem is now it is not a bicycle, it's a person who died, and it's impossible now that that person will come back.

To support my claim that the load of moral responsibility should be spread widely to include (at least)<sup>9</sup> white NP supporters during the apartheid era and their off-spring today—for the sake of our shared present and future with all South Africans—I shall (2) clarify the notion of 'moral responsibility', (3) challenge the typical excuse of ignorance offered to deny responsibility, (4) highlight the multi-layered causal connections underlying actions of the modern state, and (5) look at the communicative aspects of actions to emphasise why it is important, contrary to proverbial wisdom, to 'cry over spilt milk'. In conclusion, (6) I respond briefly to the broader question of the shared responsibility of beneficiaries of the system of apartheid.

## 2 Moral responsibility

A useful point of departure is Jaspers' attempt to differentiate German guilt after the crimes of the Nazi era (in Morris (ed.) 1971:40-53; Zvie Bar-On 1984-5:102-109). Jaspers, a prominent German philosopher who had himself lived through Fascism and had been banned from teaching by the Nazis, distinguishes between criminal, political, moral and metaphysical guilt<sup>10</sup>. *Criminal guilt* applies only to those

<sup>9</sup> To simplify matters I will be concentrating on the wrongs and responsibilities of white South Africans who have been (and to some extent continue to be), structurally speaking, the obvious beneficiaries of a racially exclusive system like Apartheid, and who are most clearly linked to the agents/representatives of this system. I am aware that not only whites supported and benefited from apartheid (e.g. some who participated in the 'homelands system' and the Tricameral Parliament), that responsibility for those politically motivated violations committed by all parties to past conflicts extends beyond 'whites only' (cf. Uys quoted in Introduction). Addressing the complications arising from these extensions of shared responsibility requires a much longer article or three.

<sup>10</sup> Jaspers (1971:46f) defines 'metaphysical guilt' as the 'the lack of absolute solidarity with the human being as such', a guilt shared by every fallible human being, with jurisdiction in the hands of God alone. However since its reach is too vague and too wide for my present purposes I am leaving this kind of guilt aside for the moment.

Germans (and others) who were directly involved in the planning, preparation or enactment of the Final Solution. This kind of guilt, claims Jaspers, should be determined and punished through the criminal justice system<sup>11</sup>. However, the fact that criminal guilt only applies to a relatively small number of direct participants, does not free the rest from all guilt. It actually means that 'the nature of our real guilt only appears the more clearly' (Jaspers 1971:40).

In Jaspers' view *political guilt* applies to all citizens of a modern state like Germany engaged in a war of aggression. German nationals are collectively liable for the crimes committed in the name of the Reich and must accept punishment in the form of reparations for the victims of the war, with the costs distributed indirectly through the tax system. A similar point is made by M. Walzer in his reflection on the democratic responsibilities of citizens of a state engaged in an aggressive war: '... citizenship is a common destiny, and no one, not even its opponents ... can escape the effects<sup>12</sup> of a bad regime, an ambitious or fanatic leadership, or an overreaching nationalism' (1977:297).

However, acceptance of *political guilt* does not necessarily imply *moral guilt* and, therefore, moral responsibility. Political liability is indirect and impersonal (Zvie Bar-On 1984/1985:107), because, although citizens might accept their common destiny, 'they can sometimes do so with a good conscience, for the acceptance says nothing about their individual responsibility. The distribution of costs is not the distribution of guilt' (Walzer 1977:297). This distinction between individual moral responsibility and shared political liability is also emphasised by Jaspers: 'The sense of political liability lets no man dodge ... yet this liability as such leaves the soul untouched' (1971:41). Let us, therefore, move closer to the heart of the matter and consider Jaspers' notion of *moral guilt*:

The question of the individual analysing himself is what we call the moral one .... The morally guilty are those who are capable of penance, the ones who knew, or could know, and yet walked in ways which self analysis

<sup>11</sup> I largely agree with Jaspers on this point, though the TRC process raised fundamental questions about the need to reform or even transform the criminal justice system to bring it closer to the ideal of restorative justice. See Verwoerd (1999) for a more detailed discussion of the complex issues surrounding (criminal) justice and the TRC.

<sup>12</sup> In other words, those who supported their state's engagement in a war of aggression, share responsibility for the war and its consequences, while the shared political responsibility of those citizens who opposed the actions of their state—like Walzer, a prominent left-wing political theorist, who was a vocal opponent of US involvement in the Vietnam War—is limited to the consequences of the war.

reveals to them as culpable error—whether conveniently closing their eyes to events, or permitting themselves to be intoxicated, seduced or bought with personal advantages, or obeying from fear (1971:41f).

S.J. Massey (in Kritz 1995:208) clarifies moral guilt further when he states that attributions of moral responsibility for actions or failure to act arise in contexts where we want to know to what extent the actor is morally blameworthy or morally obliged to make amends<sup>13</sup>. This kind of inquiry considers both the causal relationship of the actor to the harm concerned and such factors as the actor's knowledge and ability to control his/her conduct. Assignment of moral responsibility implies that 'the actor must answer or account for his conduct and that he is properly blameworthy when he should and could have acted differently' (Massey in Kritz 1995:208)<sup>14</sup>.

Though this kind of inquiry is to some extent similar to the process of determining legal responsibility, it is important to emphasise that attributing moral responsibility is a matter of degree. In this sense moral responsibility can be contrasted with the 'all-or-nothing' decisions, which characterise judgements in a court of law whereby guilt must be established 'beyond all reasonable doubt' and the stringent requirements of due process must be met. This difference is of particular importance where the complicated contribution of individual action to collective action (e.g. of a ruling elite in a political system) is under consideration<sup>15</sup>. I am, therefore, restricting myself in this case to questions of moral answerability instead of legal culpability.

In applying the above distinctions to white apartheid South Africa it appears to be relatively easy, on the one hand, to exonerate those who merely voted for

<sup>13</sup> Though there is a tendency to equate questions about moral responsibility with questions about (legal) culpability, it is important to note that (moral) responsibility is not only concerned with blame and guilt, but also with when it is right to praise people for their actions, or to feel proud about our own actions (Glover 1970:1). Further differences: legal culpability in civil law suits (e.g. law of tort) does not necessarily imply moral condemnation as is typically the case with criminal guilt. And criminal legal guilt is not always a sign of immoral, wrong behaviour, e.g. Gandhi, Martin Luther King, most anti-apartheid activists' breaking of certain racist laws (Levinson 1973:48-9).

<sup>14</sup> See also Glover (1970:19) and Hart (1968).

<sup>15</sup> See the rejection by Levinson (1973) and Massey (in Kritz 1995:210) of the legalistic approach taken by the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, which regarded less than substantial participation in certain activities as equivalent to no contribution at all.

successive NP governments from criminal guilt. They are, per definition, not likely candidates if the new government were to decide on a Nuremberg type trial of those who committed war crimes during the recent internal war between the apartheid state and the liberation movements<sup>16</sup>. It is also relatively straightforward, on the other hand, to conclude that the white electorate in general is politically guilty<sup>17</sup>.

The applicability of *moral guilt* is more complicated. In the first place, because the determination of moral guilt is, according to Jaspers, up to the individual and her/his conscience alone, though, 'we are free to talk with one another, in so far as we are in communication, and morally to help each other to achieve clarity' (1971:41). There is wisdom in Jaspers' advocacy of the suspension of 'moral sentence on the other', as far as this kind of guilt is concerned, but I think he goes too far. Of course one must start with self-judgement and be humble and exercise great caution when 'passing sentence' on other people, given the capacity for evil in every human being. The point is, however, that when we judge ourselves,

we necessarily judge other people with whom we share a common life. And how is it possible to criticize and blame our leaders, as we sometimes must do, without involving their enthusiastic followers? Though responsibility is always personal and particular, moral life is always collective in character (Walzer 1977:298).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Miller (1990; 1991) for a defense of the notion of an 'internal war' between mainly the ANC and the South African state.

<sup>17</sup> I realise that the situation in South Africa (say from the start of armed resistance in 1960 until the unbanning of the ANC and other organisations in 1990) is not as 'black and white' (morally speaking) as the case of Nazi Germany. Cf. Simpson's (1986) evaluation of the situation in Northern Ireland, which illustrates the complexities of an internal, civil war (with victims from both sides having to live together, no clear victor) vs. external wars. See also Kinghorn's (1994) arguments why apartheid was not (to the same extent) genocidal as Nazism. I believe the above mentioned notion of political guilt is still applicable to white South Africans, though those who sincerely attempted to distinguish between apartheid and 'separate development', who justified their actions as the defense of hard won rights to self-determination from British imperialism, who fought what they believed was a 'holy war' against the 'total onslaught' of the SACP/ANC Alliance, will probably not agree. We who had the right to vote, who were privileged members of a racially exclusive modern state are, at least, politically, liable for the rather ambitious leadership, the 'overreaching nationalism' (Walzer), and the unjust war (Miller (1990; 1991); Lacey (1986); Walzer (1977) of the pre-1994 National Party regime.

Secondly, marking out moral guilt is a more taxing task since it requires one to attend carefully to the moral defences of those who appear to be blameworthy. Before I challenge some of these defences typically offered by white South Africans in connection with past human rights violations, it is necessary to introduce a few further distinctions.

### 3 Evaluating excuses

In the first place there is the distinction by Walzer and Austin between a *justification* and an *excuse*. They argue that though these two moral defences might seem to be similar, there is a crucial distinction at stake: 'an excuse is typically an admission of fault ... a justification is typically a denial of fault and an assertion of innocence' (Walzer 1974:170). In the latter case 'we accept responsibility but deny that it was bad', for example, 'I killed him in the exercise of my right to defend myself' or 'I was provoked', whereas in the case of excuses 'we admit that it was bad but don't accept full, or even any, responsibility' (Austin 1979:176). For example, 'I'm terribly sorry I hurt you, but it was an accident, I didn't mean to' or 'they forced me to do it'.

These examples emphasise that within each kind of moral defence, within each type of answer to the question 'Why did you do it?' (Lucas 1993:4), further distinctions can be made between different kinds of justification and different kinds of excuse. For the purposes of this article I restrict myself to the standard, Aristotelian classification of excuses under the headings of ignorance and compulsion, which can be applied to acts of commission and acts of omission<sup>18</sup>.

It is furthermore important to stress that the classification of excuses only prepares the ground for the difficult task of judging the quality of a specific moral defence. In other words, one must still decide whether a specific excuse is a 'good excuse', or only a 'poor excuse' and, therefore, whether the accused person(s) should carry no, or diminished, or full responsibility. In this regard I find it useful to distinguish between 'mitigating excuses' (diminished responsibility and limited blame) and 'exculpatory excuses' (no blame, no responsibility) (Moody-Adams 1994:293). Under certain circumstances the claim of ignorance, for example, can be a mitigating excuse, while a similar type of claim by another person in another context might count as an exculpatory excuse.

To make this kind of moral judgement is therefore not an easy task. Glover emphasises that there is, in the case of any particular plea, 'not a morally neutral test by which we could tell whether it is a justification or whether it is an excuse'

(1970:55)<sup>19</sup>. There is 'range of toughness and leniency', in deciding, for example, what counts as negligence in the case of a claim of ignorance or 'how much my doing what I should must be to my own disadvantage before it becomes unreasonable to require me to do it' (1970:61).

These theoretical distinctions allow us to deal with some of the typical excuses forwarded by white South Africans. A common response amongst white South Africans when faced with testimonies by victims before the TRC, or revelations about a chain of shallow graves across the country containing the remains of activists who were tortured and killed, has been 'but I didn't know'—as someone put it, 'I feel as I've been caught for a sucker'. As far as this claim of ignorance is concerned I want to begin by acknowledging impediments to moral criticism and responsible agency. I acknowledge in particular the powerful blinding and binding effects of cultural and societal conditioning.

I accept the fact that apartheid-society and (Afrikaner) culture shaped, for example, my own identity and limited awareness about past human rights violations by state security forces. At a general level there is clearly a link between culture, society and individual agency—to be human is to be cultured' (Kluckhohn in Moody-Adams 1994:291). And in this regard I find that Z. Bauman's 'sociological theory of morality'—which addresses the 'social nature of evil ... the social reproduction of immoral behaviour' in the light of the Holocaust experience (1989)—helps to explain how it is possible for many people to claim (with relative sincerity) 'I didn't know'. I also realise that in my evaluation of this type of excuse I must bear in mind that it is never easy to come to an awareness which might complicate one's membership of, for example, a privileged white, male, middle class elite. In this regard Kwame Anthony Appiah refers to an all too human 'cognitive incapacity', a reluctance to face up to facts, 'to give up beliefs which play a part in justifying the special advantages we gain from our positions in the social order' (1992:20). Not surprisingly he uses (many) white South Africans' continuing racism during the long years of apartheid as a good example of this notion of ideology as

<sup>19</sup> For example a pacifist might say of a man who fought in the Second World War that his action was wrong, but was excusable in view of the threat of Nazism, while a non-pacifist might say that to fight in such a war needs no excuse since it can be justified (Glover 1970:55). In the case of South Africa there are also those from the previous regime (e.g. former President P.W. Botha, architect of the 'total onslaught' ideology, or white, Afrikaner right-wing groupings) who are still trying to *justify* everything they did. In footnote 16 I mention some of the reasons why I reject these justifications. Compare also the international consensus in the human rights community that certain gross violations such as torture can never be justified.

<sup>18</sup> See Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* (1110a10-1111b1); Lucas (1993:1-12); Glover (1970:57-63).

false consciousness (Appiah 1992:20-22)<sup>20</sup>.

This acknowledgement of impediments to moral criticism and responsible agency may, however, be taken too far. The fact that it is difficult to recognise injustices in one's own society does not mean this recognition is impossible – as illustrated by people like Beyers Naudé and Bram Fischer. More generally, M.M. Moody-Adams argues against an 'inability thesis' which gives cultural impediments too much influence and is bound up with claims about diminished responsibility. This thesis 'dangerously ignores the common, and culpable, tendency simply to affect ignorance of the possibility that some cultural practice might be morally flawed' (Moody-Adams 1994:298). She thus wants to give Aquinas' challenging notion of 'affected ignorance'<sup>21</sup> its due, i.e. 'choosing not to know what one can and should know' (Moody-Adams 1994:296). She concedes that *affected ignorance* is a complex phenomenon, but, according to her, 'it sometimes simply involves refusing to consider whether some practice in which one participates might be wrong'. Examples would be the belated, limited moral criticism of the practice of slavery in the USA by those who benefited from this institution, or a common tendency to avoid acknowledging our human fallibility, such as the university administrator who refuses to investigate charges of wrongdoing because his colleague could not possibly be guilty of, say, sexual harassment. The point Moody-Adams wants to underscore is that 'affected ignorance is a common accompaniment of wrongdoing', that it illuminates the 'banality of wrongdoing'<sup>22</sup> by challenging a 'self-deceptive complacency about the potential each individual human being has to support and engage in morally culpable conduct' (299).

A similar kind of challenge is posed by J.N. Shklar's notion of 'passive injustice' (1990:40). With this notion she draws our attention to the moral significance of indifference. Passive injustice means, according to her, that unjust persons are not only those committing unjust acts, but also those who 'shut their eyes to the injustice that prevails in their midst', those who ignore the claims of victims of

<sup>20</sup> See also Lotter (1993a:41-70) on the challenges posed to the identification of injustice in many radically unjust societies, and Crocker (1991:162) on the disadvantages of being an insider, such as being too close to get your community's values and practices into focus requisite for ethical assessment and being inhibited by 'debts' of loyalties, favours, promises owed to members of the group(s) to which one belongs.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Aquinas *Summa Theologiae* (1-2.6,8).

<sup>22</sup> Moody-Adams believes that Hanna Arendt's insights about the 'banality of evil'—the terrifying 'normality' of people like Eichmann, the ability of ordinary citizens to commit evil, to make even terrible evil part of the 'routine' of their lives—can be employed to illuminate some features of human wrongdoing (1994:298, note 19).

injustice, those who are 'morally deaf and dissociated' (42,48f)—for example, 'when we do not report crimes...when we tolerate political corruption, and when we silently accept laws that we regard as unjust, unwise or cruel' (6)<sup>23</sup>. And Jaspers, too, is quite convinced that passivity, acts of omission in the face of evil, place 'upon the individual a moral guilt .... Blindness for the misfortune of others, lack of imagination of the heart, inner indifference toward the witnessed evil—that is moral guilt' (1971:45).

As far as the widespread claim of ignorance amongst white South Africans today is concerned, the preceding discussion leads me to the conclusion that, generally speaking, ignorance induced through the workings of apartheid-society does not count as an exculpatory excuse. It provides, at best, a mitigating excuse<sup>24</sup>. I say at best, because the crucial point is that the (sincere) expression of regret *ex post facto* is actually a precondition for this claim of ignorance to count at all as an excuse<sup>25</sup>. That is, if I by accident hurt someone, the fact that I afterwards did not feel sorry, did not feel any remorse or even regret, implies that I would have been quite happy to bring the hurt about. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that if I had foreseen it, I would have acted exactly as I did. This action certainly would not have been 'an accident'. Hence, my not being subsequently sorry can make me answerable for the unintended consequences of my previous action. My not regretting now makes me to have been responsible then (Lucas 1993:276-277).

Or, as a variation on the parable of the bicycle at the beginning of this paper, and assuming that John represents the typical white security branch policeman, imagine a typical NP supporter, Piet, meeting Tom and saying: 'Hi Tom, I've seen you on TV talking about John torturing and killing your brother. It was very interesting, because I never knew our police did those kind of things .... Well, nice meeting you, good bye'? Is not the least one would expect for Piet to acknowledge

<sup>23</sup> Shklar is primarily interested in the contribution of passive citizens to the sum of iniquity in a constitutional democracy like the United States. Even though Apartheid S.A. certainly was not a constitutional democracy (cf. Lotter a/b 1993), I find it useful to employ her ideas to illuminate the moral responsibility of 'ordinary white South Africans'.

<sup>24</sup> This type of conclusion, based on the notions of affected ignorance and passive injustice, can, of course, also be applied to a few other people in a few other countries. Whether this implication amounts to a problematic 'normalization' (watering down) of wrongdoing in South Africa—especially if one accepts the international condemnation of apartheid as an exceptional 'crime against humanity'—is a question which I don't discuss at this stage. Cf. the critics of Arendt's notion of the 'banality of evil' (Moody-Adams 1994:298).

<sup>25</sup> See Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* (1110b19-24).

the suffering that Tom and his family have gone through, that what happened was wrong, to say something like, 'I was shocked when I heard your testimony (amongst the many others), I didn't know this was happening, I deeply regret that a member of my community did this to you ...'? And if these words of regret are the end of the story for Piet, I am sure that Tom, like many survivors before the TRC, would ask: 'Are you really sorry? What about my brother's wife and children, who are barely surviving without a breadwinner in the house?'

I will return later to the issue of shared responsibility for John's actions raised by this variation on the parable. At this stage my main concern is to show the limited and qualified moral defence offered by a claim of ignorance. To say 'but I didn't know' is not an easy way out, this claim does not remove all moral blame, nor the moral obligation to make amends<sup>26</sup>.

This brings me to a brief discussion of the less common<sup>27</sup>, second type of excuse based on 'compulsion'. Here the issue is not ignorance but fear—I knew what was happening to activists, but I was too afraid to protest/intervene'. In his evaluation of Shklar's notion of 'passive injustice', H.P.P. Lotter wonders whether she does not oversimplify the issue as the injustice of not assisting those who could be helped, is a function 'not simply of the needs of the victims we notice and the possibility of helping them, but also of the costs and the risks that would be involved in rendering assistance to those victims' (Murphy 1991:444 in Lotter 1993b:131).

In this regard I want to refer to the 'two lessons' which, according to Bauman, are contained in the Holocaust 'for the whole of humanity'. The first lesson is:

the facility with which most people, put into a situation that does not contain a good choice, or renders such a good choice very costly, argue themselves away from the issue of moral duty (or fail to argue themselves towards it), adopting instead the precepts of rational interest and self-preservation. In a system where rationality and ethics point in opposite directions, humanity is the main loser .... (Bauman 1989:206)

The second lesson confirms the fact that the presence of risks and threats do not count as exculpatory excuses:

<sup>26</sup> Questions surrounding the making of amends, such as the nature of sincere apology, different kinds of restitution and reparation etc., are addressed elsewhere. See Govier and Verwoerd (2001) (forthcoming); Shriver (1995).

<sup>27</sup> Less common as far as ordinary citizens are concerned, though it is quite common for soldiers and members of the police force to claim 'we had to follow orders'.

... putting self-preservation above moral duty is in no way predetermined, inevitable and inescapable. One can be pressed to do it, but one cannot be forced to do it, and *thus one cannot really shift the responsibility for doing it on to those who exerted the pressure*. It does not matter how many people chose moral duty over the rationality of self-preservation—what does matter is that some did .... The testimony of the few who did resist shatters the authority of the logic of self-preservation. It shows it for what it is in the end—a choice (Bauman 1989:207, e.a.).

A similar position is taken by Jaspers. He acknowledges that 'impotence excuses, no moral law demands a spectacular death ... [but] impotent submission always left a margin of activity which, though not without risk, could still be cautiously effective' (1971:45). In his discussion of the moral responsibilities of citizens in the face of U.S. aggression during the War in Vietnam, Walzer adopts the following principle from Gray's philosophical memoir of World War II: 'The greater the possibility of free action in the communal sphere, the greater the degree of guilt for evil deeds done in the name of everyone' (in Walzer 1977:298). In his application of this 'the more one can do, the more one has to do' principle, Walzer emphasises the particular responsibilities generated by a war situation: 'When the issue is war, the obligation is stronger, for it is not a question of doing good, but of preventing serious harm, and harm that will be done in the name of my own political community—hence, in some sense, in my own name' (1977:301).

Thus my conclusion as far as an excuse appealing to 'compulsion' is concerned is again that we are dealing with a mitigating and not an exculpatory excuse. Somebody might feel that this conclusion still comes too easily. He/she might want to argue that I am being too harsh and unreasonable, that individual supporters of NP governments cannot fairly be held responsible for gross human rights violations, committed by agents of the State like Benzi and De Kock, and resulting from laws, policies and strategies over which they had very little direct influence.

#### 4 'But I did not do it ...'—collective guilt and shared responsibility revisited

My response to the above-mentioned criticism would be to challenge a too easy 'apartheid'/separation between individual and collective moral responsibility. It is important to notice, in the first place, that Jaspers himself qualifies his apparently clear-cut distinction between collective, but impersonal, political guilt and individual, personal moral guilt. On the one hand, he wants to maintain this distinction to escape the pitfalls of crude, indiscriminate collective judgement, of 'tribal thinking'. History is full of examples, as we saw again recently in Bosnia and Rwanda, where the

'barbarism of war has seized whole populations and delivered them to pillage, rape and sale into slavery' (1971:49)<sup>28</sup>. He warns, on the other hand, that 'our dissection of the guilt concepts can be turned into a trick, for getting rid of guilt' (1971:48). He then goes on to formulate the element of truth in 'collective thinking' as follows:

There is a sort of collective moral guilt in a people's way of life which I share as an individual, and from which grow political realities ... the way of life effects political events, and the resulting political conditions in turn place their imprint on the way of life ... these conditions are part of us even if we oppose them. *This is why there can be no radical separation of moral and political guilt* (1971:49-50, e.a.).

Many people, especially those with a legal frame of mind, will still find this 'element of truth' rather troublesome as far as the assignment of individual responsibility is concerned. After all, 'as with criminal responsibility, a group member is morally responsible only if there are present both an *actus reus* (criminal act), primarily in the form of the member's contribution to achieving the group's objective, and certain *mens rea* (criminal intent), primarily in the form of knowledge' (about the group's objectives) (Massey 1995:209).

It is difficult, but not impossible, to establish an individual white NP supporter's causal relation to the gross human rights violations committed by security agents of the apartheid state. When we deal with an individual who made a small contribution—say through his voting or affected ignorance and other acts of omission—the case for the exculpation of individual guilt does appear to be strong. However, Massey's work on difficult 'assistance-in-prosecution' cases (in the context of the enforcement of certain provisions in U.S. Immigration Law) opens up interesting possibilities for thinking about the diffused causal responsibility of individual NP supporters. Massey applies Parfit's moral theory in which the latter explicitly takes account of the way that the contributions of many individuals can combine to produce substantial harm (or benefit) (Massey in Kritz 1995:211). Parfit's important conclusion is based on an expanded notion of the 'relevant effects' in terms of which a specific act might be judged: 'A particular act is wrong because of its effects, even though the individual act on an individual level is seemingly insignificant, because the relevant effects include both the effects of the particular act as well as the effects of the set of acts to which the particular act belongs' (in Massey 1995:212). This theory offers the possibility to maintain the connection between moral and causal responsibility, even in the case of a (relatively) small contribution to, for example, the manifold harms of the apartheid system, such as the systematic

<sup>28</sup> See also Levinson (1973), Zvie Bar-on (1984-5) in this regard.

torturing of political activists confirmed by the TRC<sup>29</sup>.

R. Aronson's metaphor of a 'spiral of responsibility' (1990) helps to explain further an individual citizen's responsibility for actions produced elsewhere in the complex division of labour which makes the functioning of the modern nation-state possible and in which the individual participates. 'The many-layered spiral of co-operation of the modern South African state moves outward from those at home who perform and command to those, even overseas, who profit or acquiesce or even turn away' (1990:76). He also suggests that as 'millions of "good Germans"' and the rest of German society are 'part of the web of institutional functioning, ideological support, and political complicity' which made the Holocaust possible, there is 'another vast web of complicity today [which] supports apartheid' (1990:65).

This 'spiral of cooperation' or 'vast web of complicity' is illustrated, to a large extent, by the testimony of major Craig M. Williamson before the TRC:

Our weapons, ammunition, uniforms, vehicles, radios and other equipment were all developed and provided by industry. Our finances and banking were done by bankers who even gave us covert credit cards for covert operations. Our Chaplains prayed for our victory and our universities educated us in war. Our propaganda was carried by the media and our political masters were voted back into power time after time with ever increasing majorities. It is therefore not only the task of the members of the Security Forces to examine themselves and their deeds. It is for every member of the society we served to do so<sup>30</sup>.

Contrary to Massey, Aronson states explicitly that the purpose of his *description* of the specific roles by all those who may be regarded as 'active or passive participants' is not the *ascription* of legal guilt, nor to lay the moral stigma of apartheid before the door of all who are to blame. He does not want to 'invoke guilt about the past but rather action in the present'. The question he wants to pose by describing the 'spiral of responsibility' is 'what shall be done by those who share in the evil'? The goal is 'to build bridges towards the dominant whites, to lay the basis for future reconciliation' (1990:75f).

<sup>29</sup> Parfit labels as the 'Second Mistake in Moral Mathematics' the claim: 'If some act is right or wrong *because of its effects*, the only relevant effects are the effects of this particular act' (Massey in Kritz 1995:212 note 257) (e.i.o.). (Giving this principle a 'mathematical' connotation might give the unfortunate impression that moral judgements are of a precise, quantitative nature.)

<sup>30</sup> TRC Military Forces hearing, Cape Town, Oct. 1997.



I support this shift from (legal) guilt to a creative concern about responsibility and reconciliation, although I think Aronson does not go far enough. He helps us to think about the complex causality underlying actions by state agents and to be cautious about the ascription of moral responsibility becoming a counter-productive blaming and stigmatising. However, he still seems to concentrate too much on the causal dimension of responsibility. This brings me to the work of J.R. Lucas (1993).

## 5 Crying over spilt milk?

Lucas warns against an exclusive consequentialist focus on actions as causes. Lucas' notion of actions as causes and communications can be used, I believe, to undermine a too narrow assimilation of moral to causal responsibility. Lucas covers familiar ground when he affirms that though the causal face of actions—the fact that actions bring about results—must be taken seriously, one must not forget that actions also manifest reasons, they communicate what the agent had in mind/intended when he/she acted. When he draws our attention to the 'non-privative' logic of reasons, he helps to direct us through the more unfamiliar territory of collective guilt, he provides one with a grip on the diffuse logic of shared responsibility.

Very briefly, the different steps in his argument for, at least, the conceptual possibility of collective responsibility seem to be the following: the first step is that reasons are 'not privative in the way that material objects are. My having a reason does not exclude you having it too, and one of the prime purposes of communication is to bring it about that we share reasons' (1993:75, 57-74). The second step is 'that since reasons are inherently shareable, actions, which are the implementations of reasons, are shareable too'. The third step is 'if we, ye, and they can be said to do something, we, ye, and they can be asked why they did it, and be required to account for what was done' (1993:75).

These conceptual links do not mean, Lucas is quick to add, that the limits to collective responsibility can be easily determined. For example, he asks, 'can young Germans today be held responsible for the atrocities of the Nazis, all of them committed long before they were born .... was Britain ever really responsible for the Amritsar massacre?' (1993:77). Lucas accepts that in these cases the ascription of responsibility is probably unjust. On the other hand, the absolute denial of responsibility is also problematic. It is insensitive to the meaning, the logic of the concept 'responsibility'. The vital point is that 'responsibility is not a concept belonging to the natural sciences ... (it) is not just a physical concept subject to the standard physical constraints of locality and temporal antecedence, but is, rather, concerned with the significance of actions and their interpretation, where it is perfect-

ly possible for the meaning to be altered *ex post facto*' (Lucas 1993:77,277)<sup>31</sup>.

The importance of this for my focus on the moral responsibility of (at least) NP supporters *and their children* becomes clear when Lucas illustrates this 'non-physical' logic of responsibility as follows:

As we enter into the inheritance of our predecessors, we undertake some responsibility for what they did in the process of producing those good things we now enjoy. We cannot eat the fruits of their labours and wash our hands of the stains of their toil. At the very least we take on some civil liability to make reparation for what was done in the course of producing these benefits. But often our responsibility goes further than that. We identify with our forebears, and make their values our own. In so far as we take pride in what our predecessors have done ... we identify also with the bad things they have done, and make their misdeeds our misdeeds for which we must answer ... (1993:77).

This kind of (moral) answering for deeds to which one might be indirectly connected, both in terms of causality and motivation, is important for the sake of the victims (and the descendants) of those misdeeds and injustices. For, contrary to proverbial wisdom, it might be worth crying over spilt milk<sup>32</sup>. This is obviously the case where I am clearly causally responsible for the spilling, if the crying conveys to

<sup>31</sup> Lucas refers to this as an example of 'Cambridge change', i.e. where a subsequent event alters the antecedent state of affairs (1993:77, 93, 276-77).

<sup>32</sup> It is important to clarify misunderstandings that might arise from my use of this metaphor. Expressions such as 'what is the use of crying over spilt milk', 'it is water under the bridge' or 'moenie ou koeie uit die sloot grawe nie' (don't dig old cows out of the ditch) have been used by opponents of the TRC process to indicate their preference for focusing on the future instead of the past. The politics and ethics of memory and forgetting is another huge topic beyond the scope of this article (see Verwoerd in Villa-Vicencio and Verwoerd, 2000). In this article I re-interpret the expression 'crying over spilt milk' as a metaphor to explain why even young white South Africans born after 1994 have a certain obligation to respond with moral sensitivity to past wrongs committed by people to whom they are connected in various ways. I do *not* imply that gross violations such as killing and torture can be equated with the spilling of milk. I furthermore do not suggest that 'crying' should necessarily be taken literally, nor that sincere expressions of remorse or regret are sufficient ways to accept shared moral responsibility. On the importance of *practical amends*, see Govier and Verwoerd (2001), and on the process of reconciliation in general, see Verwoerd in Verwoerd and Mabizela (2000).



oneself and to others (especially the victims) the message that the spilling was not intentional, is not part of one's autobiographical record one would be proud to recite (cf. Lucas 1993:37). 'The crying does not get the milk back into the churn, but does alter the significance of the event' (Lucas 1993:37). The crying takes the victims' tears, their sense of injustice, very seriously. Thus it might contribute to the overcoming of what has been experienced as an insult, even though the injury cannot be made good in many cases (Lucas 1993:37).

This healing potential of visible moral sensitivity to the victims' suffering remains relevant, it seems to me, even if the milk was spilled by members of the group(s) to which one belongs. Their hands might have caused the spilling, but the meaning of this event is not only in their minds. The wasted milk part of their story is also part of my history. To some extent they are co-writers of my autobiography. And if I recite these shared parts without any tears, without any signs of sorrow, I am saying implicitly that I actually approve of what they did. Thus, not only am I adding another insult to the victims, (and their descendants') injuries, I am allowing the sins of the spillers to be (legitimately) visited upon their second and third and fourth generations—for 'just as my not being subsequently sorry can make me responsible for the unintended consequences of my previous action, so I may become responsible for the previous wrongs of my society' (Lucas 1993:277).

As far as the shared responsibility of descendants of white NP supporters under the apartheid system is concerned, B. Lennon (1995) takes us beyond Lucas' emphasis on the logic of the *concept* responsibility to a more explicit notion of shared responsibility based on a shared collective/group *identity*. He distinguishes the association of *responsibility* with (legal) guilt from a meaning of responsibility that has more to do with *duty*. He applies this latter meaning to German people after World War II and to British as well as Irish people in Northern Ireland. He argues that because of the wrongs committed by members of the group to which someone belongs, that person has a particular duty to be concerned about the welfare of the group that has been wronged. So, for example, a young German today bears no guilt for the Holocaust, but that does not relieve him/her—in contrast to a young Australian—from all responsibility to be concerned about the welfare of Jewish people *because of the Holocaust*. Similarly, most Irish people are not guilty of the atrocities committed by the IRA and have explicitly rejected the violence. 'But the IRA are part of the Irish people, just as the Nazis were part of the German people [therefore] the Irish play a special role in seeking the welfare of British people as a result' (1995:116f).

In terms of the parable of the bicycle this means that if I—as a young, white, Afrikaans-speaking South African, whose family is closely associated with apartheid NP governments—meet the child of Tom's brother today, and say to him, 'I need reconciliation now'—without acknowledging what a white, male, Afrikaans-speaking

South African policeman did to his father, in my name—it is highly likely that his justified response will be: 'What about my father?' The fundamental point is: the past will not be past until I have at least distanced myself from what was done in my name and made some contribution to help victims and their descendants to overcome the consequences of those past wrongs. In other words, unless I accept my shared responsibility for at least rectifying the consequences of past violations committed in my name, that painful past will continue to haunt my relationships with those related to the violated.

Those who still see no basis for this answering for misdeeds for which I am not directly, causally responsible, who want to reject this sharing of responsibility, who prefer to think of themselves as solitary authors of their own biographies, might want to bear in mind that shared responsibility is not necessarily just a heavy burden to shoulder. It might produce substantial benefits. The sharing of responsibility,

not only flows from our being associated together in a community, but helps to create a sense of community. It is by taking pride in the deeds of my predecessors that I identify with them, and come to have an identity which makes sense of who I am. I cannot properly say who I am unless I can also say who we are. The alternative is alienation (Lucas 1993:80).

Of course, the identification is more complicated and painful when the misdeeds of predecessors are at stake. On the one hand, I am owning up to their actions, I am accepting responsibility for 'our' deeds, I am not denying my involvement with them. On the other hand, I am disowning these actions, I am acknowledging that the reasons they acted on then are reasons I no longer can endorse now. I am expressing regret (on our behalf) and am embarking on some form of reparation. I am confessing, in a sense, our misdeeds. Therefore those who rightly condemn those misdeeds need no longer be estranged from me now—if they accept my apology (Lucas 1993:10).

In other words, acknowledging shared responsibility can be quite liberating (Jaspers 1971:50). This acknowledgement could be liberating for victims, since their humanity and sense of injustice is recognised. And this acceptance of shared responsibility can contribute to the transformation of my own identity towards a deeper sense of community – as an Afrikaner and as a South African—and, therefore, a richer sense of who I am.

## 6 Concluding remarks

There is, of course, a danger that a conception of shared responsibility might be too general, thus dulling in some a 'sense of real responsibility that leads to effective

action. What is the general responsibility of all becomes the responsibility of nobody in particular' (Lucas 1993:38). This pervasive notion of guilt can also become a temptation to 'wallow with everybody else in a ritual beating of the collective breast, generally feeling bad about things without actually doing anything to make anything better' (Lucas 1993:38).

In this paper I have tried to steer a course between the two extremes: of moral overburdening, of ascribing too much responsibility, on the one hand, and of moral escapism, of attributing too little responsibility, on the other hand. In this process I've become even more aware that 'moral accounting is difficult and imprecise' (Walzer 1977:303). I also agree with Aronson that the clarification and creative acceptance of shared responsibility for past violations remains an important, unfinished part of the reconciliation process<sup>33</sup>.

Let me conclude with some comments on a crucial, unfinished part of my reflection on shared responsibility for past violations. I have concentrated on shared responsibility for past deeds committed in my name by agents of the apartheid regime. However, apartheid itself was a gross human rights violation, a crime against humanity<sup>34</sup>. To return to the parable of the bicycle: if I as a privileged, white South African was to meet the son of Tom, he would be justified in asking not only about his uncle who was killed by the security police. If I express an interest in reconciliation, he might well ask '*... and what about my bad health, because we never had enough food to eat, and what about the hours I had to walk to my rundown school and back because there wasn't even enough money to buy me a bicycle, what about my children today who still don't have enough food, nor any bicycles...?*' As a white South African, I benefited greatly in terms of access to land, housing, education, health care, business opportunities etc. under this system of systematic racial discrimination. And my children continue to benefit from my past privileges. What is our moral responsibility as *beneficiaries* of apartheid?

As was the case with my narrower focus on the shared responsibility of former NP supporters (and their children), it is again crucial to clarify the moral weight of being an apartheid beneficiary. Even though the system of apartheid has rightly been declared as a crime against humanity, this does not mean that those who

<sup>33</sup> See Shriver's (1995) moral and empirical claims about the importance of moral judgement with regard to a conflict-ridden past. He argues that this kind of 'moral truth' is a necessary condition for the achievement of forgiveness in politics, for former enemies to be able to constructively live together in one society. Other conditions are forbearance/restraint from revenge, empathy for the humanity of former enemies, and a commitment to the reconstruction of (civil) relationships (1993). See also Kritz (1995).

<sup>34</sup> See TRC Report, vol. 1, ch. 4, appendix.

have and continue to benefit from this massive crime are criminals. If being a beneficiary of apartheid implies being branded as a buddy of Benzien, de Kock and their cohorts, then this label indeed becomes an overwhelming, unfair burden. It is therefore important to emphasise that being a beneficiary is not the outcome of individual choice, nor intentional action. It is the product of *group* privilege. Even those whites who opposed apartheid are beneficiaries, because they were also members of a group that was systematically, unjustly privileged in terms of access to land, capital and so on.

Perhaps we need to develop a different language of 'responsibility' to prevent understandable resistance among ordinary, law-abiding whites, especially among the post-1990 generation, to being criminalized for benefits they had little control over. Perhaps we could speak of our '*response-ability*' as beneficiaries, for what we do have control over is how we respond to the past. We have a choice about what we do with our benefits in response to the ongoing suffering of the previously disadvantaged. Beneficiaries cannot change the facts about systematic past privileging, but we can diminish the destructive impact of past disadvantages on the present and the future. Most beneficiaries are not 'responsible' in the dominant, legal sense of intentionally causing disadvantages. But if we as beneficiaries continue blindly as if we are only individuals, with no obligations arising from past benefits associated with group membership, we are adding insult to the injuries of the disadvantaged and their children.

In this regard I am haunted by an image used by Archbishop Tutu in his Foreword to the TRC Report. '[T]he greatest sadness we have encountered in the Commission', he wrote, 'has been the reluctance of white leaders to urge their followers to respond to the remarkable generosity of spirit shown by the victims. This reluctance, indeed this hostility, to the Commission has been like spitting in the face of victims'<sup>35</sup>.

This deeply disturbing lament highlights the weighty '*response-ability*' of former followers and/or beneficiaries: our *response* to past violations and privileging has the *ability* to harm or to heal, to cause or prevent further violations, to humiliate or to humanise.

But what does this shared *response-ability* mean in practice? Laurie Nathan's submission to the TRC is highly instructive in this regard:

[The shared responsibility of the white community] could take many forms, establishing or funding memorials like those which commemorate the holocaust in Nazi Germany, funding bursaries for Black students or basic facilities for pupils, providing medical supplies to amputee hospitals in

<sup>35</sup> TRC Report, vol. 1, ch.1.

Mozambique and Angola, church actions such as fasts and others, training in respect for human rights and multi-cultural diversity for teachers and pupils. These are only some examples. These and other actions are forms of reparation but it's critical that they are undertaken, not as charity, but in partnership with Black communities ....

Let me say in closing that Whites who interpret this argument to mean that they should become passive and sycophantic have misunderstood the nature of the challenge. The challenge is to become self-critical not uncritical, to acquire some humility, not be submissive, to become empathetic, not paternalistic. The challenge has nothing to do with self-flagellation or wallowing in guilt, it has everything to do with accepting responsibility ...<sup>36</sup>.

On 16 December 2000, the annual Day of Reconciliation, a number of white South Africans have taken up this challenge and started the *Home for All Initiative*<sup>37</sup>. This initiative commenced with a signature campaign in support of a *Declaration of Commitment*. This declaration clearly acknowledges the different shared responsibilities of those who supported apartheid—through acts of commission and/or omission—and those who were and continue to be beneficiaries. Deep regret for the suffering caused by apartheid is openly expressed, and the declaration commits the signatories to a range of actions, including the establishment of a Reconciliation and Development Fund, searching for opportunities for whites to use their skills, expertise and resources in practical efforts to promote capacity-building and development in the poorest sectors of society, while other activities and programmes will be educational and commemorative in nature.

Despite its limitations I strongly support this initiative, for I deeply believe that without

a creative acceptance of shared responsibility by former NP supporters and beneficiaries, post-apartheid South Africa will never truly become a *home* for all her sons and daughters (Luthuli 1962:206 e.a.).

Centre for Applied Ethics  
Department of Philosophy  
University of Stellenbosch

<sup>36</sup> Dr. Laurie Nathan, Director of the Centre for Conflict Resolution, former Chairperson of the End Conscription Campaign, transcript of Special Submission Event on Conscription, Cape Town, 23 July 1997.

<sup>37</sup> For more detail on this initiative, see [www.homeforall.org.za](http://www.homeforall.org.za)

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## Interviews

### At the Edge: An Interview with Ronnie Govender

Rajendra Chetty  
Associate Director (Research)  
M.L. Sultan Technikon

#### Introduction

Durban playwright, director and author, Ronnie Govender, received the 1999 Commonwealth Writer's Prize for his collection *At the Edge and Other Cato Manor Stories*. The stories, his first shift towards the prose genre after sixteen plays, explore the lives, tragedies and pathos of the South African Indian community and are set in the 1960s, the time of forced removals and open repression by the white Afrikaner regime. His oeuvre<sup>1</sup> includes successful plays like *The Lahnee's Pleasure* (1974), *Swami*, *Off-Side*, *In-Side* (1949), *At the Edge* (based on his collection of short stories) and *The 31 Million Rand Robbery*. Govender's awards include the AA Vita Award for Life-long contribution to the theatre, Playwright of the Year Award for *At the Edge*, and more recently the English Academy Medal for his contribution to South African English literature. Govender has been invited to stage his play *At the Edge* at theatre festivals in Grahamstown (a festival noted for its marginalisation of black artists during apartheid), Edinburgh, Glasgow, Toronto, Delhi and Chennai.

Govender was born in Durban in 1934 and spent his entire youth in Cato Manor, with his mother and grandmother 'spinning' stories for him and his siblings. His interest in storytelling and theatre was certainly fuelled by the impression these childhood stories made on him. He is a descendant of the 1860s Indian settlers who came to work in the sugar plantations of Natal, the so-called indentured labourers. In his fiery early adulthood Govender believed that no writer in South Africa should remain uninvolved in the struggle against apartheid; to this end he did pioneering work for several anti-apartheid sporting, cultural and literary organisations.

<sup>1</sup> Govender's plays include *Beyond Calvary*, *Swami*, *His Brother's Keeper*, *The First Stone*, *The Lahnee's Pleasure*, *Off-Side*, *In-Side*, *Blossoms From the Bough*, *The Jamal Syndrome*, *At the Edge*, *Your own Dog won't Bite you*, *Too Mucking Fuch!*, *Back-side*, and *The 31 Million Rand Robbery*. *At the Edge and other Cato Manor Stories* is Govender's first collection of short stories.

With all his accomplishments one would have expected Govender to have enjoyed considerable renown by the late 'nineties, yet he is little known outside his home province—an ironic consequence of his staunch support for the cultural boycott in previous decades, when he consistently refused to be co-opted into racialised theatre institutions.

I interviewed Ronnie Govender in my office at the ML Sultan Technikon, Durban, on May 9 2000.

Rajendra Chetty (RC) Some of your earlier plays like *The Lahnee's Pleasure*, *Off-Side* and *In-Side*, fall into the protest sub-genre. How did you handle the tensions between politics and aesthetics in your writings?

Ronnie Govender (RG) There were even earlier plays like *The First Stone*, *His Brother's Keeper*, *Nineboy* and *Swami*. The debate between politics and aesthetics is still very current in South Africa mainly because the establishment media is still dominated by critics whose perspectives were born out of a supremacist ideology. I dare say that some black critics also working in the same media followed suit with even greater alacrity. There was a time during oppression when plays did not deal with South African realities. White purveyors of theatre and their black bourgeois underlings looked to the Europeans, ignoring the fact that while these plays were universal, they sprang from the particular and the local.

The majority of South Africans were made to feel inferior and many internalised this sense of inferiority. Thus you were something of an outsider, even in your own community, if you wrote about anything local or about South African realities. That wasn't a deterrent. In fact it spurred me on. Writing about these realities or basing your work on these realities did not mean that your work did not speak to the larger world or was not aesthetically pleasing. I refused to allow myself to be circumscribed by the prevailing twisted logic. Of course, one could so easily have succumbed to it and some did, as in the case of Ansuyah Singh's play<sup>2</sup> which white liberals made so much of because it pandered to their view of the Indian middle classes being charmingly exotic creatures, as long as they kept their distance.

At that time, straying from this line of thinking was a risky business. If you strayed from the norm you were immediately accused of encouraging a culture of mediocrity. Who sets these norms? Who defines these terms? In the main they are people who have specific political and social agendas, and class interests. We must

<sup>2</sup> Ansuyah Singh was the first South African Indian writer to write a novel. Her oeuvre includes *Behold the Earth Mourns* (1960) and *Cobwebs in the Garden* (1966), published by Drakensburg Press, Durban. The play was an adaptation of the first text.

always be vigilant about these lurking agents of reaction and constantly challenge their convenient assertions.

RC In terms of the aesthetics of the English language, you have used the South African Indian working class patois extensively in plays like *The Lahnee's Pleasure*. Any reasons for that specific language usage?

RG It was necessary to take patois out of its private life, the self-conscious domain and give it a legitimacy beyond the proscenium arch, once the preserve of the malleable middle-class, badgered into soulless conformity by a dominant culture. One can say that this is not the King's English and therefore is not literature. What, pray, then is the metaphor of James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, Brendan Behan's *Borstal Boy*, the poems of Dumbudzo Marechera, or of Reggae poetry? Is this not the very strength of the English language, that it can so deeply touch and link the hearts and minds of people through its elasticity and dynamism?

However, it was inevitable that once the torch had been lit, many false bearers would attempt to carry it out of sheer opportunism. Once it was demonstrated, as *The Lahnees Pleasure* did with overwhelming success, that patois would strike a ready chord in its audience, the vultures moved in and exploited it for commercial gain, as, I am afraid, they are still doing. A spate of mediocre plays have since debased patois to the point of ethnic ridicule, caricaturing accents rather than capturing speech patterns and turns of phrase and by appealing to the lowest common denominator for laughs. In our culture of racial and ethnic stereotyping, this vulgar practice continues without compunction even in advertising in documentaries and soaps on national television and radio. I once turned down an invitation to write sequences for the local television soap opera 'Generations' because the leading Indian and Coloured characters were stereotyped as either money hungry swindlers or as hopeless drunks. The challenge is to contextualise this adaptation of language in such a way that in speaking from the heart its innate dignity and power transcends the barriers which, ironically, English as a tool of imperialism, had itself created.

There is also the tendency when dealing with patois to confuse language with accents. Some accents are easy on the ear, some are difficult to comprehend and some are funny. If you listen to the accents of a Welsh speaker of English and those of an earlier generation of South African Indians, there is not much of a difference. Yet unlike the Indian accent, the Welsh accent is not perceived as being funny. Local white comedians have often, with sadistic delight, shored up their pathetic repertoires with very broadly caricatured Applesamy and Naidoo accents.

Dialects, however, bring a dimension to language that often enhances that language and can therefore have a literary legitimacy. In the metaphor of the patois there are charming turns of phrase which reflect warm familiarity and intimacy as

with such sincere invitations as: 'Howzit bro, let's vie pozzie and catch a chow'<sup>3</sup>.

A playwright of integrity avoids playing to the gallery and appealing to the lowest common denominator. There are those, however, who use an accent that is looked upon as belonging to the lower classes and exploit it for the sake of cheap laughs. The problem is that legitimate, skilful and honest usage of patois is unfortunately lumped in with the former. The most profound and moving moments in the theatre for me were during a performance of *At The Edge* at the Edinburgh Festival when Scottish women wept during the story which arose from an experience I had at my grandmother's temple in Cato Manor and yet there were elements of patois in all the stories. There was an immediate communication across time, location and language.

RC Which writer, if any, did you admire most and had the greatest influence on your writings?

RG I think somebody who won my admiration, in my youth particularly, was Arthur Miller who wrote *A View from the Bridge* and *All my Sons*. The latter was an exciting play, a deeply moving one. Philip Roth is another exciting writer whose *Portnoy's Complaint* must be one of the most widely read novels of all time. Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal have had an immense impact on social and political imperatives in my writings. Then there are Wole Soyinka, Bertolt Brecht, Rabindranath Tagore, Dambudzo Marechera, R.K. Narayan, Rohinton Mistry, J.M. Coetzee, Arundathi Roy and Njabulo Ndebele.

RC You were able to straddle the genres of drama and prose (specifically short stories) with ease. How do they differ in the actual writing?

RG The challenge in writing plays is brevity. The more economical the language, the more powerful the play. One has to be very disciplined in the use of words to catch a whole world within a hour and a half. This discipline, I think, has helped me with the short story genre because here too you cannot have the luxury of verbosity. The novel appears to be a different kind of animal.

RC Apart from *The Lahnee's Pleasure* that was published in 1980 by Ravan Press, none of your other plays have been published. What are the reasons for this?

RG Publishing houses were not interested in publishing my plays. Although I was a member of the Congress of South African Writers (COSAW), I could not push

<sup>3</sup> Translates into: 'Hello brother, let us go home and have something to eat'.

my own personal agenda in this institution, in terms of getting my own works published when the imperative was the struggle and encouraging and enhancing the writings of others. Getting published was not easy during the 'seventies and 'eighties. I tried a few times with the establishment publishing houses but was not successful. In fact, my autobiography was turned down by David Phillip Publishers because only the life narratives of eminent people were accepted and I did not fall into that category.

RC Which are your favourite works from your writings? Why?

RG I always hesitate to answer this question which I have been asked a number of times. Writing as a process is almost like giving birth. It's something that belongs to you and you feel deeply about and for it. Do mothers have favourites among their children? However, there are times when you know you have rushed something and it is not your best work.

RC I'm sure that one of the pieces of writing has given you greater enjoyment than the others?

RG *At The Edge*, for many reasons is a work that I've felt very deeply about. Perhaps, because this work is so close to the hearth I was reared at. I was born in Cato Manor and spent my youth there. Its destruction was traumatic and I think my outrage actually served to intensify my already strong sense of belonging to the district.

RC How have the critics received your writings? Have critical responses informed your subsequent writings?

RG With the possible exception of Johannesburg, we do not have a sound critical tradition in the media in this country. This is particularly so in Durban where critics in white owned media generally see things from a Eurocentric perspective. This is confounded by a shallowness, which I believe is occasioned by a resistance to the world of ideas, resistance to anything that challenges or has depth of feeling and thought. A questioning mind was dangerous to the apartheid regime. And so there was this resentment against anybody who dared to speak out or who sought to locate their writing in the realities of the day; if you did they'd immediately pigeon-hole you. I have often been the target of these spineless conformists, even to this day.

In the 'sixties my play *Beyond Calvary* broke new ground. It was hailed by the likes of Fatima Meer, Alan Paton and other intellectuals and artists. A lively discussion between myself, the actors and the audience took place after the play.



Apart from a very enthusiastic response from such knowledgeable people, it was pointed out that the play was of historical importance and that it was a most significant development in black theatre. I expected the press to, at least, reflect these views. However, the only mention of the play was in *The Natal Mercury*, a three to four line comment in eight point print merely stating that the play was based on a conflict of religions. It was far more than that. Besides this, there was not a single review.

The playwright creates from his being, he creates within a certain reality. If you located your characters in South Africa, you couldn't ignore the fact that apartheid touched their lives whether they were white or black. Realism demanded an honest look at life. When work so rooted unfolds on stage it strikes a chord in the audience and the reaction is often spontaneous. Yet these critics have chosen to ignore this excitement concentrating instead on what they consider to be political.

In 1989 I eventually accepted an invitation to the Grahamstown National Arts Festival which we had boycotted until then. Our objection to the Festival was that the Grahamstown Foundation's Charter was clearly a colonial document and the Festival itself was Eurocentric. However, after my play *At The Edge* was invited to the Baxter to be part of the People's Theatre Festival and the Congress Of South African Writers (COSAW) had taken a decision to participate in such structures with the aim of transformation in mind, we accepted the invitation to Grahamstown. The critic Humphrey Taylor was most patronising, describing the play as a collection of short stories that lacked conflict. He couldn't see—or refused to see—that indeed every one of those stories concerned a conflict. He did the same several years later when *1949* was staged at the Festival, although he was in the crowd when the entire audience gave Charles Pillai (the actor) a standing ovation.

RC What do you see as the reasons for your exclusion from the Writers' Festival organised by the University of Natal, especially in view of the fact that your writings have won international awards like the Commonwealth Writers' Prize?

RG Although I was tempted to respond publicly to my exclusion, I did not. We have precious few such festivals and I feel that we should give them as much support as possible but the organisers would do well to realise that such festivals are not there for the exercise of personal whims and fancies. The Festival belongs to the country, to the writers. Despite extending invitations to international figures these people want to keep it insular and small. It was not simply a question of inviting Ronnie Govender to the Festival, it was the snubbing of a book that dealt with a district on the University's doorstep. In fact, some of the land which University extensions were built on is land expropriated from Indian owners through the Group Areas Act. This was in fact the University saying, we don't give a shit about the destruction of Cato

Manor, let alone not recognising a book that won a prestigious international prize.

RC You have won the English Academy Medal for your contribution to South African English literature as well as the AA Vita Award for your contribution to the theatre. As a celebrated South African writer, would you like to comment on the literature curriculum of both the academe and the schools that continue to exclude local writings?

RG The civil service is clogged with people who continue to resist transformation. It is only a matter of time before they are replaced. In education, such people have resisted the selection of works by black writers to be used as school textbooks. Despite this, black teachers had a responsibility to be actively involved in the selection of readings, which they failed to live up to. White teachers continue to ensure that the syllabus of old is retained for as long as possible. However, we are beginning to see some changes. I am told that eventually my book has been recommended as a school textbook.

RC Are you optimistic that things are going to change?

RG Oh, yes, I have a great deal of faith in the future. I think we have laid the basis for many important social and cultural initiatives. Some very constructive, far-reaching laws have been passed in the fields of women's empowerment, redistribution of land, education, labour and such crucial areas. The seeds have been planted for a true human rights culture. While the foundations are being laid, it is incumbent on ordinary South Africans to become involved as part of the process instead of forever whining. For young people interested in the theatre there are more opportunities opening up in television and industrial theatre, let alone films. However, the State needs to do far more to support individual artists in the various disciplines.

There is a greater awareness of theatre that reflects South African realities. We are beginning to tell our own stories, taking a great deal more interest and pride in ourselves. We still, however, have to be constantly vigilant about neo-colonial influence through the medium of American video film and music and could well take a leaf from the Australian experience.

RC What are the reasons for the shift towards popular commercialism with plays like *The 31 Million Rand Robbery*? Incidentally, it holds the Playhouse attendance record at 93%!

RG One of the objectives in staging this production was to make money for the Playhouse during the festive season. The play had music, dance and the kind of



humour that appealed to all audiences. It made people laugh loud and long, one of the most difficult things to achieve on stage.

I asked myself what would catch people's attention and decided it would be the R31 million robbery which had caused a major stir. There were things about the play that escaped most critics' attention. Either that or they must have been upset by the play's focus on these issues. The police force was undergoing transformation at the time. Within the force there were still cops who belonged to the old era, the Neanderthals whose first response was to bash up suspects, to really manhandle them. Those suspected of the robbery, because they were Indian, were removed to the Bluff Police Station which was peopled mostly by Afrikaners, and they got bashed. The attorney acting for them told me how he desperately had to get to the station in time to remove them from the clutches of these chaps.

Now this is in no way to condone the robbery, especially where policemen are involved, but it is important to stick to a human rights culture no matter how trying this may be at times.

Although I am not partial to spectaculars, this musical was a challenge. Unlike the critics, the people enjoyed it immensely.

RC Would you like to comment on the tension that I have picked up with South African writers of Indian descent who do not wish to be labelled as Indian writers?

RG Although at various times, I have been described as an Indian South African, a South African Indian, an Asiatic, a char ou, a coolie, I know that I am a South African. So entrenched is the stereotype that the unwary can easily be trapped into the sense of displacement which hovers over migrant and expatriate communities. I know very little about Indian theatre. I am a South African playwright. I've never heard Athol Fugard being described as a European playwright, or Mbongeni Ngema as a Zulu playwright. I have no doubt about my South African-ness and I resent any suggestion that I'm not African or South African. The South African Indian has been lumbered with nasty stereotyping. He or she has to be a greasy shopkeeper, newspaper vendor, fruit seller, factory worker. He can't be a soccer player or writer.

RC Comment on the category called South African Indian writing.

RG After the success of my play, *The Lahnee's Pleasure*, at The Market Theatre, I was asked by a keen young Afrikaner reporter to tell him about Indian theatre. I said I had no idea at all and he looked at me perplexed. I patiently explained that I was a South African writer, not an Indian writer. Of course, I have located my writing in places like Cato Manor and, naturally, the people there—in

terms of the government's laws at that time—were of Indian descent, but they were no less South African. I was familiar with this location, with the people. This does not mean that in doing so, one's vision is limited. In the local and the particular is the universal; the challenge is for the writer to capture this. R.K. Narayan has written about a small community of people in the tiny village of Malgudi and yet his writing speaks of the world, to the world.

In writing about a particular people, a particular community, one must be careful not to entrench ethnicity or racialism but indeed to challenge and expose such tendencies. Yes, in that respect there is a category for what you call South African Indian writing.

RC What have you been reading recently?

RG I have just finished reading three excellent books, *Redemption Song* by Mike Marqusee, *Night Beat* by Mikal Gilmore and *Primary Colours* by an anonymous writer. *Redemption Song* is an extraordinary work on the fascinating life of the boxer Mohammed Ali. *Night Beat* is a marvellous history of rock and roll and, believe me, I just could not put down *Primary Colours*, an inside story of a United States presidential campaign in which the principals uncannily resemble the Clintons.

*Redemption Song* shows you another side of Ali, his role in the struggles of the African-American people and the protest period of the 'sixties, the time of the Beatles, Bob Dylan and the Flower Children.

RC You are currently working on your autobiography. Would you like to comment on the work in progress?

RG I am midway through the first draft. I hesitate to call my work an autobiography. It sounds a touch pompous. I have only had one book published and fourteen plays produced. Besides can one really write an autobiography, can one really publicly expose one's life, completely naked, every little detail? I prefer to call it a reflection on certain aspects of my life, on people I have interacted with and events and movements I have been associated with.

RC Do you find that there are certain incidents, certain parts of your story, that you are not telling? That's a big tendency in an autobiography.

RG Of course there are things in my life which shall remain private. At the Pan-Canadian Writers' Festival I had occasion to question the approach of an interesting young writer of Chinese extraction during a seminar. The young lady had written a novel based on her life which had established her as a writer of stature. She asserted

that one had to tell all, even if it exposed every little personal detail, no matter whether it cast people in a bad light or whether it hurt them or not. My response was that we could not play God with other people's lives. However, this does not mean that I spare quislings and opportunists who benefited by playing the game with the apartheid regime.

RC What message do you have for the readers out there?

RG The message is in my writing, although I would prefer to think that my work, far from being didactic is celebratory. Let's celebrate this life for death is a cold reality. 'Do not go gentle into that good-night/ Rage, rage against the dying of the light'. We take things for granted. We take life for granted. We are all going to die. You're gone, full stop, end of story. We have no idea what comes after death, if anything at all comes after it. Religions tell us that the soul does not die and I would love to cling to such notions as reincarnation. But notions of the after-life blind us to the fact that we are mortal. Yet we mortals have an immortal consciousness, the imperative that drives the truly great souls of this world: Sankaracharya, Christ, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Madame Curie, Mandela and those unknown heroes and heroines who have striven unselfishly to make this world a better place for generations to come. This moment, as we are talking now, will never come again. If we understand that we will appreciate every moment of our lives. This sounds a bit maudlin, but listen to Pablo Pascal, the world's greatest cellist. When he turned ninety, he was still playing his cello and was still a happy man. When somebody asked him, 'How is it that you are so happy?' he said, 'When I get up in the morning I stop to smell the roses'.

RC We have now entered the new millennium. Where do you see writers coming from?

RG Writing is informed by realities, by the environment, by interaction. Those who have felt challenged by writing that does not ignore realities, that celebrates the local, that sees the universal in the particular, constantly emphasise the paranoid question, 'Now that you have written about the struggle and it is over, what are you going to write about?'

Writers will always come from that place where Olive Schreiner, Doris Lessing and Sol Plaatje have come from. I think their concern was for life itself, they revelled in their own humanity and rebelled against the things that curtailed that humanity, both in their personal lives and in their writing. And who says the struggle is over? The struggle is still continuing and if the pain of helpless people does not inform your writing whether you are writing a love story or about an experience in

Iceland, you are limiting your canvas.

Of course, there was one-dimensional, protest writing during the anti-apartheid struggle. That's the kind of writing which, while serving a purpose then, really has nowhere to go now. This in no way reflects on the political writing of, say, Athol Fugard. *The Island* was staged recently in London to rave reviews. Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* and *The Crucible*, and Shakespeare's *Richard III* have all been born out of political issues but are timeless in their universal appeal.

RC Is there any place for the theatre of the oppressed within the South African democracy?

RG Very much so. Not only in South Africa but in third world countries there is massive poverty. You could choose to write best selling romantic novels, ignoring these realities. You could also write one-dimensional plays which will inevitably fail. You could also become a pseudo-intellectual hermit railing against the human condition in pervasive tones of self-despair. Or, you could look at life honestly, into the hearts of the beggar man, the thief, the prince, as Rohinton Mistry does in *A Fine Balance*. The theatre of the oppressed is about the eroding effects of poverty as much as it is about the human condition.

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## Debates

### 'My dear lads ...':

#### G.A. Henty, Author of Empire, and the New South Africa

Damian Clarke

'My dear lads'—with these words George Alfred Henty (1832 - 1902) would introduce yet another tale of derring-do in which a young courageous British public school lad would triumph over incredible odds, meet the important historical personalities of the day and return safely to England to enjoy the fruits of his labour. It was of no consequence that his heroes were almost always identical. Henty never addressed the 'fairer sex', non Anglo-Saxons and certainly not the people of colour who comprised the majority of the multitudes making up the British Empire. He was addressing the future rulers, administrators and police officers of the British Empire, and they may have lisped and had receding chins, but they were also white, male, Anglo-Saxon and Protestant.

G.A. Henty was, by all accounts, a remarkable man who may have stepped from the pages of his own stories. He was a pioneer war reporter, who witnessed at first hand the wars of Italian and German unification in the late 19th century. He drew on his experiences in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 for one of his earliest novels, *The Young Franc Tireurs*, and covered campaigns in West Africa and Central Asia. After a friend encouraged him to commit his stories to paper, he became both an extremely popular and prolific author. He wrote over eighty novels, which were sold all over the British Empire and America. (Elleke Boehmer, in *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*, notes that in the 1890s, his 'militaristic boys' adventure tales' were being consumed by the British 'in their tens of thousands a year'; 31). His modus operandi was to write to the British Library for information about the historical period he intended to cover and then to closet himself with a scribe for the next few weeks and to dictate the next adventure. He covered almost every period of history from Ancient Egypt (*The Cat of the Babustes*) to the Punic Wars (*The Young Carthaginians*), the Hundred Years War (*Saint George for England*), to the wars of Empire (*With Clive in India*, *With Wolfe at Quebec*, *By Sheer Pluck: A Tale of the Ashanti Wars*). He remained current, completing two books about the Boer War (*With Buller in Natal* and *With Roberts to Pretoria*) shortly prior to his death in 1902.

G.A. Henty, Author of Empire and the New South Africa

Reading Henty now, his work seems formulaic and quaintly dated. He is the epitome of the racist, sexist, jingoistic imperialists who carved up Africa in their pith helmets and knee length shorts whilst swilling gin and tonics on the banks of the Zambezi. What are we to make of titles such as *By Right of Conquest* about Cortes and his Conquistadors or *Winning his Spurs* about the Crusades or *Redskin and Cowboys* about the American West? And is he a suitable author for literary study in the new South Africa?

Henty glamorised war, as did many Victorian poets (Newbolt, Tennyson) and artists (Canton Woodville and Lady Elizabeth Butler). The Victorian association between war, masculinity and Christianity would remain a matter of faith for many years. It would take years of guerrilla war and farm burning in South Africa (1899-1902), the dismembered broken bodies of the Somme (1916) and finally the holocaust of Auschwitz and Nagasaki (1945) to convince much of humanity that war is indeed hell. Henty's work adopts numerous Victorian conventions such as the association of physiognomy with moral characteristics. Take his description, in *With Roberts to Pretoria*, of Cecil Rhodes whom the hero, Yorke, meets after bringing a despatch into besieged Mafeking:

Yorke looked with interest at the man who is the Napoleon of South Africa, a square-built man, with a smoothly shaven face except for a thick moustache, with hair waving back from a broad forehead, strong and determined chin and mouth, somewhat broad in the cheeks, giving his face the appearance of squareness, light eyes, keen but kindly; altogether a strong and pleasant face.

We find, in this narrative, no comment about the Jameson Raid, the colonisation of the Rhodesias and the destruction of Lobengula. By way of contrast, Olive Schreiner's *Trooper Peter Halkett of Mashonaland* (1897) was far less complimentary of Rhodes. 'He's death to the niggers', Halkett explains to the Christ figure he meets around his little fire in the Rhodesian bush, prior to his own conversion.

Henty was, to say the least, one sided in the apportionment of blame. In his comments in the introduction to *With Roberts to Pretoria* (1902) he had this to say about the guerrilla war: 'The obstinacy of the Boers had only the effect of bringing ruin upon their own countrymen and women; it could by no possibility alter the final result'. His failure to mention the ruinous effects of Kitchener's scorched earth policy or the activities of Breaker Morant and the Bushveld Carbineers indicates extreme bias.

He was also patronising towards people of colour. Take the conversation, in the same novel, between Yorke and his faithful African servant, Peter:

Whisky a bad thing, baas, but very nice.

It may be nice in small quantities for those who like it. I don't like it. I never touch it if I can help it. It is the ruin of half your people, and you know it is against the law to give it to you.

Against the law baas, but we can always find plenty of men ready to sell it for good money.

They are bad men Peter. The harm they do is very great. That is why so many of your people are in rags, though they can earn pay when they are willing to work. They will labour for three or four days and then spend pretty well all they have earned on spirits and be drunk for the next three.

In this account, the problem of alcohol abuse comes down to unscrupulous whites who exploit the weaknesses of the natives. The fact that colonialism had caused the destruction of tribal life, in part due to the imposition of the hut tax and the institution of the migrant labour system, is not mentioned. Nor is the (even more obviously relevant) widespread application of the tot system.

Henty was undoubtedly a product of his time. Perhaps it is unfair to judge him from the elevated moral high ground of the twenty first century. But is our own position as elevated as we may suppose? Ten years after the Cold War and the release of Nelson Mandela what do we have? Endemic war in Central Africa, ethnic cleansing in Eastern Europe, oppression in Palestine (by a people who for centuries have themselves been the long suffering victims of discrimination and prejudice), starvation in the face of excess, infectious illnesses that compare with the devastation of the Black Death. In fact, we live in what Eric Hobsbawm, in *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914 - 1991* (1991), describes as an age of barbarism. We almost seem to be living in a giant computer game with no beginning and no end.

If one takes the trouble to read Henty today, one cannot but be impressed both by the volume of his output and the vast amount of dry historical facts which he crammed into his novels. He included campaign maps, royal family trees, complex discussions of the various claims to the throne, the intricacies of Salic law and even the theological niceties of the Protestant Reformation. These are simply part of the story. I am not sure whether the average Victorian schoolboy simply skipped these dry factual lectures and got to the action or really pondered on which exact route Hannibal took through the Alps. It would appear, though, that Henty's schoolboy readers had a deeper sense and knowledge of the broad facts of history than the schoolboy or girl of today. Even though it may have been a biased view, at least they had a concept of history. Youth culture today seems to be pervaded by a sense of a-historicalness. An oft-quoted statistic is that a large proportion of American school leavers don't know who won the Second World War. How accurate this is, is unclear, however there does seem to be a trend amongst South African youth to a hedonistic

forgetfulness about our own recent past. The collapse of Portuguese rule in Angola and Mozambique, the bitter wars in Zimbabwe/Rhodesia and SWA/Namibia, the murder of Steve Biko, the Soweto Uprising, the States of Emergency and our own democratic transition are rapidly disappearing from our youth's collective memory. And this amnesia is regrettable because we are not rootless individuals who simply find ourselves in the modern world. We are part of a great story, which is ongoing. Knowing about past conflict will not prevent present and future conflict. But not knowing certainly won't. Without an understanding of our past we cannot explain our present, and we cannot understand our past without a knowledge of it.

I would argue that Henty can be read on two levels. Supervised reading of Henty by school children with non-judgmental guidance in the form of comprehension and discussion would perhaps impart a love of reading and history to our young people. No less an author than J.M. Coetzee has admitted to reading authors such as P.C. Wren (who leant heavily on Henty for his stories of derring-do in the French Foreign Legion) avidly as a child. (See J.M. Coetzee, *Boyhood*.) Children are not slaves of propaganda and understand more than we give them credit for. A frank discussion about Henty's attitudes will remind children who are growing up without any direct personal experience of discrimination what is wrong with past attitudes and hopefully make them value their current freedoms all the more. If the background of a novel is explained to a child he or she would be able to contextualise it. We cannot pretend that past prejudice and conflict did not happen. Our children will only appreciate the miracle of the new South Africa if they fully comprehend the horror of the past. Reading Henty might instil a love of history, which would inspire them to explore the past in an attempt to illuminate their present.

On a second level, Henty is long overdue for serious academic study. His books provide an amazing insight into the worldview of the Victorians. I admit that I have an endless fascination for these formidable yet incredibly fastidious people. People such as Livingstone, Burton, Speke, Gordon of Khartoum, Shepstone, Colenso, Darwin, Rhodes, Jameson, Nightingale, Hobbhouse and countless others. It was Rhodes who felt he had been blessed by God because he had been born English at such a time in history. They had the audacity and bare-faced cheek to believe that they had a divine (and entirely reasonable) right to lord it over one third of the world; they would cross Africa in caravans and still change for dinner each night; risk malaria by venturing into tropical jungles to collect exotic plants for Kew Gardens or insects for their museums. They used euphemisms such as 'in the family way' for pregnancy, 'took a fit' for an episode of drunkenness, a 'fate worse than death' for a voluntary or involuntary loss of virginity, or the 'love that dare not speak its name' for homosexuality. Yet they could stoop to intrigue and subterfuge in 'adventures' such as the Jameson Raid without a second thought, as long as these were done in the name of Empire.

The Victorians seem far removed from our own politically correct, sex soaked era, where teenage girl magazines openly discuss fellatio and contraception, and frankly expansionist or racist beliefs are officially condemned. Yet in many ways we live in the world the Victorians made. Even our (often violent) rejection of them acknowledges their profound influence. It was the Victorians who, for better or worse, created Africa's nation states, who introduced Christianity, disrupted tribal life and replaced pre-industrial barter systems with capitalism. Paradoxically, they also sowed the seeds of liberalism which bolstered the third world nationalisms which would eventually irrevocably alter the world the Victorians had made. Henty's texts provide a window onto the collective psyche of these amazing men and, as such, deserve a detailed politically-nuanced, gender-based study. Come on! There must be a doctoral thesis in there somewhere.

Fellow of the College of Surgeons, South Africa  
Durban

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## The Ethics of Reading: Conrad's *The Secret Agent*

Myrtle Hooper

In an article entitled 'Bakhtin, Addressivity, and the Poetics of Objectivity' (1994), Alison Tate discusses the ways in which meaning is shared between speakers (or writers) and readers (or listeners). It is true, she concedes, that 'understanding is an inferential, rather than a simple decoding process' (1994:143-144), hence that there is a need for a theory which will explain how hearers select and use contextual information. Yet if, as she suggests, address can be defined as reader positioning (1994:136), and if, as she asserts, 'Almost every aspect of the packaging of information in texts can be considered to offer guidance or instructions to the reader' (1994:143), the conclusion follows naturally that 'in order to negotiate the discontinuities of the text, the reader has to put him or herself *in the place of the writer* and to *adopt the world organization* signalled by textual organization' (1994:145; e.a.).

Tate's specific interest is in the effects of deixis, or, more broadly, reference. Yet her use of terms such as the 'presupposed of the discourse' (1994:144) and the 'preconstructed of the text' (1994:145) invites one to stand back and consider how texts seek to position readers: how, on occasion, they act in ways which might be described as predation upon those unwary enough to pick them up and read. Texts are dangerous beasts: they can have undesirable or unacceptable or even malevolent intent. Texts can do damage. At the very least they can jar what readers expect them to do or say, and unsettle our minds deeply.

It is a point of which we might have been reminded recently by the Gauteng education authorities, who asked teachers to evaluate a range of texts in line for prescription as school networks. The criteria the teachers were to apply included style, plot, accessibility of language, theme and characterisation, as well as technical aspects such as cover and typeface. Fair enough: most of these are literary criteria—and no one would really quibble that books prescribed for schoolchildren should be accessible to their readers. Less ingenuously, however, teachers were asked to determine 'whether the books promoted the Constitution's values of tolerance, non-discrimination and rejection of racism and sexism' (Cornia Pretorius, in *The Sunday Times*). Did the books do what our Constitution wanted them to do—or did they do different, unsettling, unexpected, even dangerous things?

Not surprisingly, this barefaced enactment of an ideological agenda gave rise to some trenchant debate: 'censorship' and 'social engineering' were two of the

accusations levelled by literary aficionados. Perhaps what rankled most was the proposed exclusion from syllabuses of 'works which belong to the core of the S.A. literary canon, as well as works which rank among the best in world literature', as critic and scholar Andries Oliphant put it, in a petition which was signed by nearly 100 writers. Nadine Gordimer herself remarked that these processes and decisions reminded her of the ways of the old Publications Control Board, at whose hands, of course, her works suffered extensive state intervention by the Old Regime.

Compelling as such controversy might be, it is not new, nor is it peculiar to our own country. In recent years the British press has devoted front-page space at times to efforts to exclude the works of Shakespeare, Austen and Dickens from school syllabuses—master works about which the British reading public is quite willing to express intense nationalist nostalgia. And with some effect, it seems, since the last time I noticed, the Bard had been reinstated to his rightful place in British children's reading programmes. Besides being amused at what seems to me a bit of pedagogic *Sturm und Drang* in a teacup I find myself broadly sympathetic to Oliphant's position. Like him I have read and enjoyed the classics; certainly I hope my children will not be deprived—as a result of the bad decisions of those who must sanction the reading they do at school—of the pleasure and the education that can be got from these texts. On the other hand, one might also wonder whether these texts have been more receptive to my efforts at reading them than they have been to the readings of others.

It must already be evident that I believe both parties to the debate are glossing certain issues, overlooking considerations of readership which bear more detailed scrutiny. Oliphant's plea to have 'selection panels consist of persons with demonstrated literary knowledge and expertise as well as an understanding of the role of literature in education' comes perilously close to an appeal for the return of decision-making power to the experts, and his advocacy of 'fine' literature and 'procedures which respect literary values' might seem to suggest a repudiation of ideological considerations from the literary domain. It would be a pity if this is what he is suggesting, since involving teachers in selecting books and stating openly what guidelines they are to follow has to be a good thing. Teachers are the people who work most closely with books and pupils, and their opinions should surely count. Probably this isn't quite what he is suggesting, and probably the more pragmatic position would be to set up panels of teachers, writers, experts ... and schoolchildren, since after all they are going to have to read these texts. Accepting this, selection panels—and the Gauteng authorities—clearly need to think more carefully about what they're doing. Perhaps the guidelines supplied to the teachers were lousy guidelines. Perhaps guidelines are in themselves a bad thing, because they inevitably prescribe ideological positions when they are based on judgements of value. It is a point which the Gauteng authorities appear to hope will be overlooked.

Either way, entering into questions of value entails entering the terrain of ethics—terrain which it is increasingly important for readers of literature and prescribers of books for schoolchildren to broach. In a recent special edition of *PMLA*, Lawrence Buell points up the distinctive contours of what he terms, variously, 'the ethical turn' and 'ethically valenced literature inquiry': it tends to favour recuperation of authorial agency; and, linked to this, questions of readerly responsibility; it has an interest in describing an ethos or implicit ethical teleology in modes, templates or structures of literary works; it is concerned with the relation between disposition and normativity; and, importantly, it addresses the vexing problem of the relation or the distinction between the personal and the socio-political (1999:140). This terrain, I suggest, constitutes an interesting and important ethical background both to Alison Tate's description of the sharing of meaning between writers and readers, and to the injunction to the teachers to check whether books affirm the values of our Constitution. In order to explore the possibilities of ethically valenced literary inquiry, I would like to describe readings of two quite different texts which make ethical demands upon their readers.

A couple of years ago I found myself caught up in an altercation with Honours students who challenged the inclusion in their course of work by J.M. Coetzee, and specifically his early novel *Waiting for the Barbarians*. I must admit that in years gone by I had not considered teaching Coetzee a politically tactful thing to do at the University of Zululand. Nevertheless, the strength of these students' reaction came as a surprise, since Coetzee had by then been on our syllabus at postgraduate level for several years, and our preceding cohort of Honours students had been sympathetic and open-minded in their response to his work. In discussion it emerged that these 1999 students were reacting both to a general sense of Coetzee as a 'great white male', and specifically to the title of his 1980 text. In Tate's terms, they felt themselves positioned by the text as 'Barbarians' and not free to adopt any other stance towards it. Their reaction went further than the claim quite frequently made by students that texts (which they may or may not have read) are irrelevant. This group felt Coetzee's novel to be hostile, inimical to their burgeoning identity as black youths in the era of Mbeki's African Renaissance. Like some of the Gauteng teachers, these students felt this text just would not do.

Given Coetzee's status in the sphere of South African letters, the significance he accords in his writing to reconceptualising South Africanness, his insistence on our connectedness with other times and other places, and, of course, the fact that the students were judging his book by its title let alone its cover, this refusal seemed to me both premature and superficial, and left me feeling, with a good deal of impatience, that it would do them good to read *Barbarians*; to discover that it is possible to confront the versions of oneself that are constructed in and by other people's texts.

Yet I also had a sneaking sympathy for their flat refusal to be defined in terms of the old categories of the old order. In Tate's view, the matter of classification is particularly important to reading and interpretation, since 'the use of referring terms is governed by the assumptions of the speaker or writer about the reader/ listener' (140-141). What assumptions did Coetzee make about his reader/ listener when he titled his book *Waiting for the Barbarians*? Now, you or I might be quite familiar with his allusive method, with his invocation of Cavafy's poem in order to claim a global cast for his concerns. My students weren't. As teacher I was left to balance the arrogance and sophistication of the writer's allusion against the ignorance and suspicion of these students' resistance to it; to arrive at some judgement upon the respective rights and wrongs of writers and readers. As researcher I found myself reconsidering my own ethnographic and epistemological positioning in the situation of teaching across cultural boundaries—as well as the ethical logistics of my own reading of texts both local and canonical. The students' resistance to Coetzee's novel reminded me of my discomfort at being pounced on by texts such as Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing*, William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, John Steinbeck's *The Pearl*—tendentious texts which seem to me to require excessive collaboration from their readers in order to achieve their narrative purposes. In a nutshell, the students' reaction had the effect of foregrounding the narrative contract held out by Coetzee's (and other) texts; a contract which seeks to position its reader in an ethical relation to its subject. Their refusal of the text's invitation to them to read was a rejection of the 'guidance or instructions' carried in its 'packaging', a resistance to 'adopting the world organization signalled by textual organization' as Tate might have put it. They would not accept the reader positioning the text supplied.

These students' reaction to Coetzee's novel could be seen as another instance of the subjective reaction to texts one does not like which was enacted by the Gauteng teachers, and which was a tad less superficial only because (presumably) the teachers had read the texts before disliking them. More importantly, though, the students' reaction demonstrates that texts have less power than Tate's model might imply—because the narrative contracts they hold out to readers can be refused.

Of course, unlike these students, we may already know beforehand what we're letting ourselves in for, when we pick up a book and read. The second instance I would like to explore is the experience of rereading another text which seems to me to pounce, ethically, upon its readers. Perhaps I'm a little slow, but only in writing this essay did it strike me how often Joseph Conrad deals in his texts with ethical choices or careers. Consider: the theft of silver in *Nostromo*, the rescue of a despot in *Heart of Darkness*, the betrayal of a comrade in *Under Western Eyes*, facing the storm in *Typhoon*, dealing with a double in *The Secret Sharer*, jumping ship in *Lord Jim*, obeying one's father in 'Freya of the Seven Isles', receiving a foreigner in one's

midst in 'Amy Foster' ... and in *The Secret Agent*, of course, blowing up one's brother-in-law and murdering one's husband. It is hardly surprising that a novel which calls itself *The Secret Agent* should thematise secrecy. Yet in taking up this book to read it once again, it was these dominant images of violence I had in mind: the explosion of Stevie, the stabbing of Verloc, the drowning of Winnie and the gallows scene she imagines before her death, with its civilised by-line, 'The drop given was fourteen feet' (1974:270; all references are to this edition). In the course of the action, the lives of three central characters are exploded by violent death. The book would do well to contain a discretionary warning: 'This novel contains scenes of crudity and violence which might offend sensitive readers'.

Conrad was himself conscious of this problem; if not at the time then certainly after the event of writing. In his 'Author's Note' he cites criticisms he received 'based on the sordid surroundings and the moral squalor of the tale', and describes being 'reproved for having produced it at all' (1967:7). The answer he gives these criticisms and reproofs runs thus:

... the thought of elaborating mere ugliness in order to shock, or even simply to surprise my readers by a change of front, has never entered my head. In making this statement I expect to be believed, not only on the evidence of my general character but also for the reason, which anybody can see, that the whole treatment of the tale, its inspiring indignation and underlying pity and contempt, prove my detachment from the squalor and sordidness which lie simply in the outward circumstances of the setting (1967:8).

His treatment of his subject is detached, he says: it is rooted in indignation, pity and contempt, and free from the desire to shock or to surprise his readers. Author's intentions, of course, may not be entirely trustworthy, nor do they offer final rulings on the effects of their texts on real readers. Yet they are illuminating, if we are willing to read their texts as acts of communication. And Conrad's justifications and explanations lend weight to the outrage of some of the writers whose texts were judged by the Gauteng teachers.

The mode his treatment of violence took was that of irony; irony both intentional and enabling:

Even the purely artistic purpose, that of applying an ironic method to a subject of that kind, was formulated with deliberation and in the earnest belief that ironic treatment alone would enable me to say all I felt I would have to say in scorn as well as in pity. It is one of the minor satisfactions of my writing life that having taken that resolve I did manage, it seems to me, to carry it right through to the end (1967:11).



Critics have agreed that the excoriating irony of *The Secret Agent* is what makes it at once so entertaining and so arduous a text to read. They have disagreed about the nature of this irony. Such disparate readers as Thomas Mann and Terry Eagleton have felt that the novel's irony makes it difficult to say which sides, if any, it endorses (Shaffer 1995:461). Gail Fincham, following Paul de Man, claims it reflects a loss of self-control on the part of writer as well as reader. By contrast, Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan suggests that irony supplies a narrative means of functioning in a dysfunctional situation. Either way, Conrad's irony places a heavy ethical burden on the reader, a burden I would like to elucidate by exploring the actions and motivations of Winnie, in whose murder of her husband, I suggest, we can find an ethical paradigm for a response to the novel.

*The Secret Agent* is named for Mr Verloc, and one of the central incidents that occurs in the novel is the explosion of his brother-in-law which he brings about. However Conrad himself asserts that *The Secret Agent* is the story not of Verloc but of his wife Winnie (1967:10). Winnie has not received very good critical press: Shaffer accuses her of prostitution (1995); Fincham of psychopathology, of 'murderous madness resulting from repression on a massive scale' (1996:48); Biles of being 'an agent, a bringer, of death' to six people, including herself (1981). I am always uneasy at critical tendencies to pass judgement on characters who are defined by their silence. And since Conrad insists that he 'never had any doubt as to the reality of her story ... it had to be made credible, not so much as to her soul but as to her surroundings, not so much as to her psychology but as to her humanity' (1967: 11), it behoves us to be wary of judging Winnie without first understanding her.

We can begin to do so by considering the breakdown of secrecy at crucial points in the narrative. Verloc is a secret agent and, apart from an injunction to Winnie to 'be very nice to his political friends' (7), he conducts his business life in secret from his wife. Winnie is perfectly accommodating, because she abjures the 'inwardness of things' (152) and because she believes that 'things do not stand much looking into' (177). Her own inner life is kept secret from all around her, including her husband, her mother, even herself. Early in the novel the narrator comments (with irony of course) that, 'Nothing now in Mrs. Verloc's appearance could lead one to suppose that she was capable of a passionate demonstration' (38). Winnie may seem unusually passive, dormant, unthinking, but she is construed by Conrad as representative; that is, not particularly unlike the rest of us: 'Man may smile and smile but he is not an investigating animal. He loves the obvious. He shrinks from explanations' (1967:7).

Winnie is not allowed to continue to 'shrink', because the primary action of the novel, in which she does not participate and of which she knows nothing, involves her husband using her brother to carry a bomb to blow up the Greenwich Observatory, and her brother tripping and blowing himself up instead. When Chief

Inspector Heat gives her this news she impresses him with her stoicism. When Verloc presents his account of his actions to her she stabs him. Winnie's ponderous outrage, and her recognition of the reality underlying 'the obvious', is expressed in her comment, 'This man took the boy away to murder him. He took the boy away from his home to murder him. He took the boy away from me to murder him' (246). Her killing of her husband might thus be seen as revenge for his killing of her brother, for whom, as Conrad puts it, she bears the 'maternal passion' which motivates the story.

But there is more to it than this. What triggers Winnie's violent reaction, it seems to me, is not the fact that Verloc has caused her brother's death, but the fact that he expects her to share the blame: 'It was you', he claims, 'who kept on shoving him in my way when I was half distracted' (257). Of course, his exculpation does not work because his mention of Greenwich Park reminds Winnie graphically that 'they had to gather him up with the shovel' (260). And the turpitude of his moral indifference is underscored when he invites her to join him on the couch: 'Come here', he says, in a peculiar tone, which is 'intimately known to Mrs. Verloc as the note of wooing' (262). Conrad is enough of a craftsman to retain a considerable degree of sympathy for Verloc throughout this scene by representing things from his point of view. The simple fact, however, is that Verloc supplied the bomb, and Verloc nurtured and exploited Stevie's trust in order to perpetrate an act of terror. Winnie is quite right in seeing his attempt to share the blame with her as a moral sleight of hand at her expense. Its intention is to ease him back into his habitual levels of moral torpor, his 'air of having wallowed, fully dressed all day on an unmade bed' (4). Verloc tries to share his secret with her, to draw her into the private world he has been inhabiting. Instead of entering it, she puts paid to it with a knife.

Two important ethical questions arise. First, how are we as readers expected to respond to, and judge, these scenes of 'ugliness', of 'squalor and sordidness'? And second, how does Conrad's irony complicate our response?

In an analysis of another story by Conrad, Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan claims that because fiction falls outside the domain of real action it inevitably entails some aesthetisation of reality, some enclosure in an autonomous sphere which is artistically contained (1993:38, 43). To her, Conrad's use of irony is his way of dealing, in his fiction, with this knowledge. To me, it does not seem necessary to start with a bifurcation of fiction and action, aesthetic and real, since this separates reading out of the realm of ordinary activity and requires for it ethical treatment different to that which we accord ordinary activity. It also implies that it is possible to analyse Conrad's narrative method in isolation from its reader effects.

To me, a more useful basis for an ethical reading of fiction can be found in the conversational model adumbrated by John Shotter, Rom Harré and Anthony Giddens. They argue that 'the primary human reality is conversational' (Shotter 1992:176), that 'it is temporally and spatially situated conversation, not the text, and

Myrtle Hooper

not writing, which is most essential to explaining what language and meaning are' (Giddens 1987:176). Shotter's theory sets out the ethical status of grammatical first, second and third persons, the 'ethical logistics' of the exchanges between 'I's' and 'you's' as 'having to do with who has responsibility for what activity in the social construction of the meanings of any communications between them' (Shotter 1989:133). Grammatically, 'to be related as a second-person, rather than as a third-person, to a first-person is both to be situated quite differently and to be assigned a quite different set of privileges and obligations' (Lyons 1968). First- and second-persons (plural or singular) are, even if in fact non-personal or inanimate, always personified (with all that implies for the 'personal' nature of their relation), and are thus, so to speak, 'present' to one another, in a 'situation'. By contrast, third-persons need not be personified (they can be 'its'); nor are they present as such to other beings or entities; nor are they necessarily 'in a situation' (Shotter 1989:134f).

Applying these terms to a reading of *The Secret Agent*, we might recognise Conrad's ironic method as locating his readers in a particular relation to the action and the characters of his text because it puts pressure on us to enter into an 'I-thou' relation with his narrative about his characters, and thus to relegate his characters to third-person—or non-person—status. Conrad shares his story with us about them. We might thus see Shotter's theory as enabling a specification of Tate's claim that 'the reader has to put him or herself in the place of the writer and to adopt the world organization signalled by textual organization'. But Shotter's insistence on 'presence' offers an important qualification. In an intriguing study in the PMLA special issue, Derek Attridge presents a case for ethical reading as reading which 'respond[s] responsibly to the otherness of a literary work', and cites the example Levinas was fond of giving as an instance of ethics in practice: 'the "After you" whereby I invite someone to go through a door before me' (1999:29). To draw analogies from a historical moment at which the role of the reader became particularly acute, I would suggest this gesture has something in common with Ben Jonson's injunction 'To the Reader', to 'read ... well/ That is to understand'; or the 'allowance' we are asked to give to Shakespeare's fools; or the participation we must volunteer in order to enable the 'postulated occasions' Helen Gardner finds in metaphysical poetry (1957:21). These instances conceptualise readers as retaining agency: they construe readers as people who have responsibilities to the texts they read. They remind us that the fulfilment of a textual contract is contingent on the presence and the participation of readers.

*The Secret Agent* seems to me a text which, more than usually, requires its readers' presence in order to enable its fiction to come into being. We are addressed by the narrative, in what amounts to a private communication about the characters outside and beyond their knowledge. Just as Verloc attempts to entice Winnie into his own pernicious private world in which Stevie lost his life, so the narrative invites us

to share the moral secrets of the novel. Winnie's refusal of this invitation destroys both Verloc and the secrecy in which he operates. Her response, I suggest, offers an ethical paradigm we should recognise, though not necessarily follow.

The narrative contract held out by texts is not incontrovertible, as is clear from the reaction of my students to Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*. They refused the reader positioning and the narrative contract the text supplied. Likewise, the Renaissance examples bid us recognise our agency as readers, and, concomitantly, our right to say no to the contract held out by texts. At the same time, recognising this right should encourage us not to exercise it reactively or irrevocably. Texts which deal with ethical issues are going to position us ethically, and the positions in which they place us may be more or less acceptable to us. As readers we cannot disallow the ethics of fiction, but must rather make the allowance consciously and with a sense both of the amount that is required and of the amount we are willing to give. Rather than simply accept, or, as my students did, simply reject the narrative contract of the text, we can choose to be moral audience, I would suggest: we can choose to read characters as moral referents for the narratives that are told about them.

The way this works in the case of Winnie is to see Conrad's irony not as compelling our ethical complicity, but rather as extending an ethical challenge. Applying Shotter's model, we can scrutinise, and question, the 'person' ascribed to Winnie by the text, and in doing so become aware of the 'person' we take up when we read it. In what conversational relation are we asked to stand towards Winnie? Do we accept the role of second person who receives and is complicit with the narrative address? Do we agree, or do we refuse, to treat her as third person, non-person, a thing; the subject of discourse about whom the story is being told? Do we, by contrast, accord her the status of 'overhearer' or 'eavesdropper' to the narrative utterance, the silent but present third party to whom the narrative utterance is necessarily related? If we do so, I suggest, we grant her the ethical status she is due, and understand the narrative act as accountable to her, because it is then, putatively at least, contestable by her.

Ethical responsibility is a recursive responsibility: it asks us to look hard at ourselves as well as at the ethical problem that is before us. As the Gauteng book prescription controversy reminds us, texts can do different, unexpected, unsettling, things; they can, especially for children, be dangerous beasts. In fairness, though, we should concede that texts are not always read by the right readers—they don't always get the readers they want. Instead of being pleased or moved in the right kinds of ways, readers are prone to resist what texts want them to do, how texts want to be read. Part of learning to read is coping with 'being the wrong reader'—being a reader whom the text may not have anticipated, and adjusting our interpretation to that fact. Although our response may be sceptical, politic, although we must exercise caution and a wary eye, this must be balanced by graciousness that grasps what is being

asked of us by a text, and politeness that provides what it requires, allows it what we are able.

Obviously this is not a balance which comes quickly or easily to readers; it is not something which child readers have immediately at their command. There is at least this difference between child and adult readers, between naive and sophisticated readers. Yet one of the points the Gauteng people seem to have missed is that reading is a transformative process. Part of learning to read is developing a skin that protects us from the dangers of the text. Part of learning to read is developing a sense of ourselves as readers as actively constructing the text as well as being constructed by it. Part of learning to read ethically is recognising the moral predation of texts, the complex and forceful demands they make upon us—while at the same time finding ways of choosing the ethical position we take in relation to texts, rather than having such a position thrust upon us. Plainly, the big question for those who prescribe texts is how to get readers from A to B.

The conversational model of ethics seems to me to offer an admirable educational resource because it appeals to the practical consciousness that children already have of social relationships. Reading is not separate from living: it draws upon and helps to refine our ordinary lives. For example, it is fundamental to social interaction to know the difference between talking to people and talking about people; to know the difference between talking in front of them and talking behind their backs. Construing reading as a conversation with a text is one way of helping children become aware both of the power of texts and of their own agency in relation to them. In the article already referred to, furthermore, Derek Attridge roots his model of ethical reading in a sense of the text as other, as stranger which requires a new, an original response. Construing the text as stranger is also something children could understand. Texts are not unique in posing predatory threats: in the violent and crime-ridden society in which we live, there are all too many pressures and influences which children must learn to negotiate in ways that protect themselves without harming others.

The radical educationist Paulo Freire defined education as becoming critically aware of our reality in ways that lead to effective action upon it. It's not the case that texts require ethical action: rather they require us to take up ethical positions when we read. The role of ethical reader is not one which can be narrowly defined, but it does require the best response of which we are capable; it does ask us to activate our best selves when we read. Fundamentally it is our presence which enables works of fiction to come into being, and the influence we bring to bear on the moral universe of texts is just that: being there, being witness or audience, being, in a sense, the 'superaddressee' whom Shotter adduces from Bakhtin, whose 'absolutely just responsive understanding is presumed' in conversation, who functions as witness and judge (1995:50). Ditching dicy texts off school syllabuses is short-term

protection for children at best: how much better to acknowledge the ethics of reading and readership and equip children with concepts and understanding that enable them to respond responsibly to texts, that develop and enhance the ethical consciousness, the ethical being that texts require.

English Department  
University of Zululand

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## Book Reviews

### Breakout: Cyberporn, Privacy and Reality-effects

*Obscene Profits: The Entrepreneurs of Pornography in the Cyber Age.*

by Frederick S. Lane III.

New York and London: Routledge, 2000, 305 pp.

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David Bennett

Department of English with Cultural Studies

University of Melbourne

'Of the \$10 billion sex industry, it's not ten perverts spending \$1 billion a year'—Nadine Strossen, former president of the American Civil Liberties Union and author of *Defending Pornography*.

The first daguerreotype of a nude was taken less than two years after the French government announced Daguerre's invention. The first public photography gallery, opened in Paris in 1841, specialised in so-called 'academy studies' or 'Academies'—nude photographs ostensibly designed for art students but sold as pornography. Within a year of the first public screening of a movie by the Lumière brothers in 1895, blue movies were being produced in France and Germany and distributed internationally. It was the pornography industry that popularised the video cassette recorder in the 1980s (North Americans alone now rent around \$5 billion-worth of 'adult' videos a year). Pornography drove the development of the BBS (bulletin board system) and scanner-manufacturing industries in the 1990s. And it is reputedly to pornographers that we really owe the amenity of on-line shopping. The U.S.-based cyberporn industry grosses between \$1 billion and \$2 billion a year, and by demonstrating the Internet's potential as an advertising medium and storefront, testing consumer confidence in on-line credit card-purchases, and pioneering on-line sales techniques such as monthly site fees, the provision of free material as a lure to

site visitors, and the concept of 'upselling'<sup>1</sup>, the e-porn industry proved the Internet a viable place for commerce, greasing the rails for businesses like Amazon.com.

The *Kama Sutra* couplings of the pornography and communications-technology industries would take more than a sexologist to unravel, but today's cybersex entrepreneurs earn immense profits for too many 'legitimate', collateral industries and agents—from phone companies and ISPs to manufacturers of VCR's, PC's, modems, filter programmes, camcorders, scanners and colour printers—for any Western government to be seriously willing, still less able, to put the pornographers out of business. (Even when the illiberal Howard government in Australia earned the sobriquet of 'global village idiot' last year for implementing patently ineffectual, because national, Internet-censorship laws, it was only addressing the hard-core end of the pornographic spectrum.) Meanwhile, the interest of establishment broadsheets like the *Wall Street Journal* and *New York Times* in monitoring the potential of e-commerce by tracking the fortunes of pornographic sites and services—undisputed as the one indefinitely-sustainable dotcom enterprise, in which even major mutual funds have begun investing—has contributed to the 'businessification' of public discourse on pornography in the West, its assessment and analysis as business, industry, investment and return, rather than its judgement simply by moral or religious standards.

Vermont lawyer and computer consultant, Frederick S. Lane III's *Obscene Profits: The Entrepreneurs of Pornography in the Cyber Age* looks on these developments with approval, as might be expected of a book originally subtitled 'Becoming a Pornographer in the 21st Century'. Lane's book (itself apparently composed largely of Web downloads) set out to profile and assess the different business models, pricing schemes, Website styles, prosecution-risks and income-generating potential of e-porn enterprises before being converted into a Routledge 'quickie' with academic Cultural Studies pretensions. (The 'How-To' pitch of the book crystallises in Lane's advice to American entrepreneurs that the safest kind of Website business with which to enter the lucrative e-porn trade is a 'link site', which provides directories, reviews of, and links to, Websites offering 'picture galleries'—safest because such sites consist mainly of text and the US judicial system has accorded the highest level of First-Amendment protection to words.) Inexcusably, given his subject matter, Lane is one of those American writers for whom the world seems to be coextensive with the United States (it takes a non-American reader a while to adjust to the unacknowledged fact that all the statistics Lane quotes—on industry revenues, Internet site numbers, computer-owning households—refer only to the U.S. scene, not to the Web's wide world); and he suggests that the best news in recent years for cybersex entrepreneurs was, paradoxically, the American public's limited appetite for

<sup>1</sup> 'Upselling' the the selling of related services to people once they have joined a Web site.

the lurid details of Clinton's Oval Office trysts as reported to Congress by Ken Starr. Contrary to the expectations of conservative columnists and impeachment-bent Republicans, public indignation over 'Monicagate' ended up focusing on the impropriety of the exposé rather than the presidential self-exposure, and the nation showed a surprising willingness to distinguish between its President's public performance (of which it strongly approved) and his private life (of which it strongly disapproved but wished to hear nothing further). Lane's reviews of the recent history of U.S. obscenity law suggest that he is no friend of the censorship that can trim the 'obscene profits' of pornographers: what citizens choose to read, view or talk about in their private lives (or do in their oval offices) is their own and not their government's or neighbours' affair. If Lane's data-cluttered book offers an ethical perspective on the cybersex industry, it is a classical liberal perspective that treats the bourgeois dichotomy between public and private life as a given; identifies sexuality with the private sphere; interprets liberty as freedom from state interference in one's private life; and equates the constitutional right to 'freedom of expression' with the uninhibited exercise of consumer choice in a free market of cultural goods and services (no matter that neither markets nor 'self-expression' are ever, anywhere, really free).

There are many ways to challenge the liberal invocation of the public/private dichotomy in arguments against censorship. What is interesting about Lane's handling of the dichotomy, however, is that while he celebrates the Internet for the increased privacy it affords to browsers and buyers of pornography (thus massively expanding the market, and hence profits, for pornographers), his book provides evidence of how, 'in the cyber age', the privacy or secrecy with which pornography-consumption was traditionally associated is fast displacing sex itself and becoming the new pornographic commodity. As the mass-mediated public sphere becomes increasingly saturated with explicit images of sex (whether on freeway billboards, in magazine fashion shoots, car ads, music videos, or prime-time television series like *Sex and the City*), the new pornography becomes privacy itself, with or without sexual content.

How so? If *Obscene Profits* offered anything resembling a 'progressive' thesis, it would go something like this. Market forces are the best guarantor of personal liberty, and a free market in pornography is one means to sexual 'liberation'—or the liberalisation of sexual culture—in the form of increased visibility, public recognition and acceptance of 'marginal' sexualities. Consider how market forces operated in the U.S. pornography industry before the advent of the Internet. The gradual rise of sexual content in the national news and entertainment media from the Roaring Twenties onwards, culminating in the bourgeois acceptance of mass-circulation magazines like *Playboy* and *Cosmopolitan*, made it difficult for individuals to become sexual entrepreneurs, unable as they were to compete with the economies of scale available to the large manufacturers and distributors. To keep a

foothold in the market, therefore, individuals and small businesses had to specialise in ever more marginal and taboo pornographies—the niche-markets of the 'perversions'—and the consequent multiplication of the varieties of sexuality on display, the stretching of the boundaries of the pornographically visible, in turn influenced 'community attitudes' and led to an expansion of the parameters of 'normal' sexuality. (Thus the erstwhile 'perversions' of oral and anal intercourse have become increasingly accepted as part of the 'normal' repertoire of heterosexuality, while polymorphous perversity in general has stepped out of the psychoanalytic closet straight onto the catwalk.) A free market in cyberporn can only accelerate this liberalising process—in two main ways.

One of Lane's themes is that the Internet is not only an ideal medium for the advertising and selling of pornography (being a purely verbal and pictorial commodity, it can be reproduced and distributed digitally) but that the Internet as a market-place offers a comparatively level playing field, in which self-funded individuals can compete on almost equal terms with large corporations. He points out that an individual with a single home page can publish several hundreds more sexually explicit photographs for a world-wide audience in one afternoon than can be found in a month's issues of *Penthouse* and *Hustler* combined. The economies of scale of the mass-circulation magazines no longer apply. The Internet's intrinsic limitations on display space—the viewer's monitor—mean that large companies have no edge by virtue of bigger buildings, more shelf space, or sports stadiums emblazoned with their corporate logos. All Web addresses are equal; location no longer matters; there are no property taxes, no rent or mortgage, no city licenses to purchase, and no 'bad' or hard-to-reach parts of town: Web surfers can visit a personal home page as easily as an on-line megastore. All this, in Lane's view, radically increases the opportunities for individuals, including the sexually individualistic, to represent themselves in the market-place of sexual imagery. *Obscene Profits* recounts the 'success stories' of several individuals who have turned themselves from humble wage-labourers into multi-millionaire pornographers by publishing sexually explicit photographs of themselves on their Web sites—some claiming to have been inspired simply by a desire to counter the stereotypes of mainstream masculinist pornography. So it would appear that Walter Benjamin's vision of the democratising potential of the daily press as a medium in which any reader might become a writer, any consumer a producer, is being realised in the so-called 'pornutopia' of the Internet, where any owner of a camcorder, laptop and modem can, as Benjamin put it, 'gain access to authorship' and assert 'modern man's legitimate claim to being reproduced' (Benjamin 1969:232)<sup>2</sup>. Such, at least, is the

<sup>2</sup> Walter Benjamin [1936]1969. *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Arendt, Hannah (ed): *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken Books.

theory. (In practice, the logic of monopoly grips the cybersex industry as firmly as it still does the daily press. The structure of the industry is pyramidal. Virtually every 'adult' site, whether operated by an individual with a single home page or a company with thousands of domains, is connected in a traffic-sharing vortex in which the smaller portal sites redirect potential customers to 'pay sites' operated by big companies with large picture libraries, in return for commission on any sales that may result from this redirected traffic. Meanwhile, the larger companies are fast swallowing the smaller in their bid to top the pyramid<sup>3</sup>.)

Equal or, at least, easy access for individuals to the Net-porn market guarantees diversity of content, in Lane's account, and the range of sexual materials available on-line more accurately reflects the population's sexual preferences and interests than do the mainstream commercial entertainment media. (He suggests, for example, that one of the niche-markets 'left open' by the endemic ageism and sexism of Hollywood, with its 'May-and-December' castings pandering to the fantasy of 20-something women falling for 50-something men, is the so-called 'Mature Woman 40+' sites, such as SeniorS EXposé.) And the corollary of 'equal opportunity' for individuals to display their distinctive tastes, fetishes and fantasies in the e-porn market-place is the opportunity for otherwise isolated individuals to recognise their sexual likenesses in the self-representations of others. Lane reports that 'One organization that has been particularly successful at helping people realize that there are others out there like them is *People Exchanging Power* (P.E.P.), a dominant/submissive support group founded by Nancy Ava Miller in Albuquerque, Mexico, in 1986' (161). Miller reportedly had no intention of starting a business but turned her support group into a phone-sex and on-line dating company when she found herself short of ready cash.

Ironically, the sheer number and variety of the pornographies now going shamelessly public on the Internet has spawned an on-line market for—if not quite privacy—then at least what might be called the 'privacy-effect'. The privacy-effect is close kin to the reality-effect, which has become the staple commodity of prime-time television entertainment for a generation of media-saturated and media-cynical viewers who turn to the amateurism of 'Real TV' for the reality-fixes that now, paradoxically, constitute 'escapist' entertainment. Consumer demand for reality- and privacy-effects has spawned numerous sub-genres of free-to-air VTV (voyeur television), ranging from broadcast compilations of security-camera, speed-camera and police-video footage to big-budget productions like 'Survivor' and 'Big

<sup>3</sup> For example, the MSNBC Web site reports that when the public company New Frontier Media recently bought out the cyberporn firm Interactive Gallery, it acquired more than 1,300 adult-related Internet domains that funnel traffic to 27 e-commerce sites selling pornographic photos and videos.

Brother'—the last functioning to reconcile and cathect mass audiences to a life of total surveillance by all the postmodern 'little brothers' (CCTV systems, personal phone-call and email monitoring by employers, credit card-tracking devices, DNA-print databanks etc.) and to teach us that the most exciting sex to be had is not secret sex but sex performed before an audience of millions. But the technology that caters most convincingly to the voyeuristic appetite for privacy-effects and reality-fixes is the Web camera, with which individuals can publish the most intimate moments of their lives to a global public, 24 hours a day. Planted in the bedroom and livingroom, taking images at set intervals, digitally compressing them so they can be instantly uploaded to an Internet server, Web cams hold the promise of extending the Warholian 15 minutes of fame to a life-time. As Lane suggests: 'Web cams are the quintessential medium for persuading consumers that they are paying for the privilege of viewing someone's private activities'—regardless of the fact that the operators are usually giving up their privacy both willingly and for a price (255). A typical example is the AmateurCam Network, a site featuring 17 individual Web cams whose operators (17 women) run them from their homes, charging subscription fees to viewers who want their images refreshed every 60 seconds, and generally promising to appear in lingerie or nude at specific times of the day or night. Even more titillating for the privacy-effect addict are 'secretary cams', planted under the desks of unsuspecting secretaries by their droll colleagues. While most sexually explicit Web cam sites advertise themselves as 'amateur', however, many amateur sites offer little or no nudity or sex—without, apparently, losing their market appeal. On the contrary. Consider the case of Jennifer Ringley, who accidentally discovered a way to get people to pay to watch her sleep. Inspired by 'Fishbowl Cam,' a famous cam-site featuring regularly updated images of someone's office fish tank, Ringley started JenniCAM in 1996 when she was a college student, as an experiment in living in a human fish bowl, initially restricting access to her home-based Web cam images to a small circle of friends. It proved popular, she went public, and her site was soon receiving half-a-million hits a day. After working briefly as a freelance Web page designer, Ringley now lives on, and apparently for, the subscription fees she charges viewers to receive quick upgrades of her broadcasts from the two camcorders set up in her apartment. (Peter Weir reportedly became an obsessive viewer of JenniCAM and sent Ringley anonymous emails during the shooting of *The Truman Show*.) Lane comments: 'What makes JenniCAM so compelling, apparently, is the sheer normalcy of the images'. As the *Los Angeles Times* reported, 'mainly it's real life, which means endless phone calls, sessions at the computer and plodding hours when Jenni is asleep' (253). JenniCAM's popularity spawned numerous imitations, and that the appeal of such sites is the reality- or privacy-effect of 'sheer' 'plodding' 'normalcy' seems borne out by the fact that even a parody of JenniCAM—WesCAM, with which Web site designer Wes Denaro broadcasts nothing more than shots of himself sitting



in his cubicle at work—keeps attracting more than 5,000 visitors a day.

In a *mise-en-abîme* characteristic of cyberspace, the plethora of amateur Web cam sites now publishing the banal, shapeless stuff of 'private' life has given rise to commercial meta-sites which assist the would-be consumer of reality/ privacy-effects by listing, classifying and reviewing such sites, presumably applying the reviewing criteria of professionally produced drama (strong plot? good dialogue? too many Beckettian pauses?) to the 'real lives' being broadcast via camcorders on the Net and whose appeal supposedly consists precisely in their unscripted ordinairiness.

The implosion of the public/ private dichotomy in the market-place of Net-porn goes hand-in-hand with the implosion of the professional/ amateur dichotomy. Like the 'normalcy' of JenniCAM's content, the very amateurism of home-made pornographic Web sites—on which individuals or couples post photos of themselves engaging in sex for pleasure, not profit—is a powerful drawcard for voyeurs, since what they are evidently seeking in a cyberscape saturated with millions of commercially produced, sexually explicit images is precisely the reality-effect that amateur exhibitionists offer. But such is the appetite of voyeurs for the reality-effect of amateurism that they are, ironically, willing to pay for it, thereby encouraging amateurs to turn into professionals. (Lane: 'Unlike many other industries, pornography is one field in which amateurism is not merely tolerated but actually prized. Privacy has proven to be a commodity to which a price can be attached and, quite often, amateurs are perceived to have more of it to give up'; 111). This, in turn, encourages professionals to simulate amateurism—the corporate entrepreneurs to masquerade as private individuals. One of the largest transnational pornography companies (a public one?) is called 'Private', and the counterpart of the 'success stories' Lane tells of amateur on-line exhibitionists becoming wealthy professional pornographers is the way the professionals have, literally, been taking leaves out of the amateurs' books. Chasing the immensely lucrative market for the reality/ privacy-effects of amateur erotica, the big companies have not only been busily buying up, in the thousands, the grainy images of unglamorous bodies posted by amateur pornographers but also heavily investing their technical expertise in simulating the low production values of home-made erotica.

All of which helps to explain how the privacy-effect and reality-effect without sexual content could become the pre-eminent pornographic commodity. If the classical bourgeois association of sexuality with the private sphere is what created and drives the market for the privacy-effect, which in turn drives the professionalisation of the amateur, then it would seem to be the very absence of sexual content (as in sites like JenniCAM) that now produces the most convincing reality-effect, and hence its most marketable commodity-form.

Academic Cultural Studies has been accused of cultivating a superior form of fandom (and why not? you might ask. At a time when universities in Anglophone

countries are being run as businesses and are busily forging commercial links with mass media corporations, why shouldn't humanities departments be helping the entertainment industries to reproduce their markets by turning out highly-trained consumers, skilled in watching endless repeats of Seinfeld and still finding new meanings in them?). But Lane's book is for the would-be producer, rather than fan or consumer, of pornography, and for this reader at least, there is nothing titillating about its contents. Those seeking an amateur-effect in their reading-experience, however, could do worse than buy *Obscene Profits*. A cut-and-paste job, the book is a true child of the Internet. Its ratio of noise to information is around 1:4; download time is frustratingly long (Lane's prose neither flows nor streams); and annoying 'banners', or sub-subheadings, clutter up its pages in a desperate bid to keep the reader's attention. Its numbing repetitiveness and slipshod writing suggest that the publishers have eschewed all editorial 'interference', doing nothing to spoil the immediacy of Lane's amateur compositional process.

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## African Unity

*Reawakening Commitment, Obligations and Responsibilities to Unity in Africa: African Union and a Pan African Parliament*  
by Manelisi Genge, Francis Kornegay & Stephen Rule  
Pretoria: African Institute of South Africa, 2000, 44pp.  
ISBN: 0798301406

Elizabeth Thompson  
English Department  
University of Zululand (Umlazi Campus)

This collection of three essays addresses urgent events on the African landscape and reawakens inspirational ideals for civil society. The papers open up pertinent debates about authority / subjugation, democracy / tyranny, autonomy / dominance at a time when fragile economies in Africa make self-determination and self-sufficiency somewhat problematic. Certainly, the discourses provoked by the large issue of greater African unity have been to some extent submerged since 1994, as the world stood in awe of an unexpected phenomenon—the miracle of the demise of apartheid. But the post-liberation euphoria, both locally and internationally, led to a silencing of



important contemporaneous debates about fundamental realities that demand redress. Accordingly, the great jamboree of victory after the struggle for freedom invoked a kind of malaise in Africa.

African Union and a Pan African Parliament is thus a noteworthy contribution to the field of African research. The authors are clearly alert to the need for user-friendly resources in multidisciplinary teaching programmes currently on offer at universities; the book is enlightening for the non-specialist reader outside the domain of Political Studies as it does not rely on the reader's familiarity with discipline-specific jargon. The book also offers solid background reading for academic courses which seek to introduce students to the broad themes of African political tensions in the 21st century. More generally, the essays may act as a route for international policy-makers attempting to make meaningful entry into Africa affairs. Sources and information are extensively researched and well tabulated.

Manelisi Genge's opening essay maps out succinctly a history of the Organisation of African Unity during the period of liberation, and indicates how the OAU conferred order and structure to movements for justice and freedom. Some interesting questions arise: did the OAU precipitate the new era of post-colonialism? Or was the organisation merely a weak association, compromised and caught in a twilight zone between power blocs, offering inconsequential political unity? The inherent weaknesses of the tentative nature of the OAU are delineated: a failure to end civil wars and military conflicts. Nevertheless, new possibilities and some crucial action necessary for the formations of new structures are indicated, namely the transcendence of existing institutional frameworks and utilisation of the strengths offered by the OAU.

Whatever the flaws of the OAU, the necessity for an African democratic forum to facilitate the expression of the will of all African people is upheld in all three essays as being of the utmost urgency. Power playing by the new élite, the failure to heed the voices and needs of ordinary people, as well as the non-engagement with NGOs, civil society and academics, are all issues which governments in Africa need to address. Likewise, the OAU has often been opportunistic and operated from within the ambit of influential hierarchies. Nevertheless, the primary mission of the OAU, the liberation of the continent from colonial rule, has been discharged credibly but the economic mandate has failed abysmally. Consequently, South Africa's intervention as an active role player is probably essential for the arbitration of new structures. However, these notions raise serious nationalist concerns. The hosting of the organs of the body of the OAU requires resources, responsibilities and international obligations. Francis Kornegay contends that most of Africa is still grappling with variations of national Pan-Africanism. But partisanship, in fact, predominates in Africa and ruling cliques exploit power in the name of national expression.

Africa's marginal role on the international stage and jealous guarding of national sovereignties immobilises and disempowers the continent. Self-interest appears predominant in the ethos of Africa rather than any genuine African patriotism. Nonetheless, the potential implications remain: Africa looms as a demographic giant alongside China and India, with a composite population constituting the largest concentration of humanity. Her presence cannot be ignored by the superpowers.

Importantly, an underlying theme informing the three essays is a critical call for the recognition of diversity and civic supervision of the constituencies and identities of the complex heterogeneity of African societies. At the heart of the continent is the predicament of many hostile private animosities. For all of these reasons, Federation has been at an impasse. Yet paradoxically, federalism may serve as a foundation and may not necessarily evolve as the route to balkanisation.

Stephen Rule notes Gaddafi's 1999 call for the formation of a parliament for Africa. His paper explores two possible options for the composition of a Pan African parliament: firstly, a demographic state based structure, and secondly, an economic-demographic state based structure. The first option might seem to be most democratic, but demography as the determining criterion would produce unevenness. Consider the example of Nigeria: one in every six adults in Africa is Nigerian. With its population of 77 million it would automatically be granted an advantageous position and would prevail as one of the most powerful interest blocs in all spheres of African political life. With 53 autonomous states in Africa, smaller states are unlikely to accept any deficit of representation. The dilemma would almost certainly escalate hostility, especially in countries that have eschewed democratic election. If the ultimate aim is unity so as to enhance the economic health of the continent then the unconventional approach of a parliament that factors in the economic status should invite support. To this end, Rule constructs a second formula for consideration, which proposes the reduction of regional hegemonies.

Kornegay's concluding essay also stresses Africa's need for centralised forums. This he evokes in his epigrammatic configuration of the 'calabash', a symbolic trajectory for transcendence of difference. In pooling ideas, resources and making joint projections for the future, many apparently irreconcilable differences may diffuse, or possibly some of the painful problems and vicissitudes facing Africa may be shared collectively. Finally, the mixing and mingling of contingencies could be inherently sustaining and as the ancient receptacle of the calabash appropriately implies, there may be a life-giving reservoir and provider of sustenance, which Africa can utilise—for the greater good of all.

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## Common Ground

*ITSHWELE LEMPANGELE*

by Vusumuzi Maurice Bhengu

Johannesburg: Heinemann, 1998, 128pp.

ISBN:1868536203

N.N. Mathonsi

Department of IsiZulu

University of Natal (Durban)

The novel tells the story of Ndelebuli. With his B.Com, he gets a job at Richards Bay which involves much travel. One day, on the return flight from a meeting in Johannesburg, he meets Shantha, a young woman, and Paul. Ndelebuli innocently asks Paul about his family. He is told that the boy has just lost his parents and sisters and is being transferred to a Durban orphanage. This disclosure triggers a strange relationship amongst the three. Shantha is deeply moved by the talk and when she realises that Ndelebuli is equally moved, she understands that although they are different, their reactions are not.

Later, Ndelebuli finds it impossible to forget Paul's sad story, and he traces both Shantha and Paul. His visit to Paul is upsetting for all: the authorities will not allow the weeping Paul to keep Ndelebuli's presents. He realises that Paul needs a real home where he is going to be given the love he deserves as a child.

He invites Shantha to accompany him on his second visit. Shantha feels strongly that Paul needs a mother, and she is seemingly his God-chosen one. Since Ndelebuli feels similarly drawn to making the child a part of his life, the grounds are being levelled for a future marriage.

When they finally decide to commit themselves to providing Paul a real home, they find that their parents still consider the man-made racial and socio-cultural barriers as insurmountable. Shantha's grandmother is, however, different. Surprisingly, she shares their sentiments and openly supports the relationship. Paul, being a strong force, eventually forces a perfect union between the people of different kinds, that is, an Indian and an African, and this is no offence since the laws of the new democracy allow them to do so. The ancestors, God and Allah bless and seal this union by giving them Thandeka, Paul's new-born sister. The novel closes with the families having been reconciled by the union.

Most characters are convincingly portrayed. The conservativeness of Ndelebuli's father and the Indian family's resistance are plausible, as is the subsequent change of heart. The novel is set in a modern milieu in which the social,

political, physical and cultural environment is shown to have affected characters differently. The transition to a non-racist dispensation is explored through the characters and their experiences. The sharing of facilities, for example, of the different forms of transport amongst previously segregated race groups and the much improved situation of the roads makes interaction easy.

The plot is skilfully manipulated. Coherence and the creation of suspense are achieved mainly through the employment of flashback as a narrative technique. A number of crises weave towards the highest point of tension. These include the episode where Shantha's family is told of her intimate relationship with an African man. At issue is the potential desertion of the Indian lady by Ndelebuli should she fall pregnant as African men are said to be notorious for this. Suicide is a possibility should Shantha's parents insist that she distances herself from Ndelebuli. Tension is compounded by Shantha's sudden disappearance. The relaxed attitude of the police when they find her with Ndelebuli, brings the tense situation under control. This change of attitude on the part of the police depicts some sound permanent normalization of the situation in a country formerly torn by racial divisions.

The novel ends shortly after the first visit of the two families at Ndelebuli - Shantha's house and this is the denouement. Here we get the impression that the author has successfully made the different communities shed individual differences and see only common good.

The author successfully deals with the crucial issues of individuality, sole ownership, ethnic and cultural stereotypes and prejudicial attitudes:

Angithandi uNdelebuli aganwe iNdiya. Angizenzisi ...

.... Iganwe yintombi yeNdiya impela, madoda?

I do not want Ndelebuli to be married by an Indian. I am not pretending ....

.... To be married by a true Indian girl, man?

This is a display of bias on the part of Ndelebuli's father. Salim Naicker, Shantha's father, differs little from him in this regard. But the narrative foregrounds the universal and the communal. The negative attitude to mixed marriages and socialising with other ethnic groups (supporting the Group Areas Act) is going to be forgotten. This new synthesis levels the grounds for the new rainbow nation to be constituted. Bhengu has used Paul, the white boy, to tie Shantha and Ndelebuli with an unslipping knot. Whiteness, the race which has been notoriously strong in policies and practices of divide and rule, is used to dispel hate and create lasting harmony. With the forces of darkness being dealt a severe blow by the power of love, the mental and socio-political barriers break down and good triumphs over evil. The novel addresses the need for the healing of souls as well as articulate previously

unacknowledged forms of politics and identity. Their union marks the end to parallel journeys amongst the three Gods—that is, Mvelinqangi, Allah and God, the Father of Jesus. Gogo, Shantha's grandmother, is a sacrificial lamb that dies for the sins of the different communities. Her death initiates the breaking down of the wall that has for centuries kept the different races separate. The power of love (positive sentiment) has been skilfully shown to rise triumphant over racial divide and enmity.

This novel is one of the first stimulating works in Zulu to touch on racial and socio-cultural reconciliation and to reflect the changing relations and attitudes between parents and children in a period of transformation. There are minor pitfalls, such as mixing the Hindu and the Muslim surnames and names: Naicker is a Hindu surname and Shantha a Hindu name while Salim is a Muslim name. But these features do not mar the good quality of the work and, in this case, already suggest an intermarriage between the two Indian groups. The novel will appeal to scholars and a general adult readership.

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## Gender

### *Changing Men in Southern Africa*

Morrell, Robert (ed)

Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2000. pp. 356

ISBN: 086 980 9830

Lazarus Chifumbe Mulenga

Department of English

University of Transkei

*Changing Men in Southern Africa* employs a social constructionist approach to gender analysis. As characterised by J. Stacey and D. Richardson in *Introducing Women's Studies* (in Richardson and Robinson 1993:68 and 78, respectively) social constructionism claims that gender and sexuality are social constructs, shaped by context and time. Gender is thus not conceived of as biologically or genetically determined, universal and unchanging, and 'our sexual feelings and activities, the ways in which we think about sexuality, and our sexual identities, are not biologically determined but are the product of social and historical forces' (Richardson, in Richardson and Robinson 1993:68). This theory of gender informs the work of many other scholars in the field, scholars such as Rajend (2000), Penvenne (1998),

Demetriades (1997) and Connell (1995). They reject the claim that all men construct and express their masculinity in the same way, and all women their femininity in one and same way.

Morrell's introductory chapter makes two claims about masculinity in South Africa: that it is diverse, and that it has undergone—and continues to undergo—changes. Morrell rejects the claim that all men, black and white, in South Africa are chauvinistic, misogynistic and homophobic (3, 33). He argues that a stereotyped description of South African men not only 'isolate[s] specific aspects of masculinity and represent[s] these as common and universal, but it fails to capture masculine diversity' (3). Morrell further argues that there have been recognisable changes in the construction of masculinity in South Africa in response to social and political changes. He points out that although there may be signs of hegemony in South African masculinity, there are also signs of accommodation.

The rest of the book is divided into four thematic sections: 'The Body in Action: Guns, Sports and Violence'; 'Fathers, Families and Kinship'; 'Performing Masculinity' and 'Sexuality'.

## Masculinity and bodies

The first five chapters focus on the expression of masculinity through militarism and sports. Jacklyn Cock, Sandra Swart and Tokozani Xaba, in their respective accounts, trace South African militaristic masculinity to the apartheid era, and show how the images of this masculinity differ from group to group. Cock and Xaba identify the AK47 assault rifle as the militaristic masculine symbol for the black liberation movements such as ANC and UDF. In addition, Cock identifies a rawhide shield, knobkierie and spear as the Zulu nationalist symbols of militaristic masculinity. Swart adds a horse and a gun to the list defining Afrikaner militaristic masculinity. All three accounts acknowledge that in post-apartheid South Africa attempts to demilitarise society have been made, although militaristic masculinity lingers on. According to Cock and Xaba, although some black male freedom fighters have been demilitarised, others have not given up arms and have become misfits in the new South Africa; similarly, in the white community, not all Afrikaner right-wing AWB members have found it easy to give up their firearms.

Focusing on surfing, Crispin Hemson and Glen Thompson also, in their respective accounts, highlight diversity and change in South African sport masculinity. Hemson notes that the black male youth involved in the Thekwini Surf Lifesaving Club in Durban have demonstrated a rejection of the hegemonic and oppositional masculinity their township peers exhibit. Their construction of masculinity is so accommodative that it has room for recognition even of female lifesavers who demonstrate sharpness, intelligence and commitment to duty.

Thompson, however, highlights the domination of white professional surfing over amateur, female and black surfing. Thompson further points out that the former is materialistic rather than recreational in orientation.

### Fathers, Families and Kinship

The five chapters comprising this section deal with the changes that are taking place in southern African patriarchal masculinity. Benedict Carton shows the extent to which the money economy has impacted on patriarchal authority over younger males in rural Zululand: on return to Zululand, the young Zulu male urbanised migrant mine workers do not subscribe to patriarchal authority as they used to before. Jonathan Hyslop asserts that the adventurous and brutal English patriarchal masculinity of the colonial era has changed. Contemporary South African white English patriarchal masculinity is far less authoritative, even within the family circles, and such men are not as keen to go to war as were their forefathers. Kobus du Pisani explores the changes in Afrikaner masculinity which has, he argues, evolved from the patriarchal owner of the family farm, to warrior, to sportsman, and business personality. It has also evolved from a puritan ideal, in which the commitment to the family is a trademark of Afrikaner nationalism, to various forms of independent thinking and living.

Bjorn Lindgren's study focuses on the installation of a female chief in a Swazi community in Mathebeleland. He points out that although contested by some men holding on to male dominant masculinity, a female, Sonqobile Mabhena, was—with community support—installed as chief after the death of her father. The last chapter in this section, co-authored by Thembisa Waetjen and Gerhard Marie, examines Buthelezi's claims of Zulu nationalism. As quoted, Buthelezi's characterisation of Zulu nationalistic masculinity changes from a militaristic type to that of family provider.

### Performance masculinity

This section centres on contradictions in masculinity. Sean Field presents a case in which social reality inhibits two young males from participating in a ritual they value—circumcision. A coloured person misses it because his mother will not allow it, whereas the black man misses it because he grows up in the coloured community where such a ritual is not practised. Rob Pattman examines the discourse of students in a Zimbabwean teacher training college and finds how contradictory their evaluative speech about girls is. Kapano Ratele's study of educated black males' attitudes to the gendered apportionment of domestic chores also shows some contradictions. Contradiction in performance masculinity is also noted in the

members of the Soweto Flying Squad. Joan Wadrop noted that those males rejected machismo masculinity.

### Sexuality

This last part comprises essays by Catherine Campbell, Ronald Louw, T. Dunbar Moodie, and Katherine Wood and Rachel Jewks focusing on sexuality. It highlights variations in the way men think about sexuality and sexual identities. In various contexts men have defined and redefined their sexuality and sexual identities. In some situations, such as the miners' hostels, some men have served as wives to other men. Yet in others such behaviour has not been condoned.

### Conclusion

This book would do well as an introductory text to gender studies, especially at undergraduate level. For those seeking greater depth, some accounts suggest the need for follow up studies to see to what extent current views on masculinity will hold.

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## Recent Book Reviews

### Recent Reviews of Life Writing Publications

Judith Lütge Coullie

This issue sees the first of what will become a regular feature of *Alternation*: synopses of reviews of new life writing by or about people from southern Africa. The reviews are drawn from a number of sources, popular as well as academic—from the South African media (newspapers and magazines) and academic journals, as well as some non-South African publications.

In the academy in the West, testimony and life writing began to gain marked academic clout in literary studies in the 1980s. The handful of theoretical and critical texts which appeared at about that time have since been joined by scores of others, with some theoreticians, critics and writers using the autobiographical medium itself to explore not only the meanings of their experiences but also the significance of the act of self-representation. Roland Barthes, Antony Burgess, Frank Lentricchia and Frank Kermode spring immediately to mind, as do Lyndall Gordon, Stephen Gray and Richard Rive, closer to home. In the last decade, international conferences devoted to life writing have been held in America, China, Canada and Britain (with another planned in Australia in 2002) and the first comprehensive encyclopaedia of life writing around the globe (edited by Margaretta Jolly) is about to roll off the press. But the burgeoning importance accorded to life writing and testimony of people who range from the poor and obscure to the rich and famous, is not confined to literary studies. It is manifest across a number of disciplines, including sociology and anthropology; history and theology; psychology and politics; education and medicine (as evidenced by the number of AIDS patient testimonies appearing lately); criminology and law.

Outside the academy, life writing and oral testimony carry greater weight now than in earlier generations. Rigoberta Menchú won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992 for her testimony on behalf of the oppressed Quiché Indians of Guatemala. In the last few years, the testimonies of those appearing before State-constituted commissions in South Africa and Australia (the TRC for example) have found their way into numerous publications, whose market is by no means confined to those who may have professional interest in them. Moreover, the fact that the World Conference Against Racism held in Durban in September 2001 allowed space on the crowded agenda for the testimonies of a range of individuals shows yet again that the personal accounts of ordinary people are conceived of as crucial to an understanding of public

policy. And as the review entries below reveal, lately in South Africa the life stories of homeless people (Jonathan Morgan's collective story, *Finding Mr. Madini*), the unemployed (Adam Ashforth's *Madumo*), a murderer (Dimitrios Tsafendas in Henk van Woerden's *A Mouthful of Glass*) jostle for the attention of the book-buying public along with the stories of a rabbi (Cyril Harris' *For Heaven's Sake: The Chief Rabbi's Diary*), a prophetess (Nonhetha Nkwenkwe, in Robert Edgar and Hilary Sapire's *African Apocalypse*) and an ex-Vice Chancellor.

It seems to me that there are a number of possible reasons for this, and I shall not here attempt to be exhaustive. Going back in time, the focus on the self and on experience and memory can be construed both as the effect of post-Medieval trends within Christianity towards individual accountability, as well as the logical outcome of the weakening of religions in the West which gained momentum a few centuries ago. Many new disciplines, philosophies and theoretical movements emerged from this secularisation, among them anthropology, psychology, Marxism, feminism and—more recently—poststructuralism. Even a cursory knowledge of what these entail will allow one to see that the value accorded personal testimony—of powerful and prominent individuals as well as the disempowered and poor—is but one outcome of such developments in the knowledge-making industry. Another is the corresponding conviction, widely held, that the expertise and knowledge of specialists and intellectuals is provisional and partial, and does not obviate the need for those who were traditionally *objects* of study to speak as knowing *subjects* about their own lives. This revolution is implicated in the imperatives of democratisation movements which challenged monarchies, aristocracies, dictatorships, masculine supremacy and imperialism. Since democratic ideals insist that each vote is equally important—the President's vote carries the same status as that of a homeless person, that of a man being equivalent to that of a woman—the lives and life stories of the one may be of no less interest than those of the other. And although the publishing industry (and the reading public which it serves) might not be quite so idealistic or egalitarian, the range of testimonies which are published would seem to indicate that something of this ethos has indeed infiltrated into the life writing industry.

In South Africa, under the apartheid regime, autobiography and, to a lesser extent, biography, were important weapons in the liberation struggle. (One is reminded that the title of Don Mattera's autobiography—*Memory is the Weapon*—points explicitly to this.) Few doubted the political efficacy, during apartheid, of accounts—particularly by the most victimised, disempowered and impoverished—which testified to the horrors of 'separate development'. And in post-apartheid South Africa, testimony and life writing have not, as might have been supposed, waned in popularity (although, predictably, the concerns of the narrators and the nature of their struggles to achieve dignity have shifted somewhat).

Given this unabated growth in attention to personal history, it is rather sur-

prising that in South African libraries it is often still difficult to find in card catalogues and classificatory systems comprehensive lists of items which fall under the generic umbrella term of life writing in general and autobiography in particular. This is because texts are usually classified in terms of the principal occupation of the auto/biographical subject. So, for example, life stories of lawyers might be found under law, sporting personalities under sport, politicians under politics. It may thus be at best troublesome, at worst impossible, to ascertain exactly what texts comprise a particular library's auto/biographical holdings. So, if one looks up the subject 'autobiography' one frequently fails to find references to texts which may well be in the holdings and which are identified—by publishers, authors and readers alike—as autobiographical. There are obviously a number of reasons for this and perhaps the debate about this aspect of information systems could be undertaken at some other time. The point which I wish to make is that this collection of synopses of reviews of recently published life writing (autobiography and biography) may go some way to making the search for such texts considerably easier. For ease of reference, I have included information about the price of the book, as well as the number of pages, and have given full details about the source of the review and the name of the reviewer. In some instances, I found more than one review of a book. In such instances, one is not only able to compare the different responses, but also to gauge the amount of interest which a book has generated in the media.

It is hoped that readers will find much of interest in this diverse collection of reviews of life stories.

**List of Publications Consulted**

<i>The African Publishing Record</i>	<i>Mail and Guardian</i>
<i>Die Burger</i>	<i>The Mercury</i>
<i>Cape Argus</i>	<i>The New York Times Review of Books</i>
<i>Cape Times</i>	<i>Pace</i>
<i>The Citizen</i>	<i>Southern African Review of Books</i>
<i>Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa</i>	<i>The Saturday Star</i>
<i>Daily Despatch</i>	<i>Scrutiny2</i>
<i>East Cape Weekend (Leisure Supplement)</i>	<i>The Spectator (UK)</i>
<i>Eastern Province Herald</i>	<i>The Star</i>
<i>Evening Post</i>	<i>The Sunday Independent</i>
<i>Femina</i>	<i>Sunday Times</i>
<i>The Independent on Saturday</i>	<i>The Sunday Tribune</i>
	<i>True Love</i>

**Buried in the Sky.**

by Rick Andrews.  
Sandton, South Africa: Penguin, 2001, 207pp. R79,95.

These anecdotes, told by a 'mildly dissident' white South African about experiences of conscripts in the South African army in the 'seventies' are well told, ironic and often amusing, with a fine eye for detail, but no over-arching pattern of significance emerges'.

Shaun de Waal, *Mail & Guardian: Friday Books* June 8 - 14 2001:4.

**Madumo: A Man Bewitched.**

by Adam Ashforth and Madumo.  
Cape Town: David Philip, 2000, 255 pp. R92,00.

This true story streamlines the experiences gained by Adam Ashforth, a Princeton professor, in the times (on and off since 1990) when he lived in Soweto—an apartheid landscape that keeps evil alive'. Ashforth tells the story of Madumo, a man 'who has indulged in witchcraft' and for whom 'survival has only compounded his difficulty'. Madumo and Ashforth the story-teller are bound together by the development of the story and the development of their lives. The book shifts between two realities, between past and present tradition and modernity. Although it cannot answer the question of what is true, it 'reveals the course of beliefs in a mutable Africa'.

Neil Williams, *Mail and Guardian: Friday Books* September 1-7 2000:4.

**Beloved African.**

by Jill Baker.  
Pretoria: Covos Day, 2000, 508pp. R165,00.

'In writing the history of her family, Baker has written a piece of the history of Zimbabwe, where she was born and brought up and was well-known as a broadcaster in the 1970s .... The most surprising thing about the book is that it's a good read ...'. Roz Wrottesley, *Cape Argus*, July 7, 2000:10.

**Rivonia's Children: Three Families and the Price of Freedom in South Africa.**

by Glenn Frankel.  
Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 1999, 367 pp. R110,00.

This book tells the story of the white Jewish Communists—Hilda & Rusty Bernstein; Ruth First & Joe Slovo; AnnMarie & Harold Wolpe—who were engaged in the anti-apartheid struggle in the 1950s and 1960s. The author is a Pulitzer Prize winning American reporter; his 'racy style ... makes for a captivating read'. Nevertheless, it adds little to what 'we already know' and 'comes dangerously close to romanticising his leading characters'. It also contains misprints and errors of fact and South African usage.

Betty Welz, *The Citizen*, February 21 2000:12.

Frankel's meticulously researched narrative into the lives of 'a handful of white activists' is based on 'interviews, autobiographical writings, letters and even notes sewn into shirt collars and smuggled into prison'. He 'highlights the destruction wrought on family life'.

Phylicia Oppelt, *Sunday Times*, March 19, 2000:20.

Frankel, who shares a common Jewish background with his subjects, contrasts the Jewishness of activists Ruth First, AnnMarie and Harold Wolpe, and Hilda and Rusty Bernstein with that of Percy Yutar, the state prosecutor in the Rivonia Treason Trial of 1963, which led to the life imprisonment on Robben Island of 'the likes of former President Nelson Mandela'. *Rivonia's Children* is 'written like a novel', underpinned by 'meticulous research'.

Gillian Anstey, *Sunday Times*, May 7, 2000:8.

In this 'fascinating' book, Frankel 'doesn't preach or take sides' in his exploration of why the subjects of his narrative, these well-off white citizens, went to such lengths to fight the apartheid state.

Gillian McAinsh, *East Cape Weekend (Leisure Supplement)*, April 22, 2000:4.

***A Country Unmasked: Inside South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.***

by Alex Boraine.

Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 2000, xviii + 466pp, R200,00.

This 'very first-person insider account of the TRC' is interesting but hardly a sparkling read.

Jaspreet Kindra, *Mail and Guardian, Friday Books*, Oct. 27 - Nov. 2 2000:5.

One of seventeen TRC Commissioners, Boraine's long and turgid account has provoked controversy because he displays his dislike for certain of his fellow commissioners and discloses the Commission's adverse conclusions on ex-President, F.W. de Klerk ('arguably in contravention of his oath of office'). Skip this book, unless you have an academic interest in the topic.

Betty Welz, *The Citizen*, Oct. 30, 2000:12.

***Cold Stone Jug.***

by Herman Charles Bosman.

Cape Town: Human and Rousseau, 1999, 199pp. R54,95.

'There were two things that struck me on reading Herman Bosman's prison memoir, *Cold Stone Jug*, republished late last year to mark the 50th anniversary of its original

publication in 1949. The first was his approval of child sex. The second was that there was no explanation in the book of why he murdered his step-brother in 1926 ...'. Turrell argues that what is at issue is not the quality of Bosman's writing (this is 'extremely gifted'); what concerns him is not only Bosman's connivance at child abuse and failure to explain the murder, but the silence of contemporary critics on these subjects.

Rob Turrell, *Southern African Review of Books*, January 2000: <http://www.uni-ulm.de/~rturrell/sarobnewhtml/>; <http://www.uni-ulm.de/~rturrell/sarobnewhtml/>.

***Dog Heart (A Travel Memoir).***

by Breyten Breytenbach.

Cape Town, Pretoria, Johannesburg: Human and Rousseau, 1998, 199pp. R54,95.

A 'tough and tender reflection' on the place where Breytenbach grew up, *Dog Heart* is also 'a meditation on the place of writing, the power and trickiness of memory, the oddities of home and family, and the elusiveness, in a postmodern, postcolonial world, of personal and national identities .... If one wishes to understand something of the ways we (South Africans) live now, and why writing remains a crucial political necessity in this country, one could do worse than read Breytenbach's latest book. But it is not only timely and compelling. It's a greatly enjoyable read'.

Tim Trengrove Jones, *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa* 11,2, October 1999:151-154.

***The Bang-Bang Club: Snapshots from a Hidden War.***

by Greg Marinovich and Joao Silva.

London: William Heinemann, 2000. xiv & 254 pp. R205,00.

Refusing to succumb to the modish trend to theorise and interpret visual images, this 'surprisingly good read' records, through the eyes of Marinovich, the experiences of four South African press photographers—Kevin Carter, Greg Marinovich, Ken Oosterbroek and Joao Silva—who worked largely in the trouble-torn black townships of the early 'nineties. It avoids 'most of the self-indulgent pitfalls of many autobiographical works' and none of its four subjects 'are fully spared the critical eye of hindsight'. The book serves as a frighteningly detailed record of 'one of South Africa's darkest times; a period marked by extreme violence, suspicion—and, ultimately, hope'. The book questions the morality of the war photographer: as Marinovich says, 'when do you press the shutter release and when do you cease being a photographer?'

Nechama Brodie, *Mail and Guardian, Friday Books*, September 21-28, 2000:8.

The two survivors, Greg Marinovich and Joao Silva, tell the story of a short-lived club of four award-winning photographers, 'white boys who drifted together at the



start of the nineties and who, for half a decade dominated South African photography with their pictures of the township wars in those tightrope years before freedom'. It is 'an honest book, telling of the drugs and booze, the jealousies and animosities, the insecurities and fears, the hopes and ambitions of its members; of the trauma of photographing slaughter by bullet, blade, rock and flame; of the bloodlust and madness that seemed poised to destroy a nation on the brink of democracy'. Described in the preface by Archbishop Desmond Tutu as 'a splendid book, devastating in what it reveals', this is a book you will not forget.

Dave Hazelhurst, *The Daily News*, September 13, 2000:9.

***Black Hamlet.***

by Wulf Sachs.

Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, [1937]1996, 340pp. R90,00.

In *Black Hamlet*, Wulf Sachs (1893-1949), a Russian-born Jewish physician and the first practising psychoanalyst in South Africa, tells the story of the anonymous 'John Chavafambira', a Manyika nganga (healer-diviner) who moved from Eastern Zimbabwe to South Africa in the 1920s. Sachs wanted to discover whether psychoanalysis was universally applicable; Chavafambira wanted to gain an understanding of Western medicine. *Black Hamlet* is Wulf's novelistic reconstruction of Chavafambira's life. It's ambiguous textual status—not 'pure' psychology, anthropology or history—makes it the kind of document likely to fascinate students of contemporary cultural studies for years to come.

Chesca Long-Innes, *Scrutiny* 2 5,2,2000:78-85.

***Man of Two Worlds: An Autobiography.***

by Wilfred Cibane.

Cape Town: Kwela Books, 1998, 160pp. R54,95.

Cibane recounts his life's journey from his "'traditional" world ... represented by his Zulu roots, his marriage ... and his role as a father' to his "'modern" experience based in "the white man's world"'. This 'well-written autobiography' is 'highly recommended for all university and public libraries'.

Joseph McLaren, *The African Publishing Record* XXVI,1, 2000: 14-15.

***Fireforce.***

by Chris Cocks.

South Africa: Cosvos-Day, 2000, 368pp. R145,00.

***Survival Course.***

by Chris Cocks. South Africa: Cosvos-Day, 2000, 244pp. R95,00.

*Fireforce* is the story of a young man who joined the Rhodesian Light Infantry in 1976. The author vividly recounts details of battles with insurgents during the bush war, as well as revealing the heavy psychological toll such combat took on soldiers. *Survival Course* is the sequel. It carries on the author's personal story from when he left the RLI in 1979 through independence in 1980 and into the rumblings of his 'new life' in Zimbabwe. These books make absorbing reading for those with a special interest in Rhodesia/ Zimbabwe or in counter-insurgency warfare, but may have limited wider appeal.

Greg Dardagan, *The Mercury*, Aug. 25, 2000:12.

***Noor's Story: My Life In District Six.***

by Noor Ebrahim.

Cape Town: The District Six Museum, 1999, 89pp. R 40,00.

This autobiography is 'the latest of a trickle of works on life' in the 1950s and 1960s in District Six—a once vibrant 'Coloured' area in Cape Town, demolished by the apartheid government. It is 'a splendid tale, devoid of contrived drama or considered embellishments' and is suitable for both adult and younger readers.

Cornelius Thomas, *Daily Despatch*, April 26, 2000:8.

***For Humanity: Reflections of a War Crimes Investigator.***

by Richard J. Goldstone.

Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2000, 152pp. R144,40.

Written in an autobiographical style, *For Humanity* gives the inside story of the three powerful positions held by the South African judge within a period of three years: the first was as Chairman of the Standing Commission of Inquiry Regarding the Prevention of Public Violence and Intimidation which investigated various events which occurred during the turbulent years (1991-1994) of South Africa's transition to democracy. The second was as Justice of South Africa's Constitutional Court. The third was as chief prosecutor of the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. The account provides intriguing glimpses of the personal communications of then-president F.W. de Klerk and Nelson Mandela, and later of U.N. foot-dragging.

Jonathan Klaaren, *Sunday Times*, Oct. 1, 2000:23.

***For Heaven's Sake: The Chief Rabbi's Diary.***

by Cyril Harris.

Goodwood: Contra Publications, 2000, 330pp. R179,95.

Chief Rabbi of the Union of Orthodox Synagogues in South Africa, Glaswegian Cyril Harris reveals the motivations behind his sometimes controversial words and actions. James Mitchell, *The Star. Tonight*, July 24, 2000:3.

### **Undaunted: An Autobiography.**

by Ethn  e Holmes    Court with Liz van den Neuwenhof.

South Yarra: Macmillan, Australia, 1999. 272pp. AU\$ 23,00.

Although Ethn  e Holmes    Court's life has been interesting as well as tragic, and her story offers 'fascinating insights' into colonial Rhodesia, it's marred by 'a perspective which is, at best, severely dated, and at worst, racist'.

Bev Rycroft, *Cape Times*, March 3, 2000.

### **The Many Houses of Exile.**

by Richard J  rgens.

Weltevreden Park, South Africa: Covos Day, 2000. 500pp. R85,00.

'*The Many Houses of Exile* is an autobiography, fictionalised to some degree, that describes Richard J  rgens's getting of wisdom in the apartheid defence force, at Wits university, and as a struggle exile in Tanzania and Lusaka. I was struck by two strengths in the narrative. The first is that its fairly rich use of colloquialism is unembarrassing .... The second is that the narrator ... engages intensely with his world and its people while remaining ironically disengaged .... [It] can be excessively anecdotal, and needs editing ... but it is well worth reading: an absorbing, sophisticated, and occasionally harrowing commentary'.

Ken Barris, *Mail & Guardian: Friday Books*, January 26 - 1 February 2001:5.

This autobiographical account by a fiercely individualistic writer will 'probably be remembered for the last part' which deals with the experiences of J  rgens and his wife in the exiled anti-apartheid movement, showing that the culture of the oppressed has surprising similarities with that of the oppressor.

Charl-Pierre Naude, *The Sunday Independent*, April 1, 2001:18.

### **Letters from Robben Island.**

by Ahmed Kathrada.

Rivonia: Zebra, 1999. 263pp. R90,00.

The letters of prisoners on Robben Island, where the apartheid regime sent long-term political prisoners, had to be passed by the censor before they would be posted. Obviously, this inhibited the writers and we thus get little sense of the personality of the author in this collection of letters. The book is shoddily edited and difficult to read because of the employment of mock-cyrillic script.

Betty Welz, *The Citizen*, Oct.30, 2000:12.

### **Country of my Skull.**

by Antjie Krog.

Johannesburg: Random House, 1998, 286pp. R90,00.

'Although Krog supervised the SABC Radio team of TRC correspondents, as well as writing about the Commission's proceedings in the *Mail & Guardian* ... *Country of my skull* is by no means simply a sampling or distillation of her reportage. Rather, it offers an assemblage of excerpts from the testimonies of victims and amnesty seekers themselves, interspersed with and framed by reflections upon, dialogues about, epistolary responses to and overtly fictionalised and poetic explorations of the philosophical and practical processes of working through trauma towards an emergent sense of home, belonging and self-possession'. The text opens 'channels of empathy between self and other, past and present', and invites re-mappings of 'all those literal and metaphorical imaginary homelands that are sought out as histories of dispossession are addressed and begin to be redressed'.

Susan Spearey, *Scrutiny* 2 5,1:2000:64-77.

### **Never Been at Home.**

by Zazah Kuzwayo.

Durban, South Africa: privately published, 2001, 76pp. R70,00.

The 24-year old woman's story of surviving childhood abuse, poverty, a battle for education and growing up in a time of political and social upheaval is 'simply told, badly edited' and 'painfully raw'.

Vasantha Angamuthu, *Sunday Tribune, Perspectives*, May 20, 2001:1.

### **Felicia—Dare to Dream.**

by Felicia Mabuza-Suttle with Thebe Ikalafeng.

Johannesburg: Zebra Press, 1999, 155pp. R89,95.

This is 'an interesting narrative of Felicia's strength, courage and commitment to an ideal' and 'has a real story to tell' but 'is slightly off-putting in its adoration for its subject'.

Unnamed reviewer, *Pace*, February 2000:18.

*Dare to Dream* 'is a classic which every South African should possess to achieve his or her dreams'.

Mandla Nxumalo, *Evening Post*, March 27, 2000:5.

### **Miriam's Song: A Memoir.**

by Miriam Mathabane, as told to Mark Mathabane.

New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000, 315pp. R153,00.

Miriam's story (as told to her brother) is about poverty and the culture of the poor in apartheid South Africa. The daughter of a mother who does domestic work 'for starvation wages' and a selfish and abusive father, as a teenager Miriam is raped and falls pregnant. 'In spite of the familiarity of the theme, the detailing is continuously

intriguing and absorbing'.

Kole Omotoso, *Cape Times*, December 15, 2000:6.

***Plain Tales from Robben Island.***

by Jan K. Coetzee.

Pretoria: Van Schaik, 2000, 124pp. R102,00.

The biographies of these six political prisoners—Mati, Mgabela, Mkunqwana, Ngxiki, Sitho and Keke—told decades after their release from South Africa's most notorious prison, are based on interviews. This 'unpretentious little book' is honest and sincere and is 'strongly recommended'.

Betty Welz, *The Citizen*, Oct.30, 2000:12.

***Mac: The Face of Rugby.***

by Ian McIntosh (with John Bishop).

Cape Town: Don Nelson, 2000, 256 pp. R69,95.

'At long last a book on [South African] rugby that tells the whole story, that does not conveniently skirt contentious issues and is not delivered in the romanticised, camp-fire tale-style of so many rugby biographies/autobiographies.

Mac, in collaboration with the respected Pietermaritzburg writer John Bishop, frankly criticises those who deserve it, openly criticises himself when he deserved it, and honestly presents the facts so that the reader can make up his own mind on the big issues .... It is an outstanding portrayal of a true rugby legend'.

Mike Greenaway, *The Sunday Tribune*, May 28, 2000:30

***Five Frontiers to Freedom.***

by Jeff Morphew.

Sun Valley, Cape: Vineyard International Publishing, 2000. 226pp. R 75,00.

The author, a captain in the South African Airforce, 'was the first to escape from an Italian prisoner of war camp during World War 2'. This account of his escape to Switzerland and his subsequent return to active service with the RAF is 'storytelling at its best'.

Greg Hutson, *The Mercury*, February 28, 2000:7.

'This must rank as one of the best—and best-told—escape stories of World War II. It must also rank as one of the best researched, vetted and edited books of its kind'.

Roger Williams, *Cape Times*, April 20, 2000:6.

***Kortboy: A Sophiatown Legend.***

by Derrick Thema.

Cape Town: Kwela Books, 1999.

This biography of Kortboy—George Mpalweni—a gangster boss, 'doubles as a socio-history of Sophiatown' [a black suburb demolished by the apartheid government]. It is 'a personal tale of crime, suffering and redemption'.

Cornelius Thomas, *Eastern Province Herald*, February 23, 2000:4.

***Island in Chains.***

by Indres Naidoo (and Albie Sachs).

South Africa: Penguin, 2000. 294pp. R80,00.

Now republished, this account of Naidoo's imprisonment on Robben Island (the island on which Nelson Mandela and other anti-apartheid activists were incarcerated) was banned in South Africa when it first appeared in 1982. The text has retained features which now seem quaint, but reads amazingly well.

Betty Welz, *The Citizen*, Oct.30, 2000:12.

***The Soweto Uprisings: Counter-Memories of June 1976.***

by Ndlovu, Sifiso Mxolisi.

Randburg, South Africa: Ravan Press, 1998, 58pp. R39,95.

The author, one of the principal participants in the Soweto Uprisings of June 1976, recounts his recollections of the events leading up to the massacre of black students by the police. Part 1 gives eyewitness accounts by Ndlovu and others, as well as newspaper cuttings expressing various viewpoints. Part 2 addresses the issue of how that tragic event has been shaped in terms of 'hegemonic memories' that 'give place of prominence to the major anti-apartheid movements, such as the African National Congress and the Black Consciousness Movement' while suppressing the 'truly authentic counter-memories that represent the views of the masses symbolic of anti-establishment resistance'.

Femi Ojo-Ade, *The African Publishing Record*, XXVI,1, 2000:26.

***Dreambirds: The Strange History of the Ostrich in Fashion, Food, and Fortune.***

by Rob Nixon.

New York: Picador, 1999. 289pp. \$23,00.

Nixon grew up in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, near the vast wasteland known as the Great Karroo. 'Like so many sons, Nixon was determined to become his father's opposite: "He knew everything about roots, so I became obsessed with flight". But the Karroo's most significant bird was the flightless ostrich ...'. There are 'plenty of characters' who can 'hold their own' against the 'flamboyance' of the ostrich: an elegant plumassière, the Lycra-clad Arizona ostrich jockeys and 'Nixon's upright and unassumingly diligent father ... [who] winds up quietly dominating the book'.

Alida Baker, *The New York Times Review of Books*, May 7, 2000:14.

***African Apocalypse: The Story of Nonthetha Nkwenkwe, a Twentieth Century South African Prophet.***

by Robert R. Edgar and Hilary Sapire.

Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1999, 201pp. R130,00.

Edgar and Sapire tell, in the measured prose of the historian, the sombre story of this illiterate woman who, in her forties, gathered followers and began to prophesy. The government of the day, nervous of the potential of African initiatives to destabilise colonial society detained Nonthetha in mental asylums from 1922 until her death in 1935. The intersection in the 1920s and '30s of psychiatry, struggling to establish scientific norms for itself, with the racial prejudices of South Africa of the time, is interestingly described. These tensions in turn overlaid a completely different African discourse concerning spiritual liberation.

Sean Morrow, *Saturday Dispatch*, July 22, 2000:4.

***From Biko to Basson.***

by Wendy Orr.

Saxonwold, South Africa: Contra, 2000, xx & 363pp. R125,00.

As one of the seventeen Commissioners on the post-apartheid Truth and Reconciliation Commission, instituted to investigate gross violations of human rights during the apartheid period, Wendy Orr does not disguise her dislike, even contempt, for certain of her fellow commissioners. Her self-pitying book 'should have remained an unpublished personal memoir'.

Betty Welz, *The Citizen*, Oct.30, 2000:12.

***Catch Me a Killer.***

by Micki Pistorius.

Johannesburg: Penguin, 2000, 253 pp. R79,95.

Micki Pistorius, South Africa's top criminal profiler, has written a book about her six years' experience in the South African Police Service during which time she 'has apparently helped catch more serial killers than anyone else, including the renowned United States expert Robert Ressler'. Accounts of cases are 'fascinating and informative'. This book, however, is 'also a kind of autobiography, a confession' which, 'like a violated body, is full of clues about its author'. Disturbing are her dislike for the Press and the fact that all photographs obscure her face ('Is this a tease, a power game or a cry for help?'). Also, 'Why does she make such dangerous statements as "I actually missed having a killer in my head"? Whatever the case, one would expect a little less self-pity and bragging and a great deal more emotional and intellectual rigour from a doctor of psychology'.

Neil Sonnekus, *Mail & Guardian: Friday*, 16,34, August 25 - 31, 2000:5.

***War of Words: Memoir of a South African Journalist.***

by Benjamin Pogrund.

New York: Seven Stories Press, 2000. 381pp. \$26.95.

Pogrund details his experiences with the now defunct *Rand Daily Mail*—a newspaper 'regarded by many as the leader of the pack'—during the years when the apartheid government was intent upon controlling the press. As the RDM's African affairs reporter, he came into contact with the young Nelson Mandela and Robert Sobukwe. 'In many ways it is a depressing read—an unpleasant reminder of what the country endured before the deal was struck for democracy'.

John McClennan, *The Sunday Independent*, September 3, 2000:18.

***The Unfolding Man: The Life and Art of Dan Rakgoathe.***

by Donvé Langhan.

Claremont: David Philip, 2000, 171pp. R120,00.

'Superb South African graphic artist Dan Rakgoathe has constantly struggled with metaphysical issues unique to the black artist supplying a white market. This biography plots the most poignant events of his life (the death of his mother and three siblings, the onset of blindness) according to the subtext in his brilliant linocuts .... The book deals with the spiritual, the mysterious—and the tragic. A compelling tribute to a great artist'.

Denise Fouche, *True Love*, April 2001: 22.

This beautifully laid out book, with its black and white and colour plates, provides a fascinating weave of events in Rakgoathe's life, but I never got the sense of the man. Lucinda Jolly, *Cape Argus*, January 15, 2001:10.

'The story of artist and philosopher Dan Rakgoathe's life and work is inescapably South African, and the impact of our history on this individual is exhaustively charted'.

'JC'. *The Citizen*, December 18, 2000:14.

***A Labour of Love.***

by Kogi Singh.

Durban: Aryan Benevolent Home Council, 2000, 237pp. R57,00.

Kogi Singh's 'beautifully written biography' of a 20th Century Indian migrant labourer's child—Shishupal Rambharos—in South Africa is 'a moving account' of how the boy 'learned to conquer his fear of living as an orphan and a refugee'.

Xolisa Vapi, *The Independent on Saturday*, May 27, 2000:11.

***The Last of the Queen's Men: A Lesotho Experience.***

by Peter Sanders.

Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2000, 175pp. R100,00.

'Peter Sanders, one of the last administrative officers to be posted to Britain's African Empire, relives his years in Africa with the sharp eye of an observer and the authority of a historian. *The Last of the Queen's Men* is a little gem'.

*Mail & Guardian: 101 Books for Christmas*, November 10-16 2000:2.

This book is 'gossipy about the life of the author as administrator' and is 'too superficial to interest politicians and says very little of social structure and history of the Basotho'.

Graham Young, *Cape Argus*, January 29, 2001:10.

***Vice-Chancellor on a Tightrope: A Personal Account of Climactic Years in South Africa.***

by Stuart Saunders.

Cape Town: David Philip, 2000. 273pp. R140.

Saunders—former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cape Town—writes of the embattled state of that university in the latter years of apartheid. It is a story of 'a terminally afflicted society' written 'with a practiced research worker's sharpness'.

Alan Lipman, *The Sunday Independent*, April 16, 2000:17.

Saunders has produced 'a valuable addition' to our understanding of the times when tertiary education was most under threat from the Nationalist government. 'Highly readable, and recommended'.

James Mitchell, *The Star*, March 13, 2000:12.

***Time Stretching Fear: The Detention and Solitary Confinement of 14 Anti-apartheid Trialists, 1987-1991.***

by Else Schreiner.

Cape Town: Robben Island Museum, 2000, 256pp. R95,00.

On September 17, 1987 fourteen South African activists, amongst whom was Jenny Schreiner, were detained in terms of Section 29 of the Internal Security Act. All were granted full and unconditional indemnity in March 1991. This is the story told by Jenny's mother 'about the people, the trialists, lawyers, supporters, police etc.'

Jill Gowans, *The Sunday Tribune*, Feb. 18, 2001:13.

***The Prophetic Nun.***

by Guy Butler.

Johannesburg: Random House, 2000, 127pp. R183,00

This 'meticulously researched text' tells the stories of three nuns—Sister Margaret, Sister Pauline and Sister Dorothy Raphael—whose 'lives and work in South Africa encapsulate much of what might be termed the contemporary "transformative" agenda', revealing how cross-fertilization between Eurocentric and indigenous traditions cut a thoroughly prophetic edge in the mid-twentieth century. This 'triumphantly successful' book belongs to that tradition of biography in which the biographer's own spiritual development can be traced.

Chris Chivers, *Cape Argus*, Aug. 7, 2000:14.

Butler's lavishly illustrated book tells a 'magical tale' of how these three women chose to bestow their remarkable individual gifts on mankind.

Bob Eveleigh, *East Cape Weekend, Leisure*, Oct. 21, 2000:4.

***The Morning Light: A South African Childhood Revalued.***

by Prue Smith.

Cape Town: David Philip, 2000. R94,95. 336pp.

'Smith's memoir is a well-written, moving account of a life that begins in Johannesburg in the "late, late British Empire". It includes a long diasporic existence in England and ends with her return to South Africa to embrace what she calls "the freedom of Mandela"'. It is not a comprehensive autobiography. Rather it focuses on 'several momentous periods and experiences, including her idyllic colonial childhood and its "dissolution" following the death of her father .... Her memoir is, in a sense about the claims made upon her by the compulsion to escape and the longing to come home'.

David Medalie, *Sunday Independent*, November 19, 2000:18.

***One Step Behind Mandela.***

by Rory Steyn and Debora Patta.

Rivonia: Zebra Press, 2000, 208 pp. R89,95..

As leader of then-President Nelson Mandela's security team for five years, erstwhile racist and policeman Rory Steyn learnt much from Mandela, including the need to respect all people and be more humble and more patriotic. The book does not indulge in gossip about Mandela's private life; indeed, it reminds one of early magazine journalism about Hollywood stars as there is not a single 'bad word' about Mandela. Being bodyguard to such a world figure was an arduous job which, at times, caused Steyn to sweat blood, particularly when Mandela insisted on visiting areas controlled by parties which opposed the ANC.

Reinet Louw, *Die Burger (Boekewereld)*, September 9, 2000:7.

***A Mouthful of Glass.***

by Henk van Woerden, translated from the Dutch by Dan Jacobson.

Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2000, 168pp. R99.95.

Dimitrios Tsafendas, a parliamentary messenger, stabbed Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd to death, in parliament, in 1966. Van Woerden's almost novelistic tale of a sad man who spent the rest of his life in prison and then—in the last years—in a mental institution, is highly readable.

Glynis O'Hara, *True Love*, March 2001:21.

Van Woerden's account 'is not a history—although in many ways it comes close—because there are too many loose ends'.

Mike Oettle, *East Cape Weekend Leisure*, December 23, 2000:5.

Dutch writer Henk van Woerden 'finely sketches' the life of Dimitrios Tsafendas, the eccentric who, as a "Christian, communist, Coloured, Black and White" ... suffered rejection at every turn until finally, "creatures" living inside his body ordered him to commit one of the most dramatic assassinations in our time. Van Woerden asks the interesting question: "Was he mad, or was the madness outside him?". Skilfully translated by Dan Jacobson'.

'SSM', *Femina*, December 2000:165.

Hendrik Verwoerd, 'the great ideologue behind the quasi-theocratic system of racial segregation known as apartheid' was stabbed several times by Dimitrios Tsafendas, a loner, a drifter, a madman. This book about Tsafendas's life is difficult to classify but is worth reading because it is 'extremely well written, and beautifully translated. Books don't need precise classification; and lives don't need to have a fixed course to be tragically and unutterably sad'.

Geoffrey Wheatcroft, *The Spectator*, October 28, 2000.

***No Future Without Forgiveness.***

by Desmond Tutu.

Parktown, South Africa: Rider, 1999, 244pp. R145.00.

Like Alex Boraine's account of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, this book is interesting, but hardly a sparkling read. Concerning the controversial episode when Tutu, as Chairman of the TRC, begged Winnie Mandela to apologise for her part in the gross violation of human rights, Tutu says that he feels that he succeeded in getting her admit to some responsibility. He also recounts the criticism which he received from members of the governing party, the African National Congress, for placing those who had fought against apartheid on the same moral plane as those who had implemented it.

Jaspreet Kindra, *Mail and Guardian, Friday Books*, Oct. 27 - Nov. 2 2000:5.

TRC Chairperson Archbishop Tutu has written 'a succinct and gripping story' which 'reads in part as a sermon, in part as a confession'. The book is 'accessible, informative, free of any personal animus and must stand as the definitive story of the TRC'.

Betty Welz, *The Citizen*, Oct. 30, 2000:12.

***The Victor Within.***

by Victor Vermeulen and Jonathan Ancer.

Norwood: Tenacity Publications, 2000. 112pp. R76.00.

This simply told tale is 'a South African story of courage and love' that will 'clutch at the heart'. At the age of nineteen, a dive into a too-shallow pool left Victor Vermeulen with paralysis due to a broken spine. He looks back at events in his childhood and sees how they were preparing him for adulthood.

Kim Robinson, *The Independent on Saturday*, Jan. 6, 2001:7.

***Rainbow Nation Revisited: South Africa's Decade of Democracy.***

by Donald Woods.

London: Andre Deutsch, 2000. xiv & 255 pp. R219.95.

The bulk of the book is a narrative of the return journey Donald Woods (the subject of the film, *Cry Freedom*) made to South Africa after a long exile. This journey is 'evocatively described and used as an excellent springboard for some salient contrasts between the apartheid era as Woods experienced it before his famous escape on New Year's Eve 1977, and the changes and developments he saw on his return in 1990'. The narrative has 'an enticingly autobiographical flavour' but the extended reflections, probably with the non-South African reader in mind, 'tend to destroy the narrative thread'. The desire to combine 'the highly personal' with 'social analysis' is problematic, as is the title: on what grounds is democracy seen as beginning in 1990? In the end the book is a muddled conflation of memoir, travelogue and social commentary.

Chris Chivers, *Cape Argus*, October 23, 2000:14.

***My Plunge to Fame: Gaynor Young's Story.***

by Gaynor Young (with Shirley Johnston).

Claremont: The Spearhead Press, 2000. xii and 227pp. R90.00.

At 28, actress Gaynor Young plunged down the equivalent of five storeys during a performance of *Camelot* at the State Theatre in Pretoria. This left her with 2% hearing, brain damage, tunnel vision, and a spastic right hand. This book recounts Young's 'literally crawling back to life'. This book, which could have been 'maudlin or self-pitying is anything but. It's charmingly colloquial, warm unputdownable and,

yes, it's inspirational'. Read this book.

Arja Salafranca, *The Saturday Star*; *The Goodweekend*, September 9, 2000:3.

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## *Alternation*

### Guidelines for Contributors

*Manuscripts* must be submitted in English (UK). If quotations from other languages appear in the manuscript, place the original in a footnote and a dynamic-equivalent translation in the body of the text or both in the text.

Contributors must submit *one computer-generated and three double-spaced printed copies* of the manuscript. The computer-generated copy may be on double density floppy or stiffie in Word Perfect 5-6, Word for Windows 6 or ASCII. If accepted for publication, 10 original off-print copies of the article will be returned to the author.

Manuscripts should range between 5000-8000 and bookreviews between 500-1000 words. However, longer articles may be considered for publication.

Attach a cover page to one manuscript containing the following information: Author's full name, address, e-mail address, position, department, university/ institution, telephone/fax numbers, a list of previous publications and a written statement that the manuscript has not been submitted to another journal for publication.

*Maps, diagrams and posters* must be presented in print-ready form. Clear black and white photos (postcard size) may also be submitted.

Use footnotes sparingly. In order to enhance the value of the interaction between notes and text, we use footnotes and not endnotes.

Authors may use their own numbering systems in the manuscript.

Except for bibliographical references, abbreviations must include fullstops. The abbreviations (e.a.) = 'emphasis added'; (e.i.o.) = 'emphasis in original'; (i.a.) or [.....] = 'insertion added' may be used.

The full bibliographical details of sources are provided only once at the end of the manuscript under References. References in the body of the manuscript should follow the following convention: Dlodlo (1994:14) argues .... or at the end of a reference/quotation: ..... (Dlodlo 1994:14).

The full name or initials of authors as it appears in the source must be used in the References section.

Review articles and book reviews must include a title as well as the following information concerning the book reviewed: title, author, place of publication, publisher, date of publication, number of pages and the ISBN number.

The format for the references section is as follows:

Head, Bessie 1974. *A Question of Power*. Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers.  
Mhlophe, Gcina 1990. Nokulunga's Wedding. In Van Niekerk, Annemarié (ed): *Raising the Blinds. A Century of South African Women's Stories*. Parklands: Ad Donker.  
Mngadi, Sikhumbuzo 1994. 'Popular Memory' and Social Change in South African Historical Drama of the Seventies in English: The Case of Credo Mutwa's *Unosimela*. *Alternation* 1,1:37-41.  
Fanon, Frantz 1986. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Markmann, Charles Lam (trans). London: Pluto Press.