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# *Alternation*

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**Guest Editor  
Jabulani Mkhize**

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# **Introduction: The Politics of Interpretation/ Theory**

**Jabulani Mkhize**

[W]e never really confront a text immediately, in all its freshness as a thing-in-itself. Rather, texts come before us as the always-already-read; we apprehend them through sedimented layers of previous interpretations, or—if the text is brand new—through the sedimented reading habits and categories developed by those inherited interpretive traditions (Jameson 1981:9).

## **Introduction**

This special edition of *Alternation* was initially conceived as one on 'Literature and Politics' and invitations for contributions were sent out with this focus in mind. As the contributions poured in it was clear that a restrictive (narrow) focus on the topic in question would not yield the desired results and that a relative degree of flexibility would beneficially broaden the scope of focus. Of course this flexibility did not mean an 'anything goes' kind of leeway to any contribution that did not refer, even if obliquely, to either the political realm or literature.

In my view the flexibility has resulted in a final product that gravitates towards a special focus on the politics of culture or cultural politics with a central thrust on the southern tip of the African

continent. This has been done without necessarily compromising on the literary bias of the focus, as the majority of the contributions will attest, or totally abandoning the essence of the initial project which, as can be inferred, is represented in a few papers.

The contributions have come from different institutions within the country and, not only from established academics but also, and, most significantly, from postgraduate students who are busy carving out a niche for themselves in the field of publication. Trying to empower postgraduate students is a trend that *Alternation* has gradually adopted in a couple of past issues so this is a continuation in that direction, especially with regard to the critical engagement of the tradition of Critical scholarship.

Therefore, Instead of providing some form of signposting for the readers by alluding to the gist of each of the contributions here, we felt that the table of contents will suffice to whet the appetite of the readers satisfy their curiosity, rather than pre-empting their responses with our own (mis)-readings of the essays. Even so, I provide brief summaries of the *aims* and basic *arguments* the authors state and highlight in their contributions. This serves to provide some form of introduction to the thought and critical fields of the different authors.



Emmanuel M. Mgwashu focuses his contribution on the 'politics of pedagogy in the Humanities' as well as what the current challenges comprise of with regard to Language Teaching. Arguing that the (South Africa) university needs to be much more closely related to the country's citizens, he points to the challenge for developing appropriate pedagogic practices. With his notion of the 'politics of pedagogy', he explains pedagogic practices in various disciplines in the Humanities faculty. Against this background, he then engages the question of teaching practice that 'tends to conceal methods, theories and strategies involved in arriving at certain discipline specific conclusions within academic discourses'. This is

followed by an explication of how such pedagogy makes students irrelevant to the needs and demands of our society.

In his engagement of the 'Literature and Politics' complex, Sikhumbuzo Mngadi shows that the space inhabited by the copula raises a number of important composite issues—especially as it relates to the formalist approach(es) to literature. He shows how J.M. Coetzee's writing has continued to provide a needed object for critics and critique in the South African situation, i.e. on both sides of the politics/ poetics divide. Focusing on Coetzee's 'Into the Dark Chamber: The Writer and the South African State'—first published in the *New York Times Book Review* of 1986—his contribution untangles related issues from both the apartheid and post-apartheid eras. Rather than seeing a 'peaceful' link signalled by the copula, he elaborates on how this constitutes an 'arena of great critical activity', as well as the continued importance of Coetzee's essay.

Pumla Dineo Gqola's contribution questions the significance of 'representations of Blackwomen in struggle iconography' beyond the focuses on Black Consciousness activists and artists. This is done through her problematising of existing 'masculinist biases in some parts of the liberation movement'. She then examines some of the engagements with 'the histories of this typecasting of the category "Blackwomen" in contemporary South African narratives concerned with the memorialising of the anti-apartheid struggle'. Even though some old stereotypes emerge in some of the narratives analysed, there are also 'some creative endeavours' that 'demonstrate an assortment of angles from and devices through which to deconstruct this legacy of typecasting'. Important in her argument is that the existing 'heterogeneity of all human clusters', including that of 'blackwomen', need to be taken seriously beyond typecasting and stereotyping. This will remove the 'imposed homogeneity which makes control and subjugation [of blackwomen] eas[y]'.  
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Johan van Wyk's translation of 'Die Rigting van die Afrikaanse Letterkunde' ([1939]; 1959), provides some insight into the thought of N.P. Van Wyk Louw at the time. Van Wyk Louw argued that it is quite problematic to chart the direction of an intellectual trend 'of your own time'. On the one hand, one is blinded by one's own 'full range of [human] emotions' and how one posits a future clouded by our own 'will and desire'. On the other hand, such crystal ball gazing is common to the futurist

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scenarios of ideologues—he mentions that of the ‘communist, a liberal or a nationalist’. These opening remarks are followed by problematisations of the local-international-national nexuses. In these he also refers to new trends in the literature of the time that, in his opinion, did not break with the old but merely ‘completed’ it. He also brings in the problematics related to the constitution of the/ a ‘nation’ or ‘nation building in our current parlance. Sensitively, he focuses throughout on the problematic of the closeness of literature to personal ‘experience’, or what scholars have labelled as his ‘existentialism’. Van Wyk Louw concludes his essay with perspectives on 1) the articulation of a ‘colonial’ and ‘local’ literature; 2) the ‘responsibility of thinking’; 3) the production of gender- and 4) ‘working life’- sensitive literature; 5) literature that represents the ‘Bantu’ as ‘human’; and 6) ‘the expression of the human’s immediate relationship with the cosmos’. Finally, he reflects on the challenges related to the form - word nexus and the ‘middle class sentiments’ captured in the ‘literature of school books’.

Mabogo P. More’s ‘Biko: Africana Existentialist Philosopher’, locates and positions Steve Biko within the existentialist philosophical frame. Even though one cannot limit Biko’s contribution to the Black Consciousness Movement and the liberation struggle to ‘existentialism’, More provides some significant insights to relevant links to this philosophical tradition. He first explicates the trend of Africana Existentialist Philosophy, significant philosophical influences on Biko, the latter’s stance on ‘racism’ from within the BC ‘philosophy, and then addresses themes related to the questions of ‘identity’, ‘liberation’, and ‘bad faith’. His aim with his essay is to ‘break with the prevailing tendency of interpreting Biko’s thinking singularly as political to the almost total exclusion of the philosophical’. He suggests that ‘as a radical Africana existential philosopher, Biko was simultaneously, like most radical Africana existentialists ... a critical race and liberation theorist.

In ‘Gramsci on Intellectuals and Culture ...’, Pravina Pillay argues for a two-fold significance of Antonio Gramsci’s significance for Africa and post-apartheid South Africa. This first is that he provided an ‘elaborated theory that places intellectuals on the cusp of social transformation in societies’. The second is that he made a very important contribution through his notion of ‘hegemony’ which refers to ‘ideological control and more crucially, consent’. She further shows that these ideas

strongly resonate with President Thabo Mbeki's speeches on the topic of the African Renaissance that question the function of intellectuals in society, claim that the masses of South Africans have mandated the ANC to govern, and, thirdly, challenge the masses of the people of our country not to be complacent but be active participants in the governance of the land.

Thengani Ngwenya's study of Sindiwe Magona's two volume autobiography shows how, through 'inherently subversive modes of self-definition', she challenges hegemonic views about gender, race and ethnicity. In order to introduce this focus he provides an argument that centrally revolves around Antonio Gramsci notion of hegemony, dating from the 1930s. This notion is also linked to the question of self-representation. So, starting from such a notion of hegemony, his essay examines the ways in which Magona's self-portrayal in her autobiography 'consciously challenges assumptions underpinning her community's cultural values and the political ideology of racial segregation'. It also shows how there has been some evolution in Magona's 'feminist consciousness'. Her autobiography, then, becomes the vehicle for her to 'elaborate her own version of African feminism which is simultaneously critical and supportive of certain aspects of the African world-view'. In his view she succeeds with this approach, because she successfully challenges hegemonic cultural and political practices related to 'common sense' in this cultural paradigm.

V.M. Sisi Maqagi's 'She's There ...' studies the 'presencing' strategies in Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue* and 'Mrs Plum'. Her choice of some of the women that Mphahlele represents provides insights into how these women develop a 'dynamism and determination in articulating their presence within communities in transition'. In this regard, it is important to not that—and quoting Derrida—that the subject 'category' can not be comprehended apart from the notion of 'presence'. So, in his portrayal of women as 'active participants in the transformation of their emerging societies' Mphahlele privileges their subjecthood and their presence, she argues.

In her focus on *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* by Phaswane Mpe, Minesh Dass points to the possibility of appreciating the generalised significance of the novel. Such generalisation, she argues, is possible through the registering of 'the loss of traditional notions of what constitutes a community, while engaging a new, humane community characterised by

both hybridity and similarity'. She also points to the 'many self-reflexive remarks' present in the novel and that they have the 'unusual effect of implicating the reader in the story being told'. The essay then explains these 'supposed "paradoxes"' in terms of the complex use of the word 'our' in the title and the second-person narration of the novel. Her explanation—especially as it relates to the 'our' and 'you' pronouns—draws on Mikhail Bakhtin's linguistic and literary theories. By utilising some of his concepts, she then argues that *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* 'is a novel that anticipates, from its readers, a responsible response'.

The essay by Olivia Vermaak focuses on Dambudzo Marechera's *The Black Insider*. Her study represents her contribution to the rethinking of Marechera 'in the light of his representation of language'. In his representation of language 'terms such as "humanity" have been appropriated for ends that make "the notion of the human more appealing than humanity"'. Such a view implies, she argues, that 'the battles over these terms and the values that they define are, perforce, battles over language'. As such, she feels that Marechera's writing should not be labelled—'categorised'—but, as is evident from *The Black Insider*, that it constitutes 'a complex and eloquent testimony to the redundancy of boundaries'. In addition, even as one concedes that such categories are continuously formed and boundaries drawn, the fact of the matter remains that even as they are constituted, it may figure a pre-emptive act before the full significance of his writings has been assessed and appreciated—especially if they are drawn from existing categories that do not fit the complexity of the author's writing.

Hervé Mitoumba Tindy's essay focuses on the political dimension of Marechera's *Black Sunlight*. The essay first frames the novel's subject-matter and the role of the writer in this framing. It then progresses to the novel's re-imagining of the colonial encounter and its multiple implications, focusing on the relationship between history and aesthetics. It further deals with the novel's implicit and explicit view that, 'whereas traditional forms of power are violent and spectacular, negotiated and/ or rehabilitative forms of social regulation are no less violent'. Theoretically, the argument is that *Black Sunlight* 'adapts the Althusserian model of the operation of power by recasting it as a basis for reading the ruses of realism'. Thus, 'the appearance of the modern bureaucratic systems in the course of the novel—the church,

the school, the prison and the psychiatric asylum—and the manner in which these systems are shown to be woven into the fabric of the lives of the novel's subjects, constitute the political thrust of *Black Sunlight*', Tindy argues.

N.N. Mathonsi's 'Social Concerns in C.T. Msimang's *IZULU ELADUMA ESANDLWANA*', starts off by pointing to the fact that social concern and commitment (in literature) presuppose 'preparedness and ability to tackle social problems, conflicts, and needs besetting the society'. This hermeneutic predisposition—arising from cultural, political, religious, and educational challenges (amongst others) that Africans have historically experienced—brought authors 'to reflect on them and their causes, and to offer solutions'. Pointing to the fact that if authors identify and address 'one or two' social ills—not too many—they should then create 'a metaphoric image, consisting of fictional characters and events, which reflect the social ills the author is highlighting'. These then function as a conduit for both 'the manifestations of the ills' and the suggestion of 'workable solutions'. Against the background of this view, Mathonsi then contextualises Msimang's play and argues that it functions analogically, i.e. in terms of conditions and experiences at Sandlwana and the experiences of blacks in 1970s South Africa—'[t]he past is considered as exemplary to the present in order to throw light on present day developments'. In terms of the present—as is the case with the fictional representation of the past—the challenge is then for African people to take up their responsibility with regard to current cultural, religious, social and economic challenges, and not merely rely on a 'moral high ground'.

Given that 'successive white minority regimes attempted to define individuals according to reified notions of race and ethnicity, and demarcate "race" groups deemed to have essential origins from other similarly constructed groups', Goolam Vahed's contribution is a researched narrativisation of the life of the Malay cricketer and school teacher, Imam Sulayman Kirsten, popularly known as 'Solly'. It functions as a sample for the study of 'identity construction in twentieth-century South Africa' in our diverse country where 'strong sanctions were imposed on those transcending narrowly inscribed race boundaries' during the heady days of apartheid. Vahed started his study with Solly 'recounting his life in a non-directive manner'. This was followed by 'specific queries during the writing process

to fill gaps and clarify issues'. Even so, he says, 'Solly, well-educated and self-assured, was instrumental in determining the flow of research'. His introductory paragraph also provides some pointers to the problematising questions the biography addresses, e.g. the formation and sustaining of racial stereotypes; the importance of culture, religion, class and other factors in shaping identities; the question whether racial stereotypes pre-dated apartheid; the 'discursive power' of 'race discourse'; the significance of racial and ethnic identities in the day-to-day interpretation of social behaviour; and the impact of this complex on our new 'democratic non-racial order'. So, with the biographic narrative focusing on formative aspects of Solly's past and present life and relying heavily on popular memory, it provides critical reflections on these themes and issues.

Shane Moran's 'Archive Fever', draws attention to the linkage between two texts, i.e. as to their engagement of the 'challenge of interrogating South African archival and academic discourse'. The first is *Refiguring the Archive* edited by Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, June Taylor, Michele Pickover, Graeme Reid and Razia Saleh. The second is Carli Coetzee's essay 'Creating an Audience'. The first opened the space for 'seeing in archival transformation an opportunity to correct the selectivity of official memoriality within the context of the new South African political dispensation'. The second focuses on 'one element of the existing archive to argue for the ameliorative and uniting effects of the work that archivists and academics can do'. He argues that these texts show a certain 'avoidance of [some] determinate complicities, or at least a choice between them, [and that these] distinguish[] post-apartheid critical theory'.

In his 'History from the Outside ...' Jabulani Mkhize points to the dearth of studies from South Africa on Alex la Guma—due to the fact that most of his works have been banned until recently. He then critically addresses two recent studies on Alex la Guma—both again published outside South Africa. The first is Nahem Yousaf's *Alex La Guma: Politics and Resistance* (2001) and the second, Fritz Pointer's *A Passion to Liberate* (2001). Even as both 'attempt to break new ground in terms of their focus on previously overlooked aspects of La Guma's work', he raises some critical perspectives.

Addressing and engaging the discursive complex of the current challenges faced by the university in South Africa, Sikhumbuzo Mngadi

*Introduction: The Politics of Interpretation/ Theory*

critically reviews Jacques Derrida's 'response to some of the philosophical traditions that have pondered the "principle of reason" and its vicissitudes since Immanuel Kant's response to the question *Was ist Aufklärung?*' It concludes by considering two unpublished poetry collections to assess the implications of Derrida's 'response' for some of the ways in which the 'principle of reason' has continued to inform writing about the problematic of thought and phenomenon.

Department of English  
University of Johannesburg

# The Politics of Pedagogy in the Humanities: How can We not Speak of Language Teaching?

Emmanuel M. Mgwashu

University education has traditionally been associated with the advancement and transmission of learning in its highest forms, and the dispensing of qualifications governing access to the learned professions. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries university institutions in the West and Europe were intimately connected with religion and the constraints imposed by it (see Mazrui 1978). The Copernican revolution in the second half of the sixteenth century, however, caused tensions between complete scientific objectivity and considerations of inherited religion to enter a new era. In many senses, therefore, the idea of a university became, in Zymunt Ziembinski's formulation:

a community of scholars, who look for truth, inform each other of the acquired knowledge, and teach the methods through which such knowledge can be acquired (cited in Horn 1997:84).

The function of a university in the Western world may have involved investigating knowledge and the teaching of the 'methods through which such knowledge can be acquired', but that is certainly not the function universities evolved to serve in Africa. Mazrui (1978:285) reminds us, for instance, that 'almost all African universities in the colonies started as overseas extensions of metropolitan institutions in Europe'. In many senses, then, just like *commercial* multinational corporations in Africa, universities had to be part of colonial enterprise in order to sell *cultural* goods to a new

African clientele. In order to make sure that this broader agenda became a reality, Britain, France, and Belgium determined decisions on priorities for development that were to be achieved through universities established in the colonies. Such development was not meant to develop and improve, first and foremost, indigenous people's standards of life in terms of relevant local needs, values and norms, but according to the colonizer's interests. Writing about skills inculcated in most of these universities, Mazrui (1978:285) maintains that:

skills were transferred without adequate consideration for value in Africa, other skills were withheld because they did not conform to the world criteria of 'excellence' as defined by the present body.

This created an inevitable cultural and economic dependency by Africa, a state of affairs that provoked African scholars and leaders such as Mazrui and Mazrui (1998), Nkrumah (1956), Nyerere (1995), and, recently, Makgoba (2003), to argue for a re-thinking of the place and function of the university in Africa. These critical responses to colonial, cultural and economic alienation inflicted upon Africa through universities, among other instruments, were provoked by the myth that a university in Africa could not be a 'true university' if it did not service the colonial regimes. The educated manpower produced by such universities would only benefit the economies and peoples of the colonial powers:

In the very process of producing educated manpower ... universities were virtually defined as institutions for the western civilization, at least de facto. The institutions below university level were different stages of the same grand process (Mazrui 1978:307).

For the 'grand' colonial agenda to be successful, educational institutions, especially universities, had to be mere reflections of the parent bodies in Europe. Just like the commercial multinational corporations, they showed a faithful response to external decisions-makers in the home countries. Even when they did respond to the local environment, this was done within the boundaries permitted by the broader policies of the metropole. As a challenge to the status quo that favoured colonizing forces, Nkrumah had the

following to say regarding principles that were to guide a 'true African university':

We must, in the development of our universities, bear in mind that once [they have] been planted in the African soil [they] must take root amidst African traditions and cultures (cited in Makgoba 2003:7).

Nkrumah's caution does not mean, it may be argued, that the African university, as Makgoba (2003:7) puts it, 'is an insular or parochial entity' with a desire to re-invent a romantic, unadulterated past. It is rather a university with well-established and entrenched consciousness of an African identity, for it is from the consciousness of the environment around them that universities should derive their strengths. On the characteristics of an American university, for instance, a former Harvard President once said:

A university must grow from seed. It cannot be transplanted from England or Germany in full leaf and bearing. When the American university appears, it will not be a copy of foreign institutions, but the slow and natural growth of American social and political habits (cited in Makgoba 2003:8f).

One cannot speak of a university then, it seems to me, without taking into consideration its relevance and role into the lives of its citizens in a more direct way. Yesefu puts this more eloquently with reference to an African university:

An African university must not only pursue knowledge for its own sake, but *also* for the ... amelioration of conditions of life and work, of the ordinary man and woman. It must be fully committed to active participation in the social transformation ... and the ... upgrading of the total human resources of the nation (e.i.o.) (cited in Makgoba 2003:8).

There is no doubt that the idea of knowledge that goes beyond merely knowing something, to knowing that brings about an 'amelioration of

conditions of life and work' for the citizens, requires very specific pedagogic practices. And, for the purposes of this essay, it is pedagogic practices in the Humanities. *Politics of Pedagogy* in the first part of the title in this essay indicates an intention to explain pedagogic practices in various disciplines in the Humanities faculty. Through this explanation I want to engage, first, with a teaching practice that tends to conceal methods, theories and strategies involved in arriving at certain discipline specific conclusions within academic discourses and, second, how this concealment is bound to render our students as irrelevant to the needs and demands of our society.

Since universities are institutions that offer formal education, one of their major tasks is to develop students' cognitive abilities. Kembo (2000: 289) defines these abilities as

[learners'] memory, their ability to generalize, to grasp relationships such as cause and effect, to predict the consequences of events, to grasp the essential message of a speech or a book, and to evaluate situations.

Kembo (2000:289) further points out that formal education is meant to develop affective skills, by which she means:

attitudes to work and study,...tolerance for people who may differ from [learners]...learners' social skills ... their ability to work together with other people, to communicate with them, and to support those who need assistance.

Taking Kembo's explications into consideration, I want to argue that unless pedagogic practices in the university are carefully and deliberately checked to see to it that they successfully inculcate the above skills in students' minds, universities will be bound to fail, not only their students, but also the society at large. It is this deliberate introspection into our pedagogic practices in the university in general, and the Humanities in particular, that will enable us to produce students with the ability, as Nyerere (1995:5) puts it:

to produce logical thinking based on facts, to explain the thought processes and the logic, and to respond to the intellectual challenge

of an opposing argument—whether this comes from within or outside their ranks.

These are the skills our society desperately needs. To develop all these skills, I want to argue, requires a sophisticated and deeper understanding of the nature of language, and, for the purposes of this essay, the English language. This particular language because it has become the language in which most knowledge, in the form of research findings, is stored and because most institutions of higher learning, at least in South Africa, use English as the medium of instruction. In this essay reference to *language* is used in two senses: first, language as a means of communication; and, secondly, *language* as discourse that characterizes specific disciplines in the Humanities Faculty. This forms part of the reasons why I chose to make the second part of the title of this essay a question put in the negative and the interrogative.

On the one hand, in a world that sells and buys everything in exchange for the general equivalent, it is the criterion of economic usefulness that tends to determine the acceptance, and therefore success, of any course introduced within the context of tertiary education. We are slowly but surely undergoing an imposition of the 'hegemony of instrumental reason', as Blake *et al* (1998:3) note. Within this context educational authorities and market forces tend to exert pressure on higher education. This pressure poses a threat to formative degrees offered by most disciplines in the Humanities because such disciplines are interested, among other things, in the institutional and social importance of non-marketable knowledge. 'Non-marketable' not in the sense that the skills we inculcate in our students do not have any material, monetary and practical use, but rather that they are not of immediate, vocation-specific marketability like Medicine. The effect of this on some disciplines in the Humanities is, among other things, to integrate language development within mainstream teaching and, in English Studies in the southern African context, to raise the profile of the previously minor place of *English language teaching* (at English medium universities). It is difficult not to speak then of language teaching in the Humanities.

On the other hand, the question 'how can we not' suggests a caution, a warning, an urgent call to alertness in order to prevent a tendency that

could be self-destructive for the faculty. In this essay it represents a concern that various disciplines in the Humanities reflect on the condition of humanity and are concerned with the articulation of thoughts regarding the way in which we experience the world. A move towards attending to students' language needs in the faculty in particular, and in servicing other faculties in general, should avoid relinquishing this focus. Noyes' (1999:214) perspective on the Humanities' mode of knowledge production may be useful to our understanding of this focus:

The articulation of difficulty is the mode of knowledge production proper to the Humanities. And it is an essential mode of knowledge production in a democratic society, a society that takes its own humanity seriously.

Within the current environment however, one of the established roles of higher education the role that the Humanities Faculty is well positioned to play is marginalized. Blake *et al.* (1998:4) understands this role as 'the transformation of individuals and of their understanding of their world [and]', a role 'that is being pushed to one side, if not abolished ...'. Within this environment the 'articulation of difficulty [as] a mode of knowledge production proper to the Humanities' is likely to be completely compromised. Students' loyalty to a tradition of enquiry, to the courses that sustain such a tradition, and the kind of commitment that is at the heart of academic endeavour are fundamental higher education values that are quickly marginalized due to globalized economic ethos. Even though it is true that students' limited (English) language competencies is among reasons for the erosion of loyalty to a tradition of enquiry characteristic of university learning, the teaching of (English) language in most higher education contexts is usually divorced from a teaching paradigm geared towards enabling learners develop a capacity to operate with ease within a learning environment that encourages the tradition of enquiry. Several factors contribute into this state of affairs.

Until recently, the paying of research-based, focused, and organized attention to students' language abilities (grammatical competence) has been a serious concern for the Humanities Faculty only. Law, Commerce, Accounting, Management and Science faculties have always, in my view,

regarded this aspect of learning as a domain for the Humanities. It became increasingly evident that 'accurate' language production is as pertinent for a student who is studying for a Humanities degree as it is for a student in the Commerce Faculty. Given the changes in the social, economic, political and educational spheres globally, sophistication in language (both spoken and written) has become a prerequisite for effective democratic citizenship and social success and, as a result, several universities in South Africa have seen the Humanities opening negotiations with other faculties regarding the introduction of Law, Commerce, Accounting, Management and Science language-specific courses. This is in fact an international trend that Humanities faculties, and English Departments in most cases, in Britain and America have already followed (see Balfour 2000). At my university, for instance, a 'successful' collaboration between the Programme of English Studies and Commerce has seen the introduction of the Commerce-specific language course for first year students. At the University of Cape Town (UCT) the Academic Development Unit, a unit within the Humanities Faculty, runs Law and Commerce-specific language courses for the Law and Management faculties.

I intend to explore, first, the problems inherent in such supposedly wise tendencies (servicing other faculties), secondly, the self-destructive pedagogic practices that tend to conceal the mode of knowledge production in the Humanities and, thirdly, conclude by offering what I suppose may be seen as an amicable approach to developing students' language proficiency, an approach that will foreground our identity as a faculty on the one hand, and a more empowering pedagogical practice that will enable our students to come to grips with the mode of knowledge production in the Humanities, on the other. It is through sufficient exposure to this informed understanding of various modes of knowledge construction, contestation and dissemination in the Humanities, I want to argue, that our students would develop appreciation for a tradition of enquiry and the courses that sustain such a tradition. Furthermore, such knowledge has potential to 'fuel ... the modern growth economy' (Blake *et al.* 1998:5) in ways that are sensitive to a democratic ethos. The argument that purports that knowledge produced in the Humanities can play a role in the economy runs directly opposite with popular belief. This belief 'is ironically (?) within universities' (Noyes 1999:210), and, I would add, entrenched within the mind-set of educational authorities.

In his Inaugural Lecture at UCT, Noyes argues that while higher education executives in most universities and educational authorities in most countries, including South Africa, doubt the usefulness of the Humanities degree, the employment market thinks differently:

Employers mention flexibility and originality of thought, critical thinking and the ability to express oneself and communicate as central reasons for the value of a Humanities degree (Noyes 1999:210).

This indicates, among other things, that employers have an insight into the fact that various disciplines in the Humanities produce graduates with valuable skills relevant to the work place. The acquisition of these skills, however, demands a particular level of proficiency in (English) language and without such a level, it is unlikely for a student to be flexible and original in her thinking. Within the South African context where racial and/or linguistic categorizations have traditionally been used as indicators of language proficiency, it is pertinent for us as Humanities Faculty to re-think and re-conceptualize this notion (language proficiency), and to re-adapt our pedagogic practices in the language development programmes. Furthermore, to be able to produce students with 'flexibility and originality of thought', the skills that employers and the society in general need for nation building project, the Humanities need to transform deliberately certain pedagogical practices in teaching disciplinary knowledge. If it is our premise in the Humanities that it is through the successful manipulation of language that students' critical thinking skills are developed, then we have to make the relationship between knowledge production and language learning explicit. This is pertinent to our success in the process of rendering ourselves as a valuable entity in an institution of higher learning and in asserting our identity as a faculty. As we may agree, pedagogy in the Humanities enterprise should be geared towards providing learners with pedagogical space for critical thinking and reflective literacy necessary in identifying the inadequacies of ideologies that appeal to dominant groups in society. It is bigger than producing simplistic instrumentalist knowledge demanded by what can be seen as the pragmatic requirements of capital.

Because of the pressure exacted by economic imperatives on institu-

tions of higher learning, the Humanities Faculty finds itself forced to design discipline-specific language courses for the disciplines outside the Humanities. Is this decision not self destructive in the sense that we are directly conspiring against ourselves and what we represent as a faculty? Are we not, as Macedo puts it, 'reducing the priorities of [critical] reading [of the world] to the pragmatic requirements of capital [thereby] creating structures that anaesthetize students' critical abilities' (Macedo 1993:190). By designing, say, a Commerce-specific language course, are we not in fact 'imprisoning' a student into Commerce discourse, thereby narrowing her understanding, and limiting her knowledge, of the existence of competing discourses that give shape to society? Such a student will not 'speak commerce' all her life. She will have to read newspapers, listen to news, watch some films, read magazines, meet students with cultural backgrounds different from hers, work for a company that will require her to work as a team member, all of which require an understanding of different, and sometimes contradictory, discourses and modes of thinking.

As a faculty, I want to argue, we can come up with a far better approach to language training to prepare such a student for challenges characteristic of democratic societies. Our success will depend, however, on our resolute stance against designing language courses that will compromise our approach to knowledge production. Now that most faculties identify language training as a necessary requirement for their students, we need not allow a situation where we become a sub-faculty for other faculties by introducing language courses that will be a mere service provider to such faculties. Instead, we need to re-think the place of English language teaching and learning in the faculty, and the relevant pedagogical approach to language teaching that will be in line with our mode of knowledge production.

But, is our mode of knowledge production accessible to students? Would we be successful, in other words, teaching (English) language to other faculties in ways that are informed by our mode of knowledge production when that mode is not made explicit to students (and to some of us)? These are pertinent questions for a society whose education system is supposed to produce critical thinkers who are well equipped to live and become productive in a society that upholds democratic values. For disciplines in the Humanities these questions are even more pertinent since our enterprise is to understand humanity and society and engage with

challenges of building a nation with a notorious history of racial inequalities.

Within various disciplines in the Humanities, academics, in the process of constructing specific disciplinary knowledge(s), tend to employ certain forms of language which operate as 'given', and, as a consequence, endow particular set of linguistic codes (constructs) with all the objectivity of disciplinary 'facts'. These linguistic codes (constructs) become the criteria in terms of which students are assessed. This is because most disciplines tend to assume that students understand what they are objectively supposed to understand. As far as assessment is concerned, students are expected to manipulate language academically, a skill which presupposes a constellation of acquired abilities. Because students are underdeveloped in high-level skills in strategies for reading comprehension and in summary and paraphrase, they resort to plagiarism. This plagiarism, however, is usually not (though not always) an intention to cheat, but is due to students' inability to rephrase ideas and arguments in their own words. This requires a situation where interaction between students and lecturers become underpinned by principles of reflexive pedagogy, i.e., an explicit teaching practice driven by a view that pedagogic communication needs to signal the discourse's constructedness. This is pertinent within pedagogical communication, as Ellsworth (1989:59) writes:

[T]here is no communication without disturbing background effects, and this 'static' is likely to be greatest in the pedagogical communication between one who knows and one who is to learn .... Communication can only be regarded as pedagogical when every effort is made to eliminate the faulty 'signals' inherent in an incomplete knowledge of the code and to transmit the code in the most efficient way.

This involves developing students' awareness of the fact that, as Montgomery and Stuart (1992:7) put it: 'meaning [is] a function, not of particular words or wordings, but rather of the discursive formation in which...expressions occur'. When language is in use (whether in writing or in speaking) a discursive formation functions as a set of regulative principles that underlie actual discourses. Within this context, meaning becomes an effect upon the human subject, but not a stable property.

Pedagogic practice in most disciplines in the faculty, however, does not lend itself to principles underpinning reflexive pedagogy. The latter is seen by most academics as too elementary, and is therefore rejected because it clashes with their pedagogical philosophy that what a lecturer says is so self-explanatory that a student who fails to unpack it is not supposed to be in the university in the first place. What this philosophy ignores is the fact that learning implies acquiring both knowledge itself, and the code of transmission used to convey a particular body of knowledge. Assuming that students will understand the academic discourse, without explicitly reflecting on its constructedness, is to ignore the fact that language is not just a collection of words, but provides us with a system of transposable mental dispositions. Given the demographic changes experienced by universities in particular, and changes our country has undergone in the last decade in general, it would be self-destructive for the Humanities to maintain a teaching practice that is essentially content-centred and insular, thereby ignoring making explicit the role language plays in learning and in the construction of specific disciplinary constructs.

Reflexive pedagogy should not be seen as a practice with potential to 'water down' the 'noble' aims of university education, but as a practice that allows practitioners of the pedagogical communication methodically and continuously to reduce to a minimum the misunderstanding arising from the use of an unfamiliar code. Such misunderstanding is usually evidenced by the kinds of essays students produce, for these display poor mastery of language as students seek to reproduce the academic discourse, thus find themselves constrained to write in a badly understood language. Defined by their lesser knowledge in academic discourse, students can do nothing that does not confirm the most pessimistic image that the lecturer, in her most professional capacity, is willing to confess to. It is a common thing to hear lecturers making comments such as 'they understand nothing because they do not want to do their work'. As a lecturer, one teaches as one ought to, and the meagre results with which one is rewarded can only reinforce one's certainty that the great majority of students is unworthy of the efforts one bestows upon them. Bourdieu (1989:7) presents the image of a lecturer in a rather illuminating light:

the [lecturer] is as resigned to his students and their 'natural'

incapacities as the 'good colonist' is to the 'natives', for whom he has no higher expectations than that they be just the way they are.

Ironically, while this is the kind of attitude many lecturers have toward students, the former still expect the latter to manipulate language academically. This expectation betrays a rather flawed image of students by institutions of higher learning, i.e. that students are a socially homogeneous group who differ only according to individual talent and merit. Because of this image, comprehension and manipulation of language are the first points on which students' knowledge is judged. I argue that assessing students on such premises ignores some facts about human knowledge, and, of course, about learning.

There are two issues basic to any inquiry into the nature of human knowledge: first, how language contributes to our understanding of the world, and, secondly, how our beliefs about the world inform our understanding of language. Language consists of a set of forms that can be described at various levels—at the level of sounds, word formation, sentence formation, and discourse structure. Some aspects of meaning can be associated with each of these levels. Presented in this way, language becomes not simply a vehicle of thought, but also a system of categories; a means of communication which, without a reader's (or listener's) 'accurate' interpretation, can be of no use. Interpretation during pedagogic communication is a difficult and risky process with no guarantee of a satisfactory outcome, even if one has correctly identified the words and correctly worked out the syntactic structure of the sentence. Bourdieu (1989:8) presents reasons for such difficulty in a persuasive manner:

This is because language does not reduce, as we often think, to a more or less extensive collection of words. As syntax, [language] provides us with a system of transposable mental dispositions. These [mental dispositions] go hand in hand with values which dominate the whole of our experience and, in particular, with a vision of society and of culture. They [mental dispositions] also involve an original relationship to words ....

This conception calls for university practitioners to identify, recognise, and

to deal with the factors that separate them from students and, in particular, to acknowledge the importance of students' knowledge of the nature of the code of communication and the dependence of this knowledge on factors such as social origin and school background. This requires explicit teaching practice that will consider, first, the fact that academic language is no one's mother tongue and, secondly, that the existing divorce between the language of the family and the language of learning only serves to reinforce the students' feeling that the university education belongs to another world, and that what lecturers have to say has nothing to do with daily life because it is spoken in a language which makes it unreal.

By choosing to mystify the language which includes them as members of the group, while ignoring the fact that they themselves are not 'authors' of such a language (but are simply 'interpellated', to use Althusser's terminology, by specific discursive formations), academics 'conceal the contradictory character of their discourses to both themselves and to students' (Montgomery & Stuart 1992:5). It is not surprising that the subtle social meanings posited in several disciplines are quite hard even for native speakers of English from outside the (academic) group to pick up, and are particularly difficult for non-native speakers. This breakdown in the teaching relationship is largely the consequence of the nature of disciplinary languages and the manner in which they are applied. Because of this, pedagogy loses all meaning, for, it does not reflect the intention to communicate self reflexively, and thus to establish true communication (true dialogue) between a teacher and learner.

Understanding in the university needs to be conceived as a function of the social group in which it is embedded. In the lecture hall, for instance, the desired outcome of the interaction that takes place between students and lecturers is the understanding of the language being taught and learnt. Because of this, understanding needs to become a social institution from which students can borrow and to which they can contribute. Meaning has to be negotiated between the participants in an interaction, for communication is a risky undertaking, requiring not simply the exchange of linguistically packaged ideas, but an effort of imagination on the part of the listener or reader. The implication for this, among many, is the fact that

understanding could be in [constant] state of flux; of augmentation,

of modification, of radical transformation, of restructuring of its patterns of silence, or even of fading from current consciousness' (Bourdieu 1994:7).

What remains unclear, though, is the extent to which this fact underpins teaching and learning in the Humanities. This is an important question, for, even though academic discourses within various disciplines, at face value, appear to be unitary, there are contradictory aspects too, and there are further contradictions amongst disciplines in general. Academics within specific disciplinary languages are actually acting in response to conventions with which strangers (students in this case) are unfamiliar. Actually, so many of the problems students are encountering within the university education system are not solely linguistic, but also have to do with the nature of conventions lecturers subject themselves to and ignore making such conventions explicit to students.

Even though teaching theory in practice realises itself as a relationship between teachers and learners, the systematic analysis of institutional practices seem to be neglected in higher education. If teaching practice in the university does not relate closely to the principles underpinning reflexive pedagogy, we need to look at the principles dominating institutions of higher learning, and be willing to consider changes in them if need be. The approach to language teaching and pedagogy in the Humanities suggested in this paper have the potential to assist first, students from other faculties who need language training and, secondly, mainstream structures within the faculty in developing more effective means of meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse and non-traditional student body. Should we not compromise our identity as a faculty, furthermore, other faculties will soon discover our worth and increasingly recommend that their students enrol for specific offerings that will make them relevant, first to the socio-political, educational and political needs of the country and, secondly to the process of nation building to enable us to enter into the international debates as valuable contributors rather than mere appendages of metropolitan interests.

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English Studies  
University of KwaZulu-Natal

# Reconsidering the Copula, ‘and’, in ‘Literature *and* Politics’, and Some Thoughts on ‘Progressive Formalism’

Sikhumbuzo Mngadi

## Introduction

During the course of his 1984 Sol Plaatje Memorial Lecture at the then University of Bophuthatswana, entitled ‘Actors and Interpreters: Popular Culture and Progressive Formalism’, the text of which was later published in his collection of essays<sup>1</sup>, Njabulo Ndebele (1991:85) made the following observation about his sense of the relation of South African literature to ‘contemporary African culture in South Africa’:

Literature appears *not to have found a place* in the development of contemporary African culture in South Africa. Instead, in groping for this place, literature has located itself in the field of politics. And it has done so without discovering and defining the basis of its integrity as an art form. Its form therefore, has not developed, since to be fictional or poetic was to be political [e.a.].

Ndebele’s observation is not without its basis in similar, though not necessarily the same, criteria for judging literature’s relation to politics or to what is in a general sense ‘outside’ of literature itself, assuming, of course, that by ‘itself’ I mean literature’s difference—its strategic recalcitrance or

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<sup>1</sup> *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (1991).

'formalism'. J.M. Coetzee (1988:4), speaking about the novel's relation to history, in 'The Novel Today', makes the following observation:

I reiterate the elementary and rather obvious point I am making: that history is not reality; that history is a kind of discourse; that the novel is a kind of discourse too, but a different kind of discourse; that, inevitably, in our culture, history will, with varying degrees of forcefulness, try to claim primacy, claim to be a master-form of discourse, just as, inevitably, people like myself will defend themselves by saying that history is nothing but a certain kind of story that people agree to tell each other.

In both of the above statements, literature in general and the novel in particular are distinguished from politics and history, respectively, on the grounds that the basis of literature's 'integrity' is its being 'an art form' (Ndebele) and that the novel is 'a different kind of discourse' to the discourse of history (Coetzee). Of course, both statements cannot be presumed to imply that literature is apolitical or that the novel is a-historical; indeed, further reading of Ndebele and Coetzee's commentaries on literature will show that such a presumption is hasty and/ or somewhat opportunistic. Even though in the opening quotation it seems that Ndebele views politics as inhabiting a (non-discursive) 'field' on its own, there is no doubt that when it comes to literature, he insists on careful, rather than apolitical, discriminations; Coetzee, for his part, is quite explicit about the discursive nature of history: 'history is not reality ... history is a kind of discourse [the] authority [of which] lies simply in the consensus it commands'. Part of the impetus for these kinds of statements is that literature (or the novel) has been called upon to further the ends of politics (or history) as handmaiden without its own ends, which it has. However, literature has also suffered from a generally conservative view, often identified with Matthew Arnold, namely that it is either a mark of cultivation or lack thereof. Together, the impetus for Ndebele and Coetzee's statements and the conservative view of literature deny literature its specificity, in the sense in which Theodor Adorno argues that 'if art smashes through the formal contours which demarcate and estrange it from ordinary life [it will] simply succeed in spilling and defusing

its critical contents' (Eagleton 1992:371). Thus, says Coetzee (1992:364) of the South African novelist and the apartheid state:

For the writer the deeper problem is not to allow himself to be impaled on the dilemma proposed by the state, namely, either to ignore its obscenities or else to produce representations of them. The true challenge is: how not to play the game by the rules of the state, how to establish one's own authority, how to imagine torture and death on one's own terms.

But also, post this (apartheid) state:

Revolution will put an end neither to cruelty and suffering, nor perhaps even to torture .... humanity [as Rosa Burger hopes in Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter*] will be restored across the face of society, and therefore all human acts, including the flogging of an animal, will be returned to the ambit of moral judgment. In such a society it will once again be *meaningful* for the gaze of the author, the gaze of authority and authoritative judgment, to be turned upon scenes of torture. When the choice is no longer limited to *either* looking on in horrified fascination as the blows fall *or* turning one's eyes away, then the novel can once again take as its province the whole of life, and even the torture chamber can be accorded a place in the design [e.i.o.] (Coetzee 1992:368).

Coetzee's 'post-apartheid' novel, *Disgrace* (2000), appears to herald this restoration of humanity, in which 'all human acts, including the flogging of an animal, [are] returned to the ambit of moral (and/or ethical) judgment'. Prior to *Disgrace*, Coetzee indeed appears steadfastly to refuse in his fiction to be 'impaled on the dilemma proposed by the state, namely to ignore its obscenities or else to produce representations of them'; or, as he remarks about Sipho Sepamla's description of the torture of Bongki, in Sepamla's novel, *A Ride on the Whirlwind*, to 'succumb to erotic fascination' or to making 'his torturers both all too satanic ... and all too easily human' (Coetzee 1992:365). Rather, since *Dusklands*, Coetzee's fiction has addressed itself to cultivating a different language that would rival the

language of conquest—the language of Jacobus Coetzee—and its multiple implications. Needless to say, how Coetzee has gone about cultivating this language is what has been the source of serious debate, both within and outside the academy. Recently, *Disgrace* came under scrutiny of the most sustained kind for a single novel in South Africa in a long time. Some of the views on *Disgrace* have reminded us that the views about literature that Ndebele and Coetzee hold, different in certain important respects as they indeed are, are not always immune to the very problems that they identify; put differently, these views on *Disgrace* have shown that it is one thing to ‘defend’ literature against the authority of political and/ or historical determinism but, quite another to ‘defend’ it against the consequences of its own authority. Thus, for instance, asks Louise Bethlehem (2002:20) of the third person narrative voice in Coetzee’s *Disgrace*:

To whom does this language belong? The declarative form of the sentence: ‘A ready learner, compliant, pliant’, effects a kind of grammatical refusal to betray the person who speaks it: there is no parenthetical or explanatory ‘thinks Lurie’, for example, to resolve the matter for us. The sentiment expressed is suspended, in a form of free indirect speech ... and remains a declaration strung out between the experiencing or focalizing consciousness, Lurie’s, and that of the narrator anterior to him, possessed of all the traditional narrative authority of the third person.

Or, earlier, Michael Vaughan (1990:189), of Ndebele’s *Fools and Other Stories*:

There is an implicit agenda for the intellectual in these stories. This is the agenda of leadership. The destiny of the intellectual as Ndebele imagines it, is to provide an intellectual guidance and leadership for the wider, largely non-intellectual society of the township.

About the stories’ composition:

Ndebele seems to me to be a skilful composer of stories in a *Western, realist tradition* of fiction-writing. I cannot see any

significant element in the composition of the stories that is extraneous to this tradition; only the subject matter is distinctively South African. Characteristic of this Western, realist tradition is its close-up focus on the inner life of the protagonist, a focus which provides the narrative with a significant principle of organization (Vaughan 1990:191).

Further, particularly on the part of materialist critique, there is concern that some of the objections to *Real politik* (Ndebele) and/or the determinations of culture/literature in/by history (Coetzee), may unduly hand over too important considerations—not outside the province of literature—to formalism and/or to the 'negative knowledge of reality' (Eagleton 1992:369) of the Frankfurt school kind. Indeed, much of what has been the ground of contention *vis-à-vis* the fiction of Coetzee is what Benita Parry (1998:163) has argued are the 'apparent referents of Coetzee's fictions [which] have encouraged their literal interpretation as protests against colonial conquest, political torture, and social exploitation' against both his fiction's refusal explicitly to acknowledge this dimension and the apparent mysticism of some of his readers. Furthermore, according to Parry, textualist/ culturalist critique sits ill with the work of (sometimes the same textualist/ culturalist) 'critics [who] have argued that by subverting colonialism's oppressive discourses, his (Coetzee's) work performs "a politics of writing"' [e.a.] (Parry 1998:164).

### **The Ideology of Aesthetics/ the Aesthetics of Ideology**

It is not this essay's brief to offer a re-appraisal of Coetzee's *oeuvre*, nor that of Ndebele. Suffice to say that, perhaps more than any other South African writer, Coetzee's writing has continued to throw into sharp relief the affiliations of critique of South African writing, and of the critics, arguably (though at times misleadingly) on either side of the politics/poetics divide (see Njabulo Ndebele 1989:23-35; see also Kelwyn Sole 1997:116-151). What I do want to ponder, however, is the essay that Coetzee first published in the *New York Times Book Review* in 1986, 'Into the Dark Chamber: The Writer and the South African State', parts of which I quoted above<sup>2</sup>. In

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<sup>2</sup> Later published in David Atwell's *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews* (1992).

particular, I want to bring the second quotation to bear on *Disgrace*, via a re-appraisal of the first. The first quotation sets a specific, if tricky, agenda for the writer in a politically repressive state, and the second ponders, from the point of view of the lives of animals, the future of a certain kind of humanism in South African writing post apartheid. What this means, then, is that my essay will rejoin the discussion of literature and politics from the point of view of the copula, 'and', which conjoins the two thoroughly complex terms, the meaning of each of which is still very much in serious dispute. Indeed, rather than conjoin these terms in a peaceful and unilateral manner, 'and' is the arena of great critical activity.

'Into The Dark Chamber: The Writer and the South African State' deals, primarily, with the nature of power and authority, rolled into one of their most spectacular manifestations in the prison torture chamber. However, this is the kind of spectacle to which only the torturer and the tortured are privy: 'the torture room thus becomes like the bedchamber of the pornographer's fantasy ... insulated from moral and physical restraint ...' (Coetzee 1992:363) yet, precisely because of this, the site of extreme fascination for the novelist. Citing John T. Irwin, Coetzee (1992:363) elaborates on this last point:

It is precisely because [he] stands outside the dark door, wanting to enter the dark room but unable to, that he is a novelist, that he must imagine what takes place beyond the door. Indeed, it is just that tension toward the dark room that he cannot enter that makes that room the source of all his imaginings—the womb of art.

Thus, 'the novelist is a person who, camped before a closed door, facing an insufferable ban, creates, in place of the scene he is forbidden to see, a representation of that scene, and a story of the actors in it and how they come to be there' (Coetzee 1992:364). It would seem that, in *Disgrace*, David Lurie, in part, finds himself in such a situation, during and after the rape of his daughter, Lucy; during the rape, he is locked inside the toilet whilst his daughter's rapists take turns on her and, after the rape, his daughter tells him to stick to the story of his experience and leave her to tell hers. The basis of the terms of David Lurie's ban, as Lucy frames it, is that:

'This has nothing to do with you, David. You want to know why I

have not laid a particular charge with the police. I will tell you, as long as you agree not to raise the subject again. The reason is that, as far as I am concerned, what happened to me is a purely private matter. In another time, in another place it might be held to be a public matter. But in this place, at this time, it is not. It is my business, mine alone'.

'This place being what?'

'This place being South Africa' (Coetzee 1992:112).

When David Lurie surmises that, by her saying 'In another time, in another place it might be a public matter', she means that her not reporting the rape serves to 'expiate the crimes of the past by suffering in the present', Lucy replies: 'No. You keep misreading me. Guilt and salvation are abstractions. I don't act in terms of abstractions. Until you make an effort to see that, I can't help you' (Coetzee 1992:112). In short, she puts him in his place, that is, even further outside the scene by rejecting his interpretation. But what does she mean, if it is not what Lurie thinks she means? Let me return to Coetzee's comment on the broad implications of Rosa Burger's reaction on witnessing the merciless flogging of a donkey by 'the man in a drunken fury' as she drives around, 'half lost', on the outskirts of the townships of Johannesburg:

Forever and ever, in Rosa's memory, the blows will rain down and the beast shudder in pain. The spectacle comes from the inner reaches of Dante's hell, beyond the scope of morality. For morality is human, whereas the two figures locked to the cart belong to a damned, dehumanized world. They put Rosa Burger in her place: they define her as within the sphere of humanity. What she flees from, in fleeing South Africa, is the negative illumination they bring: that there exists another world parallel to hers, no further away than a half hour's drive, a world of blind force and mute suffering, debased, beneath good and evil (Coetzee 1992:367).

Needless to say, Lucy will not flee the country, as her father implores her to. Instead, she will seek protection under her former farm hand, but lately co-owner, Petrus's 'wing', as one of his wives.

Even though the township does not feature in *Disgrace*, I nonetheless want to note its problematic construction in 'Into The Dark Chamber' as 'a world of blind force and mute suffering, debased, beneath good and evil', and of blackness as altogether embroiled in this, a view which seals the township, and blackness, inside the single issue of apartheid, protest style. It is to the theoretical basis of the proposition of the first quotation that I now want to turn, and the implications thereof for the South African writer both then and now. What does it mean to 'establish one's own authority ... to imagine torture and death on one's own terms', when, in fact, the instruments of torture and death reside in the state? How, indeed, does the writer avoid being impaled on the dilemma proposed by the state, when, in fact, as Coetzee himself observes, it is precisely because he 'stands outside the dark door, wanting to enter the dark room but unable to, that he *is* a novelist'? I have considered, in this connection, one instance of what it could mean to refuse the torturer the last word, by allegorising Lucy's exchange with her father after the rape.

Related to the essay's examination of the nature of power and authority, 'Into The Dark Chamber' speaks of the implications, for the writer, of the status quo, in all its manifestations; it speaks of the endless potential of the status quo to ensnare writing, to compel it to reproduce its images and to re-circulate them at the very moment that writing thinks it is undoing them. In South Africa, apartheid sought to create laws for every aspect of life, thus setting the agenda for assent and/or dissent. Coetzee's fiction has resolutely inhabited a parallel position to the status quo, often, because of its distance from it, appearing irrelevant to it, but very much the dark side of its enlightenment. *Disgrace* is probably the only novel in Coetzee's *oeuvre* that appears to coincide with anything that can be called realism. In other words, in *Disgrace*, Coetzee appears to have finally left the physical and epistemological frontier. Yet the novel's closeness to the current issues is also its distance, precisely because, whereas it appears to have left the physical frontier—or, at least, forced it into dialogue with modernity/the 'new' South Africa—it is still very much on the epistemological frontier. Despite its generally misleading tabloid straightforwardness or realism that makes up its frame—the novel is framed between potentially sensational and generalisable stories, namely the discovery of David Lurie's 'inappropriate' sexual conduct with his student,

Melanie Isaacs, and his daughter Lucy's rape in her Eastern Cape house by two black men—the significant thrust of *Disgrace* is *not* to be found inside this frame. Readers get the first indication of this when Lurie refuses to appear before his university's disciplinary committee, accepts guilt and turns down the committee's offer to negotiate his rehabilitation on condition that he shows contrition and/or accepts its interpretation of his guilt and appropriate justice. The second indication, to which I have already alluded, is Lucy's refusal to accept the terms of David Lurie's interpretation (or appropriation) of her experience and his idea of appropriate justice.

However, let me consider at length and more broadly the theoretical basis and justification of Coetzee's fictional agenda, which 'Into The Dark Chamber' proposes when it says,

For the writer the deeper problem is not to allow himself to be impaled on the dilemma proposed by the state, namely, either to ignore its obscenities or else to produce representations of them.

I also want to consider some of the objections that have been raised in this connection, in particular by those who have felt that this position is at best indecisive and untenable—or turns critical paralysis into a virtue—and, at worst, advocates an 'aristocracy of art'. Put differently, I want to consider the objections of those for whom the copula, 'and', in 'politics and literature' marks the place of literature's transcendence of its own agenda as a kind of intervention and coincides with a cause. The basis of the theoretical proposition of 'Into The Dark Chamber' is, as I have put it above, the awareness of the endless potential of the status quo to ensnare writing, to compel it to reproduce its images and to re-circulate them at the very moment that writing thinks it is undoing them. However, it is absolutely crucial to proceed from making fine distinctions between the idea of literature that 'Into the Dark Chamber' implicates and that which is generally identified with the *avant garde*. Let me, thus, (1) revisit one of the veins in which the discussion of the politics-poetics dyad has been postulated and, then, (2) propose that Coetzee's postulation of this dyad is, for lack of a better description, a kind of double gesture. Rather than make a choice between the literary-cultural and the political, Coetzee ponders both from the point of view of what I have termed the copula, 'and', which forces them to

confront each other's presumptions. I shall, then, (3) consider *Disgrace* as an elaboration of Coetzee's double gesture.

The ground of contest that I am trying to reconstruct in the first connection above is, as I understand it, the nature of the relationship between literature (and culture) and politics. Its impetus can be seen to be the progressive/unidirectional break-up into specialised enclaves of the 'three great areas of historical life—knowledge, politics, desire—each becom[ing] ... autonomous, sealed off into its own space'. Or, the 'cultural system detach[ing] itself from the economic and the political systems, and thus [coming] to figure as an end in itself' (Eagleton 1990:366f). In the introduction of his review of some of the moments 'post' the organicism of the discourse on literature and culture in South Africa, Kelwyn Sole (1997:117) makes the following point:

When local 'colonial discourse'/'post-colonial' applications first surfaced, they seemed to herald a breath of fresh air: promising new ways in which to examine and theorise literary and cultural studies in this country. In terms of scholarship, they appeared to open up untouched areas of enquiry.

However, Sole (1997:119) continues:

there are increasing signs that the theories/descriptions of 'post-coloniality' are becoming a new academic orthodoxy of their own. It is noticeable that the sense of 'newness' it both helped form and responded to often demonstrates a superficial understanding at best of what the local versions (in literary criticism) of the 'master narratives' it has sought to supplant were.

Terry Eagleton (1992:373) considers postmodernism in the same light, but adds that this state of affairs is inevitable (though no less problematic than Sole, rightly in my view, considers it to be):

Much postmodernist culture is both radical and conservative, iconoclastic and incorporated, in the same breath. This is so because of a contradiction between the economic and the cultural forms of

late capitalist society, or, more simply between capitalist economy and bourgeois culture.

Needless to say, it is the same contradiction that Sole highlights. Organicism, for a long time the dominant literary-cultural framework in South Africa, came under renewed, if at the time unexpected, critical pressure with the publication of Albie Sachs' African National Congress (ANC) in-house discussion paper on culture, entitled 'Preparing ourselves for freedom'. Its influence—it was published with responses in *Spring Is Rebellious* (1990)—says, Njabulo Ndebele in a follow-up publication, *Exchanges* (1991), was not so much that it had said what it said but, rather, that it came from a position of political influence. Nevertheless, what Sachs' paper heralded was the subtle split between the militant United Democratic Front (UDF) and the exiled ANC leadership that was preparing to return to the country and to start negotiations with the National Party (NP) for the transfer of power to the former. However, contrary to what some have argued, it was not to something of a 'post' organicism—a post-apartheid cultural eclecticism of sorts—that Sachs' paper turned to, but, rather, to an organicism of another kind: African nationalism. The accord with his own work that Ndebele remarked about Sachs' paper, in *Exchanges*, adds another dimension to the kind of formalism that Ndebele—and I would say Sachs—identifies with his work, even if, unlike Ndebele, Sachs' intervention does not declare—nor identify with—any specific academic literary credentials. What underscores the formalism that Ndebele advocates, Tony Morphet observes in his review of *Rediscovery of the Ordinary*<sup>3</sup>, is the same African nationalism that underscores Sachs' pseudo-playful proposition that the militant UDF slogan, 'culture is a weapon of struggle', be 'banned for at least five years' and be replaced by an affirmative/positive/progressive culture. If Ndebele's formalism appears radical, in the sense in which it offers itself up as a corrective to a protest tradition impoverished by the dependence of black writers on liberal humanism, it is radical insofar as it simply swells the ranks of the otherwise narrow urbanicity of the protest literature collective, by substituting it with the 'ordinary'.

What seems to me to be at stake in the formalisms that have been

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<sup>3</sup> In *Theoria* 80, October 1992.

canvassed by Sachs, Ndebele and, in the seventies and eighties, Ezekiel Mphahlele and Lewis Nkosi, amongst others, is their grounding variously in 'ourselves', 'our', 'the ordinary', 'race', 'Africanity', or 'people', without these collectives themselves being understood as mediated in form. To this extent—and here Coetzee appears particularly pertinent—there is no engagement with humanism—call it a new African/black humanism—as another straight-jacket. In many ways, *Disgrace* places this question on the agenda of its narrative. However, it would be folly to presuppose that the alternative to humanism, whether of the liberal kind or of the localised—some would say, Africanised—kinds that have been canvassed (ubuntu, ujaama, etc.) is post-humanism. In this connection, *Disgrace* proposes not a post-humanism, in which the lives of animals—dogs, sheep, geese—take centre stage because humanity has proved to be tainted, but, rather, seeks to keep humanism honest, or, to extend the metaphor of the straight-jacket, to make us wear our humanism loosely. It is my view, then, that *Disgrace* inhabits the location between literature and politics, which in the title of this essay I have called 'and'. It is from this position that *Disgrace* becomes particularly tricky.

Let me consider some of the crucial points in the last connection above, proceeding from the concern that Louise Bethlehem raises pertaining to the narrative voice that is 'possessed of all the traditional narrative authority of the third person'. One of the consequences of this narrative stance, argues Bethlehem, is that it asserts the compliancy and pliancy of 'Soraya' without the ironic awareness of the import of its authority. Here Bethlehem works from the presupposition that this narrative stance—which, at one point in her essay, she argues reaches 'heightened mimeticism'—works directly on 'Soraya' as a woman in a novel that does not reflect on its obsession with 'fathers', and, thus, asserts its masculinity without irony. But Soraya, as the same narrator informs, is 'a popular *nom de commerce*' (Bethlehem 2002:8); indeed, after the first 'Soraya' exits the narrative, another 'Soraya' takes her place. Perhaps the problem is that it is Bethlehem's essay that proceeds from mimeticism. 'Soraya' is a 'function' (Bethlehem 2002:2) of the escort agency and not the *woman* who is traded by that name, who leaves the narrative unknown and, indeed, who shuts the door to that possibility by disclaiming 'Soraya' and Lurie: "I don't know who you are", she says. "You are harassing me in my own house. I demand

you will never phone me here again, never'" (Coetzee 2002:9f). Likewise, Melanie does not become 'Meláni: the dark one' of Lurie's fantasy; she will not 'shift [with] the accent' if Lurie thinks 'Melani—melody: a meretricious rhyme [is] Not a good name for her' (Coetzee 2002:18). Petrus will not be a character in Lurie's detective plot:

'Do you know, Petrus', he says, 'I find it hard to believe the men who came here were strangers. I find it hard to believe they arrived out of nowhere, and did what they did, and disappeared afterwards like ghosts. And I find it hard to believe that the reason they picked on us was simply that we were the first white folk they met that day. What do you think? Am I wrong?'

Petrus smokes a pipe, an old-fashioned pipe with a hooked stem and a little silver cap over the bowl. Now he straightens up, takes the pipe from the pocket of his overalls, opens the cap, tamps down the tobacco in the bowl, sucks at the pipe unlit. He stares reflectively over the dam wall, over the hills, over open country. His expression is perfectly tranquil (Coetzee 2002:118f).

Petrus ignores some of his comments, 'chooses not to take [Lurie's rhetorical question] as a question' that he ought to answer and, worse, offers a rude reminder that it is no longer 'the old days [when] one could have had it out with Petrus. In the old days one could have had it out to the extent of losing one's temper and sending him packing and hiring someone in his place' (Coetzee 2002:116). I have already referred to Lucy's refusal to have her experience appropriated for ends that will not raise the issue of rape as the faultline in a country where the generalities of political transformations have not addressed themselves to the vulnerability of the human subject—politics without grace and felt contact. Lucy, thus, rejects the political narrative that her father offers her, also because the men who raped her 'do rape', and Lurie 'ought to know':

When it comes to men and sex, David, nothing surprises me any more .... You are a man, you ought to know. When you have sex with someone strange—when you trap her, hold her down, get her under you, put all your weight on her—isn't it a bit like killing?

Pushing the knife in; exiting afterwards, leaving the body behind covered in blood—doesn't it feel like murder, like getting away with murder? (Coetzee 2002:158)

This, for Lucy, is the bottom line and Lurie 'ought to know'. Melanie may not be 'someone strange' in the sense of Lucy's rapists but, Lurie's attention is 'Strange love!' (Coetzee 2002:25) nonetheless. Lurie may not quite rape her but, sex with him is 'undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core. As though she had decided to go slack, die within herself for the duration, like a rabbit when the jaws of the fox close on its neck' (Coetzee 2002:25). If, as Lurie wants Lucy to believe, there is any racial or political score that is settled by her rapists, it is, as Lucy puts it, an abstraction; it is, as it were, a distortion/mystification of rape.

But, as a narrative stance, Lurie is another place of provocation in the novel—as it were, another 'and'—a place from which *Disgrace* tests certain presumptions. Among other faultlines, his scandal and departure from the university opens up the possibility of reconsidering social theory and literature's place in it. Lurie's appearance before a committee which will hear the cases that Melanie and the chair of his department, Elaine Winter, have brought against him is chaired by Religious Studies professor, Manas Mathabane. The discourse of the committee, or, rather, its basis, is summarised in the statement that Mathabane reads to him as the committee's final offer to 'save you from yourself':

I acknowledge without reservation serious abuses of the human rights of the complainant, as well as abuse of the authority delegated to me by the University. I sincerely apologize to both parties and accept whatever appropriate penalty may be imposed (Coetzee 2002:57).

Mathabane tells Lurie that if he accepts the statement in the 'spirit of repentance', it 'will have the status of a plea in mitigation' (Coetzee 2002:58). Lurie turns it down on the basis that they

went through the repentance business yesterday. I told you what I thought. I won't do it. I appeared before an officially constituted

tribunal, before a branch of the law. Before that secular tribunal I pleaded guilty, a secular plea. That plea should suffice. Repentance is neither here nor there. Repentance belongs to another world, to another universe of discourse (Coetzee 2002:58).

Needless to say, it is this other 'universe of discourse' that the committee had rejected earlier, when Lurie had said about his sexual conduct that 'I was not myself. I was no longer a fifty-year-old divorcé at a loose end. I became a servant of Eros' (Coetzee 2002:52). Indeed, one of the committee members, the woman from the business school, ignores the Eros part and, instead, asks: "You were not the same as what?" (Coetzee 2002:52). I shall not go into the details of the significance of Eros in the spirit Mathabane claims for the discourse that he offers Lurie. It should suffice to say that Lurie has a point in saying that the spirit in which he is expected to accept the draft plea sits ill with the committee's secular ends and is, as such, offered in bad faith, which is to say in contradiction of his earlier attempt at stating his case.

However, not to go into the details of the significance of Eros in the above connection, does not mean that the tension which thus arises must be overlooked. Indeed, the tension between social discourse—the new language of human rights and representativity, the religious discourse of confession and repentance and the legal discourse which must enforce it by extracting admission of guilt—and literature—even if he admits to 'not being a poet', (Coetzee 2002:52) it is poetry that Lurie thinks would speak his case more efficaciously—is unmistakable in *Disgrace*. One of the consequences of this tension is that, after Lurie quits his job, his preoccupation with the Byron opera that he has been putting off begins to intensify. Another, which has been the subject of quite a few research articles, is the issue of ethics which begins to preoccupy the novel and which has retrospective and prospective consequences for (1) a reconsideration of the Melanie debacle and Darwin and (2) for the reconsideration of literature in a 'secular age', respectively. It is significant to consider the novel's place in and outside Lurie's preoccupation with writing an opera on Byron's romantic exploits and the Darwinian universe which it revisits (and the discussion of which, as I intimated earlier by quoting from 'Into The Dark Chamber', the novel enjoins us not to postpone anymore). In this connection, I want to consider

two essays in particular, Colleen M. Sheils' 'Opera, Byron, and a South African Psyche in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*' and Carrol Clarkson's "'Done because we are too menny": Ethics and Identity in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*', both of which appeared in *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa*, 15, 1&2 2003 respectively. In her essay, Sheils argues that Lurie's 'attempts to compose an opera on Lord Byron and Teresa Guiccioli' can be read from the perspective of Jacqueline Rose's work on 'the link between fantasy and political identity'. From this perspective, the role of Lurie's opera is to communicate 'reflections on identity, exile, and political meaning within the mind of a newly disenfranchised member of South Africa's nation' (Sheils 2003:38). Clarkson's view is that, with *Disgrace*, 'Coetzee extends ethical questions raised in Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*—questions which have to do with the subject's relatedness to other sentient beings within the context of a natural world indifferent to the individual's plight or to contingent ethico-cultural values' (Clarkson 2003:77).

From the summaries of the two essays, one can draw two pointers in the present essay's relation: Sheils' essay views Lurie's Byron opera as the mark of his 'alienation' or 'exile' from the present, which is to say post-apartheid, body politic, and Clarkson, on the issue of Lurie's and the novel's immersion in the ethical question, argues that 'As much as he comes to recognise their ephemerality and contingency, Lurie upholds Western values: the fact that his ethical paradigm is supervenient upon a cultural and historical moment does not in itself necessitate the view that his paradigm is without worth' (Sheils 2003:77). However, it is when the two essays are juxtaposed that some interesting issues arise. Whereas for Sheils there is no worth either in Lurie's preoccupation with Byron or in his involvement with dying dogs—indeed, for Sheils these simply intensify Lurie's alienation from the 'new national identity of a new South Africa' (Sheils 2003:49) that she never quite explains, let alone engages—for Clarkson, there is worth in both, albeit ambivalent. For Sheils, 'the question is what happens in the psyche of those (like Lurie) who gained from and endorsed the apartheid State, those who never shared in the desire for the unconscious nation of democracy' (Sheils 2003:39). Sheils (2003:39) continues, in this vein, to ask:

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what about those who saw their historical desires actualized in the

apartheid regime? And what happens when this fantasy (because apartheid too was once fantasy, later actualized, albeit unethical and inhumane) is crushed by the triumph of the stronger desire, the other unconscious fantasy, of the people? In the aftermath of apartheid, will the consciously racist nation simply shift to exist in the unconscious, on the level of fantasy and nostalgia, for those who do not desire to embrace the new nation? Or will the former supporters of apartheid find themselves in need of a psychic purging, to cleanse the unconscious feelings of guilt?

For Clarkson (2003:85):

It is precisely the contingency of his cultural values that Lurie has to confront—and question. At the outset of the novel he is presented as a veritable repository of European Romanticism. He teaches Romantic poetry at the Cape Technical University; he interprets his relationship with Soraya as a Baudelairian experience of *'luxe et volupté'* (Coetzee 1999a:1) and he is composing an opera, *Byron in Italy*. But what is the place of his Western Aestheticism in the isolated region of the Eastern Cape? With self-directed irony, locked in the lavatory while his daughter is being gang-raped, Lurie reflects [speaking languages that] 'will not save him here in darkest Africa' .... Nevertheless, Lurie's recognition of the contingency and ephemerality of his values—the fact that his ethical paradigm is supervenient upon a cultural and historical moment—does not in itself necessitate the view that this paradigm is without worth, or that it should be relinquished. On the contrary, the realisation that one's cultural values are under threat calls one to justify and defend them, precisely *because* they are relative.

She concludes in this vein:

In his last visit to Lucy, Lurie contemplates his future role as grandparent. He acknowledges that he is inescapably part of a transtemporal 'line of existences', irrespective of his cultural engagements. It is a line in which his share, his gift, will become

gradually less and less 'till it may as well be forgotten' (Clarkson 2003:217).

Sheils' reading of Lurie, I would like to think, is too one-dimensional—too superficial even—and without nuance. She sets up a weak paradigm: because Lurie is one of those 'who gained from and endorsed the apartheid state, those who never shared in the desire for the unconscious nation of democracy', he can never be read any other way but as an incorrigible product of the past who would not respond to the 'national identity of a new South Africa [which] calls out to [him]'. At best, 'His answer ... is too indistinct'. Clarkson's reading, by contrast, acknowledges that whereas Lurie's cultural values are at the 'outset of the novel ... presented as a veritable repository of European Romanticism', his 'recognition of the contingency and ephemerality of his values—the fact that his ethical paradigm is supervenient upon a cultural and historical moment—does not in itself necessitate the view that this paradigm is without worth, or that it should be relinquished'. To use Coetzee's words, Sheils makes Lurie 'all too satanic' and her premise is tied too uncritically to the liberal discourse of guilt and penance, which the novel considers inadequate. One waits in vain to find out what 'the stronger desire, the other unconscious fantasy, of the people' means in the broad scheme of the novel, besides that it is 'stronger'.

## Conclusion

What I have tried to elaborate in this essay is the continued relevance of Coetzee's 'Into The Dark Chamber: The Writer and the South African State'. Coetzee's essay, at bottom, identifies with the threshold on which literature must stand the better to gesture both towards itself and towards that which may be considered extrinsic to it, but which is its *raison d'être*. This threshold is the copula, 'and'.

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Department of English  
University of Johannesburg

**‘... as if this burden disguised as honour did not weigh heavily on her heart’:  
Blackwomen, Struggle Iconography and Nation in South African Literature**

**Pumla Dineo Gqola**

[W]hat is body and instinctual is by definition dumb and inarticulate. As it does not itself signify, or signify coherently, it may be freely occupied, scrutinized, analyzed, resignified. This representation carries complete authority; the Other cannot gainsay it. The body of the Other can represent only its own physicality, its own strangeness (Boehmer 1992:270).

The inevitable heterogeneity of all human clusters means that there is an endlessly large spectrum of possibilities through which members of that group can inhabit any experiential positioning. It is in light of this that representations which fix members of a group into set series of behaviours and characteristics, in other words stereotype them, are problematic. It therefore is quite clear why historic representations of Blackwomen subjects and characters as hypersexualised or long suffering mother figures is unacceptable. Much research has shown the direct correlation between the stereotyping of Blackwomen and their oppression under changing historical eras. The circulation of stereotypes therefore is neither coincidental nor arbitrary but contributes directly to knowledge production on those groups typecast. It occludes the heterogeneity present in the human clusters

concerned replacing it with an imposed homogeneity which makes control and subjugation easier.

Indeed, it is only '[b]y taking these differences seriously [that] we can better understand the ways race influences identity, motivation, and experiences as well as the impact of stereotypes' (Aaron & Oyserman 2001: 22). The circulation of stereotypical images of any group work to hinder this understanding. Indeed, the pervasive typecasting of any oppressed group cannot be seen independently of the identity formation processes by which other groups, in the same society, construct cohesion.

Stuart Hall's work (1997) has demonstrated powerfully the manner in which representation works to create because nothing exists outside of discourse. Discourse provides meaning and is always ideological, and available only through the symbolic categories made available through society. Further, 'discourse itself is the actual combination of facts and meanings which gives to it the aspect of a *specific* structure of meaning that permits us to identify it as a product of one kind of historical consciousness rather than another' (White 1978:107).

Various feminist and womanist scholars have analysed the symbolic meanings of Blackwomen in South African literature written in English, as well as in the representational politics of the liberation movement. This corpus has uncovered the highly metaphorised appearances of the category 'Blackwomen' in ways which work to erase the heterogeneity which characterises the experiences of Blackwomen subjectivities. This erasure works through the limited representations of Blackwomen subjects and characters, which trap her in facile tropes. The precise manifestations of these derive from the mythologisation of oppression in the national liberation movement, shaped by a long trajectory of activism and theorisation of oppression as clustering primarily around race. Here, ideology is both resultant from and constitutive of historical and social contexts. In a country with various systems of white supremacist terror flowing from each other—slavery, colonialism, apartheid—perhaps this focus on racism should not come as a surprise.

Examinations of the discourse of the liberation movements, most extensively the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), have linked this ambiguous positioning of Blackwomen to the masculinist language of emancipatory politics. In an interview on the gender politics of the early

BCM, Mamphela Ramphele has opined the sexist language of Black Consciousness (BC), 'didn't have space for women because it was a language borrowed from a culture, English culture, which never accepted women really as full citizens' (in Yates & Gqola 1998:92).

BC discourse has indeed betrayed some unease around differences among Black subjects. A reading of BC literature reveals an explicit largely uninterrogated masculinist bias. This is a direct consequence of the high esteem in which Black unity was held within the ranks of the movement. Having identified as key the toppling of the apartheid state, and the momentous liberation of oppressed people in South Africa, Black unity took on an unprecedented importance. This celebration of unity not only pertained to the ranks of the BCM alone, but is evident in the refusal of BC activists to criticise other aspects of the broader liberation movement. This remained the case even as several misreadings of BC labelled it as in line with the apartheid policies of the day. Black solidarity was paramount and non-negotiable for BC activists and writers (see Gqola 2001a). The *South African Students Organisation (SASO) Newsletter*, 2.1, spoke eloquently to this valuation of Black solidarity:

[w]ith the political climate as it is today SASO expects the various political groups that operate outside the system to speak with a united voice against the present regime but not to waste time discrediting their fellow Black brothers and sisters (4).

While much can be said in defence of the stress on Black solidarity, there are numerous problematics which ensure from ensue from precisely such an accent on unity. To the extent that unity of purpose was seen as self-evident, it also meant that certain ways of inhabiting Blackness were prioritised over others. For example the variety of what gets defined as Black experience is reduced to a specific, usually urban, young and male Black experience. This can possibly be attributed to the location and education levels of the activists at the forefront of the movement (see Ramphele 1991b). It also meant that performances of Blackness were regulated, and allegations of white-emulation could be levelled against those who did not exhibit recognised 'authentic' forms of behaviour. More significantly for the purposes of this paper, this stress on unity, that conflated one-ness with similarity, which is

to say, homogeneity, ignored differentiated locations which characterised the ranks of Black oppressed subjects under apartheid. Discursively, it made it easier to assume that a select Black male experiential situation could be used to generalise about Black South African experience. Thus, 'the Black man' is used, after the 'generic male' default in English, to refer simultaneously to Black men and to Black society. The ambiguity about which is of these is meant, and when, worked to occlude patriarchal and other stratifications. For example, the BC rallying cry 'Black man, you are on your own' illustrated these ambiguities because the 'Black man' was seen to refer to Black people generally at the same time that BC relied on masculinist discourse which addressed itself to the experiential location of specific Black men.

Further, numerous feminist and womanist studies have paid attention to the paucity of female activists at the forefront of BCM, and have interrogated the conservative politics of gender within BC organisations (see Driver 1989; Gqola 2000; Gqola 2001a; Lewis 1999; Moodley 1991; Ramphela 1991b; Walker 1982). Accompanying the masculinist, and urban-biased revolutionary politics of BCM was a stress on a certain kind of political mixing. BC activists valued the ability of cultural and artistic modes to be used in the service of liberation. They rejected the conventional separation between explicitly political activity and works of the imagination. Consequently, in addition to *Black Viewpoints*, *Black Review* and *SASO Newsletter*, which were the official publications of BCM, there was a flourish of literary magazines and artist communities. Art that claims direct connection to BC thought forms the largest single body of literature written in English in South Africa's history. Part of the desire and commitment to use imaginative arts as a tool for the struggle resulted often in the explicit connection of the artist with BC doctrine.

The magazine *Staffrider* credited itself as the literary mouthpiece of the BCM. To gauge the scope of influence of this magazine, it suffices to point to the association of the bulk of South Africa's living, public writers with this era. Writers like Boitumelo (Mofokeng), Miriam Tlali, Geina Mhlophe (as Nokugcina Sigwili), Nise Malange, Mafika Gwala, Mtutuzeli Matshoba, Don Mattera, Chris van Wyk, Mbulelo Mzamane, Mongane Wally Serote and James Matthews, are among some of the more prominent writers who explicitly associated themselves and their writing with this movement. All of them, and many others, published in *Staffrider*. Ravan

Press later developed an imprint, the Staffrider series, under which a series of books by some of the above were published. I list their names here simply to reinforce the sheer magnitude of 'the staffrider school'.

The staffrider writers reflected, in the main, the biases of the movement they so closely allied themselves with. This remains a valid point regardless of whether the writers were influenced by BCM literature, or helped shape it, a distinction that the poet James Matthews flags as important in his letter on the back page of *Chimurenga* 3 (2002). I have argued elsewhere that there was no recognition within the language of the staffrider school of Blackwomen's agency. Processes of reduction and distortion work discursively to contribute to the creation of partial and sanctioned realities. This is highlighted by the absence of any female staffriders, precisely because within the literary magazine a staffrider is always a Blackman who resists, and is cast as the figure to emulate. In the absence of similar revolutionary characterisation to follow for women readers, female staffriders are precluded from entry into public politics even as this belies the experiences of Blackwomen activists and readers of the magazine (see Gqola 2001b).

In an earlier study of BC creative literature published in the first five years of the magazine, *Staffrider*, it emerged that, with the exception of a handful of stories and poems, representations of Blackwomen were trapped in two stereotypes: the long-suffering, stoic mother who supports her son and/or husband in activism against apartheid; and the hyper-sexualised female character in short stories who is inscribed with gendered violence for her refusal (or failure) to conform to the previous mould of regulated sexuality. Out of the literature surveyed, approximately two hundred short stories and poems, fewer than twenty deviated from both these tropes (see Gqola 2000).

However, the liberation movement was not made up exclusively of BC activists and artists, and as such then, an engagement with representations of Blackwomen in struggle iconography needs to uncover some of the similar masculinist biases in other parts of the liberation movement.

In a December 1984 article published in the African National Congress's *Sechaba*, Phyllis Jordan chastises the rampant patriarchal attitudes within the ANC allied, and/or led, anti-apartheid movement. She notes,

[i]t is one of the ironies of history that the most pervasive and total oppression, the oppression of women, has been to a large extent neglected by scholars within the ranks of the movement. This can be explained, in part, by the male chauvinism which has been the bane of colonial liberation movements and also the imprecise ways in which we discuss the future socio-economic order we envisage for a free South Africa (Jordan 1984: 4).

What Jordan outlines above, and what she continues to critique in detail in her essay, stems from caginess within the liberation movement regarding the challenges posed by feminism for the operation and structuring of the larger anti-apartheid struggle. While movements which fought to topple apartheid addressed themselves explicitly to the liberation of all oppressed under apartheid, the privileging of race, without a mindfulness of the ways in which racism intersected with other power differentials, left much outside the conceptualisation of this freedom. Given that, as Jordan goes on to show, '[i]n its treatment of Black women, White racism as not even bothered to try pretending' (Jordan 1984: 4), the resistance to the incorporation of gender as a lens through which to make sense of how oppression played itself out on Black South Africans lives weakened the larger analyses of oppression. It also meant that other systems of oppression remained unchecked within the ranks of the liberation movement.

Defences against incorporating feminist tenets in order to critique how patriarchy shaped Black masculinities and femininities focused on the racist tendencies of branches of the global feminist movement. However, this too is not a valid defence, because

the reactionary nature of White bourgeois feminism should not be allowed to detract from the sound principles of women's emancipation, any more than Botha's calling himself a 'nationalist' tarnishes the image of nationalism in general (Jordan 1984: 15).

Cheryl Walker (1982) has noted that the discourses used across the liberation movement cast Blackwomen in a supportive and nurturing mould, and rarely represented as active participants in the struggle to end apartheid. This was not accidental, but this trope of supportive woman was reified as

the safest position for the re-emasculatation of Blackmen. Indeed, far from being a role exclusively prescribed by men into which women were then forcibly confined, it is a function that some women's organisations put forward as a way to access the politics of liberation. For example, *Black Review* 1975/6 (143) quotes the Preamble to the Constitution of Allied Black Women's Federation to read:

1. Black women are basically responsible for the survival and maintenance of their families and largely the socialisation of the youth for the transmission of the Black cultural heritage.
2. The need to present a unified front and redirect the status of motherhood toward the fulfilment of the Black people's social, cultural, economic and political aspirations.

The representation of those women who are activists as exceptional served to further enshrine this stereotypical imagining of Blackwomen subjects. Many of these women who are activists are typecast as incomparable through their masculinisation (Lewis 1994:162), a tendency Ramphele has spoken of as the bestowal of honorary male status (Ramphele 1991b; Yates & Gqola 1998). This remained the case even for those women who actively challenged their exceptionalisation.

Writing later of representations of Black masculinities and femininities, Gabeba Baderoon (2002) would note the importance of uncovering the complex ways of engaging with representations of Blackness, and assert that Black people need to go beyond the mere calling for 'positive images' in BC style. This would move away from the usual counter-romanticisation of Black fictional and historic characters which has historically been seen as antidote to the explicit stereotypes coming out of colonialism and slavery. What is necessary is not a replacement of one set of limited representations with another series deemed more 'positive' but an engagement with the already always present heterogeneity in the cluster under study. Black people, then, need to uncover those images of Blackness which engender environments where it is possible to 'create new positions from which to view Blackness, as it is to generate work which emerges from Black experience' (Baderoon 2002).

In this paper, I examine the various engagements with the histories

of this typecasting of the category 'Blackwomen' in contemporary South African narratives concerned with memorialising of the anti-apartheid struggle. Predictably, the old stereotypes emerge in some of the narratives analysed. At the same time some creative endeavours demonstrate an assortment of angles from and devices through which to deconstruct this legacy of typecasting. Neither the paper nor the refreshing departures from Blackwomen iconography analysed here offer and set alternative, more 'positive' ways to represent Blackwomen characters. As Gloria Anzaldúa has shown, stereotypes work because they highlight 'the narrow spectrum of reality that [the dominant] select or choose to perceive and/or what their culture "selects" for them to "see"' (Anzaldúa 1990:xxi). Departures from this history of oppressive representation, by definition, then, succeed only when they debunk the myth of this selective reality exposing some of the heterogeneity open for representation. By definition, heterogeneity cannot be captured conclusively and can only be revealed through a series of deconstructive manoeuvres.

Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story* is one of the narratives which grapples with the historical imaging of the category 'Blackwomen' in liberation movement discourses and the creative literature they influenced. The protagonist, David, is perturbed by the well-informed comrade sent by the UDF to address an audience of predominantly older people. Upon first meeting Dulcie,

David hesitated, savouring for a moment the memory of the UDF representative. They'd sent a woman, a young woman, for heaven's sake, in trousers and an oversized jersey and ugly brown shoes like the old fashioned walkers worn by nurses. Not someone who'd have the respect of the elders. But she said none of that (Wicomb 2000: 126).

She is both expected to look more familiar, and disapproved of here for appearing as though she does not prize the same aesthetics as he. Because of her dress and age, he doubts her ability to conduct politics, and, interestingly, this evaluation is rendered prior to any demonstration of her capacity. As it turns out, she is quite adept at winning the trust and admiration of the elders. She and David also remain life long friends.

However, the first impression cited above is important for it demonstrates the double-bind which characterises this young activist's positioning: she is expected to confirm conservative ideas about femininity at the same time that she is recognised as a revolutionary. David's irritation also stems from the fact that the UDF sends a woman in the first place.

In a piece from *Sechaba* September 1969, "Three Angry Young Women Speak to *Sechaba*", the fury is that of three activists. Mary, an MK combatant, positions herself within various revolutionary trajectories and, as she does this, it is clear that she does not see herself as an exceptional woman. Indeed, Mary is able to list a variety of prominent women combatants not only from Southern Africa, but also from various other global liberation struggles. The second is an Australian citizen, Elizabeth Aitken, an activist for the ANC in exile, whose response letter to the South African Minister of Defence defiantly declares that she is honoured to be considered a threat to the apartheid state. The third activist, Miss DN, launches an indictment against the apartheid state for the deaths of activists due to police brutality and torture, thereby rejecting the explanations of suicide which were backed by apartheid courts. Importantly, this piece appeared decades prior to Jordan's analysis on the need to re-examine the sense-making of women's participation in the liberation movement. Similarly, there were ongoing varied discussions on the role of women writer-activists on the pages of the magazine, *Staffrider*, at the same time that these tropes retained prominence. This highlights how contradictory impulses can co-exist. Writers like Manoko Nchwe, Miriam Tlali and Boitumelo directly challenged the limited prescribed roles set for women in nationalist politics as well as in imaginative renderings. The endurance of the relegation of these voices to exceptional women reinforces Desiree Lewis' and Mamphela Ramphele's points above.

Nor does this tendency seem to be confined to South African race politics. Black feminists from elsewhere have pointed to similar tendencies. The poet, Grace Nichols' persona in her 'Of course when they ask for Poems about the "Realities of Black women"', asserts that, for different Black nationalist and conservative white feminist groups, what is expected is

A mother-of-sufferer  
trampled, oppressed

they want a little black blood  
undressed  
and validation  
for the abused stereotype  
already in their heads (Nichols 1990:2-11).

This is the representation that scholars of African literature long ago named 'the mother Africa trope', which gets circulated through nationalist liberation movements and the creative literature they inform (see Dubey 1994; Gaidzanwa 1985; Stratton 1994).

### **memorialising Blackwomen**

The above traces some of the histories which attach to representations of Blackwomen in relation to the liberation struggle. With South Africa's transition to a democracy, some of these have maintained currency. In one of the most celebrated, and controversial, renderings of the proceedings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Antjie Krog chooses to engage in similar representational politics when faced with Blackwomen subjects. For her coverage, serialised by the South African *Mail and Guardian* and the British *The Guardian*, under the name Antjie Samuels, she had received the Thomas Pringle award for journalism. The book version of these proceedings, *Country of my Skull*, won her the Olive Schreiner prose prize.

Both the serialised and the book versions participate in the rehashing of the trope outlined above. In *Country of my Skull*, this is evident when she writes of Blackwomen appearing in front of the commission. Indeed, with the sole exception of her narrative on Winnie Mandela and Christine Qunta she repeatedly casts Blackwomen subjects stereotypically. Further, Krog's Blackwoman at the TRC is one

[w]ho cares endlessly ... dressed in a beret or kopdoek and dressed in her Sunday best, everybody recognises her. Truth has become woman. Her voice distorted behind her rough hand has undermined man as the source of truth. And yet nobody knows her (Krog 1998: 67).

Krog's mythical woman is the long-suffering, unknowable character of

nationalist literature. In other words, faced with a diversity of Blackwomen historical subjects Krog resorts to an older, readily-packaged metaphor of the category 'Blackwomen'. It should be unsurprising for this trope to surface here given the manner in which the TRC worked to memorialise the anti-apartheid movement. The above characterisation of Blackwomen subjects has been questioned by various South African feminist scholars. Wicomb (1999) traces it to Krog's earlier coverage of the TRC, where the visual image of the trope described above, usually in tears, was used as accompaniment for Krog's *Mail and Guardian/ The Guardian* coverage of the TRC. The same visual accompaniment would grace the non-South African issues of Krog's book later. The problematics with both the visual and verbal representation of Blackwomen in Krog's work are underlined in Wicomb's essay. Further, as Wicomb notes, Krog's casting of Blackwomen subjects in terms of the mother Africa trope was especially evident since visibly pained Blackwomen were metaphors also stood in for non-Blackwomen suffering and pain. This is a particularly disturbing trend given the extensive critiquing of this positioning of Blackwomen characters/subjects as fountains of suffering, individually unknowable, but made to function as vessels through which societal suffering can be contained. The question that needs asking, for Wicomb, pertains to why this stereotype continues to function in this way so that this long suffering woman is used as short-hand for everybody's, the nation's pain, except her own, or that of ordinary Blackwomen subjects. It is precisely because of the already accessible meanings which it carries that this stereotype can be used both extensively and uncritically within nationalist narratives of memory-making.

Additionally, Nthabiseng Motsemme has commented on the pervasive circulation of such stereotypes throughout the discourse of the TRC. When the commissioners responded to women's painful stories through a reinsertion of the long-suffering stereotype such 'an instrumentalising of female trauma was strategically used to construct a woman borne out of tears' (Motsemme 2002:3). Motsemme proceeds to ask questions about Krog's large women who cry constantly, punctuated by a white farmer Krog quotes as saying: 'If I see another black woman crying, then I remember two Afrikaans expressions from my youth, "cry like a *meid*" and to be "scared as a *meid*"' (Krog 1998: 190). While Krog cannot be held

responsible for the general stereotypes of Blackwomen in South African society (and beyond), the high level at which crying, suffering Blackwomen feature in her text raises several problems. The prominence of such figures when examined at face value is puzzling especially given many non-Blackwomen subjects cried at the TRC, coupled with the low numbers of Blackwomen who testified in front of the commission. The presence of this ever-crying Blackwoman in Krog's narrative is convenient and works as a ready, familiar stereotype available to readers of her narrative, repeatedly authorised at the TRC through the interventions of commissioners. In the absence of any critique in Krog's narrative it amounts to the re-circulation of an old stereotype in the service of nation-making. The pervasiveness of this symbolic, iconoclastic Blackwoman figure occludes the variety of ways in which Blackwomen subjects position themselves in relation to circulating and emergent national discourses. Rather, as a pattern it works 'to fix black women's positionalities making it difficult for her to speak through them in her own terms' (Motsemme 2002:4). Further, if this trope is used as 'truth' in Krog's representation, what kind of truth does it contribute to? And what kind does it erase?

Addressing the meeting of truth and representations of Blackwomen in Krog's text from a different angle, Jo-Anne Prins finds Krog's interpretations of women's testimonies at times excessively simplistic, and in other instances, irresponsible. Referring to Rita Mazibuko's testimony to the TRC concerning her experience of rape in ANC camps, and Krog's writing of that moment, Prins opines:

[Krog's] words 'Nothing more than an ordinary prostitute' carry the danger of trivialising the victim's experience and that of any prostitute. One is tempted to ask: 'What is ordinary about being a prostitute?' These words are indicative of a judgement being passed on the memory of Mazibuko's experience. The truth as told by the woman is not supported, nor her courage to speak and voice the pain she experienced in the way she could best describe it. Instead of immediately referring to her pain and suffering, her sexual history is questioned (Prins 2002:367).

The treatment Prins critiques above is reflective of both the hearings

themselves, as well as of Krog's narrative. Prins demonstrates through various citations from Krog that ultimately the only entry points for Blackwomen are as either patriarchally reified or reviled. In choosing to be party to the unproblematised circulation of these stereotypes outlined by Wicomb, Motsemme and Prins, Krog's narration of Mazibuko acts alongside '[w]hite supremacist and sexist constructions of black women as prone to sexual promiscuity [and the forums wherein they] are publicly "confirmed" or alluded to in certain ways' (West 1999:24). Krog's 'impeccable credentials', to borrow Wicomb's (1999) formulation, do not equip her with a desire to represent Blackwomen in a nuanced fashion. Her representations of Christine Qunta and Winnie Mandela, two women who enter the TRC space for highly varied ends, as threatening and despicable in precisely the same way demonstrates the extent to which Krog is unprepared for Blackwomen she can cast in neither 'safe' long suffering mould, nor as dismissable because 'sexually promiscuous'.

A refreshing departure from and deconstruction of the working of the mother Africa trope in the case of South African literature is obvious from the manner in which Wicomb chooses to cast female comrades in her novel *David's Story*. Because of the pervasiveness of the long suffering, rather than activist, Blackwoman character in South African narratives of the struggle, Wicomb peppers her narrative with various manifestations of female comrades. She uses these to destabilise any possibility that there is a singular authoritative truth about the location of, or inclinations of Blackwomen's presences in the struggle movement. In Wicomb's text the constant suggestion that there are an infinite possible ways through which the identity 'Blackwoman' in apartheid South Africa can be inhabited illustrates an unwillingness to posit a fixed, 'counter' narrative which nonetheless remains trapped in the same binaries of 'negative' or 'positive' renderings of Blackwomen activists.

The character Rachel in this novel realises that after her marriage she is expected to fit into the mould of the respectable, controlled Blackwoman instead of the defiant activist she had been until that point. Faced with this realisation, she muses disapprovingly that,

[d]ignity, it seemed, meant a bundle of dreary things for a woman: she had to keep her head covered at all times, was not to throw it

back and roar with laughter even in private, and above all, was not to venture outdoors after sunset without an escort (Wicomb 2000:49).

She realises that this dignity, like the safety in Krog's crying, recognisable women, is nothing but a form of control. These problems linger even when we remain mindful that,

[a] critical part of setting up the TRC, was to facilitate the project of nation-building in South Africa. So the tears and blood spilled in the liberation struggle present a powerful imagery critical for the making of a masculine nation, free from any form of emasculation (Motsenme 2002:3).

Indeed, the crisis of representation in Krog's text stems precisely from a resistance to thinking about the relationality of identities: about how her construction of herself, and fleeing home to the family-farm intersects with discursive identities for the subjects she writes about. It is only when Krog opens up an engagement with how white (Afrikaner) femininity is constructed through the constant transmission of Black female stereotypes, as well as how these serve to buttress harmful Black masculinities that she can present more dynamic and varied Blackwomen subjects. For, as long as they work as instrumentalisation, and prevent or protect her from having to interrogate her own identity processes, these stereotypes remain useful for her project of avoidance.

Beth Goldblatt and Sheila Meintjies' (1996) joint submission to the TRC draws on a variety of locations where Blackwomen have made themselves heard in relating experiences under apartheid. Among the many sources they highlight are the numerous autobiographies and other publicly available creative writing penned by activist women. Their submission highlights what was down played by the TRC process: the *ongoing effects* of institutionalised white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal and heteronormative oppression. This comes across throughout the lengthy submission, where, as they demonstrate, different narratives of women's experiences were being left out. Goldblatt and Meintjies pointed to the rich variety in the narratives which speak to what remains in nationalist discourses a homogenised experience, flagged repeatedly through lazy stereotypes.

Cautioning against the emptying out of Blackwomen's highly varied realities from official apartheid memorial narratives, they point out that there is a myriad of reasons why women stayed away from the TRC. Goldblatt and Meintjies' submission also highlights the urgency of making a concerted effort to uncover the grounds underlying the paucity of women's testimonies on their own account. This contributed to the fallacy that the struggle against apartheid was waged by men. For Goldblatt and Meintjies, it is paramount that women activists not be locked in discourses of exceptionalism.

In *David's Story*, Wicomb addresses discourses on the exceptionality of Blackwomen activists differently. Irritated with David's casting of his female comrades as exceptional Blackwomen, David's biographer suggests that it is precisely the construction of these women activists as unusual which needs interrogation. Indeed the numbers of female comrades present in Wicomb's text undermine this exceptionality, a point which is even more interesting given that it is David who tells the story which includes these women at the same time that he continues to see each, but especially Dulcie, as exceptional. The biographer in the novel lashes out at David's illogic thus:

As with the preservation of all prejudices, he will no doubt go on clocking exceptions rather than questioning the stereotype and its rules. How many exceptions does an intelligent person have to come across before he sees that it is the definition of the category itself that is wanting? (Wicomb 2000: 80).

David's biographer is unwavering in her certainty that casting people as exceptions in the face of evidence to the contrary works in aid of oppression, and forecloses on the recognition of a larger landscape of possibilities and contributions from the stereotyped group. Meaningful recognition of heterogeneity is only possible when ways of looking are themselves opened up in order to excavate new sites of meaning. Wicomb's novel as well as Goldblatt and Meintjies' submission participate in this project.

Goldblatt and Meintjies' submission highlights feasible routes to remedy this 'absence' of women and to ensure that women's participation in the liberation movement is acknowledged as part of the official depot of the nation's memory under apartheid. Pointing to the convention of Black-

women's autobiographies in the 1980s, they suggest that some of the experiences outlined therein need to form part of the TRC report, as do white women's narratives of activism from the same era, because prevalent circumstances in South African society belie the TRC's claim of offering a safe space for the narration of certain experiences. The consequences of this absence would collude with patriarchal tendencies to recite struggle history as that sustained by women through their support of the men who were the sole active agents.

The submission cited above led to the holding of special women's hearings at the TRC. It included interviews with women activists whose collective, and individual, narratives variously challenged the overall thrust of the TRC text then in formation. These women pointed to ruptures which would destabilise prevalent notions of 'comradely' interactions between men and women engaged in the fight against apartheid. Given the public nature of the testimony, it also called for women to testify at the TRC about the sexualised brutalisation they encountered in the hands of the state as well as from male comrades. Wicomb's Sally encounters one such memory,

Sally did not know she was afraid of water. She loved paddling and took some pleasure in feeling the resistance of water, but required to swim at one of the training camps, she found it impossible to put her face in it .... and how poorly she performed, unable to confess her terror. He said, as they made their way gingerly across the burning sand, A fuck, that's what you need, and she saw his bulging shorts and knew that her time had come, as she had known it would come sooner or later, this unspoken part of a girl's training (Wicomb 2000:123).

And the lawyer-activist Wendy Isaack points to another,

in black communities, homosexuality is still seen as a white phenomenon, unAfrican, unChristian, an attack on black culture and tradition. The black lesbian must be viewed within this paradigm. .... Homophobia leads to the perpetuation of myths and stereotypes about lesbians and gay people. More importantly, it leads to the creation of an environment in which black lesbians feel vulnerable and unsafe (Isaack 2003:1f).

The broadcasting of these kinds of memories presents problems for a narrative which seeks to affirm patriarchal Black masculinities. It points to the ruptures within the hypervisibility of Blackwomen through tropes which belie the ways processes of typecasting work to objectify. To objectify is, after all, to de-humanise and render fully knowable. It allows created images, stereotypes created about the marginalised, here heterogeneous Blackwomen subjects, to function as short hand. Thus '[t]he actual being is then denied speech; denied self-definition, self-realization; and overall this, denied self-hood—which is after all the point of objectification' (Cliff 1990:272). Given the fallacy of complete access to Blackwomen, their knowable aspects, narratives of trauma around sexuality are one way to complicate the masculinist national narrative which is comfortably rehearsed in spaces like the TRC.

Further, given the inappropriate categories of perpetrator or victimised, Blackwomen's entry into this discourse already traps them in old stereotypes that many struggle against in their daily lives. Testimonies of sexual violation by fellow comrades, or agents of the state, in addition to being in themselves traumatic experiences, can hardly be performed in live broadcasts to the country. South Africa's media record of not believing women who go public with their stories of rape does not do much to advance the benefits of breaking the silence<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The most visible cases which demonstrate this were ANC MP Nomboniso Gasa and Nomangezi Mathokazi. Both women chose to go public about their rapes, the former on Robben Island in 1997, and the latter by Makhaya Ntini in East London in 1998. See Zubeida Jaffer's discussion of the media responses to Gasa's press statement, in the *AGI Newsletter*, 11 (2002), archived at <http://web.uct.ac.za/org/agi/pubs/newsletters/vol11/woman.htm>, and Anthea Garman's analysis of the same published in *Rhodes Journalism Review* 16 (1998), archived at [http://www.rjr.ru.ac.za/rjr16/what\\_just\\_do\\_with\\_it.php](http://www.rjr.ru.ac.za/rjr16/what_just_do_with_it.php). See also the report of the SAPS's improper conduct in the investigation of Gasa's rape archived at <http://www.icd.gov.za/reports/robberisland.htm>. For Mathokazi's coverage, see the *Sunday Times* 25 April 1999, for an interview with her.

## **deserting exceptionality**

And there are black women  
considered so dangerous  
in South Africa  
they prison them away (Nichols 1990:53-56).

In her 'Two Sides of the Story', Gertrude Fester (2000) explores a range of emotions from the perspective of two Blackwomen lovers, one imprisoned under Section 29, and the other anxious on the outside not knowing whether her beloved is alive or dead. Fester juxtaposes the diary entries of the two women, and through this medium is able to explore a variety of dimensions of the inner workings of the two women. Set in the late 1980s, it begins with Sandra declaring half-tongue in cheek, 'What a bizarre sense of relief! No more being on the run, no more moving house every third or fourth day' (Day 1, 18 May 1987). Defying categorisation as exceptional because of the high level of political involvement both women have, combined with being lesbians, there are suggestions of other lesbians in the movement. This is revealed to be a preoccupation of the security officer who interrogates Sandra, suggesting its un-exceptional status. This is further reinforced when Sandra counts the other women she knows who are currently in detention under different sections.

Fester's piece like others in the anthology of Blackwomen writers *Ink@Boiling Point*, through the 'reconfiguration' of genres that they partake in, invite rethinking of identities and borders. In her 'Forward' to the anthology, Desirée Lewis suggests that these nuances show 'how the creative impulse can shift conventional barriers and create new ways of seeing, new ways of writing, and, for readers, new ways of thinking about their world' (Lewis 2000:i). Indeed, Fester's piece especially highlights those aspects and experiences leading up to a democracy that might not have not been part of the memorialising process because 'both memory and identity are rooted in contested ground' (Majaj 2001:118). Given the traditions of representing Blackwomen outlined above, such interventions offer insightful departures from the stereotypical authorising tropes. They enlarge the project of memorialising the struggle to topple apartheid, at the same time that they point to contradictions that have not miraculously

disappeared with the end of apartheid. Fester's characters experience a range of emotions: fear, anger, delirium, amusement, isolation and desperation. Each emotion is uncovered whether it is Sandra or Madge experiencing the contradictions of their lives, the rejection of their politics and sexual orientation by family.

The reminder of unfinished business is one that links to Goldblatt and Meintjies' problematisation of the past's transition from memory to the terrain of history, and the power dynamics that inevitably get omitted from the larger nationalist narrative that the TRC was such a central part of. The submission by Goldblatt and Meintjies shows how gendered violence, in physical and epistemic forms, continues to haunt Blackwomen in South Africa. This is incontestable. However, the important intervention that they make pertains to the implications which ensue from this recognition: gendered violence makes it impossible for women to partake in their new democracy.

Their submission then, more than calling for additional hearings, important though these were, also challenges the terms under which South Africans can participate in the memory terrain. The gross levels of violence against women, but highest and most varied for Black lesbians, should continue to remind us of the everpresence of various systems of oppressive violence which make it impossible for all South Africans to access freedom to the same extent. A key reminder comes from Wendy Isaack (2003:1) who declares,

Black lesbians in South African townships face violence at home, in schools, communities, in clubs and in the streets. For many of us this violence has become a way of life. It hurts our bodies, our minds and our families. This violence hurts because it is kept invisible.

The danger of the hypervisibility of Blackwomen through the tropes discussed above in national narratives of the truth reconciliation and memory-making lies in its paradoxical effects. It invisibilises the experiences of trauma for Blackwomen, especially for those who are lesbian. Because the suffering of (older) Blackwomen becomes one of the most 'naturalised' way to conceive of Black female subjectivity, this colludes to mask the variety of ways in which Blackwomen continue to be terrorised by (white supremacist) heteropatriarchy.

Fester and Isaack above also highlight the importance of being attentive to a variety of articulations. The TRC privileged the public telling of stories, so that after Motsemme, the nation could be made from those narratives of tears and blood. However, 'in privileging speech we need to be aware that those who are the most marginalized have often used invisibility and silence as a means to protect themselves' (Motsemme 2002:1), and to express experience in alternative spaces and forms.

The explorations of the various *achievable* ways of making meaning is one of the challenges that Zoë Wicomb's novel, *David's Story* grapples with. Set in the post-apartheid moment, it invites and engages the question of how to write a history that is neither totalising, nor trite for leaving out too much. The writing subject of Wicomb's text, David's biographer, examines ways of writing a Blackman's life story in ways which do not simply recycle old stereotypes about Black masculinity while effacing Blackwomen. The biographer is reminded constantly of how history's legacies continue to impact on how Blackwomen subjects are constructed.

Taking up the invitation to read differently appears an opportune moment to enter further into Wicomb's text. Shortly into the novel the reader is introduced as Ouma Sarie. This character is then used as a vehicle for drawing connections, some of which will be later unravelled, between the numerous constructions and participations of Black gendered identities under apartheid.

On the one hand, she notes 'the steek-my-weg location of unmistakably coloured country houses, the houses of farm labourers' which produced 'coloured girls; [who] wore the cut-off ends of stockings' and worked as labourers in the nearby hotel (Wicomb 2000:17). These coloured women are assumed to be safe by the owners of the hotel and indeed by the apartheid establishment. They do not appear to question much and although useful as labour, are invisible like their 'hidden' houses. However, Ouma Sarie's narrative suggests their unexpected subversive participation in liberation politics. This is foregrounded when she observes that '[t]heir tilted, stockinged heads were those of guerrillas deliberating over an operation' (Wicomb 2000:17).

As a sharp contrast to Krog's women who wear traditional wraps and suffer silently, Wicomb's coloured girls are masters of disguise. More importantly, the same disguise is used to a variety of specific ends. The

ingenuity of their gift is foregrounded precisely because Wicomb invests the *swirlkous*, the stocking used as part of the hair straightening process, as part of the disguise. This image jars with other discourses on these stockings: associations—with poverty, with aspiration to whiteness, and to rural upbringing. These links work only for those who permit themselves to be seen with their *swirlkouse* on their heads outside. Wicomb turns this object used as a way of derision on its head, when she invests it with revolutionary politics. Indeed, in *David's Story*, the stockinged head is so prevalent that soon the eighties are known as

the decade of brave baby girls with tightly bound guerrilla heads, which goes some way towards explaining the little-known fact that the Movement managed to recruit so many coloured women (Wicomb 2000:9).

Throughout the novel there is the suggestion that things are rarely as they seem at first, that women's participation in struggle, and contribution to history cannot be accessed through the 'usual' (read: masculinist) epistemological attempts. Another example with fascinating paradoxes is Sally.

Sally is at once the exquisitely feminised clerk at Garlicks and a guerrilla fighter. At her formal place of employment, it would be impossible to suspect her more subversive activities. There is a suggestion that these contradictions are not mere disguise, for Sally continues, for example, to straighten her hair after the struggle is over. The point, then, is not mere camouflage, but one which suggests that the lenses brought to bear on political, cultural and other activity be unwaveringly self-reflexive. In a fight with David, her former comrade and now spouse, Sally declares:

[s]o leave people like myself to straighten my hair if I want. Why should I not be able to cover my forehead with a fringe or a hair curling here, there, and she tugs brutally at the wisps in question. And it's not about aping white people; they don't straighten their hair (Wicomb 2000:29).

## **conclusion**

This paper has shown that the high circulation of stereotypical representations of Blackwomen in the narration of the liberation movement during apartheid retains currency in the formal memorialising of that era. It draws and builds on substantial previous research which has demonstrated the pervasiveness of stereotyped Blackwomen characters in the creative literature stemming out of various arms of the broad liberation movement. These tropes which effect Blackwomen characters' paradoxical hypervisibility flow directly from discourses of national liberation movements which were not sufficiently sensitive to interlocking systems of oppression. To the extent that the post-apartheid memory process has been about storage of recollections of the past, it is inevitable that aspects of this consciousness will permeate the contemporary. This is illustrated through examples from interventions at the TRC and Krog's coverage of the TRC's proceedings.

While the rehashing of stereotypes which served the narrative of the masculinist liberation struggle are unsurprising, their repetition in texts which claim a critical engagement with the memory process is troubling. This is especially the case given their relentless critique by feminist scholars and activists in Southern Africa. The ongoing use value of these systems of representation attaches to the safety they afford those who instrumentalise them. For as long as Blackwomen subjectivities are unengaged with beyond the stereotypical representations as long suffering mothers, or hypersexualised whore, white femininities and all masculinities need not get deconstructed. Additionally, to the extent that the exceptionality discourse is used to read those who cannot safely be subsumed into one of the stereotypical sub-categories, a certain protection can be maintained for those uninterested in reading identities as the processual, relational entities that they are.

The imaging of Blackwomen in these stereotypes continues to have material implications for those trapped in these dyads. The encouraging representations which also exist, here in Wicomb's novel and Fester's short story, point to the validity of the memory process, and the need to be attentive to the destructive habits which ensure, for example, the state of siege under which Black lesbians continue to live.

Indeed, 'the search for truth—understood as shared memory, his-

tory—is important in providing a durable basis for a political community’ (Mamdani 1996). It requires an ongoing rigorous examination of the crevices wherein Blackwomen’s agency is reflected, and as Wicomb’s narrative suggests, also a commitment to uncovering new ways of looking, listening and interpreting what seems at first easy.

Fester’s short story too suggests the ongoing usefulness of shifts in imagination as a means through which to ‘disrupt what may be seen as taken for granted and natural, to reveal contradictions and to show connections between that which may seem distinct’ (de la Rey 1997:196). Whereas stereotypical representations provide false securities for those who profit from them, the excavation of new epistemes suggests contradictions, and gestures to no closure. Perhaps this is fitting for an opening up, which is to say, freeing of the imagination to more vital and interesting developments. The interventions made by Wicomb’s novel, Goldblatt and Meintjies’ submission, and Fester’s story, among others participate in this project of opening up the imagination, critically engaging with ways of seeing which are more conducive to synthesising the heterogeneity which has always characterised the lives of any human cluster. They unpack traditions of absenting Blackwomen’s varied agency by revealing this typecasting discourse as a fiction which requires constant re-interpretation and revision in order to free the events of the past from ‘the veil of prejudice and illusion that shroud them’ (Dubois 1998:38).

To see highly differentiated texts and sites as participants in a similar project is not the same as attributing false similarities between these sites. Rather, it stands as strong testimony to the disavowal of prescriptive representation necessary in order to unsettle the prestige of place accorded stereotypical representations of Blackwomen in narratives of the anti-apartheid struggle. The varied tools, angles and structures of these texts speak to the complexities highlighted in the deconstructive process necessary engage analytical tools which are attentive to the networks of repressive depiction since they are methodologically disposed to probe historical and social specificities of oppressive definitional structures. This is part of ensuring that ‘each new generation is heir, not only to more information about the past, but also to more adequate knowledge of our capacities to comprehend it’ (White 1978:118). This alternate storying is paramount as part of the memory process, and also as part of the freedom process.

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Department of English  
Free State University

# Direction<sup>1</sup> in Afrikaans Literature

N.P. van Wyk Louw<sup>2</sup>

(Translated by Johan van Wyk)

To indicate the direction of an intellectual<sup>3</sup> trend of your own time is in no way an objective, precise or scientific undertaking. The idea itself is a figure of speech and unclear, because 'direction' is not as distinct and singular as on a map or in the veldt. The starting point, the present, we never comprehend in a concise, mental way, but with our own humanity, the full range of emotions; and the next point, somewhere in the future, we posit with our desire and will. You need only ask a communist, a liberal or a nationalist the future direction of the world. For each it would seem as if the world is developing according to his or her own aspirations.

So determining a direction is actually an impassioned play of the total personality wishing for a particular trend; it is a longing, even a wish to participate in the making of that future. That is why we all claim (it is the intellectual affliction of our human limitations) that 'so it will be, so it shall be', when it should read 'so I want it to be'.

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<sup>1</sup> *Rigting* could also be translated as 'trend'.

<sup>2</sup> Originally a lecture presented at Stellenbosch, March 1936 and published for the first time in 1939 as: 'Die Rigting van die Afrikaanse Letterkunde'. In *Berigte te Velde: Opstelle oor die Idee van 'n Afrikaanse Letterkunde*. Kaapstad, Bloemfontein, Johannesburg: Nasionale Boekhandel Bpk. (pp. 9 – 16.)

<sup>3</sup> *Geestelike* could also translate as 'spiritual'.

But it is also not just pure fantasy, because they who experience the trend in earnest, will attempt with all seriousness to try and understand and express the facts within the necessary imperatives.

Our literature must return, and is returning, to its deep sources amongst the people. This is what marks all great literature. The artist and the people are so closely linked to each other that this might sound vulgar. And yet we have to state it vigorously and again and again everywhere where we hear 'we must move away from the national in our literature'<sup>4</sup>. If this would be achieved, it would mean the end. We would then in an artificial atmosphere produce rarefied verse, pale prose, or the equivalent of the Latin verse of the Renaissance or of modern intellectuals; but without the eternal thrust of the will or the pain of the people, it will all remain a distant game, a far-off rumour.

The trend away from the national is but temporary and can be explained thus:

The older patriotic literature (after 1900) was a true expression of the people, it was the voice of the people itself. The task of those authors was the spiritual absorption of the war, so that it became meaningful and not just a brutal material event; but this task, this making sense of the senseless, was the task of each of us, so that we could become human again, with human worth and values. Just as immediate was the necessity of the humiliated to again derive self recognition from their history—therefore our historical romances.

But from this there developed after the First World War the good-natured local realism of which Jochem van Bruggen is the most representative and *Ampie* still the most attractive text. Technically and in its portrayal of the person this book is so much better than the older prose that it was seen as a radical departure and renewal. Essentially, though, this work does not embody such a renewal; it is intrinsically related to the historical trend of which it is a continuation and refinement. The historical is merely brought closer, from the remote past (East India Company, Great Trek, etc.) to the period immediately preceding our own. Realism that confronts fairly

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<sup>4</sup> Footnote in original text: 'This statement was more common in 1936. The same people now demand, and unfortunately for the same reason, the popular slogan—"Blood and soil"'.  

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the simple wonder of the real we still do not have; it is the good-natured idealisation of the happy rural existence of the past where the landowner and the tenant still knew their respective places in society. We do not know Ampie as he is immediately in the presence of God, but as he, with all sympathy, is seen through the eyes of Booysen and his class, the older patriarchal landowner. It is not Ampie as he is, but as he is seen from the convictions and certainties of a particular social perspective. One could also write the novel of Booysen as seen through the eyes of Ampie. A completely different view of farming life it would be. That is not completely relevant here; what is to the point is that that perspective and those social certainties have disappeared. The world is completely different; today Ampie is not the start of a new era, but the completion of the old.

Around this attractive figure there are dozens of prose writers from the time (it was the period in which prose dominated) to whom the same is applicable, even though not all of them write about rural life; also the urban Afrikaner (the poor and wealthy classes) are depicted only from this limited class perspective. To trace this trend of thought into greater detail is the possible topic of a separate study. I just want to refer to one significant date to illustrate the alienation between literature and the people in those years: in 1922 *Ampie* (to return again to the best example) appears, the quiet and sympathetic portrayal of the poor white from this class perspective, and in 1922 that same poor white views South Africa through the notch of a mauser. So the people and the literature have slowly grown apart.

Three things destroyed that world view for us and will form the grounds of the new literature: (1) the movement to the city; (2) the disappearance of an older, pleasant life in the rural areas and on the farms; and (3) a more acute awareness of class divisions amongst our people. These three points made our new South Africa which is not attractive and pleasant, but which has to be accepted soberly if we want to achieve great things for this country. For the city-dweller there are the same urban problems as in the rest of the Western world<sup>5</sup>; the literature will increasingly have the features of the European, it will only differ in the local solution, but not in the problems raised. Life will throttle the poor farmer, he will either be mute, without expression in literature, or inspire an image of the hard land-bound

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<sup>5</sup> *Beskawing* could also translate as 'civilisation'.

struggle without any beauty. And the divisions between rich and poor will also be reflected. The higher civil and bureaucratic class wants peace and rest, not a spiritual life; he demands and produces alien anaemic things and will separate completely from the people. In that way the authors will be forced closer to the people, they will express their anger at the dissidents in protest and satire.

Life became more serious and severe and a literature close to the people will contain the same signs. Precursors of this can be identified: in *Droogte* fragmentarily in *Booia* in *Haar Beproewing* there is something of the new severity which indicates a more rigorous art. With the sterner intellectual positing of all the great human questions, the sober and frank answering of these, even in the recent poetry we see the play with 'modernity' passing<sup>6</sup>. And if one could predict: when this extreme honesty becomes the life of our art there will be a new heroic spirit: a heroism of a small nation finding itself between Black Africa and the World Powers. And the heroism of the individual alone among the stars; possibly the source from which our epic and great future art will grow.

So then did the old way of life in South Africa came to an end, and in these directions lie the growth possibilities of a new art, as far as I can see from within the scope of my human and personal limitations: back to the severe life of the people, therefore fierce, frank, heroic.

Through these things the spirit of our new literature will be determined; but its content must be understood differently. The most important change a society can undergo is the change from a colony to a nation. This transition is only partly determined by political emancipation; it doesn't happen on a specific day; but must work through into all aspects of life over a long period, it is a spiritual change in which one 'starts dreaming in a different key'.

The colony is a national rupture and it knows that it is fragmentary, that the full beam of a people's life does not pass it. Usually it does not encompass all classes and types (officials dominate); it does not give

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<sup>6</sup> Footnote in original: 'Very slowly I would say today (1936) where we still see how there is indulged for instance with the New Objectivity. When one is young you assume that this idiocy is slowly dying, later you learn to include it in your calculations'.

direction but is directed from the motherland. A people is a unity and universal; it comprises all classes and ranks, and transcends all; it is equal in its right to other nations as bearer of culture; it is conscious of its individuality.

When the colony expresses itself in literature (for instance in South West Africa, Dutch India, or British East Africa), then it offers the *local* and the *typical* (for example the hunting story, indigenous animals and tribes, the exotic East), but the expression of a simple, timeless humanity it leaves to the literature of the mother land. When a real author finds himself in the colony (Roy Campbell) then he finds himself to be an exile and he has to escape from that narrow-minded confines. A people above all expresses itself in the total human-being: it encompasses, also in literature, all contradictions, directions and periods, and gathers them into a national literature with its own identity.

This national becoming is still developing in obscurity and unconsciously with us, complete areas of our spiritual life must still be conquered by it, much must be destroyed and started anew—also in the literature. We must still come to a realisation that our people's literature should be a mirror of everything that is part of our life. If Afrikaans will remain with the typical, the specific which is always the untrue, if it stays with the local, then it is doomed. As long as we say this and that belongs to European languages, but not in Afrikaans, that any passion or thought that is part of an Afrikaner's life or thought, principally does not belong in our literature, then we are the colony of an alien culture, and not a nation. Then the presupposition remains: English, German, Dutch are universal; but Afrikaans is local. Everything, absolutely everything that inspires modern man, that constitutes his joy or sorrow, must also find its sediment in our literature. We may not shrink back and say: that is too complex for our simple culture, it is too dangerous or too profound. The Afrikaner is simply a modern person in an Afrikaans environment. As in literature the concept of a 'ruling passion' which is sufficient indication of an individual, had been replaced by the mighty and complete humanity of for instance a Dostoyevski's characters, who do not have any peculiarities anymore, so the idea of the limited traits of the people must disappear before the idea of a complex humanity in the context of the people. This becoming of a nation must happen in our literature in this generation otherwise it would be too late.

When this happens new areas of human experience will be annexed by our literature. Of this I can only give a few loose indications because eventually it would bring about that universal form of thinking and feeling which is the essence of any national literature. I name but a few:

(1) A colonial or local literature has no place for individualism, for the severe personal expression of the universal experience, because in its looking outwards it still does not recognize the personal. A poet such as Gorter is inconceivable in such an intellectual environment in both his individualist verse ('Verzen') and his beautiful longing for the Movement of the New Humanity. A national literature has space for all apparent contradictions such as people's literature and individualism, it gathers them together and reconciles them.

(2) A national literature can never really escape from the difficult responsibility of thinking. Our technically schooled philosophers do not concern themselves with literature, and our writers do not care much about philosophy. And yet in every great art work there is a steel hardened structure of thought hidden, every great art work is the perfect formulation of a world view which is a product of intellectual struggle. The anthologising of moods, the search for the typical detail for a description does not make a people's literature. The honest, severe thinking through of modern life, as seen from our national perspective, with the help of the greatest world philosophers should be the basis of our literature.

(3) In our literature the relationship between man and woman has hardly been touched upon; we possess no love novel and very few love poems. In a colonial environment one does not dare to be truly human, and this, the most typically human relationship becomes a petite bourgeois affair of courtship and marriage. These passions which in the nations of our ancestors always constituted the beauty and severity of life and art becomes purely good-natured with a little cute suggestivity; against the essence and frankness of the modern sexual experience only concealment is placed. What is beautiful is turned into the vulgar; what is frank is avoided. That is how our petite bourgeois expression manifests itself: powerless to decide on both the beautiful or the objective.

But also here the coming-into-being of the people will happen. The dictatorship of the small minded will be broken here by the people and the writers, because its social foundations have already collapsed.

(4) The working life of both white and black in our country is another productive theme, when it is no longer seen as idyllic, but anew: the difficult struggle against the powers of nature by powers in itself still nature and unconscious. I'm thinking of a farmer who built a dam three times and saw it washed away three times before he broke himself. Here we remained with the theme of drought, with a little bit of the fisher's life (Malherbe), but mining, forestry—complete sections of our people's labour—are not yet touched upon.

(5) The Bantu and the coloured have hardly been seen by us; to a small degree we described them as enemies, then later sympathetically and humorously from the bourgeois point of view<sup>7</sup>; but they still need to appear in our literature as human beings, in books which do not come with simplified liberal solutions, but with the total burden of the fate of our nation.

(6) Upliftment and instruction, even true religiosity, is not unknown in our literature, but great religious poetry, the expression of the human's immediate relationship with the cosmos, the conversation between the mystic with God as if they are addressing one another directly in the infinity—this does not happen in a small local literature. It is only when the human being feels himself a bearer of full humanity that he could truly address God.

Just a word about language. It should be obvious that also in this we cannot remain with the typical. We are familiar with the foreigner and tourist type of realism that achieves local colour through words such as *kopje* and *voetsak*. In a people's literature one cannot idealise typical Afrikaans words. We will need the profusion of words and images from the farm, the factory, and the whole new way of life.

And to conclude: no particular content can constitute a great literature; something else should be added; something concerning the form; something I cannot describe but with the word *immediacy*. All the compositional advice from the handbooks is irrelevant, but it remains an important element of a great literature. The author must strip himself of all that is accidental to the environment and class to say only the essential; he must confront his subject as if they were alone in the world, and his words must be as intended as words uttered on the death bed. Being an artist with

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<sup>7</sup> Footnote in original: 'Mikro and his followers'.

*N.P. van Wyk Louw (Translated by Johan van Wyk)*

us, even in this barren civility of ours, must be accepted with grace and total commitment; and he who does this will know that he cannot claim much from the world for it, but that he should demand much from himself.

Purity of form and word is the technical side to the same thing. With perfect technique one could find a feeble literature (although I am not convinced of it), but without it you have not even started with a poem or prose work, because it is precisely the form which transforms a psychological fact (such as an emotion) or a sociological fact as named by me into a work of art. The author should not be easily content with inspiration. Inspiration combined with indifference produces rhetoric—the eternal Mephistopheles of literature. But if we want to produce something great in the future, our authors will have to apply the greatest measure of self discipline until we could formulate in beautiful and transparent words everything that marks our national life.

I did not focus on the distinction between prose and poetry, but the general tendency of the literature, which applies to both. I did not try to identify where the growth can be located. I wanted to make you aware of the great task to produce a new civilisation in this country—the destination of our people. I did not want to speak as a prophet about things which are assured (the future could make me into a liar as it frustrates all our expectations). I wanted to show what a valuable adventure it is to live in this country at this time. There are still so many magnificent things to be achieved. If we remain with a literature of school books and middle class sentiments we will be the scorn of nations and our language will disappear from this land.

CSSALL  
University of KwaZulu-Natal

# **Biko: Africana Existentialist Philosopher**

**Mabogo P. More**

The thing about Biko that appealed to me is that he doesn't conform to the standard Freedom Fighter image. Mandela might have been more topical but ... he is very much in the tradition of Kenyatta or Nyerere, leaders of political movements. Steve Biko was much of a philosopher (Fawkes cited in *The Sunday Star* May 31 1992).

## **Introduction**

One of the curious features of African intellectual life in South Africa is, as is the case with Afro-Caribbean philosophy, 'the near absence of an explicitly cultivated philosophical tradition' (Henry 2000:xi). South Africa has produced a number of internationally acclaimed African literary, social, religious and political figures whose works are full of philosophical insights and arguments. Yet this country has apparently not produced African philosophers of the same calibre and comparable to internationally well-known African philosophers such as Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Paulin Hountondji, Kwasi Wiredu, Odera Oruka, Kwame Anthony Appiah, or V.Y. Mudimbe,

If Africans in South Africa and those in Diaspora were able to produce poetry, literature, political theories, or theological doctrines, why not a philosophical tradition of note? It is indeed among the very same literary, political or theological figures that African philosophical minds are embedded. One major reason for their invisibility is that African philosophy

has mainly been 'an intertextually embedded discursive practice and not an isolated or absolutely autonomous one' (Henry 2000:2). From this intertextual perspective, African philosophy becomes an open but diverse discursive field in which ontological, epistemological, ethical, moral, social, political and especially existentialist traditions emerge. These traditions, defined by the peculiarities and actualities of the South African lived experiences, have been fashioned and sustained in, for example, the novels, the protest literature (especially of the 1970s and 1980s); autobiographies and poetry of many African writers. It is in these genres that the existentialist tradition as a strong philosophical tradition may be found<sup>1</sup>.

There is an ongoing tendency in certain quarters of locking African thinkers and their productions in the biographical moment and political activism. Biko was to some extent a victim of this practice<sup>2</sup>. But he defies the simple reduction to a politician or activist by assuming other equally important identities. He also combines the cultural, the political and the philosophical in the same person. He and his comrades espoused what has normally been described as a philosophy. Hence Biko himself, together with commentators, spoke of 'the philosophy of Black Consciousness' (Biko 1996:92; Ranuga

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<sup>1</sup> In his classic, *The African Image* (1962) E'skia Mphahlele, for instance, strongly rejects Leopold Sedar Senghor's concept of 'negritude' from a literary perspective. However, he agrees with Senghor's philosophical interpretation of 'African humanism', a theme that occupies pride of place in his literary texts and constitutes the basis of his epistemology in his '*Towards a Humanistic Philosophy of Education*' (1982) with further developments in *Education, African Humanism & Culture, Social Consciousness, Literary Appreciation..* In 1977 Mazisi Kunene gave a lengthy interview on the meaning and practice of African Philosophy in South Africa which was followed by a publication on '*The Relevance of African Cosmological Systems to African Literature*' (see Luchembe 1977; Kunene 1980 in Jones). See also Motshekga (1983), which in a profound way anticipated Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* (1987).

<sup>2</sup> A substantial number of writings on Biko focus mostly on the political aspect of his thinking and a few on his thoughts on culture and politics. In this respect, see for example Fatton (1986); Pityana, Ramphela, Mpumlwana & Wilson (1991); Halisi (1999); Ranuga (1986); Nteta (1987); Gibson (1988); Hemson (1995); Ahluwalia and Zegeye (2001).

1886:186) or the 'Black Consciousness philosophy' (Halisi 1991:100f; Ranuga 1986:182). Paradoxically, very few people referred to Biko, popularly known as 'the 'father' of the Black Consciousness Movement' (Ahluwalia & Zegeye 2001:460), as a philosopher. Themba Sono (1993:90), for instance, describes Biko as 'a formidable and articulate philosopher' a philosopher not in the usual academic sense of a university professor, but more precisely a man of theory and action, an 'organising philosopher' (Sono 1993:102); perhaps a sort of social and political lay philosopher. However, to merely describe someone as a philosopher as Sono or Richard Fawkes in our epigraph do, is merely to state a generality without specificity. Therefore, this paper, following on Lewis Gordon's extensive phenomenological work on Frantz Fanon<sup>3</sup>, seeks to locate Bantu Steve Biko within the philosophical terrain, more pointedly, the Africana existentialist tradition. The aim, in short, is to constitute Biko to be part of what Benita Parry (1996:12) has described as the attempt 'to disclose the dead victim's ... [philosophical] claims'.

### **Africana Existentialist Philosophy**

What is Africana existential philosophy? To understand what this philosophical tradition is we need first to explain what the broader term Africana philosophy is. The phrase 'Africana Philosophy' was coined and popularised by Lucius Outlaw (1996:76) as:

a 'gathering' notion under which to situate the articulations (writings, speeches, etc) and traditions of the same, of African and peoples of African descent collectively, as well as the sub-discipline —or field-forming, tradition-defining, tradition-organizing reconstructive efforts which are (to be) regarded as philosophy

In other words, Africana philosophy is for Outlaw (1996:77) an 'umbrella' term 'under which can be gathered a potentially large collection of traditions of practices, agendas, and literature of African and African-descended peoples'. Under this umbrella may thus be included literature, poetry, political

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<sup>3</sup> For more on Fanon the existential phenomenologist, see Gordon (1995; 1997, especially chapter 2); and Gordon, Sharpley-Whiting and White (1996).

writings, philosophical texts, art, or proverbs, of Africans on the continent and Africans in Diaspora. It is an intertextually embedded philosophy that draws from a multiplicity of sources of black intellectual production. Such a philosophy, as Lewis Gordon (1997:6) explains, 'addresses problems across a wide range of philosophical and social issues', a shared concern by Africans and peoples of African descent over issues such as imperialism, colonialism, slavery, racism and resistance to them.

By virtue of the historical fact of racial oppression, colonisation, and slavery, Africana philosophy raises questions of identity and liberation by focusing on the reality that African people are a black people and hence are affected by the significance of race and racism. The raising and articulation of the existential questions of identity and liberation within the context and framework of the situation of black people, constitutes what has recently come to be known as 'Africana existential philosophy'. Although European existentialism and Africana existential philosophy may share certain common characteristic such as concerns about 'freedom', 'responsibility', 'anguish', or 'bad faith', they nevertheless differ in that the former is a philosophy inscribed with ideological nuances which in its particularism purports to be universalistic. In other words, it is fundamentally a European historical phenomenon dealing primarily with the history of European literature. Africana existential philosophy, by contrast, deals with issues of the emergence of black selfhood, black suffering, embodied agency, freedom, racism and liberation, in short, it deals with *being-black-in-the-world*<sup>4</sup>. In Gordon's (2000:8) view, these questions of problematic existence and suffering animate the theoretical dimensions of black intellectual existential production. Africana existential philosophy, therefore, consists in reflections, rooted in black experience, on the boundaries of human existence and the utilization of such reflections to challenges confronting African and African-descended people in Diaspora.

As part of Africana philosophy, Africana existential philosophy raises

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<sup>4</sup> For the existentialist category of 'being-black-in-the-world' see for example Manganyi who has over the years articulated a humanist existentialism that found its most profound expression in his seminal text, *Being-Black-in-the-World* (1973). See also his other existentialist texts (Manganyi 1977a; 1977b; and 1981).

questions concerning primarily two themes: identity and liberation. Identity questions are in the form: 'Who are Africana (Black) people?' or 'What are Africana people?' In other words, at the subjective level, the questions combined may become 'Who or what am I?'. The *who* of identity, Gordon argues, generates questions about selfhood: 'Who am I?'. The *what* in identity takes on an ontological demand about questions of *being*, *essence*, and the existential question of meaning, namely: 'What am I?'. This is the ontological question about black identity in an antiblack world.

Liberation, on the other hand, is purposive or teleological in nature. Its concerns are directly connected to the demands of 'ought' or 'why'. Accordingly, as Gordon points out, whatever we may be, the point is to focus energy on what we ought to become. There is, therefore, a convergence between questions of identity and questions of liberation; they intersect at the question: 'Who is to be liberated?' Put differently, an epistemological turn constitutes the intersection between the ontological and the teleological. To know what we ought to do requires knowing who we are, and to know who we are we frequently have to discover what we ought to be doing. These concerns are symbiotic concerns that point values at the heart of *being* and forms of being at the heart of value. It is within this discursive field of Africana existential philosophy that Biko claims his philosophical space.

## Philosophical Influences

As a philosopher, his concern was not with theoretical abstractions, but with the concrete and existential struggles which shape human—especially black—existence, what Fanon in chapter five of *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967) describes as the 'lived experience of the black', *l'expérience vécue du noir*. Indeed, Fanon constitutes the pillar of Black Consciousness. Both Fanon's classics, *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1968) became the grounding texts of the Black Consciousness philosophy. Biko's text, *I Write What I Like* testifies to Fanon's influence on him. Besides the numerous references to Fanon in the text, some of the chapter titles of Biko's work directly echo Fanon, for example, 'Black Souls in White Skins?', 'Black Consciousness and the Quest for Humanity', or 'White Racism and Black Consciousness'. When asked by Gail Gerhart about the thinkers who influenced his thinking, Biko responded: 'people like Fanon, people like

Senghor .... They spoke to us, you know. These people were obviously very influential' (Interview, October 24, 1972). An indication of Fanon's deep influence on the thinking of Black Consciousness is further expressed by Barney Pityana, a very close comrade of Biko, who approvingly cites Fanon at length:

'I am not a potentiality of something' writes Fanon. 'I am wholly what I am. I do not have to look for the universal. No probability has any place inside me. My Negro consciousness does not hold itself out as a lack. It IS. It is its own follower'. This is all that we blacks are after, TO BE... This, therefore, necessitates a self examination and rediscovery of ourselves. Blacks can no longer afford to be led by and dominated by non-Blacks (Pityana in van der Merwe & Welsh 1972:180).

Hence, as Turner and Alan observe, it was no accident that Fanon's philosophy proved to be relevant to the liberation struggles of the Black Consciousness Movement, for, 'It was Fanon who had ... deepened the Hegelian concept of self-consciousness and in his sharp *critique* of 'reciprocity', denied that there is any reciprocity when the relationship of Master and Slave has the additive of color' (Turner & Alan 1986:38).

Fanon was of course not the only dominant existentialist figure in Biko's thinking; Sartre's name also features quite regularly in Black Consciousness. For instance, alluding to Sartre's concept of freedom and its implications for speaking out without fear, Biko himself notes: 'There is no freedom in silence Sartre discovered this to his dismay' (Biko 1972:10). Invoking Sartre's concept of freedom and responsibility, an anonymous article in the *SASO Newsletter* (1972:7) states:

We have to imprison ourselves in the ideal of humanity. Humanity is beyond freedom. To be human is to be more than free. Freedom is subservient to humanity although Sartre believes that man is *condemned* to freedom; but I would hastily add that he is condemned to responsibility too, which is a human attribute.

In an interview with Lindy Wilson, Mandela Langa reports 'We read

Marcuse, we read the existential philosophers such as Jean-Paul Sartre' (in Pityana et al. 1991:28). Finally, as Sam Nolutshungu (1983:156f) observed, there was an evident 'interest in existentialism, phenomenology, and philosophical psychology ... a philosophical preoccupation with 'being', with explicit citation of Sartre, and with social guilt, after the philosophy of Karl Jaspers' in the Black Consciousness Movement led by Biko. Unfortunately, as in our epigraph, Nolutshungu's claims about Biko, Black Consciousness and philosophy were mere assertions rather than demonstrations of the philosophical content of Biko's ideas. In what follows an effort is made to tease out some existentialist categories from Biko's writings. Within the confines of an essay such as this one, it is impossible to pay attention and do justice to all the categories contained in Biko's thinking. Hence the focus will mainly be on the following themes that best articulates the concerns of Africana philosophy of existence. First, is the articulation of Biko's conception of antiblack racism; second, and connected to the first will be his conception of black identity within the context of the antiblack apartheid society; third, the question of liberation from racism, then finally and closely connected to the question of liberation, is the existentialists category of bad faith which is an evasion of freedom.

### **Biko, Black Consciousness and Racism**

The fundamental categories in Biko's thinking are *racism*, *Blackness*, *consciousness*, *freedom* and *authenticity*<sup>5</sup>. These categories get interwoven to constitute a set of ideas that came to be called the Black Consciousness philosophy. For Biko, there is the primordial human being-in-the-world of pre-reflective consciousness. Arising from this ontology are two modes of human existence in an antiblack society such as South Africa, which are products of reflective consciousness: being-white-in-the-world (white consciousness) and being-black-in-the-world (black consciousness), what, according to Gordon (1995:131) is the 'qualitative ... knowledge of each consciousness' situation in a given society'. These two modes of being or 'ways of life' are dialectically related in such a way that they are contradictory yet dependent upon each other

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<sup>5</sup> Freedom and authenticity will be dealt with, derivatively, in the sections on 'liberation' and 'bad faith' respectively.

for their existence. Through various means—economic, religious, social, political, and legal—white self-consciousness subjugated and controlled black self-consciousness thus denying blacks their existential freedom.

But, as Sartre points out, human reality *qua* consciousness is by definition free; that is, consciousness *is* freedom. The emergence of Black Consciousness was therefore a response to a white consciousness that sought to appropriate and dominate the consciousness and thus the freedom of black people. It was and still is a struggle for a new consciousness, a reawakening of a self-consciousness, a re-appropriation of black self-consciousness from the clutches of an appropriative and dominating white consciousness, a rediscovery of the black self which lay buried beneath white consciousness imposed on blacks by cultural, political, economic, linguistic and religious domination. It is, so to speak, an 'affirmative action' on the self by the self, an affirmation not from the Other but from and by the self. Odera Orika (1990:71) captures the essence of Black Consciousness thus:

- (1) a black man's [sic] awareness or realization that the world is infested with an anti-black social reality, (2) the black man's recognition of himself as black, as a Negro and to be proud of the fact, (3) the black man's urge to explain away or annihilate this social reality, and (4) move toward the creation of a new reality, a fair social reality as a condition for universal humanism.

Central to Biko's thinking is first and foremost the problem of racism, especially of the apartheid type. Nkrumah (1968:56) once wrote: 'Social milieu affects the content of philosophy and the content of philosophy seeks to affect social milieu, either by confirming it or by opposing it'. True to Nkrumah's words, the content of Biko's thought was affected by the apartheid racist social and political milieu, and he in turn, through his antiracist philosophy of Black Consciousness sought to affect the socio-political milieu by opposing it. Just as Karl Marx was 'created' by capitalism; Lenin by the Russian aristocracy, Gandhi by British imperialism, and Fanon by the colonised 'Wretched of the Earth' who were victims of white oppression, Biko was created by apartheid racism. His thoughts on racism then reflect that reality and should be understood within that context. This concern with the racial problematic fully situates Biko in the tradition of Africana existential

philosophy. As Gordon (2000:8) points out:

[R]acial problems serve a dominating role. In Africana existential philosophy, this reality has meant detailed explorations of this dominating factor in the lived experience of African people. It has meant an exploration of their lived experience of blackness.

Echoing Fanon and Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Toure), Biko (1996:25) defines racism as 'discrimination by a group against another for the purpose of subjugation or maintaining subjugation'. First, to 'discriminate' involves acts of exclusion and inclusion, that is, certain practices; in this case, discriminatory practices. Accordingly, it is not enough to characterize racism as simply ideological. And, to 'subjugate' entails the notion of power. This leads to a conception of power which 'entails conflicts of vested interests' (Dyrberg 1997:2). To have power according to this conception, therefore, is to have 'power-over' or to have control over someone both of which are predicated on or originate in separation. 'This is because [power] secures compliance or control, or is a relation of dependence or a hierarchical relation of inequality' (Dyrberg 1997:2). A definition of this kind then is obviously one that indicates that power by controlling and dominating, establishes and maintains exclusionary relations of superiority and inferiority: racism. Taken within the context of apartheid and the extant power relations between blacks and whites within that system, Biko's definition restricts all acts or expressions of racism to white people. Biko (1996:65) constantly refers to whites as a group that 'wields power' or the 'totality of white power' (Interview with Gerhart 1972). Thus, black people cannot be racists because 'we do not have the power to subjugate anyone .... Racism does not only imply exclusion of one race by another—it always presupposes that the exclusion is for the purpose of subjugation' (Biko 1996:97f)

Power, as Goldberg (1995:13) indicates, 'involves control that can be exercised—at least in principle—over a person(s) or over resources—often over the former to effect the latter, or vice versa'. Racism, therefore, is not discrimination alone, but also the power to control the lives of those excluded. This power found its concrete exercise in apartheid white subjugation of the blacks through acts of control, domination, conquest, or defeat. In all these acts, power is also exercised in the promotion, execution and maintenance of

discriminatory practices. Indeed, Biko enjoys a lot of good company in restricting racism to the powerful, Stokely Carmichael, Manning Marable and A. Sivanandan, among others<sup>6</sup>. The latter, for example, defines racism in such a way that the focus is on practice and power: 'It is the acting out of racial prejudice and not racial prejudice itself that matters .... Racism is about power not about prejudice' (Sivanandan 1983:3).

The main concepts in Biko's definition of racism—racial 'discrimination' (exclusion/ inclusion), 'subjugation' (domination and control)—were informed and echoed by the main architect of apartheid, Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd in an attempt to justify apartheid or 'separate development' as he preferred to call it:

Reduced to its simplest form the problem is nothing else than this: We want to keep South Africa White ... 'keeping it White' can only mean one thing, namely White *domination*, not 'leadership' not 'guidance', but '*control*', '*supremacy*'. If we are agreed that it is the desire of the people that the white man should be able to protect himself by retaining White *domination*, we say that it can be achieved by separate development (e.a.) (Quoted by Bunting in La Guma 1971:28).

Biko's definition, therefore, without pretension to universality, captures apartheid racism as it is articulated by Verwoerd in the statement just cited. However, to the extent that apartheid was 'settler-colonialism' or 'colonialism of a special kind' this definition captures the kind of racism that one finds in a colonial situation. Power as conceived in this definition is not abstract and anonymous, but functions through state apparatuses and social and economic agencies.

Verwoerd's justification of apartheid racism above expresses one significant element of a racist consciousness: the idea of the 'opposite race'. In his racist consciousness, the black race is believed to be the absolute Other, an enemy and threat to the white race ('Swart gevaar'/ Black danger) against whom all whites must unite. It was therefore in the context of such racist

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<sup>6</sup> For detailed conceptions of racism as power relations see for example Sivanandan (1983); Hacker (1992); Marable (1996); and Carmichael and Hamilton (1967).

consciousness that Biko, in a similar fashion as Sartre, in relation to Negritude, articulated his conception of Black Consciousness in term of the Hegelian triadic dialectic of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. Biko (1996:51,90) writes:

The overall analysis therefore, based on the Hegelian theory of dialectic materialism is as follows .... The thesis is in fact a strong white racism and therefore, the *antithesis* to this must, *ipso facto*, be a strong solidarity amongst the blacks on whom this white racism seeks to prey. Out of these two situations we can therefore hope to reach some kind of balance—a true humanity.

Black Consciousness as the negative moment of the dialectical progression in the struggle for black authentic existence was for Biko a necessary stage, a means towards freedom rather than an end in itself. Black Consciousness, he declared, 'would be irrelevant in a colourless and non-exploitative egalitarian society' (Biko 1996:87).

Biko's characterization of Black Consciousness in Hegelian terms notably and deliberately recalls Sartre's famous essay, '*Black Orpheus*', in which Negritude is described as an antithesis, the weak upbeat of a dialectical progression, a negative moment responding to white racism; in short, an 'antiracist racism' (1988:296). Even though Fanon launched a serious critique of Negritude, he also took exception to Sartre's view of Negritude. 'Jean-Paul Sartre' he lamented, 'has destroyed black zeal .... The dialectic that brings necessity into the foundation of my freedom drives me out of myself' (Fanon 1967:135). Unlike Fanon, Biko endorses Sartre's conclusion because he probably realized that Sartre was speaking in methodological terms when he used the expression 'the moment of separation or negativity: ... antiracist racism' which is not, in this context pejorative at all.

Taking their cue from Sartre's 'antiracist racism' and placing a heavy accent on the last word '*racism*' many of those opposed to Negritude and Black Consciousness or any form of race loyalty or solidarity labelled them racist. Ruch, for example, interprets the antithetical moment (Negritude/ Black Consciousness) as racist. Referring to the blacks who espouse blackness, he writes:

In order therefore to find their identity as a race, they become

racialist in their turn, belittling their former superiors, burning what they used to adore, and showing by all means at their disposal that they themselves and not their oppressors are in fact the superior beings (Ruch 1981:201).

Besides the obvious inaccuracy of the claim, 'showing by all means at their disposal that they themselves and not their oppressors are in fact the superior beings', a distinction rarely made by most people like Ruch, is the one between 'racism' and 'racialism'<sup>7</sup>. These are often conflated to mean one thing, namely, the belief that one's race is superior to others and therefore has the right to dominate others. The two are however distinct and do not necessarily entail each other. A racist believes in the existence of races and that these races are different, both physiologically and even behavioural. Racialism by itself does not posit racial hierarchical value judgements about one race or another. It limits itself merely to distinguishing between races without attribution of negative or positive valuations. In this sense racialism is not necessarily, certainly not always practically, pernicious and to be opposed automatically. Even Appiah (1992:13), a great opponent of the concept of race acknowledges that 'Racialism is not, in itself, a doctrine that must be dangerous'. What distinguished racialism from racism is that in the latter, the superiority of one race over another is asserted. A racist, in other words, would not only say that there are different races, but also that certain races—especially one's own—are superior to other races. In other words, racism adds to racialism a hierarchically discriminating value judgement.

Sartre himself is guilty of causing this error by describing the 'moment of separation' as a kind of racism instead of racialism. For, it is evident from the context of 'Black Orpheus' that his intention was not to label the Negritude thinkers 'racist' in the usual derogatory manner. If he had meant to suggest that they are racist, that would imply that they not only had the power to dominate Europeans but also that they consider themselves superior to them; a claim neither Sartre nor the Negritudists would defend. He makes this point clear when he asserts about Negritude:

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<sup>7</sup> For a similar distinction between racism and racialism see Mosley (1995:216-235); de Benoist (1999:20-23); and Outlaw (1996:8,18).

But there is something even more important in it: the Negro himself, we have said, creates a kind of antiracist racism. *He wishes in no way to dominate the world: he desires the abolition of all kinds of ethnic privileges; he asserts his solidarity with the oppressed of every color* (e.a.) (Sartre 1988:326).

It is clear from the above that to describe Negritude as 'racism' is inappropriate. Not all separatisms are necessarily racist. In the context of the situation of the blacks within an antiblack white world, black solidarity may not necessarily amount to racism. At best, it may be correctly described as 'racialism' which in and by itself is not dangerous, pernicious or racist. Indeed, Sartre's idea would make more sense if it were to be rephrased from 'antiracist racism' to 'antiracist racialism'.

### **The Question of Identity**

Sartre's 'antiracist racism' idea also introduces two fundamental challenges confronting black particularistic doctrines such as Black consciousness: In Gordon's terms, the challenges amount to: 'First, can the struggle against racism avoid being racist? And second, can the achievement of black liberation avoid the elimination of the black race' (Gordon 1995: 4).

Biko is acutely aware of these challenges and attempts to confront them head-on. As early as his tenure as the president of the South African Student Organisation (SASO), Biko (1996:5) responded:

The fact that the whole ideology centres around non-white students as a group might make a few people to believe that the organisation is racially inclined. Yet what SASO has done is simply to take stock of the present scene in the country and to realise that not unless the non-white students decide to lift themselves from the doldrums will they ever hope to get out of them.

Again he observes: 'Some will charge that we are racist' (Biko 1996:97).

To Gordon's first question: Can the struggle against racism avoid being racist?—the answer for Biko is affirmative. His first and immediate response to this question is an echo of his conceptualization of racism as predicated upon power relations of exclusion and inclusion. Racism, in terms

of Biko's conception, is about power; hence, 'One cannot be a racist unless he has the power to subjugate' (Biko 1996:25). Racism, Biko argues, is a prerogative of white people because the 'order of things' is such that white people throughout the entire world are in power. Since black people in South Africa had no power whatsoever, they could not be racist. As a matter of fact, Black Consciousness has never been espoused as a credo for subjugation and domination of whites. In this respect it differs tremendously with apartheid.

This might mean that an individual or a designated racial group A treats an individual or a designated group B in a racist manner only if A holds power over B and uses that power to discriminate against B on the basis of biological and physical differences. Since, in South Africa whites had power over blacks (at the time Biko was writing), then only whites could be racist and not blacks because the latter lacked power. This conception of racism is unacceptable to some people on the basis that 'The bitter, solitary old [white] bigot, alone in her room, is a racist for all her powerlessness' (Garcia 1997:13). The appropriate response to this objection would be the question: 'powerless' in relation to whom and as a member of which group? If she belongs to the dominant group, powerless as she may seem to be at that particular time, she however belongs to a group designated as a race that at that particular point in time possess power. Therefore the power she wields is the power derived from her membership in the powerful and dominant group. This power is expressed succinctly by Margeret Mead in her discussions about race with James Baldwin:

But you see, I've been on a plantation in New Guinea where I was responsible for a labor line. Now they were indentured labourers; they were grown men. You had two hundred men out of the bush. Some of them had been cannibals. Some of them weren't cannibals; some of them had just been good, fiery fighters. But they came out of a very, very primitive technical level of society....

Now, when I was temporarily alone, I had to run that labor line. I had to give them orders based on *absolutely nothing but white supremacy*. I was one lone white woman. Any one of them could have killed me, and it was my business not to get killed. *If anything happened to me, maybe twenty of them would have been killed* (c.a.) (1971:21).

White power in an antiblack world means that the life of a single white woman is worth more than two hundred black lives. This is precisely what racism means for Biko, that one single white woman can control and have the power of life and death over thousands of black people. We see this phenomenon even in our media: the blood of one single white farmer in Zimbabwe or South Africa, for example, makes the headlines of the press and is reflected on TV throughout the whole world than the blood of a thousand black workers in the same country. In short, Biko's concept of power translates into a demand by a single white woman that the black other justify his existence. Her existence is justified by the existence of the black other whose existence depends on her. In other words, she is her own justification, her own foundation, a Sartrean in-itself-for-itself, God.

Second, Black Consciousness for Biko was not racist because race does not play a part in the concept of 'blackness' as it was conceived. All people defined as races, other than whites were negatively referred to as non-whites. Their non-whiteness was their common identity within the antiblack racism of the apartheid regime that confronted them. It was this common identity and experience of racism and exploitation that led to the adoption of the term 'black' as a political identity to be worn with pride against a colour conscious apartheid regime. African, Indian and Coloured medical students at the University of Natal were forced to share common university facilities different from their white counterparts. Because of this common experience, —even though Africans, Indians and Coloureds in South Africa are perceived and still perceive themselves as racially different—the concept 'Black' was used as part of a set of constitutive ideas and principles to promote collective action. Defining 'blacks' Biko and his comrades in the South African Students' Organisation, insisted that the term refers to those 'who are by law or tradition politically, economically and socially discriminated against as a group in the south African society and identifying themselves as a unit in the struggle towards the realisation of their aspiration' (Langa 1973:9).

Black Consciousness was therefore not racial or racist in content but a socially and politically constructed identity in an antiblack society that perceives colour as the central marker of inferiority and superiority. In other words, 'black' became transformed to what in William R. Jones' terms is 'a designation of an antagonist' (Jones 1977-1978:153). There is a sense, therefore, in which to formulate a Black Consciousness philosophy is a

consequence and a tacit recognition of the fact that a philosophy that reflects or endorses a white consciousness dominates our experience. Thus, to call for Black Consciousness from this perspective is to launch an implicit attack on white racism. Besides, the term 'black' as a socio-political rather than a biological concept was for Biko not necessarily all-inclusive.

The fact we are all *not white* does not necessarily mean that we are all *black* .... If one's aspiration is whiteness but his pigmentation makes attainment of this impossible, then that person is a non-white (Biko 1996:48).

In Biko's dialectic, black consciousness is not only a response to white consciousness but also its product. The core of black identity, therefore, must be rooted in the same quality that is the basis for black subjugation and oppression, that quality which is the focus of the dominant group's perception: blackness. Black identity needed to be grounded in a concrete consciousness of the situation of being-black in an antiblack world. 'What blacks are doing' he asserts, 'is merely to respond to a situation in which they find themselves objects of white racism' and he continues 'We are in the position in which we are because of our skin. We are collectively segregated against—what can be more logical than for us to respond as a group?' (Biko 1996:25). This is a call for black solidarity and unity, a solidarity the kind of which Appiah would call racist.

Appiah posits two kinds of racisms, 'extrinsic' and 'intrinsic'. Extrinsic racism is a belief that people of different racial groups possess certain characteristics that warrant differential treatment. Intrinsic racism, on the other hand, involves loyalty and preference of one's own racial group based on racial solidarity. Given Biko's insistence on the solidarity and unity of the black oppressed, that 'all blacks must sit as one big unit .... We must cling to each other with the tenacity that will shock the perpetrators of evil' (Biko 1996:97). Black Consciousness seems to fit Appiah's designation of intrinsic racism which is predicated on racial solidarity. The basis of Biko's black solidarity, on the contrary, lies in shared or common collective historical experiences rather than on shared biological or genetic characteristics

Even supposing Black Consciousness was 'intrinsic racism' as defined by Appiah, is 'intrinsic racism' really racism? One of the salient features of

racism as understood by Biko is not only power but also the belief in the given superiority of the racist group and the supposed inherent inferiority of the excluded and discriminated against racial group. It is this supposed inherent inferiority that provides the foundation of the power to subjugate. Black Consciousness, on the contrary, was black solidarity in the face of subjugation and domination, a solidarity of those and by those who were subjugated and certainly did not regard themselves as inherently superior to whites. Such solidarity cannot possibly be called racist even of the 'intrinsic' type.

If Biko's Black Consciousness is not racist, how then do we explain the exclusionary practice against whites as a race in the struggle for justice? He rejected integration. Was he then a racial separatist? Biko was both a (non)separatist and an (non)integrationist. As a separatist, Biko's argument was consequentialist because he strongly believed that given the apartheid circumstances, the only practical means to achieve freedom for blacks was through separation from whites. Hence the slogan: 'Black man, you are on your own!' Separatism, it is obvious, is for Biko merely a means to an end rather than an end in itself. Biko himself warns us of the conflation of the means-ends nexus that afflicts popular perception of Black Consciousness philosophy. In this respect, Biko's views resonate with the Pan-African Congress (PAC) policy. For both these tendencies, separatism is construed as a necessary strategic phase towards integration<sup>8</sup>. Biko, as I indicated was both a non-integrationist, as we have just seen, but also an integrationist. How is this possible?

## **Liberation**

To Gordon's second concern: Can the achievement of black liberation avoid the elimination of the black race? Put differently: Can blacks become subjects instead of objects without losing their identity as blacks? Once again, Biko's response to this question is instructive. When Biko speaks of a 'synthesis' in the white/black dialectic, is he articulating a position that would lead to the elimination of both the white and black races? How would the 'synthesis' manifest itself—through assimilation or integration? Biko launches a scathing attack on liberals for confusing the antithetical moment of the dialectical

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<sup>8</sup> For different kinds of separatists, see McGary (1983).

progression with the synthetic moment, which they interpret as an expression of integration or assimilation:

For the *liberals*, the *thesis* is apartheid, the *antithesis* is non-racialism, but the *synthesis* is very feebly defined. They want to tell the blacks that they see integration as the ideal solution (Biko 1996:90).

But this integration, Biko insists, is a liberal ruse to foist white norms and values upon blacks and thus to achieve black assimilation into white culture, norms and values. The logical point here is that nonracialism cannot both be the antithesis and the synthesis of the dialectical process. The synthetic moment is a product of and therefore must be a higher expression of both the thetical and antithetical moments. To equate the antithetical moment and the synthetical moment is to arrest the process of change at a particular stage and thus to reproduce the *status quo* in a veiled and masked form. For, in this kind of integration as envisaged by liberals, the 'in-built complexes of superiority and inferiority ... continue to manifest themselves even in the 'nonracial' set-up of the integrated complex. As a result, the integration so achieved is a one-way course' (Biko 1996:20).

While Biko's view may not have been derived from Sartre's analysis of the liberal democrat in *Portrait of the Anti-Semite*, it is however close to it in many respects. For Biko, just as for Sartre, the real target is precisely the liberals, the 'do-gooders' who in their defence of blacks or Jews, rescue them as (Western) human beings, but annihilate them as blacks. The liberal is as a matter of fact an assimilationist, one who wants blacks to be full members of humanity only if they renounce their blackness. In other words, black liberation would therefore mean the elimination of the black race. Speaking of the liberal democrat in relation to the Jew, Sartre (1948:46) writes:

'There is no such thing as a Jew, there is no such things as a Jewish question' he [liberal democrat] says. Which means that he wishes to separate the Jew from his religion, his family, his ethnic group, in order to plunge him in the democratic crucible, out of which he will emerge as a single and naked, an individual and solitary particle, just like all the other particles. This was known in the United States as the policy of assimilation.

Integration for Biko does not mean the assimilation of blacks into an already established set of values set up and maintained by whites. By assimilation generally, is meant the attempt to have one racial or ethnic group absorbed, physically and /or culturally, by another. The absorbed group takes on the defining characteristics of the absorbing group and renouncing its own racial or ethnic uniqueness and singularity. Black assimilation project is however limited because, unlike the Jew who can physically disappear within a white world, the black body is overdetermined from without. At the ontological level, therefore, as Gordon (1995:153) points out, assimilation, especially black assimilation is easily classifiable with hatred, for, '[i]t manifests a desire to eliminate the Other as Other—in other words, to create a world of only one *kind* of human being'. The liberal 'myth' of integration, which is, in fact, a form of progressive assimilation, Biko (1996:64) insists, 'must be cracked and killed' because it ultimately turns out to be an attempt to deny the culture of black people. To this extent, Biko was, in the words of Howard Mc Gary, also a 'cultural separatist' like Amiri Baraka and Moulana Karenga in the USA who believed that 'integration deprives black people of a culture that they already have or that they ought to regain because it involves the grafting of black people onto the white culture' (in Harris 1983:202). Biko, just as Baraka and Karenga, urged blacks to recover and maintain the positive aspects of their culture.

There is at a deeper level the means/ends problem that finds expression in the antithetical/synthetical moments at play. It is precisely this means/ends problem that ultimately sets Biko apart from both the liberals and the now ruling African National Congress party policy. For both the liberals and the ANC, integration *qua* nonracialism is both a means and an end. As a means integration (nonracialism) fails on two accounts. First, such integration is infested by inbuilt apartheid complexes of superiority and inferiority, which continue to manifest themselves in any such 'nonracial' movements, organizations or situations. As a result of such integration, power relations remain untouched. Second, this type of integration quite often suffers from internal strife generated by 'the lack of common ground for solid identification' (Biko 1996:21). To overcome these complexes resulting from 300 hundred years of oppression, 'a very strong grass-roots build-up of black consciousness' (Biko 1996:21) is necessary.

What kind of liberatory synthesis then does Biko conceptualise? It is

suggested that this synthetic moment in Biko's dialectics is nonracialism. What does nonracialism mean? Does it imply the obliteration or elimination of blacks and whites as 'races'? Is it a negation of the existence of 'races'? But to negate something is on the one hand to implicitly recognize its presence, in whatever form it may take. On the other hand to deny the existence of 'races', is in a significant sense to posit the unity and sameness of humanity.

The Bikoan synthesis is a kind of what in Lucius Outlaw's (1996:81) terms is a 'pluralist integration', an economically, politically and socially integrated society but racially and culturally distinct whilst not threatening the integration of the social whole by cultural distinctness. That is, integration for Biko (1996:24) 'means there shall be free participation by all members of a society, catering for the full expression of the self in a freely changing society'. In a sense, Biko would reject Sartre's Hegelian invitation to look 'to the end of particularism in order to find the dawn of the universal' (Satre 1988:329). This invitation would be tantamount to giving a negative answer to Gordon's question: Can the achievement of black liberation avoid the elimination of the black race? Instead, Biko insists on a synthetic moment that preserves the interplay of unity and diversity, that is a recognition of difference within sameness, of the universal and the particular. Incidentally, this synthetic view would seem to avoid the 'bad faith' which Biko sees as one of the major problems emanating from racism; the full identification with my past to the exclusion of my future possibilities, my facticity to the exclusion of my transcendence, my body to the exclusion of my consciousness, or my universality to the exclusion of my particularity, or vice versa.

If nonracialism *qua* integration means the elimination of blacks as a race then, Biko emphatically declares, he would be totally against it. If integration means 'a breakthrough into white society by blacks, an assimilation and acceptance of blacks into an already established set of norms and code of behaviour set up and maintained by whites .... YES I am against it' (Biko 1996:24). For Biko, assimilation *qua* integration is not only to be rejected because it is the project of the liberals, but also because it leads to bad faith and alienation in blacks who strive for it. The black who tries to assimilate is inauthentic because s/he wants to deny her racial and social identity

### **Bad Faith**

Fundamental to Black Consciousness is the problem of bad faith (inauthenticity) and its necessary consequence, alienation. In the antiblack

apartheid world bad faith is an 'effort to evade one's humanity' by asserting this 'humanity as what it is not' (Gordon 1997:124), that is, as either black or white consciousness. This view is a consequence of the principle in dialectical thought according to which a being realizes itself in direct proportion to the degree of its opposite; such that interiority, for example, is realized in direct proportion to exteriority, transcendence to facticity, or whiteness to blackness. So black consciousness is posited as the antithesis of white consciousness; a purging from black people of a consciousness that alienates them from who they are; not essentially but situationally. As Biko (1996:100) succinctly declares: 'I think Black Consciousness refers itself to the black man and to his situation'. This alienation has its origin in the antiblack racism that affects the black person from the cradle to the grave. Because of the injustices, differential treatments, inequality 'you begin to feel that there is something incomplete in your humanity, and that completeness goes with whiteness' (Biko 1996:101)

'What is the being ... of human reality in an antiblack world?' Gordon asks. The answer, he declares in a single phrase, is: *bad faith*. The concept of bad faith, popularised by Jean-Paul Sartre, basically refers to different modes of human existence characterized by self-deception, self-evasion, flight from one's freedom and responsibility and the acceptance of values as pre-given. Without delving deeper into the complexities of the concept as articulated by Sartre, and the different patterns bad faith normally assumes, suffice it to say with Gordon that located within the context of an antiblack world, bad faith is,

an effort to deny the blackness within by way of asserting the supremacy of whiteness. It can be regarded as an effort to purge blackness from the self and the world, symbolically and literally (Gordon 1995:6).

Bad faith, therefore, has to do with self-identity in the sense of one's reflective consciousness of who one is and what one is like. Such reflection is however unavoidable given that, as Sartre (1956:47) puts it, a human being is 'a being such that in its own being, its being is in question'.

Apartheid racism, Biko emphatically declared, is obviously *evil*. However, the tragedy of it all is that the victims of this vicious system, black people not only acquiesce in it but also participate in their own oppression.

This is because they deceive themselves into believing in the naturalness and givenness of their situation. 'What makes the black man fail to tick?' Biko asks in earnest. Because 'reduced to an obliging shell, he looks with awe at the white power structure and accepts what he regards as the "inevitable position"' (Biko 1996:28). However, deep inside, the black person knows that he is lying to her/himself for 'In the privacy of his toilet his face twists in the silent condemnation of white society but brightens up in sheepish obedience as he comes out hurrying in response to his master's impatient call' (Biko 1996:28). In the presence of the white person the black person assumes an attitude of pure facticity. He plays the role assigned to him by the master. He lives his situation by fleeing it; he chooses either to deny it or to deny his responsibility.

One of the tragedies arising from racism for Biko is the effect of self-negation which characterizes the black person's situation; '[T]he black man in himself has developed a certain state of alienation, he rejects himself, precisely because he attaches the meaning white to all that is good, in other words he associates good and he equates good with white' (Biko 1996:100). Part of the source of this alienation, Biko believes, is the education system as whole, a system whose content a black child does not recognize herself in. This is a system that teaches the black child about Europe and Europeans to a point where 'we don't behave like Africans, we behave like Europeans who are staying in Africa' (Biko 1996:131). Fanon (1967:147) makes the same point thus:

The black schoolboy in the Antilles, who in his lessons is forever talking about 'our ancestors, the Gauls', identifies himself with the explorer, the bringer of civilization, the white man who carries truth to savages—an all-white truth. There is identification—that is, the young Negro subjectively adopts a white man's attitude.

In the South African case, 'the explorer, the bringer of civilization, the white man who carries the truth to savages' was the supposed discoverer of the Cape of Good Hope, Jan van Riebeeck.

Also because of a developed sense of self-hatred, black alienation involves an attempt to flee one's black body, 'the way they make up and so on, which tends to be a negation of their true state and in a sense a running away from their colour; they use lightening creams, they use straightening devices

for their hair and so on' (Biko 1996:104). This attempt to play at not being black condemns them to a perpetual struggle of what Sartre calls 'impression management' which becomes a mark of the oppressed. The desire of the slave, the Jew or the colonized to become like the master, the anti-Semite or the colonizer is an avoidable consequence of the master-slave relationship, anti-Semitism or colonialism.

Oppression often makes blacks turn against their own in an attempt to flee and evade their blackness. They assert a white consciousness by adopting an antiblack standpoint on human reality. This they attempt to achieve in several ways. For example, seduced by the seeming nonracialism and equal treatment in liberal organizations, mixing with whites at wine, beer and tea parties in white suburbs, '(t)his serves to boost up their own ego to the extent of making them feel slightly superior to those blacks who do not get similar treatment from whites' (Biko 1996:23). What these blacks try to forget is that even in those 'mixed' circles, it is as blacks that they are received. In doing so, they lie to themselves because they know perfectly well that they cannot cease being black. They conceal from themselves the truth, which, despite their futile attempts to deny, they nevertheless carry in the depths of their being. By assuming an antiblack consciousness, by trying to flee from the black reality, by attempting to cut themselves off from the mistakes of their race, by making themselves judges of other blacks, they evince a consciousness in bad faith and lack of authenticity.

The other way in which antiblack consciousness manifests itself in blacks is when a black, because of the accumulation of white insults in his being, 'vents it in the wrong direction—on his fellow man in the township' (Biko 1996:28). This is normally called 'black-on-black violence'. Several reasons may be advanced for this phenomenon but one of them is certainly the fact that such a black 'may either be displacing his anger toward whites—he may be hiding from his own desire for white recognition ... [a clear example of bad faith]—or he may be avoiding the unbearable sense of humiliation of not being recognized by even the lowest denominator [black people]' (Gordon 1995:111).

What should blacks do to be authentic and avoid bad faith? The authentic black, in terms of Biko's Black Consciousness, should be conscientized—what Heidegger (1962: 317) might term the 'call of conscience' or Sartre's 'radical conversion'—to choose to be black in the face

of an antiblack racism. Conscientization is that process which brings to the consciousness of black people the task of taking charge of their destiny, of resolutely taking responsibility for who they are and the choices they make, of committing themselves to authentic possibilities, taking over their freedom, uniqueness and resolutely engaging in the projects through which they create themselves. Black Consciousness thus becomes the quest (vehicle) for authenticity.

### **By Way of Conclusion**

This portrait of Biko as an Africana existential philosopher is neither exhaustive nor by any means an attempt to encase his identity within a single determinate essence. That indeed would be both difficult and unfair. The focus of this essay has been to break with the prevailing tendency of interpreting Biko's thinking singularly as political to the almost total exclusion of the philosophical. It is suggested therefore that as a radical Africana existential philosopher, Biko was simultaneously, like most radical Africana existentialists such as Fanon and Sartre, a critical race and liberation theorist.

Some people, especially mainstream and traditional philosophers, have contemptuously pointed out that Africana philosophers seem to be preoccupied with race, and that for them to make race their primary subject is, in the long run counter-productive, for it harms their image by portraying them as perpetual 'one-themers'<sup>9</sup>. Indeed, some of these critics even go to the extent of rejecting race as a legitimate philosophical problem by locating it in sociological or anthropological terrains. Undeniably, a considerable number of Africana philosophers are indeed 'pre-occupied' with race. But this is because following on Nkrumah's observation, philosophy always arises from a social milieu such that a social content is always present in it either explicitly or implicitly. The social milieu affects the content of

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<sup>9</sup> For interesting discussions of this attitude and events involving them see, for example Yancy (2004), especially the 'Introduction', and chapters 2 and 6; Yancy (1998); and Mills (1997; 1998). On the marginalization of 'race' as a legitimate philosophical concern see for example, Jones (1977-78), or Outlaw (1996).

philosophy, and the content of philosophy seeks to affect the social milieu, either by confirming it or by opposing it. Philosophy therefore is a product of the lived-experience of social beings. The reality of the social milieu of Africans and African-descended people is a racialized reality, hence the primacy of the racial problematic among black philosophers. A further problem about this objection is the assumption on the part of the critics that Africana philosophy is the sole preserve of a racially distinct group, namely, people of African descent. Not all contributors to Africana existential philosophy are black. “Africana philosophy” is meant to include, as well, the work of those persons who are neither African nor of African-descent but who recognize the legitimacy and importance of the issues and endeavours that constitute the philosophizing of person, African or African-descended and who contribute to discussions of their efforts’ (Outlaw 1996:76). Besides Sartre, among the leading contemporary non-Black Africana philosophers are: Robert Bernasconi, David Theo Goldberg, and Nigel Gibson

As though responding to the above critics, Sartre—a paradigmatic case of a non-black Africana philosopher—in his *What is Literature?*, responds to the question ‘For whom does one write?’ by giving as an example Richard Wright, the African-American novelist’s writings:

If we consider only his condition as a *man*, that is, as a Southern ‘nigger’ transported to the North, we shall at once imagine that he can only write about Negroes or Whites *seen through the eyes of Negroes*. Can one imagine for a moment that he would agree to pass his life in the contemplation of the eternal True, Good, and Beautiful when ninety per cent of the negroes in the South are practically deprived of the right to vote?...

If we want to go further, we must consider his public. To whom does Richard Wright address himself? Certainly not the universal man. The essential characteristic of the notion of the universal man is that he is not involved in any particular age, and that he is no more and no less moved by the lot of the negroes of Louisiana than by that of the Roman slaves .... He is a pure and abstract affirmation of the inalienable right of man. But neither can Wright think of intending his book for the white racialists of

Virginia or South Carolina whose minds are made up in advance and who will not open them (Sartre 1988:78).

The dilemmas of a black philosopher are therefore different from the dilemmas of, say a white philosopher. The black philosopher's problem is about recognition as a human being, denied precisely because she/he is not regarded as a full person. This recognition matters to the black philosopher precisely because the Other exercises power over her/him thereby limiting her/his possibilities. Had it not been for this power relation, the Other's recognition would certainly not matter at all. So the black philosopher's preoccupation is to attempt to convince the Other that s/he is not merely a sub-being or thing but a person and therefore deserved to be treated as such. The '*I AM*' of the black philosopher will thus be different, 'it will be relational, not monadic; dialogic, not monologic; one is a subperson precisely because *others*—persons—have categorized one as such and have the power to enforce their categorization' (Mill 1998:9). Africana existential philosophy is therefore inherently oppositional and liberatory.

Even though Biko nowhere provides a sustained and systematic articulation or treatise of a traditional philosophical nature, his writings contain numerous philosophical insights and ideas from which it is possible to draw together an account of a philosophical outlook. Such a philosophical outlook, we have suggested, is an Africana existentialist preoccupation with 'being-black-in-an antiblack-world' and questions of 'black authenticity' and 'black liberation'. He realized that liberation of any kind required an authentic consciousness of self, for, as he avers, 'we cannot be conscious of ourselves and yet remain in bondage' (Biko 1996:49). Like Fanon, Biko recognized one right only, a right that led to his untimely death: 'That of demanding human behaviour from the Other' (Fanon 1967:219).

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Philosophy  
University of KwaZulu-Natal

# **Gramsci on Intellectuals and Culture: A Review**

**Pravina Pillay**

Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) was an Italian communist, journalist and major theorist<sup>1</sup>. He was a leader and organizer of the workers' struggle in

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<sup>1</sup> Said (2002:9) points out that most readers of Gramsci have read him only in the one-volume compendium, which is full of mistakes. He refers to the four volumes of *The Prison Notebooks* and observes that the translators (Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith) 'had the tendency to lop off bits of Gramsci'. Said also notes that when looking at key words in Gramsci like 'hegemony', 'intellectual', 'war of position' and others, the reader must be reminded that these key words are constantly shifting and changing because of the way in which he wrote and the condition of his notebooks. It is only under the conditions of the latter that Africa and the world will succeed in its efforts to defeat African underdevelopment. In its own interest, the African continent itself has to organize itself such that: democracy and respect for human rights prevails, underwritten by the necessary constitutional, legislative and institutional arrangements; conditions are created to end all resort to measures that lead to civil and interstate wars, including strengthening Africa's capacity for the prevention, mediation and resolution of conflicts; there exists a system of governance, with the necessary capacity, to ensure that the state is able to discharge its responsibilities with regard to such matters as development, democracy and popular participation, human rights and respect for the rule law and appropriate responses to the process of globalisation.

Turin between the end of the First World War and the advent of fascism, and was one of the founders of the Italian Communist Party. A fierce opponent of fascism, he spent the last eleven years of his life in Mussolini's prisons and during this time he wrote a series of notes on literary, political, philosophical and historical subjects. The essence of the notes was the development of a new Marxist theory, applicable to the conditions of advanced capitalism and other crucial themes like that of the intellectuals and their relation with society and the theory of hegemony. Gramsci believed that no regime, regardless of how authoritarian it might be, could sustain itself primarily through organized state power and armed force. In the long run, it had to have popular support and legitimacy in order to maintain stability.

I will argue that Gramsci's significance for Africa and post-apartheid South Africa is two-fold: providing an elaborated theory that places intellectuals on the cusp of social transformation in societies, and the concept of hegemony which refers to ideological control and more crucially, consent. These ideas strongly resonate in President Thabo Mbeki's speeches on the topic of the African Renaissance that highlight: the intellectuals in society, the claim that the masses of South Africans have mandated the ANC to govern and that the masses must not be complacent but be active participants in the governance of the land. The President's speeches on the African Renaissance call upon the intellectuals and culture workers to fuel social transformation in post-apartheid South Africa:

... Africa needs a political order and system of governance that would: be legitimate and enjoy the support and loyalty of the African masses; be strong enough to defend and advance the sovereign interest of these masses; and, have the capacity to ensure the achievement of these objectives, including interacting with the various global processes that characterize the world economy.

The benefit of this to Africa is self-evident. It is also important to the rest of the global community because it would ensure that stable and predictable conditions exist in Africa, rationally to order the sustained interaction of the rest of the world with the globally strategic African resource base. This is also critical for the rest of the world because it would constitute a major blow

against both the global grey economy and global organized crime, bearing in mind the fact of the globalisation of both these phenomena.

To address the challenge of poverty, underdevelopment and marginalisation, Africa and the rest of the international community need to ensure that Africa takes the next step in her political evolution. This refers to the evolutionary movement: from slavery to colonial subjugation; from colonial subjugation to neo-colonial dependence; from neo-colonial dependence to genuine independence and democracy.

... What we have been speaking of requires that things be done that go beyond the ordinary. One of these is that we should treat the critical matter of Africa's development and reconstruction as a challenge that faces not only our governments and the African elites, but also the masses of our people. Accordingly, we must seek to ensure that whatever we say as Africa's intelligentsia and leadership, we communicate this to the ordinary people of our Continent. Thus should they be empowered to speak out about what they want for themselves, their countries and Continent and thus will they be enabled to participate in the struggle to emancipate themselves from poverty, underdevelopment and despair (Mbeki Durban, 31 March 2001).

In his book *Hyanas*, South African writer and poet, Mongane Wally Serote has also attempted to define the role of intellectuals in post-apartheid South Africa. He views the role of intellectuals as restoring African pride and striving for unity in the African continent to make Africa a formidable force in global politics. This involves ensuring knowledge is inclusive and facilitating processes to effect a fundamental change in the lives and conditions of the grassroots and to emancipate African culture:

The challenge in my view is a challenge against African intellectuals. The African intellectual, who, having abandoned his roots, whether cultural or in terms of the liberation struggle, for acceptance, which actually never did happen, by western culture, has now to retrace his tracks. And there exists a possibility, arising out

of the liberation process and culture, that 'African intellectual' can also describe and mean a non-racial phenomenon. They are needed by their source. They must unpack and process the past and the present circumstances of the African people in South Africa. If they do so, and emancipate African culture, they also will be liberated. The African, and therefore, the African continent will be emancipated (Serote 2000:82).

Despite the apparent historical and geographical distance, Gramsci's work is relevant to the set of concerns these arguments point, particularly the connection between the State, civil society and intellectuals. A.S. Sassoon (1987:xviii) argues, Gramsci's theories can assist in illuminating developments such as the implications of new technology and the relationship between vocational and academic education, the nature of the new economic order, political phenomena such as the New Right and neo-liberalism, a critique of the limits of professionalism and of bureaucratic practices while recognizing the necessity of a division of labour and specialization, and his work on hegemony.

Claudio Gorlier (2002:101) in evaluating the usability of Gramsci in an African context espouses that South Africa has produced the widest area of Gramsci's influence. For Gorlier (2002:101-102) evidence of the usability of Gramsci in a South African context is posited in the apartheid era. He expands on this view by asserting that the element of rule, that is, direct coercion was proportionally greater in South Africa than in Western 'democracies' as blatant coercion was virtually the 'normal situation'. Gorlier (2002:102) also draws on the organic and traditional intellectuals, using the 1950's as a case in point where, according to him, co-operation between white and black intellectuals was possible, with the Afrikaner intellectuals tending to isolate themselves, thus becoming subordinate to the ruling class, with the exception of a few 'dissidents' and some liberal intellectuals who enjoyed a certain 'independence'. Furthermore, Gorlier (2002:102) predicates that Stephen Bantu Biko was the closest to the Gramscian concept of hegemony in his attack on the apartheid system. He views Biko as Gramscian in his writings on the definition of Black Consciousness and the role of the intellectual who leads and organizes the masses, a point I intend returning to in my conclusion.

In South Africa, intellectuals, especially black intellectuals, have a major role to play in intellectual production, politics and culture. However, there has been a proliferation of views and literature bemoaning the deafening silence of black intellectuals. P. Ntuli and J.A. Smit (1999:1-20) in confronting this problem see the modern African intellectuals as defining themselves in relation to an elsewhere and a powerful other. They carry the colonial baggage and are blind to the rich cultural heritage of South Africa. It is of interest that Ntuli and Smit (1999:8) consider one of the functions of the organic intellectual as expanding the markets. Regarding capitalistic enterprises, Gramsci (1987:138) states that whilst some of the organic intellectuals, such as the industrial technicians, provide services for a single or few capitalists within the productive sphere, and in this sense their activities remain within the realm of what he terms the economic-corporative needs of the capitalist class. Gramsci emphasizes that this class must at the same time select other intellectuals with the capacity to be an organizer of society in general. It needs to be stressed that whilst Gramsci envisaged a socialist society for Italy, South Africa operates within a capitalistic paradigm. According to A. Mafeje (1994:194) the African intellectuals are a product of the post-colonial period which denied them the institutional base for self-production and reproduction. Thus, they could not develop a sense of themselves as an independent force. Ntuli and Smit (1999:6) accuse South African intellectuals of being impotent, and rather than being functionaries of truth and power are afraid to express their views. They believe that what South Africa desperately needs are intellectuals of the calibre of Govan Mbeki, Nelson Mandela and Steve Biko amongst others who stood firm for their beliefs.

Njabulo Ndebele (1994:130) points to institutional factors in *South African Literature and Culture: Rediscovery of the Ordinary*, stating that South African black intellectuals' attempts to define and promote black political, philosophical and cultural priorities have been largely futile because these attempts have remained over-determined by viewpoints emanating from predominantly white liberal institutions. Thus, the main point that emerges from his analysis is that black intellectuals have been so influenced by white intellectuals that they have failed to determine their own codes of reference and are constantly seen as existing outside the ambiance of the masses. Thus, for Ndebele these black intellectuals cannot fulfil their

hegemonic role of leading and organizing the masses. For Gramsci, intellectuals together with ideology, culture and philosophy are intrinsic to the notion of hegemony.

### **The Concept of Hegemony and the State**

Gramsci felt that what was missing from the traditional Marxist theory of power based on the role of force and coercion as the basis of ruling class domination was an understanding of the subtle but pervasive forms of ideological control and manipulation that served to perpetuate all repressive structures. He identified two quite distinct forms of political control: domination, which referred to direct physical coercion by police and armed forces, and hegemony, which referred to both ideological control, and more crucially, consent.

By hegemony, Gramsci (1971:12) meant the permeation throughout society of an entire system of values, attitudes, beliefs and morality that has the effect of supporting the status quo in power relations<sup>2</sup>:

These two levels [civil society and state] correspond on the one hand to the function of 'hegemony' which the dominant group exercises throughout society and on the other hand to that of 'direct domination' or command exercised through the State and 'juridical' government. The functions in question are precisely organizational and connective. The intellectuals are the dominant group's 'deputies' exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government. The 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production. The apparatus

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<sup>2</sup> Fontana (1993:141) writes: 'Hegemony is conceived as the vehicle whereby the dominant social groups establish a system of "permanent consent" that legitimates a prevailing social order by encompassing a complex network of mutually reinforcing and interwoven ideas affirmed and articulated by intellectuals'.

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of the state coercive power 'legally' enforces discipline on those groups who do not 'consent' either actively or passively. This apparatus is, however, constituted for the whole of society in anticipation of moments of crisis of command and direction when spontaneous consent has failed.

This hegemonic system of power was defined by the degree of consent it obtained from the popular masses which it dominated, and a consequent reduction in the scale of coercion needed to repress them. Its mechanisms of control for securing this consent lay in a network of cultural institutions which included schools, universities and churches amongst others. Hegemony has since come to be understood as mode of social control by which one group exerts its dominance over others by means of ideology. Gramsci continued to anticipate the circumstances in which a proletarian State might be generated in Italy and the separation of State from civil society eventually abolished.

His redefinition of the State involved the following: firstly, the division of the State into two component parts: 'political society' and 'civil society' representing the activities of force and consent, respectively; secondly, the reformulation of the State as a variable 'balance' between its two parts. The latter 'extended' conception was sometimes termed 'integral' or 'ethical'. According to Gramsci (1971:238) 'in Russia the State was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous; in the West, there was a proper relation between State and civil society, and when the State trembled a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed'. He saw the State as being an outer ditch, behind which there stood a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks. Martin (1998:66) argues that Gramsci's definition was far from precise, but, importantly, its vagueness pointed to a generality that allowed for an historical and geographical variation. It was this relative balance between political and civil society, force and consent that juxtaposed Western capitalist States from that of Russia.

Importantly, Gramsci identified political society with the exercise of coercion and civil society as the realm in which hegemony was exercised through 'spontaneous consent'. The analytical division between political and civil society and the assignation of force to the former and consent to the latter, crops up throughout the *Notebooks*. Gramsci's purpose was to

emphasise the extension of governance into civil society as this was the realm in which a politics of hegemony was practised. The definition was almost exclusively directed at the politics of consent (hegemony) rather than at force and law (coercion). Gramsci's central innovation can be seen as his identification of the State with the struggle for hegemony over civil society. According to Gramsci (1978:102) the integral State is characterized by a hegemonic equilibrium based on a combination of force and consent, which is balanced in varying proportions, without force prevailing too greatly over consent. For Gramsci (1971:238) leadership is exercised over allies and associates, that is, those groups who consent to be led:

Among the many meanings ascribed to democracy, the more concrete and realistic is the one which may be related to the concept of hegemony. In the hegemonic system, there exists democracy between the leading group and the groups which are led, to the extent that development of the economy, and thus the legislation which expresses such development, favour the molecular passage from the led to the leading group'.

Gramsci's remarks on State and civil society and the importance of hegemony in sustaining the bourgeoisie have been interpreted as critical of classical Marxist thought.

In return a Marxist critique of Gramsci has been offered postulating that Gramsci held a flawed theory of the relationship between capitalism and ideology. This criticism is based on the weight he places on his theory of hegemony and on the role of consent within civil society to 'explain' the success of capitalism. Perry Anderson's influential article 'The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci' has been central to much of the later criticism of Gramsci's ideas. Anderson (1976-7:28-31) argues that Gramsci failed to adequately characterize the relationship between capitalist society and the ideological generation of consent. In his view, Gramsci did not provide a consistent account of how the dichotomy of State and civil society relates to a division between coercion and consent. Gramsci (1976-7:31) he argues, ended up suggesting a number of incompatible explanations of the place of consent in capitalist society. Anderson intimates that Gramsci either mistakenly depreciated the coercive role of the State in favour of the

primacy of consensus generated in civil society; or he correctly attributed to the State a coercive and consensual function but did so, falsely, to civil society; or, likewise, he mystified the basic principle of bourgeois rule by obliterating the differences between the two spheres, so undermining the distinction between coercion and consent.

In Anderson's (1976-7:32) view, 'Gramsci's use of the term hegemony accredits the dominant mode of bourgeois power in the West with also being the determinant mode'. Anderson contends that a correct formulation is that a dominantly consensual bourgeois rule is ultimately determined by the threat of force via the State. This, Anderson (1976-1977:32) claims, 'is a law of capitalism'. Anderson postulates that Gramsci was wrong in suggesting that the consensual nature of bourgeois rule is to be detected in civil society.

It is in the State that a society's 'universal' interest as a community is represented and it is the State and not civil society which is the institutional channel that mobilizes legitimation. Whilst Anderson concedes that civil society may be the site of certain consensual relations, these are entirely secondary to the dominant State-constituted consensus<sup>3</sup>.

To Anderson and Hunt, Gramsci's *Notebooks* offer an analytically untenable theory of the structure of capitalism and the location of ideology within that structure. According to them, Gramsci's main failing is in not providing a fully 'historical materialist' analysis of consent<sup>4</sup>. However, with regard to literature, culture and the State Gramsci does devote attention to historical processes. In post-apartheid South Africa the concept of civil society has generated discussion in the academia:

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<sup>3</sup> A similar argument has been proposed by Geoffrey Hunt (1986:209) who claims that Gramsci held on excessively to the 'superstructural' definition of civil society, employing a Hegelian concept of civil society as the sphere of private interest and associations, but depriving it of the economic relations that Hegel had admitted were included. The true universality that civil society in itself was unable to attain was represented by the state.

<sup>4</sup> Martin's (1998:128) criticism is that there is an inability of Marxists like Anderson and Hunt to come to terms with the specificity of Gramsci's intellectual project in prison and that they totally disregard his attempts to construct an open-ended Marxist theory.

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Some of those involved with, and reflecting on, oppositional organizing led by the African National Congress in South Africa today, for example, have described their efforts as at least partly working on the space of civil society; while they certainly envision their liberation movement assuming or participating in State power, they also emphasise the importance of maintaining and deepening voluntary self-organised collectives of people outside the State (Young 1994: 73f).

M. Reitzes (1994:105) reflecting on civil society in South Africa in 1994, states that this social construct is being burdened with the expectations of providing a panacea for many ills. All problems are seen as potentially solvable in and through the creation and existence of a vibrant civil society. David Hemson (1998:248-251) echoes Mahmood Mamdani's reservations about the emergence of a vital civil society in Africa, pointing out that in South Africa there is a major concentration of the masses in the rural areas who are disenfranchised as they are held in the grasp of traditional despotism<sup>5</sup>. Yet, it is within civil society, that the proletariat can organize itself politically, economically and culturally.

### **The Creation of a Proletarian Culture**

In his *Notebooks* Gramsci gives literary and cultural topics a central place. It is possible that Gramsci's concentration on cultural topics at the time of his imprisonment came out of a sense of isolation from political life and his powerlessness to affect the political process, but in the *Notebooks* refuses to divide culture from history and politics. The form of cultural production to which Gramsci devotes most attention in the *Notebooks* is literature. He displayed a keen interest in Luigi Pirandello, Dostoyevksy and Dante. In addition to his interest in great literature and literary scholarship there is a consistent involvement with popular literature, its production and diffusion.

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<sup>5</sup> Mamdani (1997:353) argues that a civil society bound by the laws of the modern State reflects the general contours of apartheid. Like Ndebele he sees the deracialization of the state structures through independence as having failed to come to terms with the institutional legacy of apartheid.

Gramsci's approach can be termed historical as he is always seeking to relate literary production to the historical process which produced it and to which it contributes. Some scholars state that it is also political, to the extent that running throughout his reflections on literature and culture is the hidden threat of an unstated political question: what are the agencies by which culture is shaped, and to what extent can culture be guided by conscious political agency?<sup>6</sup>

In 1913 Gramsci joined the local branch of the Socialist Party (PSI), and culture had been an important issue within the PSI since the Young Socialist Federation put it on their agenda in 1912. Arguing against counterposing culture and concrete historical practice, Gramsci tried to establish a definition of culture that would allow the proletariat to become conscious of an autonomous historical role. He envisaged a society where the working class becomes the dominant class. Together with the problem of gaining political and economic power, the proletariat must also face the problem of winning intellectual power. In a similar vein Raymond Williams cautions against viewing cultural work and activity as a superstructure. The reasons he offers is that there is depth and thoroughness at which any cultural hegemony is lived. Furthermore, cultural tradition and practice are seen as much more than superstructural expressions of a formal social and economic structure. He emphasizes that they are amongst the basic processes of the formation itself and, further related to a much wider area of reality than the abstractions of 'social' and 'economic' experience.

From 1917, Gramsci begins to pose the question of what form a specifically proletarian culture might take, how it is related to bourgeois culture and how it can be practically organized. The notion of 'proletarian culture' is based on productive work, collaboration and responsible personal relations, as well as his belief in a new kind of educational system in which the division between manual and intellectual labour is superseded. In an article written in January 1916, Gramsci considered a theme which would remain central in his thinking: the relationship between culture and politics. Arguing against counterposing culture and concrete historical practice, Gramsci tried to establish a definition of culture that would allow the proletariat to become conscious of an autonomous historical role:

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<sup>6</sup> See Forgas & Nowell-Smith (1985:12).

We need to free ourselves from the habit of seeing culture as encyclopaedic knowledge, and men as mere receptacles to be stuffed full of empirical data and a mass of unconnected raw facts, which have to be filed in the brain as in the columns of a dictionary, enabling their owner to respond to the various stimuli from the outside world. This form of culture is really dangerous, particularly for the proletariat.

Culture is something quite different. It is organization, discipline of one's inner self, a coming to terms with one's personality; it is the attainment of a higher awareness, with the aid of which one succeeds in understanding one's historical value, one's own function in life, one's own rights and obligations. But none of this can come about through spontaneous evolution, through a series of actions and reactions which are independent of one's own will—as in the case in the animal and vegetable kingdoms where every unit is selected and specifies its own organs unconsciously, through a fatalistic natural law (Gramsci 1978:10f).

In the *Prison Notebooks* language and linguistics occupies a central place as organizational models. Gramsci (1985:165) saw language and linguistics as being important, as a political party could function as collective intellectuals and exercise its attraction through smaller organizations, breaking up existing hegemonic relations and constructing new ones with the popular classes over whole diffuse cultural areas. After the Fascist transformation of the state, Gramsci (1985:41) stressed that a new literature or art cannot simply be created on demand, or 'from above', by decree. It can only be an effect of a new culture involving the concrete process of the formation of new strata of intellectuals with a mentality and a new educative relationship with popular masses of readers.

In this respect Gramsci's views can usefully be compared with those of Trotsky. Like Gramsci, Trotsky was one of those revolutionaries who set great store by the role and importance of art, science and creative activity in general and in the advance of socialist aims. Commentators on Trotsky, like B. Knei-Paz (1978:446), concede that Trotsky was never so crude as to turn art and literature into sub-departments of politics:

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Revolutionary literature cannot be imbued with a spirit of social

hatred, which is a creative historic factor in an epoch of proletarian dictatorship. Under Socialism, solidarity will be the basis of society. Literature and art will be tuned to a different key (Trotsky 1990:276).

Both Trotsky and Gramsci firmly believed that art cannot be decreed and if one did so, then it would tantamount to stifling and destroying it. This does not imply that art was politically neutral or politically uninvolved for its commitment to social and political causes was unavoidable and desirable. In a Socialist society there will be no class struggles and thus 'liberated passions will be channelized into technique, into construction which also includes art' (Trotsky 1990:276)<sup>7</sup>.

A major area of commonality between Trotsky and Gramsci was that both of them did not overvalue the capacity of the working class to contribute to culture in the short term. Trotsky acknowledged that the proletariat did have its own intellectual vanguard, but, he did not view their function as creating a proletarian culture. Rather, he said: 'The main task of the proletarian intelligentsia in their immediate future is not the abstract formation of a new culture regardless of the absence, of a basis for it, but definite culture-bearing' (Trotsky 1991:193). In a similar vein to Gramsci, he stated that in the area of art, in the short-term the proletariat does not contribute anything essentially new, in comparison to that which was contributed by the bourgeoisie.

On the subject of language, Gramsci (1985:285-286) refers to the 'the British Commonwealth Education Conference', at which were present hundreds of teachers of all levels coming from the various British colonies. Intellectuals met at this conference to discuss the various aspects of the education problem 'in a changing Empire'. The intellectuals at this conference had to decide if it was opportune to teach even the so-called 'semi-savage' population of Africa to read English instead of their native

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<sup>7</sup> According to Trotsky (1991:229): 'Revolutionary art which inevitably reflects all the contradictions of a revolutionary social system should not be confused with Socialist art for which no basis has as yet been made. On the other hand, one must not forget that Socialist art will grow out of the art of this transition period'.

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language, if it was better to maintain a bilingual approach or to aim at making the indigenous language disappear through the educational process:

I was struck by the short statement of an African I think he was a Zulu, who made a point of saying that his co-nationals, so to speak, had no wish to become Europeans. One could feel in his words a touch of nationalism, a faint sense of racial pride (Gramsci 1985:286).

At this conference, according to Gramsci, South African intellectuals declared their spiritual and political independence. He makes a pointed reference to Professor Cillie, Dean of the Faculty of Letters in a South African University, who had observed that traditionalist and conservative England was living in the past, while they, the South Africans, were living in the future. Gramsci also theorized that for critical consciousness to be prevalent there has to be historically and politically the formation of an intellectual elite, for the masses will find it impossible to achieve ideological independence through their own efforts. They need first to be organized and there can be no organization without intellectuals.

### **Traditional and Organic Intellectuals**

Gramsci's interest in intellectuals stems from an interest in culture, which we have noted can be traced to his earliest political activities in Turin. He examined the question of the role of the intellectuals as part of his attempts to understand the real unity of base and superstructure: the intellectual was the key in starting a counter hegemony via creating a mass consciousness.

When Gramsci wrote about intellectuals he was not referring wholly to academics and the professional strata. The intellectuals have a role to play in all levels of society<sup>8</sup>. In the State apparatus which is a site for hegemony,

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<sup>8</sup> According to Gramsci (1971:97): 'By intellectuals must be understood not those strata commonly described by this term, but in general the entire social stratum which exercises an organizational function in the wide sense—whether in the field of production, or in that of culture, or in that of political administration'.

the intellectuals can organize a counter hegemony. In civil society they exercise organizational functions in the wide sense—whether in the field of production or that of culture, or political administration. A worker is defined as such not because he might undertake predominantly manual labour but because whatever labour he undertakes and Gramsci maintains that there is always some component of mental labour, it is within certain conditions and certain social relations. On the other hand, the capitalist, he says, may either personally embody and carry out certain intellectual functions or hire someone else to furnish those which he needs. The fact remains that his role is not defined by these but by his place in the social relations of production. It is in this sense that Gramsci (1971:9) purports that ‘all men are intellectuals ... but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals’. Intellectual activity is ascribed importance within the complex of social relations.

I turn first to the category of intellectuals that Gramsci called the traditional intellectuals. An example of this traditional intellectual was the clergy which had been organically linked to the aristocracy, or philosophers like Croce and Gentile who appeared to be part of an intellectual tradition unconnected with a particular mode of production or a simple formation. Sassoon (1987:142) states that what defines these groups of intellectuals as traditional is the fact that they belong to a different historical time from the organic intellectuals created by the new class. Some of the traditional intellectuals had an earlier organic link with a previous dominant class and they appear to be part of a historical continuity. Gramsci believes that the traditional intellectuals with their caste spirit form a governing elite charged with achieving consent between state and society. They are direct agents of the dominant group, who exercise subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government.

Gramsci (1971:116) points out that journalists, men of letters and philosophers may still think that they are the true intellectuals. However, in the modern world, technical education closely bound to industrial labour even at the most primitive and unqualified level must form the basis of the new type of intellectual. This lies behind his distinction between rural and urban intellectuals. Gramsci (1971:14f) asserts that the rural intellectuals are considered to be part traditional as they are linked to the social mass of the country people and the town bourgeoisie. They have an important politico-

socio function. They are considered traditional from the point of view of the dominant, capitalist mode of production. They are still linked to a world which is pre-capitalist. They live as it were in two different historical times. Gramsci purports that intellectuals of the urban type have grown up along with industry and are linked to its fortunes and he claims that the peasantry has produced no organic intellectuals. The argument being that the person of peasant origin who becomes an 'intellectual' (priest, lawyer, etc.) generally ceases to be organically linked to his class of origin<sup>9</sup>.

When one places Gramsci within a Marxist framework, it stands to reason that he will not view the intellectual as an independent agent; but rather the intellectual can only execute his role function effectively when he links himself with classes, because for all Marxists classes are the key forces of history<sup>10</sup>. Gramsci (1971:10) viewed the organic intellectuals as being more directly linked to the dominant mode of production.

Whilst some organic intellectuals, such as the industrial technicians, provide services for capitalists within the productive sphere, and in this sense their activities remain within the realm of what Gramsci terms the economic-corporative needs of the capitalist class, this class must at the same time select other intellectuals with the capacity to be an organizer of society in general.

What are the elements which define certain groups of intellectuals as organic? They belong as a category to the same historical time as a new class which creates and elaborates them and these intellectuals perform a particular function in all areas of social reality. It is imperative to note that there is a range of organicity depending where in the superstructure the

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<sup>9</sup> However, in South Africa ANC stalwart Govan Mbeki is an organic intellectual elaborated by the peasant class.

<sup>10</sup> This is in juxtaposition to Karl Mannheim (1936:38) who sees intellectuals as being free-floating and unattached. Said (1994:84) poses an important question: how far should an intellectual go in getting involved? Is it possible to join a party or faction and retain a semblance of independence? He is cautious with regard to the intellectual surrendering himself to a party or faction. Said is not advocating not being involved in worldly causes as his own critical interventions (he was a member of the Palestine National Council which he joined as an act of solidarity) is a case in point.

intellectual finds himself<sup>11</sup>. Whereas the capitalist class and the proletariat are related directly to the mode of production, the function of the intellectuals is always considered as part of the superstructure even though it may be relatively nearer or farther from the structural base. It is not the historical time which indicates the organic nature of an intellectual but his function and place in the superstructure.

Organic intellectuals are specialists who fulfil technical, directive and organizational needs. In a sense the closer to the sphere of production, the more organic is the function of the intellectuals. Sassoon (1987:140) points out that there is an inherent danger here of assuming that Gramsci perceives the capitalist class as not having organic intellectuals closely involved in the sphere of production. Gramsci saw the organic intellectuals as being more directly linked to the dominant mode of production:

Every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields. The capitalist entrepreneur creates alongside himself the industrial technician—the specialist in political economy, the organizers of a new culture, of a new legal system, etc. (Gramsci 1971:5).

Indeed, the industrial technicians are examples of organic intellectuals of the bourgeoisie. Pursuing this line of discussion, can we reject the organic relationship between, for example, intellectuals in the State machine or

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<sup>11</sup> Bhabha (1994:21) poses the following question: 'I want to take my stand on the shifting margins of cultural displacement—that confounds any profound or 'authentic' sense of a 'national' culture or an 'organic' intellectual—and ask what the function of a committed theoretical perspective might be, once the cultural and historical hybridity of the postcolonial world is taken as the paradigmatic place of departure'. The question posed by Bhabha is a valid one as the margins of cultural displacement are constantly being defined and redefined, which makes it difficult for intellectuals evolved in this context to be organically linked to their class of origin.

upper echelons of the academic world? Gramsci believes that these functions are organic<sup>12</sup>. But, the nature of the link is different for the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. What can be inferred here is that the relationship between the organic intellectuals of the proletariat in the various realms of the superstructures and the economic base must be a more organic one than is the case for the bourgeoisie. With the bourgeoisie, the intellectuals play an essential role, but within a broader political process. These distinctions can be traced to a central argument of Lenin.

In March 1902 Lenin published his most famous political pamphlet, *What is to be Done?* that contains his theoretical efforts and his practical revolutionary activity. In this work he asserts that a controlled party of dedicated revolutionaries is a basic necessity for a revolution. Lenin believed that in the Revolutionary Party there should be no distinctions between workers and intellectuals. Gramsci (1971:8) in a similar vein, views all members of a Vanguard Party as intellectuals, arguing that a tradesman does not join a political party to produce more at lower cost. In the party he forms professional associations and he becomes the agent of more general activities of a national and international character. Thus, what matters is the function, which is organizational. Lenin (1960-68:464-467) asserts that no movement can be durable without a stable organization of leaders to maintain continuity; that the more widely the masses are spontaneously drawn into the struggle and form the basis of the movement and participate in it, the more necessary it is to have such an organization; that the organization must consist chiefly of persons engaged in revolutionary activities as a profession; that in a country with autocratic government, the more the membership of this organization is restricted to persons who are engaged in revolutionary activities as a profession and who have been professionally trained in the art of combating the political police, the more difficult will it be to catch the organization and the wider will be the circle of men and women of the working class or of other classes of society able to join the movement and perform active work in it. Lenin envisaged that the active and widespread participation of the masses will not suffer but will benefit by having experienced revolutionaries who are professionally trained and able to centralize all activities.

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<sup>12</sup> See Sassoon (1987:41).

It must be noted that the special conditions that prevailed in Russia called for a party organized with a hierarchical command structure, a high degree of discipline and centralization, and a limited membership which will be a match for the Tsarist police. Stalin, and in later decades dictatorial Communist governments, deliberately distorted Lenin's theory in their quest to exercise power over the proletariat. M. Legassick and G. Minkley (1998:106) express the view that Gramsci may also have been affected by the Stalinist distortion of the meaning of Lenin's *What is to be Done?* It is possible that their view stems from the importance Gramsci (1971:258) ascribes to the State, seeing it as the means to 'raise the great mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level, a level which corresponds to the needs of productive forces for development and hence to the ruling classes'). In the African context, there exist elements of mistrust and fear when a theory attaches too great an importance to the State as autocracy and blatant abuses of power have characterized many African States. However, I would suggest that Gramsci's definition of the State was almost exclusively directed at the politics of consent rather than at force and law. His central innovation was to identify the State with the struggle for hegemony over civil society:

We are still on the terrain of the identification of State and government—an identification which is precisely a representation of the economic-corporate form, in other words of the confusion between civil society and political society. For it should be remarked that the general notion of State includes elements which need to be referred back to the notion of civil society (in the sense that one might say that State = political society + civil society, in other words hegemony protected by the armour of coercion) (Gramsci 1971:262f).

Christine Buci-Glucksmann (1980:70-71) in her major political-theoretical study entitled *Gramsci and the State* affirms that Gramsci's concept of the expansion of the State involves an incorporation of hegemony and its apparatus into the State. Furthermore, she argues that the nature of this expansion does not include for Gramsci military terms (the Stalinist thesis of the strengthening of the State). Thus, Legassick and Minkley's

observation that Gramsci may have been affected by the Stalinist distortion of Lenin's *What is to be Done?* can be seen as contentious.

## Conclusion

To return to Gorlier's assertion that Steve Biko is Gramscian in his writings on the definition of Black Consciousness and of the role of the intellectual who leads the masses. This runs counter to Gramsci's theory of the party affiliations of the organic intellectual because for Gramsci the revolutionary party is the force that will create the conditions for a superior socialist hegemony. However, in the present, as the South African State operates within a capitalist paradigm this makes it impossible for the ANC as a party to create a proletarian hegemony in opposition to the prevailing culture and ideology of the bourgeois class. Gramsci's ideal of the organic intellectual is the *hegemon* of the people, member of the communist party that as the organ of the people leads them to a new way of life. On the other hand, the traditional intellectual generates and reproduces the values and way of life of the dominant and ruling groups. In the South African context and in terms of Gramsci's analysis the ANC State can by definition only produce traditional intellectuals, or intellectuals organically related to capitalist aligned classes, and not revolutionary organic intellectuals committed to the overthrow of capitalism. When Ntuli and Smit (1999:8) point out that the bulk of South African intellectuals belong to the category of traditional intellectuals they might also have included anyone adhering to the line of the ruling party.

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*Pravina Pillay*

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DLitt Student  
Literature, Languages and Culture  
English Literary & Cultural Studies  
University of KwaZulu-Natal

# Hegemony and Autobiographical Self-Representation: The Case of Sindiwe Magona

**Thengani Ngwenya**

Sindiwe Magona's two-volumed autobiography, *To My Children's Children* (1990); *Forced to Grow* (1992) is a compelling narrative of a black woman's struggle for self-reliance and dignity in a socio-cultural environment fraught with numerous obstacles to personal fulfilment. Born in the Transkei in the early forties, Magona now lives and works in New York as a press officer for the United Nations. Like most black South African autobiographers, Magona writes of her struggle to create an 'authentic self-identity' by challenging those roles and identities imposed on her by dominant cultural and political discourses and ideologies. In its portrayal of Magona's challenges to both patriarchy and racism, the autobiography suggests alternative and inherently counter-hegemonic modes of self-representation available to South African black women in the 1990s.

This paper examines Magona's attempts, through inherently subversive modes of self-definition, to challenge hegemonic views about gender, race and ethnicity in her autobiography.

The paper's central argument revolves around the notion hegemony elaborated by Antonio Gramsci in the 1930s. Tim O'Sullivan *et al's* (1994:133) definition of hegemony alerts us to the usefulness of this concept as an analytical tool in studies of self-representation:

The crucial aspect of the notion of hegemony is not that it operates by forcing people against their conscious will or better judgement to concede power to the already-powerful, but that it describes a

situation whereby our consent is actively sought for those ways of making sense of the world which 'happen' to fit in with the interests of the hegemonic alliances of *classes*, or *power bloc*. Hence our active participation in understanding ourselves, our social relations and the world at large results in our complicity in our own subordination (e.i.o.).

Taking this conception of hegemony as a starting point, this essay examines the ways in which Magona's self-portrayal in her autobiography consciously challenges assumptions underpinning her community's cultural values and the political ideology of racial segregation.

Feminist critics of autobiography have long recognised the inherently subversive nature of personal histories written by women caught up in the double bondage of patriarchy and racism. Mainly because of the historical or referential status of this mode of writing, women autobiographers are in a position to create a counter-hegemonic discourse by re-defining their roles and identities to oppose cultural and political institutions from which they are excluded. It is hardly surprising therefore that most South African women's autobiographies of the pre-1994 era deal, almost exclusively, with the theme of constructing an identity and finding a voice within the constraints of the dominant ideology underpinned by patriarchy and racism. In a largely theoretical study of women's autobiography, Leigh Gilmore (1994:79f) comments on the political implications of autobiographical writing in relation to hegemonic discursive practices:

If subjectivity, figured by the autobiographical 'I', is produced in relation to discourses and institutions, then autobiography, the 'genre' most explicitly identified with self-representation, can be taken as a participant in that production. If we then also regard autobiography more broadly as part of a historically and formally changing discourse of self-representation, it is possible to interpret it as a *political site* on which human agency is negotiated within and against institutions on the grounds of truth. If this is so, then autobiography may also be a site of resistance, especially as it engages the politics of looking back and challenges the politics of

how the past and the present may be known in relation to a particular version of history (e.a.).

As Gilmore's astute comments suggest, autobiography is a powerful tool which may be used by women and other minority groups to 'write themselves into history'. The concepts of history, subjectivity, individuality, gender and race are all contestable and open to re-configuration within the mode of autobiography.

Magona's autobiography merits critical attention mainly because of the revealing and self-conscious ways in which it explores the convergence of class, race and gender in the creation and legitimation of certain social roles and subject positions within the South African social formation. She describes her development from being a daughter of an urbanised working-class family, a wife and a mother, a single parent, an 'unskilled worker' and ultimately, a professional woman who enjoys the hard-won respect and admiration of her community. As Margaret Daymond (1995:570) rightly points out, Magona's autobiography accounts for 'the transition from Xhosa cultural traditions and peasant economy to the current realities of black, urban, professional lives in a racially-based capitalist society'.

### **Feminist Theory and Autobiography**

Feminist studies of autobiography, especially those published during the 1960s and 1970s, display a marked tendency to present women in essentialist terms as a monolithic group. The common aim of these studies seems to be to expose and challenge male domination of women in its various manifestations. As Nancy Miller (1991:125) explains, for feminists in the 1970s, 'challenging the universality of the male autobiographical subject—the universal, but as it turned out Western, European, heterosexual, in a word canonical "I"—seemed an all-consuming task'. The oppression of women was often taken to display some characteristic features which transcend cultural and political ideologies.

Perhaps a more pragmatic approach would be to examine female subjectivity and identity not as totalizable and universal phenomena, but as products of a subtle interplay of a variety of factors relating to racial, material and socio-political considerations. Anne McClintock's (1991:220f)

comments on the assumptions underlying the idea of 'the Feminist Woman' alert us to the dangers inherent in essentialist approaches to gender:

Some feminists have been justly sceptical of the idea of a universal, female 'gynesis', fearful that it runs the risk of being fatally essentialist, formalist, and utopian. There is a very real danger in baptizing certain texts with the holy water of a new female privilege, erasing historical and cultural variations, and subsuming the multiplicity of women's lives into a single, privileged, and, as it happens, white middle class vision.

Bearing these prudent words of warning in mind, I shall attempt to avoid reductive feminist theory in my discussion of Magona's autobiography. A socio-historical and not exclusively 'feminist' analysis of Magona's life story will reveal the pivotal roles played by race, class, culture and history (in the broadest sense of that term), in the shaping of social consciousness and the allocation of domestic and public roles to women. As I hope to show in my analysis, Magona consciously critiques these predetermined roles and succeeds in creating her own 'authentic' identity which accords with her desires and aspirations. In an important sense therefore, Magona's autobiography demonstrates that hegemonic discursive practices which underpin both cultural and political ideologies can be effectively challenged both in the contested terrain of social action and in the arena of life writing.

Theorists who have written on the subject of women's autobiography tend to grapple with the demanding task of formulating a coherent poetics of this burgeoning sub-genre (Smith 1987; Stanley 1992; Stanton & Lionnet; Smith & Watson 1992; Smith 1993). For the purposes of this essay, the issue of gender and the network of social relations influenced and determined are seen as ideological constructs which assume different forms in different societies and historical epochs. The crucial role played by hegemonic discourses about identity and gender roles in autobiographical self-representation cannot be over-emphasised. Needless to say, these discourses form part of the ideology or a set of ideologies which determine self-conception in any given society. My discussion of Magona's strategies of self-portrayal takes as its point of departure the relationship between ideology and consciousness as described by Catherine Belsey (1991:596) in

her essay aptly entitled 'Constructing the Subject' in which she writes:

The subject is constructed in language and in discourse and, since the symbolic order in its discursive use is closely related to ideology, in ideology. It is in this sense that ideology has the effect, as Althusser argues, of constituting individuals as subjects, and it is also in this sense that their subjectivity appears 'obvious'.

Without granting ideology an all-determining role in the creation of subject positions, I shall argue that social roles prescribed by society for women are contingent on historical, cultural and political conditions. Consequently, autobiographical self-definition always takes place within the context of dominant 'languages'. As Sidonie Smith (1987:47) explains, 'the autobiographer situates herself and her story in relation to cultural ideologies and figures of selfhood'. Smith amplifies her argument as follows:

As she examines her unique life and then attempts to constitute herself discursively as female subject, the autobiographer brings to the recollection of her past and to the reflection on her identity interpretative figures (tropes, myths, metaphors, to suggest alternative phrasings). Those figures are always cast in language and are always motivated by cultural expectations, habits, and systems of interpretation pressing on her at the scene of writing.

Magona has chosen the discourses (what Smith accurately describes as 'languages') of culture, race and gender within which to situate the story of her personal growth and development. For Magona these major determinants of self-identity are far more important than her current status as a member of the professional class of the petty bourgeoisie. She has also chosen the conventional chronological narrative mode to depict her gradual development from a state of being a helpless victim of political conditions and repressive cultural values to a condition of an articulate, self-reliant and assertive professional woman. Obviously, the structure of Magona's story is at variance with the commonly held view that women autobiographers write anecdotal, fragmented or discontinuous autobiographies (Jelinek 1980:19). However, in Magona's case the deceptive smoothness of chronology

conceals ruptures and disjunctures in the narrator's stages of development: She was saddled with the responsibility of motherhood and marriage at the age of nineteen, became a single parent at the age of twenty-three, and had to go back to the life of a student from the age of twenty-eight to up to her early forties. This could hardly be described as a smooth sequential pattern of growth and development commonly associated with 'classical male autobiography'. As Magona (1992:174) herself remarks, '... I am the one who had hardly any carefree, young adulthood: I was middle-aged by twenty-three'.

What emerges from the structural organisation of Magona's autobiography is that narrative structure does not always conform to pre-determined rules of composition but often reflects the writer's peculiar circumstances and her attempts to give meaning to those circumstances. Besides dividing both volumes into distinct chapters with appropriate subtitles, Magona has chosen the theme of physical and intellectual growth as an organising motif in her autobiography. Thus, the metaphor of growth with its literal and symbolic connotations is central to Magona's autobiography as a whole. For Magona, growing up does not merely denote the process of physical development and life-cycle changes this entails but has a deeper connotation of intellectual and emotional maturation linked to an awareness of the interplay between socio-political factors and personal choices, desires and interests. It is therefore not fortuitous that she chose to use the phrase 'Forced To Grow' as a sub-title for the last chapter of *To My Children's Children* in which she recounts her first decisive steps towards achieving the goal of self-reliance and independence. The theme of self-reliance, introduced in the final chapter of the first volume, constitutes the thematic focus of the second volume, also aptly entitled *Forced to Grow*.

### **The Hegemony of Traditional Culture**

*To My Children's Children* deals with the first phase in Magona's 'growth', the phase which culminated in her ill-fated marriage at the age of nineteen and her subsequent suffering as a single parent. The book is divided into five sections corresponding with the writer's stages of physical and intellectual development. The first part deals with the period of childhood at Gungululu and various townships and shantytowns around Cape Town; the second part

focuses on the author's education. The third and fourth sections deal with the author's premature marriage and its subsequent breakdown. The fifth and final section examines the most difficult period in Magona's life when she had been left to fend for herself and her three children by her husband.

A large section of the first volume is devoted to the period of childhood in the rural district of Gungululu in the Transkei in the early forties. As shown in Magona's account of her childhood, the contention that childhood feminine subjectivity is relational, with the mother acting as a role model for the young girl may not apply to Magona's situation. In Magona's depiction of her childhood there is no obvious attempt to highlight the significance of her closeness to her mother. Instead, she draws the reader's attention to her closeness with her grandmothers.

It would seem that for Magona, being close to her grandmothers has less to do with being a woman than with the sociological reality of the migrant labour system. Similarly, the communalistic ethos which characterises the peasant community of Gungululu is shown to be the consequence of the clan system as well as the value attached to extended families and has very little to do with 'feminist consciousness' on the part of the author:

The intricate ways in which relationships are drawn among us make it almost impossible for an individual to be destitute in the sense of having connections with no living soul. One could conceivably, be minus parent, or issue; have neither spouse nor sibling; but to be alone, with no relative, no one to care for or lean on, is virtually unheard of ... (Magona 1990:3).

This is one instance in which cultural values coincide with common attitudes engendered by oppressive political policies. However, traditional communalism must be distinguished from solidarity brought about by the shared condition of being oppressed or discriminated against on the basis of race or gender. As shown in those sections of *Forced to Grow* dealing with this topic, Magona apparently understands the difference between feminist solidarity which may cut across racial barriers and cultural solidarity which is often confined to the members of a particular ethnic group. Her understanding of the former is evident in her account of her participation in

various non-racial women's organisation.

As suggested in the title *To My Children's Children*, Magona's story of her 'womanhood, wifehood and motherhood' (preface) is meant for her grandchildren who are supposed to learn something useful from their grandmother's resilience and determination to succeed. In this light, the autobiography assumes the status of a modern written *iintsomi* (Xhosa oral tale). Though ostensibly narrated within the traditional mode of the oral storytelling, Magona's *iintsomi* is not the story of myth, legend and folklore, but an account of the harsh realities of fighting for independence and respect in a patriarchal and racist society. As indicated in the opening paragraph of the first volume, it is not only the content of the *iintsomi* that has had to be modified to accommodate changed socio-political circumstances but also the story's mode of presentation: written autobiography has replaced the fireside oral tales. The way in which Magona begins and ends her autobiography suggests an organic sense of ethnic identity which links her to her ancestors as well as to her as yet unborn great grandchildren: 'By now I understood also that I was part of the stream of life—a continuous flow of those who are still alive, and the spirits, our ancestors'. (1990:183). It is clear therefore that she sees the task of telling the story of her life as her duty to posterity. Thus her autobiography has as its intended primary audience the younger generations of Xhosa 'children'. Magona has ensured that the book reaches the majority of her Xhosa speaking readers by publishing a Xhosa translation of *To My Children's Children* in 1995.

That Magona's presentation of lifestyles and habits of Xhosa rural communities is not mere romantic idealism is confirmed by similar accounts in the autobiographies of Noni Jabavu and Phyllis Ntantala both of whom grew up in the Transkei. Although these writers come from educated black middle class families, they both emphasise the virtues of the extended family and the strong sense of community displayed by rural people. However, Magona challenges those Xhosa cultural values and practices which she sees as oppressive, at least from the point of view of women. By adopting a critical stance towards her own culture, Magona encourages her grandchildren – the readers identified in the title – to be suspicious of all apparently innocuous cultural values and practices that often take the form of self-evident truths.

Like most things in the young Magona's life, her choice of career

was determined by her gender. After passing standard eight (Junior Certificate), she went on to train as a teacher, because among other reasons she did not think that as a woman, she was intelligent enough to attempt matric. As she puts it in *Forced to Grow*:

... to me at that time, all men were infinitely brighter than women. ... Therefore I condemned myself to never doing matric in the firm belief that if gentlemen of such superior age and intellect could not pass it, it was way, way above my own nothing-to-write-home-about mind (Magona 1992:15).

This is an obvious example of what could be described as Magona's own complicity in her own subordination which, in Gramscian terms, is traceable to the effect of hegemony. However, from the vantage point of hindsight, the enlightened writing self is in a position to uncover the assumptions underpinning the attitudes and behaviour of the younger and relatively naïve self. Clearly, autobiographical self-representation is an essentially emancipatory interpretive and analytical exercise.

Having qualified as a teacher at St Matthews Teacher Training College in 1961, Magona (1990:91) felt adequately empowered to free herself 'from the grinding poverty that is the status of the African in South Africa'. Besides the anticipated material benefits that would accrue from this achievement, her success would enhance the image of the Magona family and demonstrate to the sceptics that educating a girl had its value. As Magona explains, her entry into the male dominated arena of professionals had important implications for the family as a whole:

In the history of my family, going back three or four generations, except for one of Father's uncles, a forester, I was breaking virgin ground. Although Jongi had passed his Junior Certificate before me and was now grappling with matric, I had not only passed JC, I had a professional certificate: I was a qualified teacher (Magona 1990:91f).

Magona's belief in what she saw as an inherent value of education reflects the values of her parents who had accepted the teachings of the Christian

religion stressing individual responsibility and self-improvement. Although Magona's parents had no ambition themselves, they apparently wished their children to escape from the poverty of the unskilled working class people. Perhaps it was an illusion to think that a black person could ever escape from his or her class of birth because by law black people belonged either to the working class or the nondescript group of the petty bourgeoisie whose status was never clearly defined. It is therefore hardly surprising that Magona generally presents her racial identity as a black *person* as taking precedence over her gender and class identities. Magona's apparent over-emphasis of her racial identity over her newly acquired class membership is perhaps the predictable consequence of her situation in a country where racial identity determined almost every aspect of a person's life. The complex relationship between gender, class and race in social contexts such as Magona's is accurately explained by Evelyn Higginbotham (1992:254):

... in societies where racial demarcation is endemic to their socio-cultural fabric and heritage—to their laws and economy, to their institutionalized structures and discourses, and to their epistemologies and everyday customs—gender identity is inextricably linked to and even determined by racial identity. We are talking about the racialization of gender and class.

The harsh realities of the Bantu Education system Magona experienced as a newly qualified teacher opened her eyes to the intractable socio-political problems of her society. As she puts it, 'I thought I knew so much of my world; yet I was almost unaware of the injustices' (Magona 1990:90). During this period she had no conception of the possibility of her own involvement in attempts to change the political situation in her country. 1962, the year in which Magona began teaching was also the year when she accidentally fell pregnant. Like her educational achievements which had been shared by the whole family, her misfortune was a family disaster (Magona 1990:106).

To safeguard what was left of the family's dignity, Magona (1990:107) who was now regarded as 'spoiled goods', had to marry Luthando, the father of her child. Her pregnancy had another and more devastating consequence: she lost her new job as a primary school teacher.

Thus less than a year after leaving St. Matthews with determination and eager anticipation, she had become a housewife. Nothing could have been further from her childhood ambitions:

No feminist, I had nonetheless often joked with colleagues at St Matthew's: 'I was born for better things than washing shirts and mending socks'. In my clear eyes, I had fallen. Fallen far short of what I had dreamt of becoming. But, I could see no way out of the quagmire in which ... I sank deeper and ever deeper, with each passing day (Magona 1990:110).

Whereas marriage had been seen as a solution to the problem of unplanned pregnancy, it soon became a hindrance to Magona's personal development. Although Luthando failed to support his family, in the eyes of the law and custom he had absolute authority over his wife. Besides blaming the legal system which privileges men over women, Magona (1990:153) also blames herself for having married Luthando:

I have never hated anyone more than I hated Luthando at that time. But I hated myself even more. I could not believe I had, with no coercion from anybody, while of sane mind, voluntarily, nay, eagerly, placed myself in the custody of such a man.

It is obvious that the marriage was a *misalliance* and was, consequently, doomed to failure even before it started: Luthando was a migrant worker from some remote area in the Transkei whereas Magona had recently qualified as a teacher.

At the age of 23 the now unemployed mother of three children became a *de facto* divorcee. Soon after the departure of her husband for Johannesburg to look for work (a pretext he used to forsake his family), Magona started selling sheep heads to support her children. Prior to this she had worked for four different white families as a domestic worker. Luthando's irresponsible conduct strengthened Magona's resolve to assume full responsibility for her own life. In her opinion, she was lucky to have been deserted by her inconsiderate husband at her age:

My husband had left me young enough still to be optimistic: I

believed I was equal to the task at hand. But above all, I came to see I was not just alone; I was free. Free of him. Free to be. So many women's lives are hindered, hampered, and ruined by husbands who will not leave long after they have ceased to be husbands or fathers to their families (Magona 1990:182).

In *To My Children's Children* Magona records the impressions of a relatively young and inexperienced Xhosa girl growing up in a social environment characterised by an on-going contest between tradition and modernity. In contrast, *Forced to Grow* explores the implications and consequences of the freedom she acquired when her husband left her. For women, the institution of marriage especially in its 'traditional' (pre-colonial) form, is particularly repressive. In a male-dominated society 'married mothers' have to put up with all sorts repressive circumstances especially associated with the condition of 'motherhood'. Being deserted by her husband at a young age was therefore a blessing in disguise for Magona. She was not only free to develop herself as she wished but she was also free of the cultural stereotypes attached to the institution of marriage. She was now in a position to turn a deaf ear to society's condemnatory comments about her status as a single mother, although she could not ignore the emotional hurt they caused. Although she did not think of herself as a feminist during this stage her actions and opinions suggest a strong though dormant, feminist consciousness.

*To My Children's Children* ends with Magona's resolution to assume responsibility for her own life. In her determination to pull herself out of the mire of poverty she instinctively knew she would be sustained by the exemplary conduct of the members of the family as well as by the spiritual power of her ancestors:

I did what they did. Father worked: I worked. Mother had done business at home: I did that too. Jongi had studied: I embarked on a correspondence course. I became them. By now I understood also that I was part of the stream of life—a continuous flow of those who are still alive, and the spirits, our ancestors (Magona 1990:182f).

If the first volume is about the largely unreflective period of growth in

Magona's life, the second is about devising self-conscious strategies of coping with personal problems arising out sexual and racial discrimination. *Forced to Grow* is the story of a new phase in Magona's long journey towards self-reliance; this journey is marked by the author's enhanced self-confidence and a steadily increasing socio-political awareness. The author's changed mood is evident in the contrasting tones of the two volumes: whereas the first volume is largely factual and descriptive, the second volume is characterised by ironic humour and a more self-conscious and analytical presentation of events and impressions. It is mainly in the second volume that Magona consciously exploits the emancipatory possibilities of the autobiographical form.

### **Self-definition as Subversion**

*Forced to Grow* opens with an account of a crucial episode in Magona's life in which she underwent a dramatic process of conversion from being an indifferent participant in the cultural and political institutions which restricted her freedom to being an assertive person determined to make something worthwhile out of her brutalized life. This radical change of consciousness or being 'born anew' (Magona 1992:13) as Magona puts it, is dramatised in her decision—partly spontaneous and partly deliberate—to throw her ring into the sea: she was swimming with friends on New Year's day in 1967 when she felt her ring slipping off her finger and, instead of making an effort to retrieve it, she picked it up and threw it away. In retrospect, this symbolic act has clear implications for the mature narrator:

Looking back, I know that I had begun to 'let go'. I had embarked on the long journey that was to be the rest of my life, travelling light, sans husband. The act of letting the ring go was deliberate, but it was prompted, suggested if you will, by the workings of the waves (Magona 1992:13).

The obvious symbolism of this decisive act and its strategic placement at the beginning of the second volume may suggest that it has been manipulated for 'dramatic effect' by the author. However, this does not detract from its thematic significance: Magona was no longer willing to be governed by the narrow expectations and patterns of behaviour associated with the institution

of marriage. Like a phoenix rising from its ashes, she was bent on initiating a new phase of regeneration in her life. As she strikingly puts it: 'My life was under rigorous reconstruction' (Magona 1992:47).

Like the first volume, *Forced to Grow* is arranged chronologically and covers the three major periods in Magona's adult life namely, the period of academic development, the period of her growing political and feminist consciousness and her gradual shrinking into the cocoon of individualism after her first visit to the United States in 1978. Whereas the younger Magona had either acquiesced or tacitly accepted the culturally defined roles of women in her society, the enlightened protagonist of *Forced to Grow* began to question and challenge the assumptions on which these roles and attitudes were based. According to the values and norms of her society, the failure of her marriage was somehow her fault. While she earned the opprobrious name of *idikazi* (a Xhosa term for a spinster), the real culprit escaped the censure of society.

The narrator-protagonist of *Forced to Grow* is aware of the sexism inherent in the traditional values of her own community. The critical and sometimes downright condemnatory voice of a woman who has seen through the hegemonic discourses of gender begins to emerge in the early chapters of *Forced to Grow*. Her awareness of her situation as 'unfair' in comparison to that of the man who had ruined her life must have alerted her to the way in which her society rewarded men for having fathered so-called illegitimate children while punishing the mothers of these children:

It was common practice for women to hide the fact of their motherhood. They were stamped as damaged goods in the pure minds of men whose reputations remained untarnished despite their fathering offspring. Indeed, rather than detracting from it, a man's stature grew in direct proportion to the number of women he had impregnated (Magona 1992:79).

As if to demonstrate the subtle functioning of ideology in the creation and legitimation of gender roles and expectations attached to them, Magona (1992:79) refers to the unsympathetic attitudes of other women who were obviously unsuspecting victims of patriarchal ideology masquerading as 'collective wisdom':

The censure came from women as well as from men. Their agreement about the correct behaviour for women with children chilled me to the marrow. Married, divorced, widowed and single mothers were lumped together. Mothers, it was clear in the minds of the vast majority, had no business being anything else. But I had dreams yet.

The more enlightened Magona had begun to appreciate the underlying assumptions and underlying principles of patriarchy comprehensively described by Adrienne Rich (1977:57):

Patriarchy is the power of the fathers: A familial-social, ideological, political system in which men—by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labour, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male.

In her fight for basic survival and self-affirmation Magona faced two major obstacles: on the one hand she had to contend with the ideology of culture which often took the form of 'common knowledge' and, on the other hand she faced, like all black people, the repressive policies of the apartheid government. In the former case it was 'common knowledge' that women with children should not aspire to careers that would interfere with their domestic roles as mothers, whereas in the latter the myriad apartheid laws affected every aspect of a black person's life irrespective of gender or class position. Having no power to fight these oppressive conditions on her own she chose instead to pursue her childhood dream of freeing herself from the Blakean 'mind forged manacles' by acquiring higher educational qualifications.

Evidently what Magona hoped to achieve through education was not only financial self-sufficiency but also self-respect which society had denied her as an *idikazi*. When she finally got a job as a teacher in 1967 after four bleak years of unemployment, she soon enrolled for matric at Damelin College. After passing matric she registered for the General Certificate of Education with SACHED hoping to qualify for admission to any British

University. It was a student of SACHED that Magona began consciously to widen her intellectual horizons as she came into contact with mature students from different cultural and racial backgrounds. The SACHED experience prepared her for her future role as an active participant in multiracial women's organisations. During the period beginning in the late 1960s to the late seventies Magona became increasingly involved in the political, social and cultural campaigns of various women's groups including the National Council of African Women which she joined in 1969. She writes as follows on her initial impressions of this group:

This organisation opened my eyes to prevailing social ills. Not to anything I had not seen or known existed, but now for the first time, through discussion and action by members, I began to see myself as someone who could do something out there—away from family, job, neighbour or friend (Magona 1992:80).

This was a period of enthusiastic political activity for Magona (1992:82) who 'had woken up to [her] social duty'. Having been deprived of opportunities to make her family life worthwhile as a mother and a wife, she hoped to find personal fulfilment through involvement in public activities. In the domestic sphere she became both a father and a mother to her children while gaining popularity and recognition as a speaker and organiser in women's organisations of which she was a member. It was as a member of Church Women Concerned (CWC) that Magona really began to show an interest and to be actively involved in politics. In 1976 she was chosen as one of the South African delegates to a women's conference in Brussels where she spoke eloquently about the 'simultaneity of oppression' facing South African black women:

The point I attempted to convey was that the African woman was the worst oppressed of all South Africans. Race and sex combined to put her at the bottom of the dung heap, and only her child was more pitiable (Magona 1992:141).

In her involvement in the various politically inclined groups which included SACHED study groups and the Cape Town based Women's Movement,

Magona became more and more adept in the task of 'bridge building'.

Thus Magona's activities combined the tasks of fighting for political rights for black people as well the rights of women in general. She soon discovered that the predominantly white women's organisations had no clear understanding of the enormity of the problem of racial oppression. Moreover, she found herself trapped between ignorant but well-meaning white compatriots and suspicious or openly hostile black friends. Whereas some people in Gugulethu were accusing her of being an informer because she had white friends, those white friends were accusing her of being too elitist and sophisticated to understand the nature and extent of the suffering of black people. For instance, white women's responses to her stand on sanctions were less than favourable. She was asked questions like: 'But, Sindi, how representative are you of the black people?' (Magona 1992:169) and 'Sindi you are educated. You are sophisticated. How do you know what black people, the ordinary black person in the street, want?' (Magona 1992:170). The almost unbridgeable gulf between women of different races brought together by their common outrage against the excesses of apartheid became increasingly evident to Magona: 'White women could not escape the privilege which their colour bestowed on them. Black women could not escape the discrimination theirs made them heir to' (Magona 1992:129).

Magona's realisation that race was the main factor governing social relations in South Africa is shown in what seems to be a deliberate decision on her part to privilege race over gender and class in her autobiography. As she explains in *Forced to Grow*, genuine attempts had been made on both sides of the racial divide to bring about mutual understanding, but the inescapable reality of differing political rights, lifestyles made this increasingly difficult. Black women had first-hand experience of what white women could only experience vicariously. This explains why Magona saw her racial identity as a black person as taking precedence over her gender status as a woman. Daymond (1995:567) has argued that Magona does not succeed in her autobiography to problematize the implications of her class status:

When she speaks of her own position, she declares no profound affinity with or loyalty to either the urbanised peasantry from which she comes or to the professional class to which she aspires. Instead

she speaks as a determinedly mobile individualist and, in so doing, again plays right into the habit, in the dominant discourses of South Africa, of hiding class issues behind the 'totalising languages of racism'.

As mentioned earlier, social mobility is the overarching theme in Magona's autobiography. There is nothing inherently wrong with what seems to be a healthy desire for self-improvement. It becomes a problem, however, when it results in a deliberate masking of self-identity as Daymond seems to suggest. In a society where government legislation determines class position it is somehow delusional to think of oneself as belonging to any other class other than the one legally prescribed for one by law.

What emerges with striking clarity in Magona's autobiography as in the life histories of other black South Africans is that the idea of a black professional class in South Africa has always been riddled with irreconcilable contradictions. It was therefore safer and pragmatic for black professionals of Magona's time to foreground their racial identities as their 'new' class identity did not afford them any practical changes in terms of political rights and material benefits. Largely because of her temperament and liberal education, Magona found it difficult to identify with revolutionary politics of the 1976 era. It is not entirely accurate to regard this as failure to identify with the 'urbanised peasantry' as Magona makes it abundantly clear that she agreed with the aims of the mass-based resistance movement but objected to the use violent methods which often harmed black communities instead of advancing their cause. Having played her role in liberal politics as a bridge-builder, she found herself caught between the impotence of South African liberalism and the radical political strategies of the black youth in the township. Perhaps this accounts for her decision to leave politics and to become a 'determinedly mobile individualist', a choice imposed on her by circumstances.

The autobiographer's 'displayed self' in both volumes of Magona's autobiography is an identity shaped largely by factors of race and gender. As I have tried to show, Magona sees the factors of race as well as ethnicity as the major determinants of her identity. Her decision to present herself as a Xhosa grandmother narrating the story of her life to her as yet unborn grand children affirms her belief in the continuity of life and of the centrality of her

culture in her own self-identity. She regards her life as exemplary and thus worth preserving as a valuable record of cultural history. This is implied in her final words to the imaginary reader in *Forced to Grow*:

So, my child that is the story of your great-grandmother. That is the story of where you come from. Here I am, thousands of miles from home, for the ancestors have seen fit that as of now I dwell among strangers. Perhaps, for now, that is the only way I can fulfil my duty to you, my child. The only way I can tell you: This is how it was, in the days of your forebears (Magona 1992:231f).

The young and relatively naive protagonist of *To My Children's Children* accepts the values of her tribe without any major reservations. In contrast to this, the educated and sophisticated Magona of *Forced to Grow* is sceptical of a cultural and value system which assigns women inferior roles. As an urbanised and politically aware professional woman Magona questions the assumptions on which the repressive patriarchal system is based. The dilemma she faces is that she apparently values the sustaining beliefs and the sense of solidarity provided by the tribal belief system yet at the same time she is opposed to the sexism inherent in the system.

This essay has attempted to show the evolution of Magona's feminist consciousness as reflected in her autobiography. She uses the autobiographical form to elaborate her own version of African feminism which is simultaneously critical and supportive of certain aspects of the African world-view. Magona is successful in doing this because she sets out to challenge hegemonic cultural and political practices which have assumed the apparently innocuous label of 'common sense'.

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School of Education  
University of KwaZulu-Natal

# **‘She’s There’: Strategies of Presencing in *Down Second Avenue* and in ‘Mrs Plum’**

**V.M. Sisi Maqagi**

Mphahlele (1989:59) explains the cryptic expression ‘She’s there’ in the following way:

when Africans say a person ‘is there’, they mean you cannot but feel she is alive; she allows you no room to forget she was born and is alive in flesh and spirit.

The demonstrative ‘there’ points to a place other than that in which the speaker is. In this expression a woman is located in or on that place. The manner/nature of her location is characterised by her agency and visibility apparent in her refusal to be put aside or effaced. From the vivid memories of childhood in *Down Second Avenue* and in the naive narrative voice of Karabo in ‘Mrs Plum’ Mphahlele registers the state of the woman’s presence as a historical being that lives out or actualizes her life within a given historical and political context. ‘She’s there’ is a response that consciously refuses the multiple marginalisations/ effacements that systematic practices of the patriarchal and apartheid systems seek to perpetuate.

The women that Mphahlele portrays in these stories are in communities which have just emerged from the rural settings into the urban territories of Pretoria and Johannesburg early this century. The migrations of people in search of economic and social opportunities necessitated the creation of new communities and new relationships that were different from those they left behind. It is within this process of formulation and change

that these women begin to identify and deploy strategies of survival, enabling them to continue to live or even thrive in spite of multiple added oppressions beyond the boundaries of their rural environment. Indeed, in *The African Image* Mphahlele (1974:28) affirms the importance of survival as a form of self-definition. He states that:

... out in the open labour market, you get to feel the muscle of the white power. You have to survive. If you are more sensitive you want to do more than survive. You want to create, to assert a presence.

Not only is the notion of community then with its implied homogeneity questioned but also the idea of tradition with established customs/culture is severely estranged. Homi Bhabha (1994:7) captures the situation I have been describing above in the following words:

The borderline work of culture demands encounter with 'newness' that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates the sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause .... it renews the past refiguring it as contingent 'in-between' space that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present.

The women's agency and visibility manifest this sense of newness in the transference of cultural practices on to a new and different context. This sense of the new constitutes a break with the past, for it disrupts the seamless continuity by foregrounding resistance and interrogation. Mphahlele shows these women using varied mechanisms of cultural translations to construct sites of contestation. In this context the past (tradition/ culture) is revived not in its pristine state but altered by prevailing contemporary conditions. This altered state becomes a bridge between the past and the present. It is this mediating zone that these women have identified as a space for intervention and it is here that Mphahlele locates them. In fact, Carole Boyce Davies (1994:154) explains that location or positionality refers to one's 'physical or social space' as well as 'the oppositions embedded in each identity'. She further maintains that 'One's location may ... be a site of creativity ...

exploration, challenge, instability. Or it be a site of further repression' (Boyce Davies 1994:154).

In these narratives Mphahlele projects home or the domestic arena and community as physical and social spaces whose contradictions are explored and challenged by these women. In *The Politics of Home* George (1996:9) maintains that

Home is manifest of geographical, psychological and material levels .... Its importance lies in the fact that it is not equally available to all. It is not a neutral place. It is community. Communities are not counter-constructions but only extensions of home ....

Mphahlele presents the women as using the home or domestic and community spaces as sites of creativity to establish their own agency. Their agency is reflected in their progressively empowering employment of transgressive strategies. Such strategies as the crossing and re-crossing of geographical and cultural borders, the position of initiation of a consultative process in a madam-servant relationship, the blurring of boundaries between the privacy of home and the public space of work are some of the many strategies that I want to examine in this paper.

An additional strategy is Mphahlele's assumption of a female voice in 'Mrs Plum' which enacts the immediacy and the subjective nature of first-hand experience at the same time that it subverts male agency which, in a rural traditional milieu, normally assumes ascendancy. In *Down Second Avenue* the voice is decidedly that of a boy whose observation of the women allows him to describe them only externally. His reliance on detailed physical description seems to focus on their physical concrete presence which is meant to reflect the psychological make up of the particular character he is describing.

In *Down Second Avenue* Mphahlele portrays women deploying these strategies in ways that enunciate both their determination to inscribe their presence and the contradictions of their locations as they participate in the 'act of cultural translation' (Bhabha 1994:7). The paternal and maternal grandmothers occupy opposing or dissimilar spaces both geographically and psychologically in the young boy's mind. The paternal grandmother represents only the negative and uninspiring characteristics of the boy's

experience of Maupaneng village. His narrative captures the absence of agency in her cultural activities or lack of them as well as her unrelenting hostility when he says she sat there ‘... as big as fate, as forbidding as a mountain, stern as a mimosa tree’ (Mphahlele 1989:11). Rather than actively taking charge, she passively files her existence in a pre-determined traditional way. Her uncompromising meanness signals a determined refusal to accommodate change and the youthfulness (newness) of her grandchildren. The instability and disintegration of traditional life and culture in the village which Mphahlele records but whose devastating effect, which his young mind cannot fathom at the time, causes the grandmother to cling all the more to this fast-vanishing way of life. The Land Act of 1913 as well as the migratory labour system stripped the village of young able-bodied men and women. They left old men and women like Mphahlele’s grandmother bitter and disillusioned. She has been abandoned by her own children and grandchildren. Mphahlele then seems to project the village as a marginal space of passivity and emotional stunting. The geographical location of the village of Maupaneng is, for the paternal grandmother, a site of further repression which she is unable to challenge.

In contrast, Eseki’s maternal grandmother’s location in the urban geographical space is a site of active participation in the transformation of cultural categories and expectations as she transgresses traditionally assigned roles. Eseki’s grandmother assumes the patriarchal position of authority as head of a large family of thirteen members squeezed into a tiny two-roomed home. Her authority derives from the concrete circumstances of her position of seniority, her widowhood, her motherhood. It also emanates from the psychological and emotional significance of her children’s and her grandchildren’s dependence on her for a place of belonging that they can call home. Her centrality in the home is confirmed not only through the hierarchical sleeping arrangements through which she uses the only bedstead—‘an institution’—but also in the calculated decisions she takes about including homeless witchdoctors like Mathebula in her home space. This she does to protect herself against witches who might be lurking around.

However, the grandmother’s exercise of authority does not preclude patriarchal influence. Indeed, the confrontation ‘with newness’ of the urban situation makes her recall the past as an interrogation of the present as well

as an pointer to cultural transformation. She constantly mentions or repeats her husband's words, pearls of wisdom, as a method of interpreting and making palatable those elements of contemporary life that are difficult to comprehend fully. However, the paradox of her strategy is that the contemporary incidents are beyond the conceptualisation contained in the echo of those patriarchal words. In a sense, she unconsciously foregrounds the inadequacy of past patriarchal significations at the same time that she highlights her own hesitant agency in an active cultural transformation.

Grandmother was a religious woman .... I never knew my grandfather ... he must have exercised rigid discipline in his house in the true Lutheran fashion, because grandmother liked to quote some of his maxims (Mphahlele 1989:77f).

When she quotes some of his maxims and constantly refers to Titus 'sleeping in his grave' she uses them as images of stability in spite of their contradictory effect. When she decries the moral depravity of youth as exemplified by Boeta Lem it takes Old Rametse to point out that the world is not coming to an end. Rather it 'is the beginning of a new world' (Mphahlele 1989:91). Thus in this instance grandmother is located at a transitional zone in which her agency in the home as well as in the community is mediated through the repetition of past patriarchal maxims which become 'disjunct and displaced' (Bhabha 1994:4).

Yet her strategy of economic agency creates a space for intervention as she translates the cultural meaning of home and the domestic sphere. She interrogates idea of home as the 'private sphere of patriarchal hierarchy, gender, self-identity, shelter, comfort, nurture and protection' (George 1997:1). The border between the privacy of home and the openness of a public place becomes blurred as the grandmother and her daughters deploy their gender roles to interrogate their traditional location in the domestic space for economic survival. Mphahlele points to the urgency of survival in the following words:

Leave school my daughter and work ... stand up and do the white man's washing and sell beer. That's right—that is how a woman does it ... (Mphahlele 1989:41).

Home then becomes a place of economic production controlled by women, offering services within the community and across racial barriers. Both services washing and selling home-brewed beer make the home space alienating as they open the home to brutal police intrusion through beer raids and as Eseki encounters the hostility of the Afrikaners whose laundry he has to transport. The alienation in the home re-enacts the larger exile predicament experienced by blacks in the country as a whole. The home transforms into a sphere of matriarchal hierarchy where Eseki as the youngest male child assumes the traditional adult female role of running the home because the grandmother and aunt are bread winners, the uncles are too big and his brother and sister too small to do household chores. Structural changes within the home as well as between the home and the outside world bear witness to the agency of women's location in the home in an urban geographical space.

To the youthful Mphahlele both Aunt Dora and his mother present strength, but of a different kind. Whilst the mother's strength is characterised by quiet endurance, Aunt Dora's is marked by an irascible streak. His mother's agency is rooted in her children, more so than aunt Dora's and his grandmother's because of the bitter relationship between his parents. His mother's fierce assertion and challenging question to his father: 'They're mine. What do you do for them?' (Mphahlele 1989:26) signals her ascendancy as provider and authority over her husband and gives direction to her sense of survival. In contrast, Eseki's father needs 'skokiaan', the beer that grandmother condemns for its unwholesomeness, to bolster his own sagging self-image. Significantly, his father transposes his paternal grandmother's eroding harshness and absence of agency into the urban site.

On the other hand, Aunt Dora, unlike grandmother, is firmly located in the present. Mphahlele states that for her

... the past never seemed to hold any romantic memories, she never spoke about the future; she simply grappled with the present (Mphahlele 1989:107).

Her immediate, decisive 'reaction to' conditions around her determine her performance of the present. Her actions become examples of 'insurgent intervention' when she confronts both the school teacher and Abdool

speakers in contexts out of this region (cf. Finchilescu and Nyawose 1998) indicate that these speakers reject the idea of a one-to-one correlation between their language and their ethnicity. Finchilescu and Nyawose (1998:59) cite the following quotation from one of their participants:

I have also experienced something like that when people say to you 'Oh! You are Gatsha's child.' And now you get scared to tell people that you are Zulu speaking because they will think that you are also IFP.

This and other quotations from Finchilescu and Nyawose's study indicate that the subjects refute the assumption made by other African language speakers that as isiZulu L1 speakers, they are unequivocally members of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), a party that was established as the party for the AmaZulu in its genesis. In other words, these subjects perceive ethnicity to be bigger than political party affiliation and reject the 'insularity' and 'tribalism' (cf. Finchilescu & Nyawose 1998:57) that is implied by such an assumption. They state that they prefer to embrace a 'more global black African or even South African identity' (Finchilescu & Nyawose 1998:57).

Finchilescu and Nyawose's study was conducted among isiZulu L1 speakers on the University of Cape Town campus (UCT), confirming the use of isiZulu in this setting but with reservations. On the Westville campus, my findings are similar in that the isiZulu only option is not the preferred choice in this educational setting (30.6%), a low statistic when compared to the use of the monolingual isiZulu variety in other domains as mentioned previously. While the subjects of my study did not highlight political reasons, other reasons became apparent.

Questions asked in the questionnaire survey as well as in the interviews that relate to language attitudes are: How important and necessary are English and isiZulu in your life? Asking how 'important' a language is, was intended to test one's intrinsic attitude towards it and how 'necessary' it is, one's extrinsic attitude. Cross-tabulating the results reveal that subjects rate the importance and necessity of English higher (87.6%) than the importance and necessity of isiZulu (72%). It could be said that the high score for English on the one hand reflects its 'assumed' role as the High

Variety and the vehicle to upward social mobility. On the other hand, the high score for isiZulu highlights the covert prestige that a Low Variety may enjoy in a diglossic situation, a situation that Bourdieu's model fails to explain.

Other than the 87.6% of the respondents who consider English as very important and necessary, 11.3% think English is important but unnecessary. Only a minimal 1% considers English to be unimportant and unnecessary, and 6% of the respondents failed to give a response. One may question why 6% of the respondents did not give a response. Can it be said that by not answering, they were reflecting their psychological discomfort at having to choose one language at the expense of another? Could it be that they preferred not to make such a choice but preferred an alternative, that is, a mixed variety that enables them to enjoy the advantages of both languages?

Drawing on P&B's approach, it may be said that isiZulu L1 speakers do not want an imposed identity, one that may arise from the use of either monolingual variety. Neither do they want an assumed identity that may result from the tacit acceptance of one or other option. As developing intellectuals, isiZulu L1 students prefer to exercise their right to challenge and negotiate their linguistic options in considering which would be most optimal in a given situation. The 6% who did not respond could possibly be categorized as 'psychologically uncomfortable' as suggested above. Alternatively, that they are 'intellectually astute' and would prefer options other than those that were presented to them in the questionnaire, in my opinion, is a more plausible explanation, affording these respondents the benefit of the doubt.

Both explanations may be understood in view of Davies and Harre's (1990) positioning theory, a theory that forms a key component of P&B's approach. Simply stated, this theory postulates that identities are shaped, produced and negotiated as a result of the way in which one positions oneself in discourses. These researchers distinguish between 'interactive positioning' and 'reflective positioning', stating that the former refers to the way one positions oneself in relation to others and that the latter refers to the way one positions oneself without the other as reference. P&B (2004:20) draw on this distinction and extend it further by stating:

While agency and choice are critical in positioning, it is important to

who rule this country', on the other she wants Karabo's 'people who have been to school to choose those who must speak for them in parliament' (Mphahlele 1993:24).

Lilian Ngoyi is presented as a catalyst in Karabo's learning and growth. Her intervention sets up a dialogic exchange with Mrs Plum's words and activities. It is in the processing of the oppositions in these views that Karabo makes a decision on how to act. She measures her 'growing up' by the progress she achieves through Ngoyi's teaching. Her progress from being mystified and frightened by 'Madam' to understanding that 'this woman is like all other white women' (Mphahlele 1993:29) constitutes this 'growing up'. Yet the words 'Madam' and 'all white women' signal the contradictions of her location, as a servant, rather than her insight. The relations of power signified by the word 'madam' seem to be refuted in the phrase 'this woman' but reinvoked again in the generalisation of 'all white women'. If she cannot understand Mrs Plum because of her location as a domestic servant and as a black woman in spite of the close but circumscribed relationship with Mrs Plum how can she 'understand' all the other white women? Her 'understanding' then seems to refer to her active engagement with the class and race barriers of her location rather than indicating a complete insight into all white women.

Mrs Plum's invitation of Africans into her house in defiance of The Group Areas Act creates a space for contradictory ideological interpretation for Karabo. She is forthright about her view:

I was ashamed and I felt that a white person's house was not the place for me to look happy in front of other black people while the white man looked on (Mphahlele 1993:35).

She conceptualises 'her place' within a white household as a place of alienation, self-doubt and oppression. The presence of Africans disrupts her being resigned to her place as a servant in that although they belong to the same race as she, their higher class position inserts differences and prevents her from identifying with them. She admits that she does not like them because apart from speaking difficult English, 'they looked at [her] as if [she] were down right there whom they thought little of' (Mphahlele 1993:35). Their perceived superior attitude aligns them with Mrs Plum who

ironically is contemptuous of them. At the same time the presence of Mrs Plum prompts Karabo to display the understood oppressive power relations on her face which she feels ought to look unhappy. Thus she opts for dissembling as a strategy of dealing with the contradictory demands of her location. Her agency would not be compromised if she were at a place in which she belonged: 'At home or in my room I could serve them without a feeling of shame' (Mphahlele 1993:35).

Even though Karabo hides her feelings for the African doctor, the love triangle brings out views that Mrs Plum and Karabo seem to share but for different reasons. The irony of Mrs Plum's response to Kate's love for the African doctor is that she invokes the sentiments that are enshrined in the Immorality Act in her rhetorical questions 'It cannot be right is it?' (Mphahlele 1993:36). The irony of Kate's paternalism 'I want to help him', is that the doctor has already succeeded without her help. On the other hand Karabo is silenced by her location. However, her thoughts and condemnation of Kate as 'a thief and a fox that falls upon a flock of sheep at night' (Mphahlele 1993:36) puts both her and the doctor at the level of victims. Karabo sees Kate as the hostile intruder into a territory that is reserved for Africans. Her expression of strangeness, 'We have never seen this happen before where I come from' (Mphahlele 1993:36) hides a more intense emotion. Karabo's presencing here might not be 'an insurgent act of creativity' in that she plays out the status quo, but it is a process of learning to cope in a new situation.

The prison episode illustrates the working out of two divergent ideological perspectives. Mrs Plum's hosing of policemen and going to prison for it as an act of significant political protest is assessed by Karabo's more confident awareness of the nature of their relationship:

[Madam] looked very sad when she came out. I thought of what Lilian Ngoyi often said to us: You must be ready to go to jail for the things you believe are true and for which you are taken by the police, what did Mrs Plum really believe about me, Chimane, Dick and all the other black people? I asked myself (Mphahlele 1993:41).

Through the dialogue with herself Karabo dramatizes her attempts to reconcile Ngoyi's political lessons with Mrs Plum's behaviour and remains

unsure of her motives. Karabo's view seems to be that in the absence of equality based on human dignity there will always be suspicion. It is this doubt that takes away the impact of Mrs Plum's imprisonment. Indeed Karabo sees her shame for having been in prison as a litmus test of her real commitment to the African people African people: 'she was ashamed to have been there. Not like our black people who are always being put in jail and only look at it as the white man's evil game' (Mphahlele 1993:50).

Repudiation as Karabo's strategy of self-empowerment reaches its culmination when Mrs Plum dismisses Dick for suspecting him of killing her missing dogs. Karabo starts this process when she wants to read a 'Sunday paper that spoke about my people' (Mphahlele 1993:30) and when she decides 'she was going to buy other kinds [of cosmetics]' (Mphahlele 1993:44). Her feeling of repulsion signals her rejection of what she sees as Mrs Plum's attempts to colonize her. Thus Mrs Plum's question 'Do you think Dick is a boy we can trust?' (Mphahlele 1993:50) evokes a rejection from Karabo. She refuses to be included in the pronoun 'we' with its implication of convergence of views. The irony is Mrs Plum's unawareness of Karabo's cynical view of their relationship.

The masturbation episode participates in the unfolding of the process of repudiation. It is Mphahlele's extremely provocative image of alienation and repulsion engendered by the apartheid system. Karabo's observation that 'Mrs Plum loved dogs and Africans' emphasises the attention and care she lavishes on her two dogs. In subsequent references to them Karabo privileges the African point of view. She achieves this through the structure of her narration in which she gives primacy to the servant's perspectives. She inverts the prioritizing of Mrs Plum's dogs by focussing the first three parts of her narration on the problematics of relationship among people located on this site of multiple intersections. The casual, unapologetic tone of her statement:

When I began to tell my story I thought I was going to tell you mostly about Mrs Plum's dogs. But I have been talking about people (Mphahlele 1993:31),

foregrounds her essential interest in people.

In addition Karabo consistently highlights the servants' assessment

which is based on their own cultural views that centre the value of human beings. Thus Chimane criticises her employer for valuing a cat more than her mother-in-law and Dick sees the importance of animals in the use they are put to rather than in their indulged existence. Within the South African political system of repression Karabo and her peers regard the elevation of animals above human beings as a further repudiation of the bond of humanity between the white and the black people at a more private and personal level. Chimane's words:

These white people can do things that make the gods angry. More godless people I have not seen (Mphahlele 1993:47).

express shock at the envisaged dog cemetery. Her judgement is sanctioned by her indigenous belief system that centres on human beings. It is also this judgement, prompted by Dick's dismissal that makes Karabo terminate her service. Her resignation, in the following words: 'I told her I was leaving for Phokeng and was not coming back to her' (Mphahlele 1993:53) signal her own repudiation and agency as 'an insurgent act' of political transformation on a personal level. Mindful of the master-servant dialectic that Lilian Ngoyi affirms when she says: 'they cannot breathe or live without the work of your hands' (Mphahlele 1993:28), Karabo uses her location as a site of self-empowerment. Her resignation is not capitulation rather it is the creation of a space for self-actualisation, another step in her critical exploration of the white urban territory. She knows now 'how far she would go with others' (Mphahlele 1993:20).

Her temporary return or relocation to Phokeng, the home territory, creates a dynamic interface between the urban and the rural territory. Karabo occupies the rural space as a site of replenishment and restoration. She makes the following statement:

I wanted her to say to say she was sorry to have sent me away, I did not know how to make her say it because I know white people find it too much for them to say Sorry to a black person. As she was not saying it , I thought of two things to make it hard for her to get me and may be even lose me in the end (Mphahlele 1993:55).

She puts herself in the position of control. The restoration is not so much for

her as it is for Mrs Plum. The latter's dignity as a human being can be restored only if she acknowledges the dignity of other human beings. In the absence of a clear apology Karabo sets up a process of 'negotiation' in which Mrs Plum is forced to consult her on the terms of her employment. Mrs Plum's conciliatory words are an attempt to recognise and acknowledge Karabo's presence as a person in her own right. When they leave together to return to Johannesburg Karabo observes that Mrs Plum

looked kinder than I have ever known her. And me, I felt sure, more than I had ever done (Mphahlele 1993:55).

Karabo's self-confidence remains undisturbed by her doubt of Mrs Plum's real transformation. On the contrary, the fact that Mrs Plum comes to Phokeng to request her to return is salutary.

My selection of some of the women that Mphahlele represents focussed on their developing dynamism and determination in articulating their presence within communities in transition. According to Derrida (1998:396f) 'the category of subject is not and never has been conceivable without reference to presence'. Thus, in portraying women as active participants in the transformation of their emerging societies Mphahlele privileges their subjecthood and their presence.

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University of Port-Elizabeth Vista Campus  
Port Elizabeth

# Response and Responsibility in Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*

Minesh Dass

*Welcome to Our Hillbrow* by Phaswane Mpe is a novel faced with the difficult task of both telling a specific story, and simultaneously making that a story of 'Our All' (Mpe 2001:104). Similarly the novel must register the loss of traditional notions of what constitutes a community, while engaging a new, humane community characterised by both hybridity and similarity. Moreover the many self-reflexive remarks within the novel have the unusual effect of implicating the reader in the story being told. In the following essay I will show that all of these supposed 'paradoxes' can be explained in terms of the complex use of the word 'our' and the second-person narration of the novel. I hope to argue that the consistent use of the pronouns 'our' and 'you' forms a quite unique response to Mikhail Bakhtin's linguistic and literary theories. To that end, it will be necessary to discuss certain key concepts in Bakhtin's work and finally, through close analysis of the text, to show that *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* is a novel that anticipates, from its readers, a responsible response.

## Linguistics and Dialogism

Firstly it is important to have a general understanding of Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of dialogism. The theory developed in response to the monologism of both linguistics and fiction—especially the separation and emphasis on either the self or the other and the ignorance of the effect of context. At this point it is worth keeping in mind that *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* is equally concerned with issues of self, other and context.

For Bakhtin every aspect of expression is 'determined by the actual conditions of the given utterance—above all, by its *immediate social situation*' (e.i.o.) (Vološinov 1973:85). Moreover, any given utterance is orientated toward a specific context and specific addressee by a specific speaker/author. According to Bakhtin, language itself is not, strictly speaking, dialogic precisely because it does not make clear the interdependent relationships between these agents. Thus

any word exists for the speaker in three aspects: as a neutral word of a language, belonging to nobody: as an *other's* word, which belongs to another person and is filled with the echoes of the other's utterance; and, finally, as *my* word, for, since I am dealing with it in a particular situation, with a particular speech plan, it is already imbued with my expression (e.i.o.) (Bakhtin 1986:88).

Crucially, Bakhtin argues that the context within which an utterance is generated and/or uttered<sup>1</sup>, ineluctably affects all aspects of that utterance. As V.N. Vološinov (1973:63)—arguably an alias for Bakhtin himself and certainly one of Bakhtin's followers—writes: 'the constituent factor for understanding the linguistic form is ... orientation in the particular, given context and in the particular, given situation'. As this statement suggests one of the most crucial factors in any social situation that is able to affect the utterance is the person or people to whom the utterance is addressed. It is by recognising this that Bakhtin is able to claim that an utterance is both individual *and* social in nature. Indeed in every sense, the utterance is

*a two-sided act. It is determined equally by whose word it is and for whom it is meant. As word, it is precisely the product of the reciprocal relationship between... addresser and addressee (e.i.o) (Vološinov 1973:86).*

The nature of any given utterance is such that the addressee affects its content, theme and style. This is primarily (and this is the most crucial factor

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<sup>1</sup> Of course 'utterance', for Bakhtin, cannot be understood in the narrow sense of verbal communication but must include all forms of address, including writing.

for the discussion to follow) because any speaker anticipates active responsive understanding from his/her audience. Moreover, the

speaker himself is orientated precisely toward such an actively responsive understanding. He does not expect passive understanding that, so to speak, only duplicates his own idea in someone else's mind. Rather, he expects response, agreement, sympathy, objection, execution, and so forth (Bakhtin 1986:69).

In point of fact, Bakhtin argues that by *presupposing* such actively responsive understanding the utterance becomes internally marked by the other.

There is another logical conclusion drawn by Bakhtin that is relevant to *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, namely that any speaker/author 'is himself a respondent to a greater or lesser degree. He is not after all the first speaker the one who disturbs the eternal silence of the universe' (Bakhtin 1986:69). Thus, it is important to note that, for Bakhtin (1986:69), any 'utterance is a link in a very complexly organized [sic] chain of other utterances'. Once again the relationship between self and other (my utterances and all other utterances) is marked by both difference *and* connection.

### **The Relevance of Bakhtin to Mpe's novel**

Firstly, it is worth considering the title of the novel. I think it is accurate to say that to be welcomed is also to be located. Thus in the title the 'Welcome' locates its addressee/s as already in Hillbrow. This is reinforced by the use of the word 'Our' that suggests—amongst other things—belonging, ownership and obligation. Of course the matter is further complicated by the fact that one cannot be sure who the 'Our' refers to—and thus who is being addressed and asked to respond. For instance, it could refer simply to Refentše and the omniscient unnamed narrator; it could refer to Refentše and all other inhabitants of Hillbrow; more enticingly it could also invoke the reader. Yet Carrol Clarkson (2004:12) also notes that 'The phrase "Welcome to Our Hillbrow", is [in a sense] addressed specifically to Refentše, and when it is taken in this way, it is as if the reader is *overhearing* the second-person address to Refentše in the novel' (e.i.o.). Thus the unavoidable task,

already suggested by the title, is to respond appropriately to a novel that places you where you may not actually be, invokes and includes you in a community (denoted by the 'Our') you may not feel you belong to and that simultaneously excludes you.

As if this task were not difficult enough, it is also necessary to consider the preconceptions of Hillbrow held by Mpe's probable readers. Phaswane Mpe (2003:191) in an essay entitled 'Our Missing Store of Memories: City, Literature and Representation' writes of the widely-held 'general idea of Hillbrow as a monster—with crime, drug-dealing, prostitution'. The reference to 'Hillbrow as a monster' is a near-direct quote from *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*: 'you already knew that Hillbrow was a monster, so threatening ...' (Mpe 2001:3). I would like to suggest that in this way Mpe is attempting to prove that stereotypes are social constructions. On the one hand, this is Refentše's opinion that we should share. Since he is the focaliser of the novel we see the world through his eyes, and if his perception is biased, surely, to some extent, so too must ours be. Conversely this is the generalised opinion that Refentše has internalised: his utterance is therefore internally marked by the prejudices of others. Thus 'Welcome to Our Hillbrow' is not simply a phrase locating one in a physical locality. It is also a phrase which, at least at first, places its readers in the uncomfortable position of sharing certain prejudices that the novel obviously finds wanting. Thus it is apt that Hillbrow is described as a 'monster' since its physical attributes are secondary to its symbolic and abstract qualities.

This is made all the more evident if one briefly notes the events that dominate the first few pages of the novel. The narrator recalls people hurtling bottles 'of all sorts from their flat balconies' (Mpe 2001:1); reckless drivers attempting 'U-turns and circles all over the road' (Mpe 2001:2)—one such driver hits and kills a child no older than seven years of age. And, of course, there are the inevitable stories of those who die of AIDS. Notably the disease is immediately associated with the *Makwerekwere*—foreigners, mostly from North and West Africa. All of these details are presented without any moral judgement or use of euphemism—Mpe (2001:3), for example, speaks of 'the shit that the greedy and careless penises sucked out of the equally eager anuses'.

Of course Mpe is well aware of the shocking image he is presenting of Hillbrow—in fact he is depending on it for the novel to achieve its ethical

objective. In 'Our missing Store of Memories' Mpe (2003:191) writes the following:

Perhaps one of the persistent factors in the development and promotion of stereotypes and melodramas is incidental experience or observation, which is then generalised without any rigorous attempt to research and assess the extent to which it may or may not be representative.

Is this not precisely what the first few pages of the novel amount to? Indeed, does Mpe not expect the reader to find such events representative of Hillbrow, that is, of their preconceptions of Hillbrow? Thus, it seems clear that Mpe in order to write a responsible novel about the suburb must first account for the prejudices and stereotypes he *anticipates* his readers will have.

'Our' when considered in this light, suggests, not only ownership and belonging, but also perception. By this I mean that the title of the novel welcomes 'you', the reader, to a particular notion or representation of Hillbrow ('our' *version* of Hillbrow). This is, notably, in keeping with Bakhtin's all-important focus on the position (or context) of the speaker. Michael Holquist writes that dialogism is based on the fact that

everything is perceived from a unique position in existence ... [The] corollary is that the meaning of whatever is being observed is shaped by the place from which it is perceived.

Crucially by acknowledging his subjective position Mpe also immediately anticipates that the reader will compare his/her notions of Hillbrow with those represented in the novel. Obviously in so doing, Mpe hopes the readers will note the biases and failures of *their* version of the suburb. Thus Mpe is able to interrogate the values of his readers through his fiction.

Consider, for instance, the use of second-person narration in the novel. Of course literally the novel is entirely written to and about Refentše, who is dead, and later Refilwe, who is dying. Yet it seems certain that the 'you' of the novel also, on some level, invokes the reader. This leads Peter Blair (2002:163) to write, in his review of *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, that the

second-person conceit ... successfully creates an intimate voice that encourages readers to put themselves in the position of the *addressee* and thus identify with the novel's protagonist (e.a.).

In point of fact, the use of second-person narration encourages the readers to empathise with a protagonist who makes love to his best friend's girlfriend, feels increasingly isolated from his friends and family and finally commits suicide. Indeed, since the novel is written to Refentše only once he is dead, the reader must surely consider what, if anything, he/she has in common with this protagonist. Thus I would argue that, at least as much as the use of second-person narration leads to alignment between readers and protagonists, it also anticipates distance. The effect of this simultaneous distancing and engagement is 'disorientating' to say the least (Clarkson 2004:10). Yet it seems clear that Mpe expects this since it is only possible that a reader will consider his/her position (prejudices, opinions, limits etc.) if that position is destabilised, and is thus made difficult to adopt without some measure of insecurity.

Moreover, it should by now be relatively obvious that since 'you' in the novel addresses both a specific individual and an anticipated other there is an overt connection to Bakhtin's theory of dialogism. As Vološinov (1973:86) writes:

A word [in this case 'you'] is a bridge thrown between myself and another. If one end of the bridge depends on me, then the other depends on my addressee.

It is apt that Vološinov should write of the word as a 'bridge' between oneself and another, since it is precisely the early distance between Refentše (and indeed Mpe too) and the reader that the novel ultimately bridges.

Consider, for instance, the first time the phrase 'Welcome to Our Hillbrow' is used in the novel:

Welcome to Our Hillbrow! You heard one man say to his female companion, who was a seeming newcomer to this place of bustling activity, visiting it for the first time since the conspiracy between her parents and fate decided to usher her presence onto the face of the Earth (Mpe 2001:2).

Of course, there is a degree of ironic detachment in this welcome since it is uttered immediately after a seven-year old child has been struck by a car and has died. It is probably for this reason that Ralph Goodman<sup>2</sup> (2003:96) writes of the phrase as never 'free from the strong echo of formal yet empty public utterances [made] at crowded airports and banal signposts ...'. I think however that to recognise only this aspect of how the phrase is used is to miss the point. For instance, in the cited passage the actual narration contextualises the welcome by mentioning conception, birth and the entire 'face of the Earth'. Thus, a phrase that, seemingly, is cynical and that locates one in a very small physical area is linked ineluctably (and linguistically) to the entire scope of human experience.

It is also by keeping in mind this relentless alignment of the individual and the collective other that one can best understand Mpe's representation of place, especially places other than Hillbrow. Of course, in many ways Mpe's novel is a response to the traditional South African novel in which a protagonist moves from the purity and peace of rural life to the corruption, degradation and squalour of the city—that usually destroys him/her morally and/or physically. Written into the novel is a seemingly overt case of exactly this, namely the story of Piet. The aspects of Piet's story known to most is that he was a decent man from Tiragalong who was stabbed to death in Alexandria, apparently for no reason. Thus, in Heaven Refentše's mother is quick to tell Lerato of her father 'And how the monstrous city swallowed him' (Mpe 2001:70). It is only later that the true story is revealed. It is made clear that an unscrupulous bone thrower from the village had falsely made Molori, Piet's cousin, believe that Piet, because of jealousy, bewitched Molori's mother causing her to be seriously ill. This deception led Molori to hire two professional killers. Piet's story is thus not an example of the corruption and violence of the city, but rather an example of Tiragalong's corruption. Thus, claims Blair (2002:166),

part of Mpe's purpose is to subvert the traditional dichotomy of

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<sup>2</sup> Goodman's essay does actually focus on *Welcome to Our Hillbrow's* relation to Bakhtin's work (most notably the idea of the text as 'carnavalesque' and an example of a 'parodic-travestying' novel) but it does not really raise issues relevant to my essay.

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corrupting city and nurturing village that has had such a powerful claim on the imaginations of South African creative writers.

I would go further and argue that this 'Jim comes to Jo'burg motif' (Blair 2002:166) is so prevalent that it is probably expected by most readers—especially when they are faced with a novel about the 'notorious Hillbrow'. Thus, Mpe's self-conscious deconstruction of that narrative is not only a response to its persistence in South African fiction, but it is also a way of anticipating the preconceived notions of his readers. In this way Mpe's novel enters into a dialogic relationship with this dominant narrative, incorporating it into his 'total speech plan' (Bakhtin 1986:69). Were Mpe to present his novel in opposition to that dominant narrative he would run the risk of making his narrative simply a *different* eternal, transcendental truth. This would clearly defeat Mpe's purpose since even Heaven—the classical realm of the eternal and transcendental—is a place of configuration and interpretation in the novel

Heaven is the world of our continuing existence, located in the memory and consciousness of those who live with us and after us. It is the archive that those left behind keep visiting and revisiting; digging this out, suppressing or burying that ... (Mpe 2001:124).

Also by virtually ending the novel on this note Mpe challenges the desire to read his text as the final word. Once again the text anticipates its response. This has two obvious results. The first is that Mpe, who wishes to write a story about humanity, is able to intimate that the story of humanity is on-going and can thus be changed. The second is that it challenges the reader ethically since the story, though it ends on the page, continues, so to speak, in the reader's personal life.

It is also important to recognise that since *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* interrogates the traditional representation of the rural idyll it must also interrogate the traditional notions of community encapsulated in that representation. In the traditional African community the individual's sense of self is believed to be the product of that community, and therefore the

individual is in many ways responsible for his/her community<sup>3</sup>. It is of course precisely such an understanding of the self as dependent on the collective other that Bakhtin advocates. As Vološinov (1973:89f) writes: one's sense of self is 'only another social conception of addressee peculiar to himself'. Similarly, Mpe's concern with the responsibility of the individual for the other is evident throughout his novel. Yet in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*

the image of an ideal community ... does not match the lived experiences of the characters in the novel, even in those traditional communities' (e.i.o.) (Clarkson 2004:6).

Indeed, Tiragalong is the site for much of the violence in the novel—the necklacing of Refentše's mother being only the most obvious example. Moreover, much of the violence that occurs in Hillbrow either directly or indirectly originates in Tiragalong—as Refentše himself notes:

hadn't we better also admit that quite a large percentage of our home relatives and friends who get killed in Hillbrow are in fact killed by other relatives and friends (Mpe 2001:18).

The condemnation of the 'loose Hillbrowan sins' (Mpe 2001:46) of the Johannesburg and especially the *Makwerekwere* women are obviously rendered hypocritical since Refilwe is most promiscuous while living in Tiragalong. Moreover, sexual infidelity in general does not, in the novel, lead to the deaths of Refentše, Lerato and Refilwe, as Tiragalong villagers are so quick to assume. Rather it is that those acts are taken out of context and are stripped of their 'humanness' that leads to so much pain and tragedy. Yet it is worth noting that Refentše—arguably the most fair-minded and least prejudicial character in the novel—should fail to hear Lerato's reasons for making love to Sammy. On the one hand, this links Refentše to what is most appalling and cruel about those in Tiragalong. Like most in that village

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<sup>3</sup> Clarkson's essay addresses this issue in far more detail than I am able to and also relates it to the notion of identity in the novel (an aspect that is not particularly relevant to my own focus).

Refentše does not recognise the position of the other in relation to himself, that is, he never realises that Lerato's position is influenced by his and vice versa (Lerato seeks solace from Sammy because of her concern for Refentše). Thus Refentše is, at least partly, to blame for what ensues.

Yet it should also be remembered that Refentše has himself slept with another who sought only solace. Yet the novel does not seem to find either of these acts cruel or malicious. Thus, the alignment of Refentše with what is worst about Tiragalong, whilst not condoning the prejudices and narrow-mindedness of the village, does nevertheless demand that the actions of the villagers be viewed in context. Also it suggests that Tiragalong is not a space *outside* of the 'humanness' that the text so values. Rather Tiragalong is influenced by all other spaces and, similarly, Tiragalong influences all other spaces. It is for this reason that Mpe writes (2001:49):

Tiragalong was in Hillbrow. You always took Tiragalong with you in your consciousness whenever you came to Hillbrow or any other place.

That said, there are at least some forms of constructing difference that Mpe will not abide, most notably the discrimination of foreigners and those suffering from HIV/AIDS. Perhaps it is in this regard that Tiragalong is most dangerous. As the novel makes clear, Tiragalong bases its sense of 'community' on beliefs that are at best destructive, and it is hardly surprising that this too links the village to Hillbrow—a suburb with, seemingly, no shared beliefs and/or history. Therefore, prejudice is ultimately only another thing used by Mpe to suggest the interconnectedness of things and places. Tiragalong, of course, views those from Johannesburg and those from elsewhere in Africa with near equal distrust. It is also worth noting that a third community—one which is arguably the pinnacle of educated society—is also linked through its prejudices, namely England. At Heathrow Airport (where one enters the country and should therefore be welcomed) Refilwe is disappointed by the treatment of Nigerians and Algerians 'at the hands of Customs Officials' (Mpe 2001:100). This leads Refilwe to the conclusion that England has

another word for foreigners that [is] not very different in connotation from *Makwerekwere* or *Mapolontane*. Except that it [is] a much

more widely used term: *Africans* (e.i.o.) (Mpe 2001:102).

Hillbrow too is the site for much mistreatment of foreigners. Note, for example, the way in which Cousin humiliates and extorts the *Makwerekwere* since they have no legal rights. Finally all three communities are blatantly discriminatory against those infected with HIV/AIDS.

The issue of AIDS in the novel is made all the more complex if one reads Mpe's comments about Kgafela oa Magagodi's poem 'varara'. Mpe (2003:193) writes that the poem deals with the fact that people (readers included) do not accept 'responsibility for their own involvement in the spreading of viruses and diseases *as well as stereotypes*' (e.a.). In this way I think Mpe is trying to suggest that AIDS is represented so often in terms of preconceptions and generalisations that the disease itself is difficult to extricate from what people think about it. Thus, it is apt that Mpe (2001:122) refers to 'Linguistic chisels, furthering the process of carving your death that AIDS had begun'. The effects of this passage are many and complex. Most notably, it asks the reader to take responsibility for and dismiss prejudices that are, at least in part, of their own making. Similarly, if, on some level, the 'you' makes the readers put themselves in the position of Refilwe, then it is almost as if their own stereotypes have helped further the 'process of carving [their] death[s]'.

Finally it is necessary to note that Mpe's novel has a strong connection to Bakhtin's ideas on the nature of quasi-direct discourse which generally refers to any report of another's speech in which the utterance simultaneously contains

an expression characterizing [sic] ... the speaker himself—his manner of speech (individual, or typological, or both); his state of mind as expressed not in the content but in the forms of speech ... and so on (Vološinov 1973:130).

Examples of quasi-direct discourse are numerous in the novel, but for the purposes of this essay only one needs be looked at. This example occurs while the villagers of Tiragalong are discussing the validity of Refilwe's version of Lerato's parentage. Mpe (2001:46) reports their discussion in the following way:

Some said it didn't matter, that whether you died because of *Lekwerekwere* or a Johannesburger did not make much difference. Were the two not equally dangerous? Immoral... drug-dealing... murderous... sexually loose ....

The most interesting thing about the cited passage is that these words are not attributed to specific speakers. This leads to the conclusion that these are generally held beliefs and therefore might themselves be mere generalisations. Similarly, the use of ellipsis dots suggests that these are simply snippets of many conversations of this nature. In this way Mpe is able, quite literally, to show that such assumptions are made without context, that is, they are generated in the absolute absence of the very situations and people they purport to describe.

### **Self-reflexivity, Response and Responsibility**

It should by now be clear that Mpe's novel absolutely centres itself on the responses of its readers. It seems that this is so much the case that the issue of response becomes central to those readers too. It is to this aspect of the novel that I now turn my attention.

Firstly it is worth noting that the actual plot of the novel is marked by encounter after encounter in which a character either makes some form of request/invitation or conversely responds to such a request/invitation. For instance, Refilwe invites Refentše to supper at her flat. This, in turn, mirrors an earlier episode in which Bohlale asks Refentše to come to her place, as she is distressed. Notably, Bohlale and Refentše's affair is also described using the language of request and response: Refentše's 'dilating eyes' send out 'an innocent message' to which 'Bohlale's heart [is] receptive' (Mpe 2001:37). Moreover, Lerato's affair with Sammy could be construed as a response to Refentše's sudden aloofness. When Lerato pleads with Refentše to tell her what is wrong his response of 'Nothing' is 'not ... a satisfactory answer'. If Refentše's answer is considered a non-response then this scene could be interpreted as a subtle warning to the reader concerning his/her response. Indeed, Mpe (2001:65) certainly intimates, in a passage dealing with crime in Hillbrow, that those who refuse to help, that is to respond, are in some sense complicit in those egregious acts:

there were many such vulnerable people in Hillbrow, where human cries for help often went *unanswered*, the multitudes passing by as if oblivious to what was happening ... (e.a.).

In fact the matter of responsibility becomes even more urgent as the novel progresses and the welcome of the title is extended to include an ever-growing community. At various points, the novel welcomes 'you' to 'Our All' (Mpe 2001:104), to 'Our Heaven' (Mpe 2001:124) and to the 'world of Our Humanity' (Mpe 2001:113). Thus, argues Clarkson (2004:13), 'a refusal to be welcomed to our Hillbrow becomes difficult to extricate from a refusal to be welcomed to the "World of Our Humanity" to "Our All"'. Once again, the idea that Mpe is anticipating the responses of his readers is quite obvious. Like the characters in the novel (such as Refilwe who overcomes her xenophobia and Refentše who wants to be a part of the Hillbrow community), Mpe assumes that the readers' desire to be included will overcome their early desire to be distanced. In this sense 'you' now hails each and every person, simultaneously in his/her singularity. Therefore, the use of second-person narration '*hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects*' (Althusser 1970:173). According to Louis Althusser (1970:174) the individual is transformed into a subject the moment he/she recognises 'that the hail "really" [is] addressed to him, and that it [is] *really him* who [is] hailed (and not someone else)' (e.i.o.). More importantly, Althusser (1970:178f) is quick to note that the process of interpellation obligates one to act in a way deemed responsible by the 'Unique and central Other Subject in whose name the ... ideology interpellates all individuals as subjects'—in this case *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* could rightly be construed as the 'Subject'. Thus, argues Althusser (1970:182), the ambiguity of subjecthood (both its ideological purpose and its semantic meanings) is such that 'the individual *is interpellated as a (free) subject... in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection*, i.e. in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection' (e.i.o.). Thus Althusser rightly claims that we as individuals subscribe to an ideology and act accordingly because this ideology is already implied by the hail. Similarly the use of 'you' in the novel has from its first use to its last already implied that the reader should act responsibly.

It is for this reason worth considering the effects of the many self-

reflexive remarks in the novel. Carrol Clarkson (2004:11) writes the following:

Mpe's provocative use of 'you' destabilises a distinction that Roman Jakobson makes, a distinction between the 'narrated event'—the story being told—and the 'speech event', that is to say, the situation of address in which the story is told.

It seems that in a similar way by making the act of storytelling *a part* of the 'narrated event', Mpe has closed off the distance between the reader of the novel and the characters in the novel.

To further develop this notion of responsibility it is necessary to firstly note the use of self-reflexivity in the novel. Examples of such self-reflexivity are too numerous to be all mentioned, but here are some of the most striking examples within the context of this essay: Refentše, while in Heaven, watches movies about the lives of Piet and Refilwe (notably despite the fact that movies are considered 'fictions', they depict Piet and Refilwe's *real* lives, more so than do the stories those in Tiragalong have told); Refilwe tells an erroneous story regarding Lerato's part in Refentše's death; and perhaps most interestingly, Refentše is himself a writer who has written a short story about Hillbrow.

It is worth noting that Refentše's short story leads to the conflation of 'fictional characters' and 'non-fictional characters'<sup>4</sup>. The character in the story, a woman from Tiragalong (who is herself a writer), contracts AIDS and is ostracised by the community. In this way her story strongly resembles that of Refilwe's. Yet there is an even more intriguing parallel created by the story. Refentše begins writing his story because he is disturbed by the 'scarcity of written Hillbrow fictions in ... all eleven official South African languages' (Mpe 2001:29). Notably, Refentše therefore thinks of his writing as 'a mission in all this omission—a mission to explore Hillbrow in writing' (Mpe 2001:30). Of course, it seems right to assume that this 'mission' is Mpe's also (in this sense the story is dialogic as it speaks for both Refentše

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<sup>4</sup> For the time being it is still necessary to use terms such as 'fictional' and 'non-fictional' but it should be understood that it is precisely such distinctions that Mpe finds wanting.

and Mpe). Obviously such remarks in the novel lead one to the realisation that Mpe's work is itself a response; it is not what Bakhtin terms 'the first word'. Further still, Mpe's ethical mission—to represent Hillbrow in fiction—is a response not even to stereotypical literary representations of Hillbrow, but to the startling scarcity of any works on the subject. Mpe, throughout his novel, attempts to show that Hillbrow's colourful history and status as a 'changing society' makes it ideal for writers. Considered in this light, the scarcity of fiction dealing with a suburb that *demand*s precisely such representations could be construed as a non-response to the challenges posed by this suburb. Yet if Mpe is able to respond to this 'absence' then surely even these non-responses are a response. As Jacques Derrida (1995:17) puts it: 'Clearly it will always be possible to say, and it will always be true, that nonresponse [sic] is a response'.

Yet the question that still remains is: What specific challenges does Hillbrow present and, more precisely, what does Mpe respond to? Obviously there are those this essay has already tackled, namely stereotypes, AIDS, crime etc., but there are still others that should at this point be discussed. The first relates to an observation made by Refentše:

there are few Hillbrowans, if you think about it, who were not originally wanderers from Tiragalong and other rural villages, who have come here, as we have, in search of education and work (Mpe 2001:18).

Similarly, it is worth noting that most who live in Hillbrow are simply tenants since those 'who can afford [to buy] would mostly hesitate anyway, given that they are unlikely to view buying as an investment' (Mpe 2003:190). Finally, the actual geographic area defined as Hillbrow is disputed. Thus, Mpe has chosen to write a novel about an area that is geographically questioned, not owned by its own inhabitants and is populated mostly by people who come originally from elsewhere. Obviously this relates symbolically to the crucial idea that our supposed boundaries—of race, origin, and class etc.—should hold little sway when what is common is recognised. More importantly though, it also seems that these challenges faced by Mpe make *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* a distinctly open text, that is, since Hillbrow—the subject of the novel—is so indeterminate (in its

boundaries) it is only right that the novel itself should be too. The novel thus enters into the 'complexly organized chain of other utterances'. That is, though clearly the novel begins and ends, one might say that the story does not. The story becomes part of the consciousness of its readers and thus has a profound effect on their thinking and expression.

One might therefore argue that the novel employs, at times, a form of stream-of-consciousness narration precisely because it must show that other utterances are at play within it. For example, Mpe (2001:61), at one point, writes the following

And so when you finally come to this part of your journey to embracing suicide the spinning of cars the prostitution drug use and misuse the grime and crime... flowing into each other in your consciousness ....

Yet, intriguingly stream-of-consciousness narration as well as the use of self-reflexive remarks are both techniques most commonly associated with modernism. Modernism, in turn, is often associated on a theoretical level with Formalism. Notably, Viktor Shklovsky (1989:19), a leading Russian Formalist, writes the following in his seminal essay, 'Art as Technique': 'An image is not a permanent referent for those mutable complexities of life which are revealed through it; its purpose is not to make us *perceive meaning*, but to create a special perception of the object (e.a.). It is also worth keeping in mind that Shklovsky, later in the same essay, elaborates on how euphemism can be used for this purpose, that is, to 'defamiliarize'. Similarly Ann Jefferson (1982:32) argues that according to Formalists 'self-conscious comments made by the author ... [point] out the differences between *fabula* [the content] and *syuhet* [the form]'<sup>5</sup>. It is therefore the nature of Formalism to distinguish between form and content, and also between art and life. The difficulty of Mpe's novel is that it uses these modernist techniques, but *crucially* it does not in the process render itself a purely aesthetic object, that is, a novel unable to depict, connect to and therefore initiate change in the world beyond its borders. In point of fact,

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<sup>5</sup> Though it is beyond the scope of this essay it is worth noting that Bakhtin opposed the distinction of *fabula* and *syuhet* made by the Formalists.

Mpe's novel seeks to disrupt the tendency in modern art to create such boundaries in the first place.

In this regard it is worth considering Mpe's own comments about techniques such as euphemism. Once again the passage has to do with Refentše's short story. The protagonist of the story, like Refentše and Mpe, is disappointed to find that even in the new South Africa 'euphemism is believed to equal good morals' and thus to 'too realistically call things by their proper name' is to be an 'immoral and unsuitable writer' (Mpe 2001:57). It is, in my opinion, through such self-conscious remarks that Mpe is able to overcome the dangers of euphemism and other modernist techniques. This is because he constantly uses these techniques to invoke the reader; to place the reader in the novel and, so to speak, place the novel in the reader. In this sense the novel allows the readers 'to relate to themselves as subjects of aesthetic experience', not for purely aesthetic reasons (as Formalists might suggest), but so that the work of art can become what Ian Hunter (1990:351) terms 'a device in the practice of self-problematization [sic]' for the readers. Indeed, when considered in this way the text cannot be separated

from the sphere of *our* real existence. To the contrary, it means that ... the aesthetic [is] a distinctive way of actually conducting one's life—as a self-supporting ensemble of techniques and practices for problematizing [sic] conduct and events (e.a.) (Hunter 1990:348).

It is, not coincidentally, worth noting that Bakhtin too writes of a fluid boundary between the text and life. As Michael Holquist (2002:111) notes:

Both art and lived experiences are aspects of the same phenomenon, the heteroglossia of words, values, and actions whose interaction makes dialogue the fundamental category of dialogism.

Thus, Mpe (2001:59) is right, the 'worlds of fiction ... are never quite what we label them'.

As the above-mentioned references to 'self-problematizing' suggest, the final concern of this essay will be the link between response and responsibility in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*. Firstly, on a semantic level the

two words are very similar, so much so that, according to the Oxford English Dictionary (1963), one of the definitions of 'responsible' is 'Correspondent or answering to something' (e.i.o.). Furthermore, it has already been intimated that the novel does not allow the reader the possibility of a non-response (since that too would constitute a response). Two questions then arise: 1) is the novel not in this sense demanding one specific type of response? and 2) does this not go against the spirit of the reader-text relationship (one which includes you in its community and asks that people be treated humanely and as individuals)? In short, is the novel's request not irresponsible? In this regard it is worth noting Jacques Derrida's (1995:7) comments about the nature of the invitation: 'A gesture "of friendship" or "of politeness" would be neither friendly nor polite if it were purely to obey a ritual rule'. Thus, claims Derrida (1995:8)

the 'ought'... of friendship, like that of politeness, *must not be on the order of duty*. It must not even take the form of a rule, and certainly not a ritual rule. As soon as it yields to the necessity of applying the generality of a prescription to a single case, the gesture of friendship or of politeness would itself be destroyed (e.i.o.).

Therefore, the complexity of an invitation is that it should 'never imply: you are obliged to come, you have to come, it is necessary', yet paradoxically it should also

never imply: you are free not to come and if you don't come, never mind, it doesn't matter. Without the pressure of some desire—which at once says 'come' and leaves, nevertheless, the other his absolute freedom—the invitation immediately withdraws and becomes *unwelcoming* (e.a.) (Derrida 1995:14).

There are several ways in which the novel, either implicitly or explicitly, is able to negate its invitation being construed as a 'ritual rule'. Firstly, it seems logical that the very openness of the text would render any request/invitation it makes similarly open, especially since the request/invitation is precisely the thing that makes this text so open. Also, since the novel constantly focuses on contextualising even the most cruel of acts (for example the crime in Hillbrow) it seems likely that this novel would

'forgive' its readers if they did not respond as requested. Similarly, the emphasis on the context of any given action must surely, to some extent, nullify the possibility that the novel's request will become 'the generality of a prescription to a single case'. Also if the phrase 'Welcome to Our Hillbrow' both distances and invokes the reader, is this not an almost perfect example of an invitation that 'at once says "come" and leaves, nevertheless, the other his absolute freedom'? Finally, I would argue that even though the novel consistently anticipates and thus problematises certain responses, it does ultimately suggest that all responses, like all utterances, are connected in an intricate, complex pattern. Thus, even as the reader responds in one particular way (in a way deemed responsible, irresponsible etc.) all other possible responses are necessarily intimated. In *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* it is only possible for the reader to respond responsibly because he/she has already read, in the text, the other possible responses<sup>6</sup>.

Finally it is this very condition in which the other must be taken into account that is at the heart of Mpe's notion of responsibility. Once again Derrida (1995:10f) is interesting:

From this point of view responsibility would be *problematic* to the further [*supplémentaire*] extent that it could sometimes, perhaps even always, be what one takes, not for oneself, *in one's own name* and *before the other* (the most classically metaphysical definition of responsibility) but what one must take for another, in his place, in the name of the other (e.i.o.).

It is a responsibility that Mpe has taken on since by anticipating the other's response he speaks in the name of the other. Far more importantly, it is a responsibility that the reader is also asked to take on. Increasingly as the reader is included in an ever-growing community, he/she is obliged to speak in the name of that community. No longer can he/she speak only for him/herself since, as the novel proves, the self too is marked by that community. Refentše, who feels so absolutely isolated that he chooses suicide, is not simply a warning to the readers against forgetting one's

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<sup>6</sup> Derrida is thus doubly appropriate since the notion that the possibility of failure enables an appropriate response is distinctly deconstructive.

implicit connection to others. Rather, he is also the *embodiment of that connection*. The reader is responsible, in many ways, for Refentše's death (this much should by now be clear). More importantly, the reader is also responsible, since Refentše's Heaven is dependent on how he is remembered and accounted for, for Refentše's voice after death. Perhaps then, it might yet be possible that Refentše need not altogether die, since he should still live on within us. At one point after Refilwe has been diagnosed with AIDS she notes that 'These other voices within her consciousness told her that there were those who loved her still. For them, she would try to live ...' (Mpe 2001:116). Surely, if love is the connection between one and another, then this is the responsibility of the reader too. Also, the reference to 'voices' is an unequivocal signal to the reader that this novel is dialogic, that is, that it speaks to and for many. Further still, it is right that a character in a novel should express ideas that belong, in various guises, to Mikhail Bakhtin, Phaswane Mpe, Refentše and the readers. As Refilwe herself understands, her consciousness, and therefore her voice are only ever in existence at the convergence of all these other voices. Thus she and by association the reader is rendered responsible for the other as much as she is responsible for herself.

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Postgraduate Student  
English Department  
University of Johannesburg

# Language Play and Humanism in Dambudzo Marechera's *The Black Insider*

Olivia Vermaak

## Introduction

Language is like water. You can drink it. You can swim in it. You can drown in it. You can wear a snorkel in it. You can flow to the sea in it. You can evaporate and become invisible with it .... Some take it neat from rivers and wells. Some have it chemically treated and reservoired. Others drink nothing but beer and Bloody Marys and wine but this too is a way of taking your water. The way you take your water is supposed to say a lot about you. It is supposed to reflect your history, your culture, your breeding, etc. It is supposed to show the extent to which you and your nation have developed or degenerated. The word 'primitive' is applied to all those who take their alphabet neat from rivers, sewers, and natural scenery—sometimes this may be described as the romantic imagination. The height of sophistication is actually to channel your water through a system of pipes right into your very own lavatory where you shake the hand of a machine and your shit and filthy manners disappear in a roaring of water. Being water you can spread diseases like bilharzia and thought. Thought is more fatal than bilharzia. And if you want to write a book you cannot think unless your thoughts are contagious (Marechera 1990:34)<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> All subsequent page references will be to the 1990 Baobab publication of the novel.

The above passage from *The Black Insider* seems to me a poignant way to introduce a study of a novel in which the central argument is that language is central to any process of subject fashioning.

In *The Black Insider*, the narrator/protagonist (hereafter, 'Marechera', as this is the name/word by which he introduces himself later) presents us with a Faculty of Arts under siege from what appears to be a guerrilla war of independence in the Rhodesia of Ian Smith. He has taken refuge in one of the Faculty offices. All we know about the fighting is that it

had been going on for a long time. In fact no one (I mean 'myself') could remember when the thing had begun, how it had begun, why it had begun at all, and finally who was supposed to be on whose side. All I know is that at one stage it was us blacks against whites. But somehow or other things had suddenly become complicated and it was no longer a black against white chess game. It was more like a kaleidoscope in which every little chink of colour in the shaken picture was fighting every other little chink. News agencies could no longer keep track of the alliances and counter-alliances, the neutrals and the non-aligned, the ferocious and the hyperferal, etc. (Marechera 1990:24).

We also begin to notice that the physical siege outside prompts another kind of siege in 'Marechera's' psyche, which forces him to reconsider the vexed question of the condition of humanity. What intensifies the interplay between the siege outside and the one in the psyche, is that both appear to have been abstracted from scripts, a mock American Western film script in the case of the former and, in the case of the latter, a literary-philosophical treatise, so that the boundary between what is taking place outside and what is taking place inside his mind becomes blurred. Indeed, as he observes, the 'faculty is the last desperate ditch of a state of mind bred in the tension of war' (Marechera 1990:31). This blurring, it would seem, is not fortuitous, but carefully staged by 'Marechera' in order for him to take full critical advantage of the distance allowed him by his 'entrapment', and the intellectual opportunity that such a distance promises. In any case, in his discussion with one of the interlocutors, an insider in the Faculty, the African Schweik, on the subject of reality and illusion, it turns out that the

term insider, with which Schweik had addressed him earlier, does not attract an opposite, that is, outsider. Rather, it relies on the system of differences that he invokes when he asks:

What did you mean by 'insider'?

His fingers drummed impatiently on the arm of the chair. He muttered:

'Does it matter? Inside-out is outside-in, but there's always bleeding. And hidden persuaders. Do you know how to make a man who walks away from his shadow? It is an illusion based on chemical preparation. A screen having the appearance of an ordinary white blind is shown. The performer stands behind this screen while the stage or room lights are turned off; a strong light behind him causes his shadow to appear on the screen; while he moves freely about, the shadow moves accordingly. No matter what position he takes, the shadow still appears on the screen; if he walks away from the screen, the shadow remains fixed ...' (Marechera 1990:75).

He proceeds to describe the technique, all the time keeping stage and off-stage indeterminable in terms of reality and illusion, even while it seems that the process fosters such a dichotomy.

The setting, in which 'Marechera' introduces us to the Faculty, is his room, on one of the walls of which is painted a mural depicting a jungle setting. Aside from the fact that this prepares us for the constant shifts in setting, it again foregrounds the impossibility of keeping the inside and the outside separate, and further reinforces the status of the novel as a philosophical treatise on issues ranging in nature and significance, from nation-making, through the human condition to the position of the intellectual in a context that does not seem to afford space for the intellectual. In the absence of that possibility, 'Marechera' proceeds to project an alternative via a series of dialogues with imaginary philosophical figures, Cicero and Otolith, and literary figures, from the classicists (Chaucer) through the romantics (Shelley) to the realists (Achebe) and the modernists (Conrad) in the form of a European and African inter-text. These are all representations of the shards constituting his fractured psyche. What he introduces to these philosophies and literatures, however, is a

carnivalistic code that borders on the fantastical, reminiscent of the notion of carnival that Mikhail Bakhtin identifies with the historical carnivals of the Middle Ages. The notion of carnival stems from the historical peasant carnivals that played a vital role in the lives of the ordinary people, who partook in the celebration of the carnival, in the process inhabiting two spheres in one carnival space, made up of, on the one hand, elevated religious dogmas of the Church, the trenchant hierarchical institutions, and the hardships of the consequent feudal labour, and, on the other, 'unrefined' peasant life.

In Bakhtin's terms, carnival is laughter, song, ritual celebration and via the latter, a way of legitimately parodying the institutions of authority, or, in his term, the Official. It is of a piece with Roland Barthes' (1991:44) *le sens obtuse* (the third meaning), which

belongs to the family of puns, jokes, useless exertions; indifferent to moral or aesthetic categories (the trivial, the futile, the artificial, the parodic), it sides with the carnival aspect of things.

In this sense, carnival may appear to mimic and, indeed, to re-stage the peasants' conformity, when, in fact, what it re-stages is a parody of the conformism of daily life.

Let us consider the description of his setting, in particular the mural on one of the walls in the opening passage, and with that the confluence of the modern and the Stone ages where progression and regression, primitiveness and sophistication, are rendered implicit in each other:

A fire-engine red chair had planted its four legs by the door. The pile of sex magazines resting on it ranged from *Playboy* to *Alpha*; a dairy-maid doll sat very primly on top of them. The naked light bulb still shone down upon the jungle mural which covered the far wall: A naked black woman was being pursued by a blood-red giant cat which was looking back over its shoulder at a brawny black archer who was aiming at it with an invisible bow and arrow. In the top center of the mural a myopic falcon held in its talons a Stone Age handaxe; its eye pierced towards the archer. Directly beneath it and slightly behind the cat a frozen zebra was simultaneously rubbing its

buttocks on a baobab and pawing the ground with its nose and hooves (Marechera 1990:23).

If we consider that outside his space there is what appears to be a war of independence, his description of his space is particularly odd, especially his drawing of the reader's attention to the pile of sex magazines on the *fire-engine red* chair with a dairy-maid doll sitting primly on top of them, and, later, his mentioning of the same sex magazines when he has to cover them with his coat so that Helen, one of the insiders of the Faculty who asks to move in with him, does not see them. Again, if we consider the violent pursuit and the disinterestedness of the zebra, 'simultaneously rubbing its buttocks on a baobab', we begin to see a connection between the war outside and the self-indulgence that the sex magazines and the zebra presuppose. Is it not possible, then, that he is asking the reader to view the war outside as another self-indulgent act? Considering that the war taking place outside is a nationalist war, and that he expresses his disillusionment with the ideals of nationalism:

It's a pity nation-making moves only through a single groove like a one-track brain that is obsessed with the one thing. It is not enough to be in power but to be power itself and there is no such thing except in the minds of people with religious notions. We are a devastated garden in a time of drought in which only those weeds grow which are lean and hungry, like Cassius. The multitudes are thick with grey hairs. Their empty bellies propel them to the immediate source (Marechera 1990:37),

it should not surprise us, it seems to me, that the war outside should be seen in the terms of the self-indulgence prefigured inside his space. Indeed, the mock Shakespearean drama that depicts post-independence leaders in trivial banter about their own sense of self-importance bolsters his case on the futility of independence as liberation:

Marota: What about the attack on Zambia? He said we all agreed on it. That cuts us off from whatever support Africa ever gave us.

Bishop: I do not need that kind of support.

Marota: But the masses -

Bishop: I am the masses ... Have I not engineered the first black and white government without a Congo or an Angola? What are you worrying about? I am black and you are black but do I know whether your soul is with the devil or with God? These who strike at the heart of God's country have renounced religion. They are communists. Devils. That is why I agreed to let our troops attack the Zambian bases. (Music)

Marota: You carry your God too high above the trees. The people cannot see him. All they see is the smoke and shrapnel of their own kind being killed at your orders.

Bishop: I am the people. And I have the best advisers; that professor who wrote *On Trial For My Country*. Right now I can see myself this day centuries to come being dragged into the dock on trial for God's own country.... (Marechera 1990:38f).

The Bishop, a reference to Bishop Muzorewa, who contested power with Canaan Banana, who went on to become the first Prime Minister of post-independence Zimbabwe, and the professor, Stanlake Samkange, the author of *On Trial For My Country*, are simultaneously a reference to the all too familiar story of post-independence African states, in which intellectuals were compromised by the promise of a benevolent and classless nationalism. Nonetheless, I want to recall the point I made above regarding the form in which the dialogue is presented, for it is here that 'Marechera' makes an ironic intervention, by posing another question that is implicit in the stage directions: the Bishop's violent intentions are spoken to the accompaniment of 'Music, Enter (Ian) Smith and his Train, Exeunt Smith and Bishop and the Train, Exit Citizen' (Marechera 1990:39f). It is not so much the deconstructive mock Shakespearean framework in which the political drama of post-independence is inserted that marks the force of this ironic intervention, as the de-naturalization, as it were, the ritualisation of official political ceremony. It is thus my contention that, given the prominence in the novel of the figures of pun, irony, buffoonery, mock ritualism, and such-like figures via which the ceremonial, the official and/or the authoritarian is read, a more pointed engagement with some of the ideas proffered by Bakhtin on language and authority is salutary. Indeed, Bakhtin reminds us that, with the

advent of modernity, the ancient carnivals migrated into literature, most notably, the novel. Morris (1994:107) observes as much when he asserts that, carnival in literature

prove[s] remarkably productive as a means for capturing in art the developing relationships under Capitalism, at a time when previous forms of life, moral principles and beliefs were being turned into 'rotten cords' and the previously concealed ambivalent, and unfinalized nature of man and human thought was being nakedly exposed.

Puns, ironies, satires and all modalities of meaning that foreground contradiction, indeterminacy and language play are, in *The Black Insider*, part of the 'novel resting uneasily under every human skull', which, unfortunately, is often reduced, by those 'who think that objectivity is possible where such things as language rule' (Marechera 1990:91). However, as 'Marechera' (1990:91) tells us, even though

Roland Barthes has tried to blow up that balloon, and quite successfully too... they have, of course, an in-built eject-mechanism and he will probably find himself falling into oblivion without a parachute.

However, it is not so much that 'Marechera' wants to play down Barthes' importance, as to highlight the possible objectification or reification of his linguistic terms. Barthes postulates the existence of three types of images or textual spaces. Firstly, we have the denotative, which is strictly dependent on linguistic codification and linguistic interpretation. Secondly, there is the connotative, which is dependent upon that which is culturally and sociologically construed and is reliant upon its associated symbolism. In between these two systems, is what he calls *le sense obtuse*. In *The Black Insider*, it seems to me, this third meaning is brought about by the play on the word 'black', both in the title of the novel and in its representation of 'Marechera', a word that simultaneously identifies the narrator/protagonist as the black insider among other insiders, and as a sort of blind (or dark) spot inside—or at the core of—the light that the other insiders hope to shed

on the subjects of their discussions. In this connection, the description of the Faculty as

small when seen from the outside; but [from the inside] stupendously labyrinthine with its infinite ramifications of little nooks of rooms, some of which are bricked up to isolate forever the rotting corpses within (Marechera 1990:25),

becomes, perforce, the description of the encircling 'darkness' that becomes the novel's own narrative abyss. If the other insiders are to be regarded as hosts to a disobliging 'black insider', then, as he tells us, 'it is not to the advantage of a parasite to cause serious harm to its host, as thus it is likely to suffer itself' (Marechera 1990:33). Thus, the staging of the debate in *The Black Insider* tracks the contours of the Faculty itself, in the sense that, like the Faculty, nothing can be presumed from the pseudo-transcendentalism of Cicero, the visionary poeticism of the African Schweik, the grim realism of Liz, the corrosive cynicism of Otolith and the existentialism of Helen.

### **'Waiting on the end of the world'? Existentialism, Nihilism and *The Black Insider***

There is a bomb on our roof. It dropped there on Sunday night. When I climbed on to the roof to look at it I could hear a faint humming sound purring inside it. The planes came over early in the evening .... I've never lived under the shadow of a bomb before (Marechera 1990:44).

*The Black Insider* is a novel that is saturated with apocalyptic visions and caricatured observations of the general state of the human condition living under the threat of a 'bomb'. The 'bomb' on the roof of the Faculty is at once the vanishing point of a certain paradigm, the touchstone for the 'predestined horror' that Otolith believes the condition of humanity to be, and the unlikely source of a community caught in an existential situation; as 'Marechera' tells us, which 'had Helen decide to 'move in with me' (Marechera 1990:54).

The dialogues between the insiders bear testimony to the complex labour of self-reflection by their very inter-disciplinarity, and allow for the strategic interventions by 'Marechera', whose 'role' in the novel is to test the intellectual possibilities that such a collision promises. It is also in these voices that the opportunity presents itself for him to take advantage of another collision, so to speak, between the war as event and as cause for sustained reflection, or, in his words, between the 'war [that is] no longer a mere fact of life... but life itself', and the implications of this for 'the bleak theatre of the (Faculty) room where every little action—because performed in isolation and solitary confinement—gleamed with self-consciousness' (Marechera 1990:26). *The Black Insider* is, thus, an existential novel. Yet, unlike the existentialism of Helen who, 'Marechera' tells us, on seeing on his television set a picture of 'a black military personage supervising the extermination of his enemies ... yawned [and said] It was the same old story. If hawks have always had the same character, why should you suppose that men have changed theirs?' (Marechera 1990:27), *The Black Insider* is a novel that wills the human, albeit in the moment of its symbolic decay. If, for the novel, the 'people in the house are all refugees in one way or another, exiles from the war out there ... pilgrims at the shrine of the plague', and if the 'place stinks of psychological wounds', then the point he makes, that this gives the place 'a human fragrance' (Marechera 1990:25), must, at the very least, reinforce the optimism of the novel's will to track, rather than to dismiss, the symbolic putrefaction of which it speaks. It is in this sense that Antonio Gramsci's observation that nihilism and/or its analogies collapse too uncritically the optimism of the will and the pessimism of the intellect, is illustrated.

However, Helen, more than any of the other insiders, is 'Marechera's' Muse. She may lean dangerously towards nihilism but, of much significance, is how she looks into the abyss and suspends her descent into it, that prevents him, and, indeed, the novel, of which he is both agent and *provocateur*, from falling into it. What is apparent in Helen's existentialism is that it illustrates the proximity of human thought—the testament of human solitude—to the broad sense of violence, the supervision of death as a guarantee for one's life. Her smiling of 'what she thought was a Mona Lisa smile', soon after making her point about the inherent violence of human existence, recalls, for 'Marechera', 'the Dark-Ages-painting by that

Italian barbarian' (Marechera 1990:27). When placed in the broad context of *The Black Insider*, this reference to the Mona Lisa is significant, particularly when considering that the

deeply introverted and obsessional nature of Leonardo's art is fully revealed in the Mona Lisa. He kept this picture by him until his death and soon became the object of a far greater personal concern, a kind of testament in paint (Jacobs 1980:75).

Similarly, in her eventual 'death' in the novel, Helen becomes his testament to another side of life, and her voice imparts to the novel as a whole, like the Mona Lisa, a 'sense of mystery from which the work emanates' (Jacobs 1980:75). Thus, the correlation drawn in the novel between 'Marechera' and Da Vinci, as creators of mystery, testifies to his idea of the novel as a 'big toe with little toes ranged down one of its sides' (Marechera 1990:24), as the Mona Lisa, 'an almost androgynous human being correspond[ing] to a purely personal ideal', was for Da Vinci (Jacobs 1980:76). The interplay between personal and public discourse is tangible throughout *The Black Insider*, which is, to be sure, the interplay between 'Marechera' the word/name by which the narrator/protagonist introduces himself to Liz, and Marechera the protagonist of another, but not different, autobiographical text. Thus, we find, interspersed with the forced sedentary existence of the insider, the worldly migrant from whom the former draws its textual sustenance.

### ***The Black Insider*, Dialogism and the Orders of Discourse**

M.H. Abrams (1999:62) conceives of Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of dialogue, and of the dialogic, in the following terms:

To Bakhtin a literary work is not (as in various *poststructural* theories) a text whose meanings are produced by the play of impersonal linguistic or economic or cultural forces, but a site for the dialogic interaction of multiple voices, or modes of discourse, each of which is not merely a verbal but a social phenomenon, and as such is a product of manifold determinants that are specific to a class, social group, and speech community.

Barring the somewhat inflexible identification of the speech act with the grand categories of class, social group and speech community, which remains Bakhtin's cumbersome traditional Marxist inheritance, Bakhtin's view of the social is usefully tempered with the irreducible 'dialogic interaction of multiple voices' (Abrams 1999:62). It is with this last point in mind, that I now turn to the epistemological thresholds on which the insiders present their cases, and the subtle pointers that the narrative interjections introduce in-between speech acts to contend, cast doubt, and/or to relocate the discussion to other textual and social landscapes to which the dialogues must 'respond'.

We enter the active space of 'Marechera' through Helen's visit, and, with this, the novel shifts from the mere description of its setting to an analysis of the co-implication of solitude—being for oneself—and community, or being for oneself in the presence of others. This is evident in the realisation that 'having people around me made me feel at ease. There are possibilities, choices, alternatives only when one is with others' (Marechera 1990:26). Yet, Helen 'can't read or write' (Marechera 1990:26), which accentuates, for 'Marechera', the existential dilemma, which is that to be with others is, ostensibly, to be alone. As such, it is hardly surprising that in the presence of Helen, he conceives of his loneliness with increased intensity: 'But now, utterly alone in action and state of mind, every little thing has its season and every little purpose has its own downright good time' (Marechera 1990:26).

It is important not to lose sight of the paradox implied above with regard to such terms as self/other, solitude/company, individual/community, and such-like relations, for it is in the breaking down of the binary structure that they inform—Helen's presence-absence—that 'Marechera' proffers his thesis that,

what we see, being our sight, has no objectivity and cannot be of itself but there it is, aghast at the end of sense where our perception seeks to fuse with the concrete that is always *just* out of grasp [e.a.] (Marechera 1990:32).

He continues in this vein to propose that:

It is not so much what is unimaginable as what we cannot imagine that frames each individual human experience. Words evoke more than that which is there to be evoked. Imagination has the same edge over mere experience. And yet man is rooted only in what is there, beginning with birth and death and the state of his guts. The infinite is best expressed inexpressibly, suggestively, negatively. Human capacity is, in reverse, a definition of the impossible that incredibly surrounds us. We are what we are not, is the paradox of fiction. What is not observed, sharply observes that which is. What is not said, qualifies all that is said. Each circumstance comes into focus when we adjust the lens, making reality a series of parallel foci rather than a sharply outlined human epic whose every detail is simultaneously in focus (Marechera 1990:32).

I have quoted at length 'Marechera's' development of his thesis, for it sets the tone for both *The Black Insider* as a kind of narrative 'strip-tease'—in one of his interventions later in the novel, he observes how 'Homer does ... a strip-tease of the ancient Greeks' (Marechera 1990:82)—and the frame of his subsequent engagement with his interlocutors. It also characterises the modernism with which the novel is encoded, which, on the level of form, extends its particular intervention. Just as there is need to de-automatise the human through language, language itself, and the modes in which its rhetorical dimension has been given more prominence—the epic and the *Bildungsroman*, amongst others—requires critical vigilance; otherwise, as he tells us, it becomes merely 'an attitude' (Marechera 1990:36). Elaborating on the automatism of the human in language, and language in rhetoric, he observes that:

My studies have made me my own jester. I cannot say anything without striking an attitude. I tried to love and found it an attitude deep within myself. I tried to hate and that too I found to be an attitude, nailed firmly down to my gut. Everything is an attitude, a sign. Pity, cruelty, good, evil, they are all attitudes, mere jack-in-the-box that suddenly spring out of me. I woke up one day and looked at the things I had always looked at, things like the sun, the clouds, a street, a dustman, a tree, a toilet roll, a bishop, an overcoat. Each

single thing was suddenly an attitude utterly complete in itself, abstracted in its own language (Marechera 1990:36).

The above bears traces of the material against which Bertolt Brecht developed his concept of alienation, by which he meant, in the case of his practice as a dramatist, a well considered critical distance that a dramatist must foster between the audience and actors and between actors and their roles, as the Formalists before him meant by defamiliarisation—though, of course, with a formal, rather than a social, context in mind.

While his brief meeting with Helen is significant, in the sense in which it provides the initial impetus for his subsequent engagement with the history of ideas, and their implications for his immediate present, it is the 'chance' meeting with the other insiders at Liz's 'tea party'—which is essentially a meeting of disciplines—that inaugurates a debate under a different kind of 'bomb'. If we consider, in light of this last point, his narrative diversion to his years as a student and exile in England, prior to this meeting, and that at some point after he had been 'sent down in disgrace' from Oxford, he found himself spending 'three nights on the roof of the English Faculty library' (Marechera 1990:31), which is the same place that the 'bomb' occupies on the roof of the Faculty of Arts in which they are trapped, then it would perhaps not be farfetched to consider this diversion as signalling a strategic displacement of a bomb that merely mimics the panic of an unexamined existence. In this connection, it should hardly surprise us that Cicero would point this out, during his conversation with 'Marechera':

Is it not strange and uncommon that we can talk like this in the very midst of bombs and bullets and disease? It is not. The imagination reaches only that which is just beyond the grasp of human capability. No More. If our acts were really strange to ourselves and to our imagination then we would indeed understand what insanity is. For we are only a minute fraction of the spectrum of the impossible and the possible. Hence such of *what we know of as real life is limited within the thin thread of colour in which we have positioned ourselves in the spectra of the universe* (e.a.) (Marechera 1990:46f).

Now, the introduction of, and conversation with, Cicero, raises these

questions quite elaborately. Cicero's dress code is a visual template on which the novel grafts a post-Aristotle dramatic thesis, by way of deconstructing the model of 'real life' that Aristotle's actors must imitate:

He actually wears a toga and a bowler hat. He walked into the room like a Royal Shakespearean Company public relations stunt. He, in fact, studied at RADA and did some minor roles in *The Satyricon* and in *The Golden Ass* for an obscure provincial company in the back yard of Scotland...There is in his right eye a dusky Latin glint which is perpetually piercing the marrow of whomever he is talking to (Marechera 1990:45).

Cicero starts his discussion by installing an Aristotelian thesis, that 'real life being the essence of drama ... means every instant of our lives is a complete play in itself' (Marechera 1990:45), which he then proceeds to deconstruct, by rescuing it from its inflexible classicism, and bringing it on par with the idea of infinity that 'Marechera's' strategic interventions propose. In this connection, in Cicero we are not so much in the presence of Aristotle as such, as in the presence of the de-totalisation of his (Aristotle's) grand dramatic scheme, in which drama reproduces the given surfaces of 'life'. Indeed, Cicero is forced through constant interrogation, which includes 'Marechera' shaking his 'head up and down, from side to side' (Marechera 1990:45), in a gesture of assent and dissent, to complicate the exteriorism of Aristotle's thesis, by forcing it to account for the processes that operate under and beyond the surface of 'real life', but which nonetheless constitute its texture. If, as he (Cicero) says, 'Our very bodies are composed of neat cellular dramas whose total tumult is a man in the act of saying "I am ill" or "Good Evening"' (Marechera 1990:47), and if we consider his substitution of the subjective position for Aristotle's authorial one, then the pathos enclosed in Aristotle's 'great tragedy', which is a consequence of an unproblematic passage from art to real life, is undercut. His view that even the 'stones upon which we stand and call planets and mine and grind into settings for our human dramas are themselves always in the act of their own dramas, spinning around the sun and eclipsing and disintegrating into meteorites' (Marechera 1990:48), highlights this will to a more complex relationship between art and life, and warns against the seduction of totality.

Cicero recounts the consequences of this, when he observes that,

While we, immersed in the minutes of our last rehearsals (what we call tradition, civilization) think only of our own lines and footnotes, perhaps the grand drama of all the things we do not take into account is itself approaching a climax whose debris and shrapnel will devastate us (Marechera 1990:45).

While he retains the idea that, even the occluded drama in Aristotle is a grand one in its own right, his insistence on the things that are not taken into account is salutary. In any case, he is inevitably only a voice that must be tested against the scepticism of the novel. Indeed, the novel does this by pitting Cicero against Liz, whose attitude to Cicero, to whose presentation she has been listening, is that of disdain. She introduces herself via her discipline, which is also the position from which she seeks to dismiss what she considers Cicero's obscurantism:

I did not learn linguistics and Old English from gazing at the smoky sky. The kind of reason I know is not learnt from gaping at scenery, neither does it grow on trees. And certainly the kind of feeling one 'absorbs' from the Victoria Falls is not to be encouraged in anybody, let alone a child. I was once nearly eaten alive by a lion in the Serengeti Park. Though I was petrified I remember quite well what I felt looking at those great jaws and I know I did not like it. All this about intense and vivid apprehension of life is pure twaddle. One may as well learn one's alphabet from sewers as from water-colour scenery. It's no use building the creative 'if' into one big system and labelling it the Romantic Image. There are too many loopholes in it. If you absorb too much of the sun you get sunburnt. If you absorb too much water you drown in it. If you absorb too much of the cold you freeze and get chillblains. If you absorb anything you better watch out it doesn't infect you with all sorts of diseases. It's all very well talking about reveries when a snake is crawling up your leg. But go on, Mr. Cicero, I find you very interesting (Marechera 1990:70).

Yet, her introduction by 'Marechera' is significant, not least of

which the significance of the contrast that he draws between her transparency and Cicero's English-upon-Roman-upon-Greek-upon-modern minimalism palimpsest:

For the first time I looked at her, seeing her as she was. A thin face and thin stringy hair both set precariously on an onion-shaped body that rested uneasily on a pair of thin scanty legs. The gold earrings squinted with myopia. But it was her ears which struck me the most about her. They were a shrunken version of the elephant kind, waving slightly with the rise and fall of her carefully modulated voice. And she was pale, paler than the whitest ghost in a girl's romance. Her long, slender fingers were almost transparent. Looking at her thin white face that was set like a skin of water you could've sworn that you could see the fragile skull underneath and even the grey impression of the brain imprinted eerily on the weak-seeming skull (Marechera 1990:48).

And again:

As she sipped her tea I thought for one ghastly moment that I could actually see (as she swallowed it) the tea going down into her in one evergrowing brown stain so pale and pink was her beaux-arts frock (Marechera 1990:48).

Her brief introductory exchange with the narrator/ protagonist who, at this point, and for the first time, introduces himself as 'Marechera', is also interesting in this regard:

'And you, Mr-?

'Marechera', I said.

...

'What do you do?'

'Stories and fictions' I said vaguely.

She looked vaguely at my face with her extended finger.

'Those who do, do; those who can't teach' she said and added wonderingly: 'I've never met any black writers. Are you angry and

polemic or are you grim and nocturnal or are you realistic and quavering or are you indifferent and European? Those are the categories, I think', she said (Marechera 1990:49).

Indeed, the point that the writer Marechera made in an interview with Flora Veit-Wild, returns with a parodic vengeance, that is:

I think I am the *Doppelgänger*, whom, until he appeared, Africa had not yet met. In this sense, I would question anyone who calls me an African writer. Either you are a writer or you are not. If you are a writer for a specific nation or a specific race, then fuck you. For me, the direct international experience of every living entity is an inspiration to write. That is why it seems to me always a waste of time to waste anybody's life in regulations, in ordering them.

Thus, as 'Marechera' watches Liz and Cicero 'on the brink of a conversational wrestling match which I did not think he would win', it is a fitting tribute to Liz that he ['Marechera'] 'sat on a cushion in front of the girl [Helen, who had 'reached out from nowhere and touched his face'] and stirred a cup, wondering at the confusion inside me' (Marechera 1990:49).

I pointed out earlier that, in my view, Helen features in the novel as 'Marechera's' Muse, in the way that her virtually quiet presence, as the Mona Lisa of Leonardo Da Vinci, prompts and defeats the objects of art. She assures him that she 'won't disturb [his] writing at all. I know how not to. And it's important you must go on writing. I will be doing my drawing. I draw quite well but not yet as well as I want to so I have lots there to do', (Marechera 1990:50) which immediately recalls for 'Marechera' his own attempt to write her: 'I remembered what I had written about her in the slick and hypocritically honest way about 'invisible wound bleeding in her mind' to make her like that' (Marechera 1990:50). This idea of art reflecting on art, Helen's art seeking impossible perfection without naming its subject, and 'Marechera's' already foreclosed by its objectification of its subject, forces the latter to review his literary lexicon, particularly where Helen is concerned:

I had never 'understood' women and I am never likely to do. I detest

understanding anyone that way. I cannot even say I know anything about my feelings for particular women. I usually close the subject to myself by saying that I do not want to know... Perhaps I was too early in contact with the bookish nature of it all. Even Jane Austen's notions about it among the landed gentry and middle class were as much a textbook of it as *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*. At the same time there was the Dickensian lorgnette of it; the Lorna Doones and Becky Sharps; and the *Middlemarch* versions and they were all somehow mixed up with the more masculine preoccupations of heroism, manhood, trial by strength which in effect led to ideas about worthiness and unworthiness. And there was the Henry James effect which at once elevated it and curiously enough debased it. It all led back to dissections of art and artistic feeling especially the type in Thomas Mann where disease and corruption or consumption are at the very guts of beauty (Marechera 1990:51).

Yet, 'Marechera' brings no spoils with him from this literary history, which would allow him to redraw the virtual silence that Helen poses. What rescues him is what he borrows, by implication, from Helen herself, her earlier statement that 'I draw quite well but not yet as well as I want to so I have lots there to do' (Marechera 1990:50). The impact of the thrice-repeated 'I watched her go' (Marechera 1990:51), 'Yes, I watched her go with something like self-loathing' (Marechera 1990:52), and 'I watched her go without misgiving' (Marechera 1990:53), is reminiscent of Barthes' idea that art is at its profoundest when it is pensive, when it thinks. I want to extend this point, for it represents the last possibility for a discussion that is less concerned with the coherence of its logic, but, rather, with the possibilities that the very idea of discussion promises. 'Marechera' explores this in the person of a sedentary figure, the African Schweik, who, almost throughout the duration of the discussions, 'looked smilingly at everything that passed' (Marechera 1990:72). In his elaboration of his notion of art, which he bases on the photographs of Sergei Eisenstein, Barthes proposes two types of context in which responses can be made. One is what he calls the *studium*, by which he means the cultural and social expectations from documents that lay claim to the object world and its attendant social and cultural dimensions. The *studium*, according to Barthes, marshals all

available evidence on which it relies for its validation. A war photograph, for example, will draw its boundaries around notions of horror, aggression, suffering, victory, unity, blood, and similar images that can immediately be grafted onto a social landscape without the irony that profound art must generate. The second, he calls the *punctum*, by which he means the unlikely aspect of the image that, in his words, ‘pierces’ one outside of the field of visual expectation and socio-cultural validation. The *punctum* requires no evidence, for it is not the image in its totality but, rather, the glimpse of an unlikely aberration, or of something out of place and out of line with the evidential force of a given image—a missing tooth or feet sticking out of a covered dead body—that is at stake. In this sense, Barthes would look for the fictional in fiction, rather than the documentary force with which expository discourse has been imbued. If ‘Marechera’ brings no spoils from the Victorian literary canon, it is then remarkable that, as the point comes through quite forcefully in the above perusal of the shifts that are not quite shifts in the conception of the subject of art, the limits are already set, so that what promises to be Jane Austen’s departure from the homogeneity of *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*, becomes a textbook—or by the book—form of departure. This form of departure mimics Cicero’s attempt to break the monotony of Liz’s disarming realism through impressionism, an attempt that is already trapped in its impatience to *get to the point*, which, paradoxically, is what Liz wants to achieve from another critical path.

On turning around, he almost collides into Otolith:

He was dressed in black Elizabethan dress, like a single-handed performance of Hamlet on a cramped stage. He was of middle age, coal black, disillusioned, transfigured, damned, and as it seemed prey to his nerves. I was to learn that he was a barrister who had somehow seen an inexplicable light on his way to the courts and had from that time totally changed his life ... He did not so much believe in anything as in the uselessness of human beings in so far as their condition was a kind of predestined horror. For instance, the bomb on our roof did not surprise nor affect him in any sense (Marechera 1990:53).

This ‘collision’, like those with Cicero and Liz, poses another

disciplinary problem, one that recalls post-colonial literary disillusionment, except that *Otolith* is set on a nihilistic course in which horror must be actively sought and rewarded. Described as 'dog-eared', he brings with him the image of an old book which is over-read, over-analysed and over-used, the mental make-up of a cynic. His experience as a barrister, which he recalls to 'Marechera' with the authority of one who, unlike Helen, has not only looked into the abyss, but has found it an appropriate setting for a post-colonial drama of which he sits in judgement, says as much:

'... I once had the honour of meeting one of Zambia's executioners. A white chap. He had retired and returned to pastures green in Rhodesia on a fat pension. He gave a most entertaining grisly picture of the gallows. He had with the patronage of the government there executed some three hundred black condemned men. There were all kinds—murderers, armed robbers, rebels, rapists. Now he is himself tormented by gout and ulcers and worries more about his wine and food than all the ghosts of the men he hanged. What kind of a man becomes an executioner, do you think?'

I frowned trying to think.

'Unimaginative' I replied: 'Without funds. Practical. Totally un sentimental. One who is not his father or his mother unless they too had been in the trade'.

But he shook his head.

It takes an awful lot of humanity to execute another human being. This particular white hangman in the employ of a black government was extremely imaginative, of independent means (at the beginning), crassly romantic, and doted on his mother. In spite of all this he was good at his job and never pretended to hate it. After all, it was well paid (Marechera 1990:56).

Yet, on reflection, it is with this meeting that another, more sustained meeting between the implied 'Marechera' and the historical Marechera begins, and if the Faculty of Arts is a metaphor for a more constrained form of exile, then the collision with *Otolith* is the extension of this metaphor, without the terminal lexicon with which 'Marechera' identifies the exhausting, because circular, dialogues taking place inside the Faculty,

particularly between Cicero and Liz, with both of them defending the internal coherence of their disciplines, impressionism and realism respectively. Consider, for example, the following:

'Nothing exists but as it is perceived', he (Cicero) insisted.

'That's Shelley', Liz said smiling.

'For instance, children do not distinguish what they see and feel from themselves. Their nature is dissolved into the surrounding universe and the universe is absorbed into their being. And they have an unusual intense and vivid apprehension of life. Each is at once the point and the circumference; the point to which all things are referred, and the line in which all things are contained. Love-'

'But familiarity shields us from such tedious gazing, don't you think?' Liz asked unperturbed. 'All this unfathomable astonishment would put quite a strain on our eyes I should think. If life was really like that and all feeling and reason was simply the combined result of a multitude of impressions planted by reiteration, then we may as well pack up and close down our schools and universities', she said.

'They are closed', he said grimly.

'That's just this funny war' (Marechera 1990:70).

Later in this exchange, 'Marechera' notes that 'Cicero did not know when he was losing' (Marechera 1990:71). I have ventured the argument that the impetus for a more sustained engagement with the broader question of post-colonialism begins with 'Marechera's' meeting with Otolith. However, I want to add that, it is not so much that Otolith provides such an impetus as, to borrow Joseph Conrad's apt phrase, the 'sinister backcloth' against which the 'tragic farce' is acted which has led to his absolute disillusionment. When, in concluding his case about the executioner, he says:

And the law is, of course, the opinion of the citizen. And the citizen in Africa will not, of course, be denied his right to witness public executions, public scourgings, public amputations, public castrations, as long as some court or other has sentenced the victim to that. I was a barrister. I still am but I no longer practise. I found out too late that I was of a timid and squeamish nature. I could not

face the fact that the law is merely a screen behind which many a villain lurks. More crimes are committed within the law than against it. It is big business in Kenya. It is big business in Nigeria. In fact there is not one place in our continent where it is not so (Marechera 1990:56).

Yet, it is the hysteria, the 'exclamation marks of weariness which gleamed deep in the wrinkles of his face', which, in 'Marechera's' words, were complimented by 'that Elizabethan costume [in which] he could have been the horror which Kurtz saw at the *Heart of Darkness* Brussel's (*sic*) suburbia', that render the backcloth that Otolith provides particularly banal. Indeed, rather than have his case validated by the grim statistics he marshals with a breathless triumphalism to give it substance, that is, 'It is big business in Kenya. It is big business in Nigeria. In fact there is not one place in our continent where it is not so', he becomes the generalised horror that he projects onto the entire continent. Such is the banality of disillusionment, that the novel makes one last entry, in the form of the African Schweik, to proffer a less anxious critical departure:

I passed my eye over the room. In the far corner sat one who *looked smilingly at everything that passed*. He was dressed in an old tattered dressing gown that had certainly survived the rigours of the better part of the War. It looked like the kind of hardy trench-coat which would see a timid man through the missiles and bombs of dreams. At the same time it was like the one which Dostoevsky invented as the uniform of characters constipated by ennui and wretchedly cursed with manservants of insolent wit. The face was as long as it was broad; its outstanding feature was its unremarkability: two wide-apart beady eyes, a miserably crestfallen negro nose, and a mouth perpetually stretched into smiling by a vacant and unnatural void that glowed luminously beneath the dark skin. He caught my eye and nodded self-consciously.

He said in greeting:

'Dreadful world, isn't it?' (e.a.) (Marechera 1990:72).

Not only does the African Schweik introduce into the novel a

worldly perspective but, also, a poetic mode of critical address that threatens to implode even Cicero's argument which, by an unfortunate paradox, rests on the very terms 'clarity and stability' (Marechera 1990:47) that he is happy to have 'Marechera' reject in their earlier discussion. Indeed, against the better judgement of the latter, that is, 'Cicero did not know when he was losing' (Marechera 1990:71), he is adamant that his case for impressionism must *rest*, which, needless to say, defeats it entirely or, more to the point, locks him in the finitude that is antithetical to impressionism. In short, the African Schweik closes ranks around Cicero and Liz, by rendering them as two aspects of the same expressionism, the former representing the particular and, the latter, the whole. When Schweik points out to 'Marechera' that he 'travelled widely in Europe before [he] came back home [and that the] expense was not worth it but [he] would not have missed the experience for anything', he returns us to the first description of the Faculty with its 'bricked up rooms to isolate forever the rotting corpses within', but, also, with its 'infinite ramifications of little nooks of rooms' (Marechera 1990:25), so that the structure that the dialogues have taken up to the point when he is introduced, mirror such closure and only the possibility of openness. Because Cicero's impressionism is ultimately caught up in the rhetoric of Liz's ridicule and condescension, that is, 'It's all very well talking about reveries when a snake is crawling up your leg', and 'But go on, Mr. Cicero, I find you very interesting' (Marechera 1990:70), he is ostensibly an insider whose 'outside' is an impressionism that cannot redeem itself from mere special pleading. He may not quite be a 'rotting corpse' yet, but he is not quite not one either.

Finally, what Schweik introduces us to, is the question of cultural and political migrancy, and, with it, the question of home, exile and return in post-colonial discourse, which is then taken up in the rest of the novel. I now want to turn to this question, and to the various theories that have been proffered to elaborate it.

### **Home and World in *The Black Insider***

The African Schweik enters the novel in the following terms:

*Anonymous lanes* where misery treads unknown through the fog with cries as silent as pennies in the nether belly of a jukebox. Here none

scrutinizes the crescent moon but through a mist of desolation whose only sound drills into the skull phantasma of black multitudes sorrowing. The newly-born are condemned to seek *unborn routes* and wander through the pulsing cloudbreak toward the secret horror of the storm where old and cynical gods still dream where last they dreamed and fell in the darkened byways of tradition-tried hell. In the schoolroom marking their books I glean from my pupil's essays the disease soon to overtake their minds and plunge them hysterically straight-jacketed into the abattoir world of guns and meat-cleavers ....

*An empty house on an empty earth creaked beneath the prodigal's feet. Only the land that's framed by the empty blue sky is enclosed like a brain in my skull. The dust that will reclaim me fashioned me; it falls like snowflakes upon everything in my life. When I stand still and look through the pitch dark of myself, I reach out for the electricity switch which is not there (e.a.) (Marechera 1990:73).*

The recurrence of the word 'empty' in the above, signals the clearing of the redundant space of point and counter-point that has hitherto tied the novel to a narratological dead-end. The arid formalism of Cicero's thesis-counter-thesis-synthesis is superseded by the poeticism that grafts itself onto a liminal space that sets up boundaries, such as, 'home', 'earth', and 'world' at the very moment that it denies them the final word. This comment on migrancy is significant, particularly its implicit recognition that, an indissoluble dialectic subsists between the migrant and the borders that s/he has to negotiate, which pose very specific structural demands. 'Marechera' raises this point in his interjection on the question, when he points out that:

We are a continent of refugees; one day here, another day there; so much fodder for the boundary makers. There is no sense of home anymore, no feeling of being at one with any specific portion of the earth. As you said we have to seek unborn routes and these, like the evidence of ourselves, are yet to come. We live as though we are rehearsing our roles in a misty womb where we cannot see the text clearly but as it were remember vaguely the general theme of it (Marechera 1990:79).

I want to track this argument by considering two divergent positions in the scholarship of post-colonialism. Homi Bhabha (1994:1) taps into this argument when he announces that:

It is the trope of our time to locate the question of culture in the realm of the beyond. At the century's edge, we are less exercised by annihilation—the death of the author—or epiphany—the birth of the 'subject'. Our existence today is marked by a tenebrous sense of survival, living on the borderlines of the 'present', for which there seems to be no proper name other than the current and controversial shiftiness of the prefix 'post': *postmodernism, postcolonialism, postfeminism....*

In 'The potentials of boundaries in South Africa: steps towards a theory of the social edge', Robert Thornton (1996:136-156) argues that, to hasten to surpass neo-colonialism, to claim that imperialism's legacy has passed, and that it has retained no impact on the culture that conventional imperialism has 'left behind', is to deny its residual material impact, the evidence of which is the acquisitive culture and client state system that has continued to generate similar forms of class relations as in the period of active colonisation. In this sense, it is my view that, whereas *The Black Insider* does acknowledge the weakening of borders in the way in which Bhabha (1994:1), citing Martin Heidegger, sees them as places 'from which something begins its presencing', there is also a sense in which, for 'Marechera', the migrant will always be 'fodder for the boundary makers', (Marechera 1990:79) and these boundaries, to be sure, are economic. As such, he is cautious about Bhabha's culturalist generalisation that:

The move away from the singularities of 'class' or 'gender' as primary conceptual and organisational categories, has resulted in an awareness of the subject positions ... that inhabit any claim to identity in the modern world (Marechera 1990:79).

The marked difference between the two migrants in the following encounter in London between 'Marechera' (who is quite close to the historical Marechera) and the black policeman who accosts him, is indicative

of the care that 'Marechera' takes not to elide the material implications of crossing boundaries. He tells us that:

I came up from London where a meagre advance from my publisher saved me from the terror of Trafalgar Square when I was sleeping out in St James's Park and evading homosexual advances from the kind of guys who feed on homeless hippie types! I had gone there to sign the contract about the book and get the advance but time didn't seem to move and I didn't want to go to any of the other blacks I knew were in London. It's one thing to be comrades against whites and it's totally another thing to be penniless; the comrades would be suddenly struck by amnesia as far as knowing you went. So I hung around Trafalgar Square and St James's Park and there were hundreds like me without a penny or a roof anywhere in the world. I don't know how many times I stared at the pictures in the National Art Gallery. Or at the pigeons shitting on Nelson's head. And at the lions against which so many tourists were always being photographed.

Then a black policeman stopped me one morning in St James's Park. He demanded to search the rucksack... He looked at the dirty grey hair on my dirty black head. His own was smart—legally groomed. He looked at my jeans and T-shirt; they were filthy beyond belief from sleeping on the ground in the rain with only the branches of trees to keep out the wetness. He demanded to see my letters from Heinemann. I gave them to him. He smiled a sort of Kojak wry smile and said sternly 'Keep out of trouble' (Marechera 1990:58f).

I have quoted at length from this encounter, particularly because it proposes a very specific way in which to talk about cultural and political migrancy. The individualism that is implied in Bhabha's subjectivism, does not account for the collective poverty that 'Marechera' alludes to in 'there were hundreds like me without a penny or a roof anywhere in the world' (Marechera 1990:58f). Indeed, Bhabha's (1994:1f)

'in-between' spaces [which] provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood ... that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself,

appear to be self-constitutive, and the financial access codes that lubricate them are downplayed. There is also a deliberate attempt on the part of 'Marechera' to highlight the multiple profiles that constitute the socio-cultural and the political-economic texture of border-crossing—tourists, sexual migrants, the unemployed—which it would be folly to theorise under the common and disarming rubric of 'the beyond' or the 'in-between'. 'Marechera' makes this apt observation regarding the nature of one particular 'in-between' space, the Africa Centre:

I looked around, at the bar where a few blacks in national costume were standing at the dining tables where the smart black faces were eating impeccably African food recommended by the *Guardian*, and at the side seats where little groups of black and white faces sat talking and drinking in an unmistakably (*sic*) non-racial way (Marechera 1990:66).

This observation simultaneously reiterates Bhabha's argument that 'border lives' must be lived 'beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities',—a point which the 'black faces ... eating impeccably African food' seem to have conveniently forgotten, though, of course, the fact that the food has been recommended by the *Guardian*, is an ironic reminder of the opportunism with which this impeccable African identity is occupied—and rejects his (Bhabha's) elision of a rigorous engagement with the real content of the 'in-between' space which, in the case of the above, is an insular and, as such, vacuous, non-racialism that is only sustainable against the backdrop of a paranoid social system. If we recall the incident of the encounter with the 'legally groomed' black policeman in St James's Park, it becomes particularly urgent that discussions of migrancy are taken beyond the notion of 'the beyond' that Bhabha proffers but never seriously engages.

It is with the last point in mind that I now turn to consider the terms whereby 'Marechera' confronts Bhabha's elision, by exploring the coincidence of the material and the cultural in the formation of the migrant subject, both intra- and inter-nationally. He does this by evoking the notion of the emperor's new clothes, thus linking migration to imperialism. The significance of this part of *The Black Insider* is that it acts as a closing argument, not so much in the sense of foreclosing on the dialogues that have hitherto only proposed conceptual possibilities as to give them substance by testing them against a range of texts that have imagined their communities along the lines of similar concerns as those of the insiders. Further to this, this part of the novel also sharpens its focus on the predicament of exile, which, paradoxically, also generates active debate without the baggage of social routine. The Faculty of Arts, with its 'bricked up walls', is a constant reminder throughout this final section of the hazards and limits of critical engagement with one's time and place. Earlier in the novel, during one of the narrative diversions, 'Marechera' observes as much regarding the paradox of exile as a simultaneously morally paralysing and intellectually ennobling place, the former being the response of those, like Liz, who still hope that after 'this funny war', the old disciplines will be re-installed:

I found it congenial to my nature to live an insecure wandering life and this was fortunate because I had no money and this lack of funds meant that I would have no friends worth domineering, no wife worth lording it over, no house worth imprisoning myself in, and lastly no false sense of self-respect to think myself other than what I was: a penniless young writer who ought to know better (Marechera 1990:29).

Because at the centre of *The Black Insider* is a debate about the conditions of possibility for a different critical consciousness and, with it, a different approach to the relationships between the self and nation, the self and the world, and the self and its own assumptions about itself, it is my view that the following comment on the image of Africa that has been circulated and deconstructed all at once, must constitute 'Marechera's' last attempt at an analysis, and, if, as he says earlier, the 'faculty is the last desperate ditch of a state of mind bred in the tension of war', then the

following is a reminder that exile and return are saturated with the terms of empire:

History is not something outside man, but man in his own merciless nakedness, in spite of the emperor's new clothes. Aye (*sic*) Kwezi Armah in his *The Beautiful (sic) Ones Are Not Yet Born* not only stripped the African image of its clothes but also forced it to undergo a baptism of shit. Okgibo's inexorable resculpting of our nakedness in the Pygmalion sense filled his homecoming with shadows of the conflict that would kill him. And Gabriel Okara, with his ear to its heartbeat, listened to the inner voice that was being stifled by the new style and the unheeded crumbling of the old historical walls. The voice penetrates to the innermost promptings of human accessibility which can find no meaning except brutal response in the man-made artefacts surrounding it. Here a chasm is exposed within the African image; our roots have become so many banners in the wind, with no meaningful connection with the deep-seated voice within us. But they have at the same time strengthened their grip on us: a new kind of fascism based on the 'traditional' African image has arisen. Ngugi is in jail, eating his grain of wheat. And here we are drinking tea in the rabble of the war (Marechera 1990:82).

## Conclusion

Recent critical literature on Marechera's works, *Emerging Perspectives on Dambudzo Marechera* (1999) being the most comprehensive, has, in the main, placed almost exclusive emphasis on the combative nature of Marechera's relation to terms such as humanism, nationalism, Africanism, and other such terms that, with the advent of deconstruction and the 'post' theories, seem to lose their referential value. To some extent, it does seem that Marechera, particularly in his well-documented commentaries, has encouraged this sort of approach to his writing. Indeed, his famous statement on the position of his writing in relation to 'African' writing, that is,

I think I am the *Doppelgänger* whom, until I appeared, Africa had not yet met. In this sense, I would question anyone who calls me an

African writer. Either you're a writer or you're not. If you're writing for a specific nation or a specific race, then fuck you (Veit-Wild 1999:34),

does seem to prompt an evaluation of his literary *oeuvre* as a blue-print for 'post' discourse: post-nationalism, post-humanism, post-Africanism, in the sense of 'post' as past or after.

This study has represented my attempt to rethink Marechera in the light of his representation of language in the opening quotation, where terms such as 'humanity' have been appropriated for ends that make 'the notion of the human more appealing than humanity'. As the opening quotation implies, for Marechera, the battles over these terms and the values that they define are, perforce, battles over language. In this sense, it does not seem helpful to me to search for a category in which to place Marechera's writing. *The Black Insider* is itself a complex and eloquent testimony to the redundancy of boundaries, even as it concedes that they will always be drawn nonetheless, and that, when they are, it will be presumptuous to preempt their characteristic presence-absence on the basis of an unexamined transcendentalism.

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*Olivia Vermaak*

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Department of English  
University of Johannesburg

# The Political Dimension of Dambudzo Marechera's *Black Sunlight*

Hervé Mitoumba Tindy

## Introduction

The reception of Dambudzo Marechera's *Black Sunlight* was mixed.<sup>1</sup> In this essay I want to focus on the political dimension of the novel, particularly since some of the criticisms of *Black Sunlight* faulted the novel for what the critics considered variously as its idiosyncrasy, its lack of any discernible theme and relevance to African issues and its lack of the forms of African conceptions of the world. These views about *Black Sunlight* seem to me too limited and extrinsic to the novel itself.

*Black Sunlight*, in my view, deals with the power of fiction in offering alternatives to apprehending political change and its implications, particularly for the individual; it does so largely in the context of Zimbabwe on the threshold of independence. As a work of fiction, *Black Sunlight* shows the interconnectedness between politics and poetics. One of the consequences of this dimension of the novel is that readers are compelled to consider the issues that are structured by the discourse of politics as issues of *writing* as well. Thus, for instance, the West/Africa opposition that informs much of the criticism of *Black Sunlight* as Euro-centric, is answered in the novel's implicit and, at times, explicit, argument that modernity and modernisation in Africa cannot be appreciated independently of the contradictions of Western Enlightenment. Thus, *Black Sunlight* provides

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<sup>1</sup> Flora Veit-Wild documents many of the readers' responses prior to and after the publication of the novel, in *Dambudzo Marechera: A Source Book on his Life and Work* (1992).

new ways of perceiving the self in modern Zimbabwean society, a society characterised in the novel by the alienation of the individual from the body politic. Thus, the topic of this essay creates the space which allows me to argue that the language play in *Black Sunlight* constitutes a new and creative approach to politics; that is, the use of language is a starting point in the questioning of the significance of the Zimbabwean struggle for independence against the backdrop of the artistic censorship of alternative expression that prevailed at the time that the novel was published.

In placing the primary instrument of meaning production on the agenda of its examination of what the struggle signifies, namely language and its vicissitudes, *Black Sunlight* turns what is conventionally a formal question into a thematic one. Because the struggle for independence in Zimbabwe and Africa as a whole never spelled out what was envisaged after the struggle, beyond the generalities of the terms 'liberation' and/or 'freedom' from colonial 'oppression', the analytical import of this approach to the *meaning* of independence in Zimbabwe and Africa as a whole, springs from the novel's positioning of itself between pre- and post-independence. Owing to this strategic self location, the novel endeavours not only to demythologise and de-romanticise the Zimbabwean past but, also, to offer a critique of the legacy of Enlightenment in the Zimbabwean modernity by showing that roughly the same devices of power operate in both situations.

In this essay, I shall establish the political dimension of *Black Sunlight*. My argument will begin with the discussion of the framing of the novel's subject-matter and the role of the writer in this framing, the colonial encounter as the novel re-imagines it and its multiple implications, the relationship between history and aesthetic. I shall then consider the novel's implicit—on one occasion explicit—view that, whereas traditional forms of power are violent and spectacular, negotiated and/or rehabilitative forms of social regulation are no less violent. *Black Sunlight* adapts the Althusserian model of the operation of power by recasting it as a basis for reading the ruses of realism. Thus, the appearance of the modern bureaucratic systems in the course of the novel—the church, the school, the prison and the psychiatric asylum—and the manner in which these systems are shown to be woven into the fabric of the lives of the novel's subjects, constitute the political thrust of *Black Sunlight*.

### **The Politics of Writing/ The Writing of Politics**

Drew Shaw (Veit-Wild & Chennells 1999:4f) provides an illustration of the status of realism in Zimbabwe as the 'predominant model for the assessment of contemporary writing' and Marechera's subsequent marginalisation for rejecting realism and for being an 'individualist'<sup>2</sup>. Indeed, Marechera 'renounces all three criteria of realism': the truthful and plain telling of the story, the featuring of ordinary characters and the reproduction of these characters under real circumstances. The rejection of these three criteria results in Marechera's productive detachment from both the rhetoric of nationalism and the new tendencies to bureaucratise the arts in the mould of the Rhodesia Literature Bureau. David Pattison observes in regard to the Rhodesia Literature:

... [The Rhodesia Literature Bureau] had been established in order to prevent the emergence of critical political literature. All submissions to the Literature Bureau were closely vetted by the Native Commissioners who rejected all political or religious subject matter ... (Pattison 2001:74).

The closing sentence of the above quotation highlights the grounds on which *Black Sunlight* was banned on 23 October 1981 by the Censorship Board of the newly independent Zimbabwe. Indeed, the Censorship Board declared *Black Sunlight* an 'undesirable publication' allegedly because it was 'offensive' by its recurrent use of 'obscene language' (Veit-Wild 1992:290f). However, the un-banning of *Black Sunlight* by the same Censorship Board on 23 February 1982, as the result of appeals by people other than Marechera, is undeniable proof that the ban had been unfairly announced. Importantly, however, the banning of *Black Sunlight* reinforces my view that it is a thoroughly political novel. As a matter of fact, Stein points out that:

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<sup>2</sup> Even though from the point of view of historical materialism this designation would raise serious objections, it is not in the sense of solipsistic 'individualism' that Shaw uses the term. Rather, it is as a marker of strategic alienation.

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... writing is by its very nature a political and revolutionary activity, he [Marechera] goes as far as claiming that the 'entire history of Russian terrorism can be summed up in the struggle of a handful of intellectuals to abolish tyranny, against a background of a silent populace' (Veit-Wild 1992: 373).

To this end, for Marechera politics and revolution need the language of literature if they are to avoid falling into the non-critical apathy of post-independence stasis. Thus, if Marechera appears irresponsible to politics or subject-matter, it is because *Black Sunlight* resists the dialectical terminus that is installed in advance between literature and politics. In *Black Sunlight*, the relation of literature to politics and vice versa is one in which the power to name the 'real' is contested, rather than settled in the disarming rhetoric of the collective organisation of the 'real'.

*Black Sunlight's* opening chapter is an allegory of the European encounter with Africa. This encounter is occasioned by the sighting of a white woman, Blanche Goodfather (1980:1), bathing in a stream 'by the Blunt Rock Falls' near the chief's court. It turns out that Goodfather is a published anthropologist. At any rate, the narrator, at this stage only known as the court jester, couches the penetration of Africa by the West not in the conventional masculine or militaristic terms but, rather, as occurring more pervasively, because not immediately visible. Thus, hidden in what appears to be a less threatening figure of the woman anthropologist, is not only her name that betrays her origins, that is, Blanche (white) Goodfather (emblematic of the paternalism of the grand but, decidedly self-aggrandising, colonialism) but, also, the (anthropological) book as the new instrument for a new conquest. Beyond the sexual surface, the chief's 'erection', after the jester tells him about the presence of Goodfather in his domain, and about the untold pleasure of having a white woman sexually, speaks conceptually of the dangerous seduction that colonialism by the book occasions. If anything, *Black Sunlight* is a novel in which the book or, more precisely, the word, is where colonial battles are fought. Blanche Goodfather is the deceiving and treacherous figure, and the fact that she is an anthropologist shows European penetration of Africa to be subtle and pervasive, thus requiring a similarly subtle critical vigilance.

Blanche Goodfather's anthropological research is of the nature of

Orpheus's descent into the underworld in the quest for Eurydice (Blanchot [1955] 1982:171-76), a metaphor for the European encounter with an Africa which, in the former's colonial imagination, attracts as much as it repels. The jester (whose name the novel later establishes as Christian), an avid reader of her anthropological works, muses:

This intrepid seeker after the ideal human society .... I had avidly read her books. On life among headhunters. Life among skinheads, screwballs, dossers, down and outs, tarts, the shitheads of skidrow. Life among cannibals. She was a moth fiercely attracted to the lights of the savage, the earthy, the primitive. And how she roamed the earth—how she too searched—ferreted out the few bits and pieces of authentic people reducing them to meticulous combinations of the English alphabet (Marechera 1980:4).

Christian, as the jester, is aware of his implication in the 'alphabets' that have exercised their influence on his identity. 'Swinging. Backwards and forwards' in the chicken-yard, after he is dismissed from the chief's court for 'insult[ing] our [the chief's people's] most central traditions', the jester observes that, after his extensive travels before he lands up in the court of the chief as jester:

Europe was in my head, crammed together with Africa, Asia and America .... Those years of my travels. Years of innocence and experience .... In search of my true people. Yes, in search of my true people. But wherever I went I did not find people but caricatures of people who insisted on being taken seriously as people. Perhaps I was on the wrong planet.  
In the wrong skin.  
And sometimes all the time. You know. In the wrong skin.  
This black skin (Marechera 1980:3f).

The above quotation sets the scene for what in *Black Sunlight* will become a view of history that calls for strategic subjectivity. As having been a chronicler for the magazine called Precision, prior to serving at the chief's court—a chronicler of Africa's history and in search of his 'true people'—

Christian is condemned by that very history to trace it indirectly, that is, via the routes that he and, to a significant extent this history, has taken. Thus, he concedes, Africa's history is also Europe's history, Asia's history, America's history and, in fact, the history of all the (dis)locations that have exercised political and cultural influence over his 'people'. Given this view, Christian cannot be said to be overstating the consequences of this political and cultural influence when he says that after cross-political and cultural contact, one can no longer speak of 'my true people', but 'caricatures' (Marechera 1980:10). Moreover, Christian speaks not of historical erasure but, rather, of its rendering honest. In this last connection, he writes:

History's idiosyncrasy. This desire to expose the wounds of an undecided innocence. No more were nocturnal insights reclusive treasures to be savoured in the secrecy of poems and stories; they were to be the inspiring spark to set reality's façade on fire. (Marechera 1980:113)

Christian contends that stories and poems have the insight that a certain historical blindness lacks. According to the logic of the above quotation, history, considered as a record, rather than as a trace of the past, fails because in speaking of the past, it mistakenly presumes its coincidence with it. By contrast, stories and poems declare themselves as interpretations of the past, 'nocturnal insights reclusive treasures' that, while conventionally meant 'to be savoured in secrecy', increasingly 'set reality's façade on fire'. Thus, the word 'insights' defines the status of the past in the present or in history in terms of the intervention of interpretation. According to Paul de Man (1983:106),

[t]he insight exists only for a [writer] in the privileged position of being able to observe the blindness as a phenomenon in its own right ... and so being able to distinguish between statement and meaning.

Indeed, Christian considers stories and poems to inhabit the 'privileged position' of which de Man speaks.

Christian resolves to abandon the search for his 'true people' which is bound to fail owing to the multiple legacies of European, Asian and

American cultural-political influences. Whereas for Blanche Goodfather the English alphabet is the ultimate template onto which the complex lives that she tracks in her work can be grafted, for Christian such a reductionism belies the subjective status of anthropological/ethnographic account and conceals in its claims to authenticity a thoroughly subjective *and* colonial intention.

It is tempting to read off the jester's account of his fall from grace as the chief's favourite entertainer a literal commentary on the barbarism of pre-colonial African societies. Yet this reading misses a crucial point, namely that in the entire episode, which spans a mere ten pages, specific terms arise which one cannot afford to collapse with the deliberately grotesque irony that attends the chief's description.<sup>3</sup> For instance, after the jester laughs at the chief's 'erection', the chief promptly censures him for daring to 'insult our most central traditions!' However, at the jester's commendation of the chief's 'ornament', and that as 'Our great chief' the chief cannot possibly be a 'sodomite', the jester observes that the chief 'oiled his eyes with orthodoxy' (Marechera 1980:3). Thus, the point in this brief episode is not so much that readers are given a tour of the 'real' court of the traditional African chief, as the argument that power, whether traditional or modern, craves appeasement. Indeed, perhaps without even knowing it, the great chief nonetheless makes an apt observation when he says to the jester, 'You could bind a man with long ropes of words he did not understand' (Marechera 1980:3). Here, reference is to the jester's pacification of the chief, which he does by saying that he is a great chief and not a 'buggerer' or a 'sodomite', thus priming the chief's virility which the jester nonetheless knows is on the wane. However, it is the metaphorical, rather than the literal, import of this episode that seems to me particularly significant. If at being laughed at for his 'erection' the chief responds by calling for the jester's censure, but at being called 'Our great chief' he 'oiled himself with orthodoxy', then surely the point is that notions such as 'our most central traditions' are orthodoxies that are only sustained by continuous

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<sup>3</sup> Attentive readers will recognize in the narrator's description of the chief the standard comical reconstruction of the colonial fantasy of a massive African chief who is ready to throw his detractors in a huge boiling cauldron. It seems to me that *Black Sunlight* is simply sending this fantasy up.

uncritical appeasement and censure. Thus, when the jester avers while swinging 'Backwards and forwards' in the chicken yard where he is hanged 'upside down' as punishment for daring to insult 'our most central traditions', more than just meets the eye obtains in this surreal episode:

As I swung gently by my heels in the thick fat fucking breeze of sheer humidity, I had a clear view of the court and could see and hear all that went on there. So this is humankind. Swinging. Backwards and forwards. Swinging through history. These are my people. I am their people too (Marechera 1980:3).

Far from being simply punishment, to the jester the hanging is a productive 'vantage point' (Marechera 1980:7) which offers 'a clear view of the court and ... all that went on there'. Viewed from his vantage position, the court and the 'central traditions' over which the chief presides, become less central and collective. This is buttressed by the bitter irony that subtends the jester's realisation that his punishment sits ill with the fact that 'These are my people. I am their people too'. The same irony underscores the relationship between the jester and Blanche Goodfather whom, as it turns out, he had met during his time at Oxford as a fellow student and sometime bedfellow. Indeed, re-surfacing in the African 'jungle' of his incarceration, Blanche Goodfather becomes 'the Tarzan to rescue [him] from [his] plight' (Marechera 1980:7). Needless to say, Goodfather's is the same centring that fails to convince the jester about the 'central traditions' of which the great chief speaks.

When Christian escapes from his punishment in the chicken yard, and after Goodfather gives him his 'back payments' (Marechera 1980:13) for his articles in *Precision*, he visits a place called Devil's end, which is the hideout for the oppositional organisation that calls itself the Black Sunlight Organisation. The BSO, as the Organisation is also called, draws its membership from the ranks of those who have 'a price on [their] head[s]', that is, those who are sought by the secret police for their subversive ideas. With this visit, he hopes to revive *Precision* by documenting alternative voices in a country where there is no

difference between the chief on his skull-carpentered throne and the

*The Political Dimension of Dambudzo Marechera's Black Sunlight*

general who even now had grappled all power to himself in our new and twentieth-century image (Marechera 1980:13).

His visit takes place also after Blanche Goodfather

had given me a long list of those killed behind the barricades, those summarily executed, those detained, those who had escaped into yet another soul-destroying exile (Marechera 1980:13).

The first indication that his visit would yield insights into the architecture of power is his description of Devil's End that simultaneously offers readers a vantage point that he enjoys:

Devil's End looked like the name implied. Jagged rock, granite outcrops, stony valleys, sharp flinty peaks and running through them, underground, a network of caves and interlocking tunnels, natural and man-made .... Within its caves and tunnels were the prisoners' quarters, the Jade Chamber and the Black Hall (Marechera 1980:52).

Chris, one of members of the BSO, keeps a ledger in which he makes entries of even the minutest details of what goes on inside Devil's End. It turns out that Devil's End is run with ransom money obtained by kidnapping members of the Rhodesian security personnel. It is also a sort of bizarre torture and death camp for those for whom ransom is not paid. Following Chris as they walk to meet the leader of the opposition, Christian observes:

We passed through huge rooms in which vague human figures were poised in very excruciating postures. Some dangled from chains fixed to the roof. (One hung upside down and dangled by his testicles.) Some were on a redhot treadmill. Some were transfixed upside down by huge nails driven into the rock passing through their ankles or their knees (Marechera 1980:53).

'Disloyalty here', Chris informs him after they pass the huge rooms, 'is a capital offence' (Marechera 1980:54). When Christian almost salutes after

*Hervé Mitoumba Tindy*

responding to a bizarre question that Chris asks him about Susan's sexual prowess, Chris enlightens him on another Devil's End condition:

You can salute if you want to but you know that's not in this outfit because it's undemocratic and smirks of military totalitarianism.

And another:

NO! NO! NO! Nobody smokes tobacco here. You have to smoke what we smoke. Here's your ration. If you smoke different that's undemocratic and upsetting. It smirks of individualistic opportunism. You know. Not that I don't know different (Marechera 1980:54).

The above represent a crucial statement that *Black Sunlight* makes about the pervasive nature of power, particularly the fact that resistance/opposition very often mobilises the tactics of the power it resists/opposes. Capitulation to a form of containment made spectacular by the contradiction between intention (to resist/oppose enslavement and torture) and practice (enslaving and torturing one's persecutor), as the above examples from Christian's observations at Devil's End illustrate, is what in *Black Sunlight* dogs not only the Black Sunlight Organisation but, as I have shown, also the chief and, no less spectacular, the ethnography of Blanche Goodfather.<sup>4</sup> Aside from the evidence that attends the narrator's framing of these particular cases of containment, the three forms of containment that I have highlighted can also be considered as part of the broad framework in which they are understood by the narrator to collaborate with more established apparatuses of power. Against this background, the premise of the argument that I want to develop takes on board Paul Rabinow's view that for Michel Foucault

the real political task [of writing] in a society ... is to criticize the

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<sup>4</sup> It may be that Goodfather's 'renown' rests on the presumed generosity of her intentions to give off her time and resources to record autochthonous societies, but the manner in which she goes about it renders her generosity spectacularly at odds with the reductionism of her methodology.

### *The Political Dimension of Dambudzo Marechera's Black Sunlight*

working of institutions which appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticize them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked (Rabinow 1984:6).

Recall that for Susan, one of the members of the Black Sunlight Organisation:

All the forces of social and national man have been levelled against that tiny spark within us and seek to snuff it out with types of religion, education, legislation, codes and in the last resort, jails and lunatic asylums. The mass of men live underneath the hand of these forces (Marechera 1980:66).

I spoke about the manner in which *Black Sunlight* adapts Althusser's theory of power as manifesting itself in the form of persuasion (negotiation and/or rehabilitation) and coercion (punishment). I want to consider some of the ways in which *Black Sunlight* re-writes the terms whereby the church, the school, the prison and the asylum conceal their will to power in their characteristic rhetoric.

In his influential essay, entitled 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes towards an Investigation', Louis Althusser points out two apparatuses or ways in which subjectivity is produced in ideology. One is through persuasion and another through coercion. Furthermore, Althusser argues that the most pervasive of these apparatuses is persuasion, by which he means that as subjects we are called to the places which the ideology of the state has already created for us. In this sense, what subjectivity is, is the product of a certain kind of (ideological) 'hailing' (quoted in Rice, Philip & Patricia Waugh 1992:60); by 'hailing' Althusser means invitation to participate in the terms of the one who sends out the invitation, in the case of his context, the state. Althusser's theory implies that the target of ideology will, from time to time, reject the invitation. It is in this last connection that *Black Sunlight* makes its important intervention.

At stake in *Black Sunlight's* treatment of religion, is the contradiction between Christianity's claim to the personal and the reality of its institutional standing. From the point of view of writing, *Black Sunlight*

may be said to proffer a critique of the consequences of religion's vertical explanation of the world—God, then Man and, lastly, all the other terrestrial creatures or species—against the backdrop of the shift towards an horizontal explanation in modern artistic and philosophical movements, according to which God is the creation of the human mind.<sup>5</sup> In the scheme of the horizontal explanation, imagination is the essence of Man and constitutes Man's godly power, so that Man and God essentially share the same limitations. For instance, hanging upside down in the chicken yard, Christian avers:

Crucified upside down by my heels. My Golgotha a chickenyard.  
Father! Father! Why the fucking shit did you conceive me? You  
have no meaning. I have no meaning. The meaning is in the  
swinging. And that is ridiculous. Absurd (Marechera 1980:3).

In essence, the above is a proclamation of the impotence of both God and Man. The parody of Christ's crucifixion is a form of heightened mimesis, that is, the imitation or reproduction of that historical and religious event, the better for Christian to enter the social debate about the condition of the human in modern times.

Julia Kristeva (1984:61) writes that

... poetic language and mimesis may appear as an argument  
complicitous with dogma ... but they may also set in motion what  
dogma represses.

What dogma represses is the critical spirit. This is precisely the point that Marechera is making throughout his discussion of the erasure of the individual in dogma. The complicity of the church in this erasure finds its expression in the play on what has become a marxisant commonplace; Christian enters the church and muses:

I was in the opium of the people. The huge cross dangled from  
chains fixed to the roof.

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<sup>5</sup> Nietzsche's famous assertion that for modern Man God is dead.

*The Political Dimension of Dambudzo Marechera's Black Sunlight*

I stood looking at the crucified Christ .... He looked like I felt. That was the connection .... He hung there like one in dire need of a cigarette ....

Why had I come? I always came to watch Him whenever the soullessness was too much for me. It always ended with the same humiliated ridiculousness of becoming aware that I was staring at a man-made statue expecting a miracle to take place (Marechera 1980:28f).

The above quotation speaks of a failed personal relationship with the human dimension of 'Christ' with an emphasis on the ambivalence between Christian's awareness of the Christ's basic humanity which mirrors his own and of the Christ figure as unduly elevated in the systematic church mythology of miracles. Foucault writes of this ambivalence thus:

... all Western Catholics have been obliged to admit their sexuality, their sins against the flesh and all their sins in this area ... one can hardly say that the discourse on sexuality has been simply prohibited or repressed. The discourse on sexuality was organised in a particular way, in terms of a number of codes, and I would even go so far as to say that ... there has been a very strong incitement to speak of sexuality (in Kritzman 1988:102).

The difference is that Christian gives free reign to the 'discourse on sexuality' and on 'the flesh', so that the ultimately guarded generosity of the system of confession, which prescribes the codes while seeming to provide a platform for a freedom to speak on sexuality and on the flesh, is confronted by what it fears, namely that someone might actually find confession cause for more discourse, rather than the closure of repentance. According to Foucault, the Catholic Church does not repress discourse on the 'sins against the flesh' (Marechera 1980:102) and on sexuality as such. Rather, it uses the practice of confession to control its multiple implications beyond the ecclesiastical limitation on which the idea of confession is founded. By entering the mindscape of the confessor, the confessee or the Catholic priest hopes to render the secular as a threat no longer excessive beyond the confessor-confessee relation.

However, the foremost interest of the above passage from *Black Sunlight* is in its exemplification of Christian's horizontal view of the world. This conceptual move establishes a continuum on which both Christian and the crucifix occupy the same position, rather than the elevated position on which the crucifix is placed. The nature of the connection between Christ and Christian probably explains why Christian chooses a moment when the church is empty to visit. The cumulative use of the personal pronoun 'I' indicates a radical selfhood that is also drawn to the possibility of spiritual transcendence in the figure of Christ. Indeed, as Christian enters the church, his attention is drawn towards the 'huge cross ... fixed to the roof' (Marechera 1980:28). The elevated position of the cross mirrors the ideology that Christian seeks to deconstruct, namely, one in which the Christ is inaccessible by means other than the church. Thus, for Christian to establish a personal relationship with the Christ behind the symbolism of the crucifix, he must demythologise the ideology that elevates the crucifix beyond reach of any personal encounter.

It is interesting to note that the connection that Christian establishes with the Christ behind the crucifix is purely biological. It is constituted by Christian's projection onto or reflection of himself in the image of the crucified Christ. Subsequently, what appears to be blasphemous and debasing, namely, a view of Christ in earthly terms as someone who is not above human cravings, turns out to be a more productive view in which Christ reclaims the humanity that the institutionalisation or canonisation of Christianity disavows.

One of the main implications of this demythologisation of the Christ is certainly the flattening of the terrain between Christian and Christ as exemplified by the cross falling from its elevated position above Christian and crashing 'at [his] feet' (Marechera 1980:30). This obliteration of the crucifix as it falls from the roof that engenders doubt which serves to mirror the disappointment in the ideology that elevates Christ in the first place; what comes crashing is not so much Christ the man with whom Christian establishes a human relationship but, rather, Christ the ideological/institutional cipher.

If institutionalised religion participates in the erasure of the individual by rendering the self an inevitable appendage of a religious system that nonetheless ignores the self's specificity, Christian, in retrospect,

sees his school education in Rhodesia as having been no less complicitous with this erasure. Consider the following:

'One! Two! Three! Four! ...Eleven! Twelve! Go back to your seat!' I was hot with resentment and pain. So that was school. From all the sides my head was being jammed with facts .... On the loan, however, were these prisoners dressed in khakhi. Over them stood an armed guard who also carried a rawhide whip. The prisoners were weeding the lawn with an intentness that made getting those weeds out the most significant thing in the whole universe (Marechera 1980:7).

This seems to come straight from Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* or Mrs. Ghent's comment in *Great Expectations* about the de-animation of the human in the modern machine. There is something poignant in the coexistence of the mechanical education that the narrator describes and the prisoners whom he describes as working mechanically at the most insignificant routine under the armed guard. The choice of exact sciences to make the point about the consequences on the individual of a mechanically administered polity is apt, particularly against the background of the military metaphor which ties learning to military discipline. However, because it is from the vantage point of a participant-observer that readers experience the alienating effect of this kind of setting, there is a certain critical distance/detachment from its consequences that is achieved.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1996), Paulo Freire writes of the conventional teaching and learning situation as the prototype of the vertical reading of the social in terms of which the teacher relates to the students as the omniscient narrator of the conventional realist novel—the 'narrating Subject'—relates to his 'listening objects'. In this scheme, 'The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable' (Marechera 1980:52). Thus, Christian recalls his geography lesson:

When the teacher came in he spread across the blackboard a large map of the whole world .... Hours later, my head had become all the things on the map and it was days before I could scrub them out and

let the dirty water gurgle out of the sink (Marechera 1980:18).

What clearly emerges from this passage is the idea that the alternative to the reduction of the world to mathematical doxa or absolute/pure rationality is the mapping of the world onto a natural landscape that is also conceived in pure form that excludes the vagaries of unpredictable sociality, much less the vagaries of the radical subjectivity of *Black Sunlight*'s modernist approach. The map is no longer the representation of the world but the world itself. Indeed, one of Christian's school mates, Stephen, cultivates a corresponding attitude: 'He read a lot, as I did, but he read encyclopaedias, manuals, factual matter whereas I rigidly stuck to all kinds of fiction' (Marechera 1980:19). Confronted with the formidable combination of the apparatuses of consent and coercion, it is to 'all kinds of fiction' that the young Christian turns and, like Stephen to his facts, it is to fiction that he 'rigidly' sticks.<sup>6</sup> As an experimental novel, *Black Sunlight* seeks precisely to erect itself as a deconstruction of the mechanical education. As a deconstruction, the novel strives for an awareness of the co-optation of education by the hegemonic apparatus, in which the school serves the interests of those who seek to reinforce this hegemony.

Whereas in *Black Sunlight* the church and the school already constitute a formidable metaphor of incarceration, there is nevertheless explicit treatment of the traditional prison as a total institution. The prison is founded on the contradiction between coercion (punishment) and the manufacture of consent (rehabilitation). However, in *Black Sunlight*, the latter is represented as farcical at best and, at worst without foundation. Recalling his time as a schoolboy, Christian informs us about the prisoners who worked in their schoolyard:

'On the lawn, however, were these prisoners dressed in khakhi. Over them stood an armed guard who also carried a rawhide whip. The prisoners were weeding the lawn with an intentness that made getting those weeds out the most significant thing in the whole universe .... [T]hey were a faded picture from a faded planet on

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<sup>6</sup> It would seem that the play on 'rigid' is intended as a productive, rather than reductive, satire.

which I found myself (Marechera 1980:17).

Imprisonment appears as a fundamentally administrative and directly hegemonic enterprise. In *Black Sunlight*, the prison is run along the lines of Foucault's notion of punishment whereby consent is first and foremost elicited by marking the prisoner's body. Foucault continues to argue that what is called ideology is a symptom of a brutal form that underscores and/or compliments consent. In this connection, the whip, with which the guard is armed, inaugurates a much subtler system that is nonetheless dependent on the constant presence of the threat of brutal punishment.

Nevertheless, in *Black Sunlight*, readers are never taken into the prison itself in the same way that they are taken into the classroom. But there is enough evidence that the prison, like the classroom, is satisfied to produce a prisoner who would respond to the world in the mechanical manner in which Stephen responds to the kind of education that is similarly mechanical. In the same way that Stephen reacts to his education by reading 'encyclopaedias, manuals [and] factual matter', the prisoners react to their 'education' by 'weeding the lawn with an intentness that made getting those weeds out the most significant thing in the universe'. In an interview with Colin Gordon, which appeared in *Power/Knowledge*, Foucault (1980:42) informs us that:

[From] the late 1830s, it became clear that in fact the aim was not to retrain delinquents, to make them virtuous, but to regroup them within a clearly demarcated, card-indexed milieu which could serve as a tool for economic or political ends.

Even though Foucault is talking about a different context to that of *Black Sunlight*, there is nonetheless a striking similarity between the idea of imprisonment that he describes and the fact that the prisoners in *Black Sunlight* are not being taught anything, the better for the system that keeps them in prison to ensure that 'they could do nothing when they [come] out of prison' (Foucault 1980:42).

What reinforces the idea of prison as a place of conformity is that those who try to exist outside of the conformed state are thrown in jail. We read that after the banning of *Precision*, and when the 'editor tried to defy

the ruling' he ended up 'cooling his heels in jail' (Marechera 1980:12). This conformity is also captured by what Christian tells us about the social in its entirety as prison-like. Pondering what it would be like to be free as he hangs upside down in the chicken-yard, it is not to a different scenario that his imagination takes him but, rather, to other images of confinement:

Eating sadza and beans, sadza and sugar in jail. In boarding school, in college. Sadza, that supposed cornerstone of my authentic image. That icon of African greatness, my great chief, snoring in thought (Marechera 1980:7).

Marechera's conceptual view of the notion of prison and of imprisonment is already discernible in the last sentence of the above quotation. The transformation of sadza from its being the 'icon of African greatness' into being the icon of prison diet is similar to the transformation of tobacco into the icon of conformity at Devil's End, allegedly the icon of the struggle against conformity to the state's design. Like sadza in prison, at Devil's End it is tobacco which is rationed. Indeed, Devil's End is a prototype of a prison. Like the prisoners at Christian's school, who are marked by their khaki uniforms, the inmates of Devil's End are marked by their 'denims and cotton with bare toes and beads'. Again, vodka is the preferred drink, so that wherever Christian goes he is offered either tobacco or vodka. There is a subtle comment that the novel appears to be making regarding the organisation of Devil's End around communist stereotypes such as sharing and equality, which nonetheless conceal the fact that Devil's End in its entirety is a stereotype.

Now, let us consider what is taking place outside Devil's End. We learn that: 'The jails were full. There were executions. Nick was never identified and was buried as an unknown' (Marechera 1980:28). Except for the elaborate description of the execution room at Devil's End, there is not much of a difference between Devil's End and the manner in which the state treats its detractors. In fact, the leader of the opposition at Devil's End, Christian, observes about the place:

It's this place, a sort of labyrinth. All the ones you meet are as lost as yourself and after a while you cease to take any human thing

*The Political Dimension of Dambudzo Marechera's Black Sunlight*

seriously. You just think of how long ago you had it in you to want to look for the way out of it all. To escape. I suppose you haven't thought of trying to get out of here? It's all the same really (Marechera 1980:61).

In the above quotation can be found all that one associates with prison and prison life: Devil's End is described as 'a sort of labyrinth', it dehumanises, so that, as Christian says, 'you cease to take any human thing seriously'. In this scheme of things, it would appear that as an alternative to the devices of the state, Devil's End is not as alternative as it appears to be. The only viable alternative is literature itself and only if it is able to reflect on its own limits. Indeed, *Black Sunlight* is such an attempt to reflect on the limits and the possibilities of literature. Nonetheless, people whom the various oppositional and state institutions like the church, the school and the prison fail to transform are considered mad and confined in asylums.

Asylums, as Foucault argues, are a product of a discourse about madness (psychiatry), rather than products of madness as such. Indeed, Foucault argues that psychiatry is a permanent function of social order and makes use of the asylums, which suggests that one cannot speak of madness as such.

In *Black Sunlight*, Marechera takes up this idea of madness as a fabrication of psychiatry to some interesting extent. It is Chris, we are told, who goes to the madhouse after *Precision* is banned and Devil's End is captured. In the novel, Chris serves to illustrate the critical pressure under which Marechera places the notion of madness. Chris is by all accounts mad, at least if we take Susan's word for it, which is that his obsession with women's underwear results from the fact that he had 'a lousy childhood in a motherfucking environment ...' (Marechera 1980:40). However, let me consider this 'madness' and there work out the novel's argument as I have framed it above. It is interesting to note that we first find out about Chris's 'madness' from a conversation between Katherine and Susan. For his part, Chris believes that 'You are only mad when there are other people around you, but never when you are on your own'. He also believes that 'It's people who manufacture all kinds of craziness' (Marechera 1980:71).

The Black Sunlight Organisation, in which Chris appears to hold an important administrative position, altogether appears as a cluster of

renegades who, taken separately, exemplify various aspects of what I would call a 'psychic disorder'. As I will show in the analysis of Franz's brother and Chris, these two members of the Black Sunlight Organisation are, to a certain extent, depicted as evincing a psychic disorder, not because it is in fact the case but, rather, for Marechera to test the assumptions that circulate madness as a self-evident condition against the implicit view that madness does not exist until we call it. The novel does this by establishing a chaotic social order in which no position exists from which to oppose sanity to insanity except that which mirrors the chaos or 'madness' of the social order itself.

If Devil's End reflects the general social and political 'madness' that has driven its inmates into a pariah state, then it is interesting that Franz's brother would say about himself that 'I am what the great cunt wants me to be. A kind of one-slogan agitator whose very obsession is the proof of his tolerated madness' (Marechera 1980:70). Needless to say, the 'Great Cunt' is the sum total of all that which is not only one-dimensional but, also, renders all in its sway one-dimensional as well. As Franz's brother elaborates:

'It's inside you. It's everything you are. It's the soul that's inside you looking out into the world. It's everything outside yourself that looks inside you. That's the great cunt. ... Do you see what I mean? Do you? You are not there and in great darkness and all at once you find you weren't there at all but in some great big womb that's going to shit you out after nine month (Marechera 1980:70).

Thus, according to Franz's brother, the real madness is to surrender one's mind to the dictates of the society that has become inseparable from the 'Great Cunt'; hence the way in which he not only defines the 'Great Cunt' but, also, the way in which he shouts the slogan 'DOWN WITH THE GREAT CUNT!' (Marechera 1980:64). For his part, Chris introduces into the Black Sunlight Organisation's 'unwritten constitution' (Marechera 1980:69) an apparently inane question, 'how is Susan in bed?' which turns out to serve the same purpose as Franz's brother's slogan 'down with the great cunt'.

However, besides his obsession with women's underwear, Chris's

'madness' is also conveyed by Katherine:

... Kathy [Katherine], have you got any clean underwear I can borrow?

It's out on the line, somewhere. Unless Chris has been at it again.

Didn't he [Chris] go see that analyst?

Katherine nodded.

She nodded very meaningfully.

Susan gaped. She slit her throat with a forefinger gesture:

You mean ...?

Yes, Katherine said (Marechera 1980:40).

In the above quotation, particularly in the part where Kathy says 'Unless Chris has been at it again,' the idea of Chris's habit of stealing women's underwear is reinforced. In effect, this means that Chris's first degree of madness manifests itself as a sexual disorder. Let me go back to the source of this first degree of Chris's madness which Susan locates in his 'lousy childhood in a motherfucking environment' (Marechera 1980:40). I want to illustrate the effect of Chris's childhood as described by Susan on his adulthood. It would seem that the expression that Susan uses to contextualise Chris's madness, 'a lousy childhood in a motherfucking environment' is an allusion to Christian's own childhood. Christian informs us that, 'Susan [his mother] was in there with another client. We were eating the proceeds from her last but one client' (Marechera 1980:5). Therefore, the impression that Susan's expression creates is that Chris's mother, like Christian's, also earned a living from prostituting herself; hence '*motherfucking environment*'. From this perspective Chris is right to say that those who think that he is mad, because of his obsession with women's underwear will think so even if they knew the source of his obsession and that his obsession may not be a sign of madness after all.

The second degree of Chris's alleged madness comes up in the part of the conversation between Katherine and Susan, in which Susan implies by her gesture that Chris may have murdered the (psycho-)analyst. I want to insist, as Foucault argues, that maybe killing the psychiatrist was not a bad thing after all. In fact, in an interview that Christian conducts with the opposition leader at Devil's End, the issue of 'killing' the system that

alienates the workers, rather than seek accommodation with it, is the way to go. Needless to say, the psychiatrist that Chris kills is part of the system that defines madness and, by doing so, reinforces social order.

Finally, that Chris's madness is used as a device to interrogate the mainstream conception of madness is further illustrated by Franz's brother, the political propagandist of the Black Sunlight Organisation, who does not consider himself mad, despite evincing what in the mainstream view of madness would be a symptom of madness. Explaining his attitude, Franz's brother claims that 'I am what the great cunt wants me to be. A kind of one-slogan agitator whose very obsession is the proof of his tolerated madness' (Marechera 1980:70). I have already highlighted Franz's brother's view that madness is surrendering to the 'great cunt', and it should suffice to say that it is a greater madness that is at stake in *Black Sunlight*.

## Conclusion

The questions that *Black Sunlight* asks speak of what it means to live inside and/or outside of institutional knowledge: what it means to be an *historical subject* inside and/or outside the institutional organisation of historical subjectivity, what it means to be a *sexual being* inside and/or outside the institutional organisation of sexuality, and what it means to *know* inside and/or outside of the organisation of knowledge in the school system, the asylum and/or in certain forms of systemic incarceration/imprisonment. Proceeding from the commonplace critique of Marechera's writing as eccentric, individualistic and, as such, without any bearing on any recognisable subject or issue, I proposed the view that *Black Sunlight* appears not to have a recognisable subject-matter because its subject matter is the process whereby a work of literature arrives at its subject-matter in the first place.

What I have argued in this essay, is the manner in which *Black Sunlight* attempts to re-read Althusser's influential, but ultimately limited, understanding of the 'behaviour' of the superstructure which, in classical Marxism, is not given the attention that Marechera gives it in *Black Sunlight*. Whereas Althusser sought to repair the Marxist limitation by situating discourse on the Marxist agenda, in 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes towards an Investigation' he retained Marxism's most

problematic presumption, namely, that power is negative. I have shown how *Black Sunlight* rejects this view, by arguing instead that power is productive of other sites of power, or, to use Antonio Gramsci's term, hegemonic. As such, again to invoke Foucault's idea of the productive force of power, there is no singular position from which the subject is 'hailed'. Indeed, that Christian is able to reject the collective purchase of the chief's 'our', of Blanche Goodfather's anthropology and of the self-aggrandizing marginality of the Black Sunlight Organisation, testifies to a far more complex view of power and contestation that *Black Sunlight* presupposes.

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Postgraduate Student  
University of Johannesburg

# **Social Concerns in C.T. Msimang's *IZULU ELADUMA ESANDLWANA***

**N.N. Mathonsi**

## **Introduction**

**Social concern/ commitment** refers to preparedness and ability to tackle social problems, conflicts, and needs besetting the society. Given that the problems (cultural, political, religious, etc.) that afflicted the Africans were so vast during the apartheid period, no practitioner of literature should have failed to reflect them and their causes, and to offer solutions. As part of the dramatic expression in serious literature, a socially committed author must identify the ills besetting society, and take aim at one or two of them. Targeting becomes necessary because if too many ills are presented, the force is dispersed. The next step should be the creation of a metaphoric image, consisting of fictional characters and events, which reflect the social ills the author is highlighting. Through the fictional characters and events the manifestations of the ills should be shown, with one or more workable solutions suggested. A socially committed work could challenge the society to alter itself and its circumstances through a catharsis, if the work is dramatic; through laughter at itself, if the work is comic. As Ngara (1985: vii) points out:

Committed writers are extremely sensitive to the social problems of their day and are constantly coming to grips with them, hoping to play their part in changing society for the better. They are therefore constantly defining the role of art in society and endeavouring to develop literary forms that match their social vision.

According to Marx:

Literary works are not mysteriously inspired or explicable simply in terms of their authors' psychology. They are forms of perception, particular ways of seeing the world which is the social mentality or ideology of an age (Eagleton 1976:6).

Craig (1975 in Selepe 1991:95) supports the Marxist view that for the work of art to be successful as a reflection of a social process:

... a writer is great to the extent that he can provide society in general, (or the reading public of the time) with a true mirror of itself, of its conflicts and problems.

It is generally accepted that literature mirrors society, i.e. it is inspired by social conflicts and needs; it expresses such conflicts and offers solutions to them, thus ideally leading society out of its ills. Yet one should guard against limiting and enslaving art's nature and scope to social problems (especially great sufferings) only, when in actual fact it can also be inspired by great pleasures, joys, discoveries, etc. Social commitment is just one side of literature, which has to do with the type of content to be coupled with the form—the base of literature. Literature is more than just social relevance, otherwise bucolic, symbolic and lyric poetry could not be considered as literature.

The social significance of art lies, among other features, in the fact that:

Art comes from a particular content and understanding that work involves responding to it as an element within that largest canvas of its own time (Orkin 1987:13).

Hence we need to look at the social, economic and political conditions that prevailed at the time the work was produced for possible motivation, and not merely photographically reproduce 'the surface phenomena of society without penetrating to the significant essences' (Eagleton 1976:30). Life is made up of history, geography, politics, economics, religion, and education

amongst others. For literature to be adequate, it must throw a beam of light on these aspects. Only then can we speak of literature as typifying social relations.

The struggle between the aristocracy and the working classes is the soul of Marxist theories. Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1984; 1987; 1993; 1997) transposes the theory to the colonial and post-colonial situation in Africa. Ngugi insists on the anti-imperialist struggle. He displays an intense sense of progressive socio-political commitment and this anti-imperialist thrust recurs throughout his social philosophy (Amuta 1989:96). His socio-political thought is part of the dialectical theory that has society as the starting point and then spreads to its products to command relevance. He aligns himself with the broad masses, and to him commitment in Africa means moving away from literature which is 'deeply rooted in the liberal bourgeois tradition, with its emphasis on value-free culture and art for art's sake', to making literature socially relevant through making it 'an object of intellectual dispute'.

Amuta (1989:114) aptly asserts that 'engaged and committed (*African*) literature' articulates 'the parameters and manifestations of commitment in several ways'. It involves writing about the daily issues and also assuming the role of a teacher by guiding the society; and tackling public issues. This could imply mediating in the socio-political, socio-cultural, economic and religious worlds inhabited by the writer. In short, social commitment is literature compelled to face the socio-historical challenges of time and space. But it is taken for granted that the literary work becomes committed if it commands relevance by striking socio-political significance.

Amuta (1989) points out that commitment is a matter of being 'consciously' aligned or consciously prepared to change alignment in response to the social realities in question. It is the change of position which makes the writer relevant. In the apartheid era, for instance, it was the question of conscious alignment with challenges to grapple with the aberrations of apartheid. Each era presents challenges to literature and forces it to take sides for or against the progressive forces. This, however, must not change the fundamental fact that literature is essentially 'artistic'.

Amuta (1989:115) aptly sums up this interdependence thus:

Commitment in literature is essentially artistic; the commitment in a literary work of art strikes us through the laws of artistic composition. When artistic commitment appeals according to the laws of mundane social rhetoric, art yields to propaganda.

This implies that commitment is intrinsic to art, and where art yields to propaganda, it is no longer art. Social commitment is no new concept in Zulu literature. Folktales were mainly told in response to social needs; *izibongo* were performed by the monitoring traditional *imbongi* as popular reflections of feelings towards persons and events; *izaga* were employed as expression of social norms. During the period of tremendous pain and oppression we expected not only socio-political commitment of literature but also historical, cultural, religious and educational commitment. In times of social change and transformation we still expect literature to deal with the aforementioned aspects

### ***Izulu Eladuma ESandlwana: Drama synopsis***

The play is about the events which led to the battle of Sandlwana, which is the most memorable battle that ever took place between the Zulu nation and the British Empire. When the story opens we see Cetshwayo a disgruntled man. He is worried about the outcome of the discussions regarding the contested land of Zungeni. The Boers have, without permission, occupied the land that rightfully belongs to the Zulus, but Cetshwayo hopes that Sir Theophilus Shepstone will uphold the rights of the Zulus. The king later learns that the decision over the land has not been in his favour. Soon after this he gets a report that Mehlokazulu has killed two of Sihayo's wives on Natal soil, and, according to the agreement with the British, no Zulu armed men were allowed into Natal. The Natal government sends an ultimatum with the demand that the guilty party be sent to Pietermaritzburg for a court case. If the demand is not complied with by the king, it could mean war with the colonial government. This demand is coupled with the imposition of a heavy penalty of 600 cattle, and the request of disbandment of the regiments protecting the Zulu empire. This is a clear insult to the independence of the king and a thorn sore enough to make war inevitable. Cetshwayo has had enough of the British who have already taken his land and given it to the

Boers. He is prepared to fight the British and this is just the spark to start the fire that leads to the battle. After meeting with his councillors, Cetshwayo decides to challenge the colonial government by sending it a bag of *uphoko* (grain), warning of the number of soldiers that he could field if the British intolerance is not checked. Cetshwayo's refusal to comply with the terms of the ultimatum provides the colonial government with a pretext to attack him. The British soon enter Zululand but are defeated by the Zulu army at Sandlwana.

### **Social Concerns in *Izulu Eladuma ESandlwana***

The play politically reflects on the reasons for the Anglo-Zulu war of 1879, namely, the white man's land hunger and British arrogance. Cetshwayo fights for the maintenance of the Zulu traditional way of life, for Zulu independence and for the integrity of Zulu freedom. Canonici (1998:62) points out that, in *Izulu Eladuma ESandlwana*:

The author reflects on the reasons that led to the bloody Anglo-Zulu war of 1879: the colonists' hunger for land, and the British colonial arrogance to impose their way of life on the various black populations with the excuse of bringing western 'civilization' to them.

The process of African decolonisation had begun in 1958. But whilst most countries in Africa were obtaining independence, South Africa remained firmly governed by a white minority government which imposed strict conditions on the black majority. This minority government excluded blacks from political life, and imprisoned or forced into exile leaders of black political organisations and individuals. Msimang's play, which appeared at the same time as the Soweto students' riots of 1976, is a bold demand for Zulu (and, by extension, South Africa's) freedom and independence. It is a cry for re-acquisition of the national right to be oneself on our continent and in our country. Through Cetshwayo's words and actions, the play describes independence at various levels (which applied to both 1879 and 1976).

In *Izulu Eladuma ESandlwana* the land issue is central. Cetshwayo is prepared to die rather than lose the land he keeps in trust for his people.

Physically, the whole country must legitimately return to the original owners, the Africans. Or, at least, the government's tricks to increase white-owned land by re-settling Africans on barren land must stop. The independence and integrity of the land is a pre-requisite for freedom. The play opens with the king expressing his loss of patience for having to wait for many days to hear the verdict on the disputed land. This is a struggle for physical independence: when the kingdom does not have to answer to any outsiders, and the land is secure in Zulu hands.

*Ngihlatshwe yiva lapha nceku yami. Isihlungu saleli va singicima inhliziyo sengathi isihlungu seva logagane noma lesinqawe.*  
(I have been pricked by a thorn, my attendant. Its poison affects my heart-beat as if it were a mimosa thorn tree poison or that of a small scrubby thorn mimosa tree.) (Msimang 1976:1).

Cetshwayo's language is never direct. All he means is, the pain he feels while he is waiting for the verdict of Zungeni, makes him explode. It is threatening to cause him to stop tolerating the trouble he is forced to tolerate. In fact the issue of the disputed land makes him fed up.

Cetshwayo intensifies the discomfort by using the expression '*iminjunju eqaqambayo*' (excruciating pain), but indicates that he wants to get the views of Mnyamana and Bhejane, because one benefits by the experience of others—'*injobo ithungelwa ebandla*' (Msimang 1976:1). Bhejane and Mnyamana, who have just joined Cetshwayo and Makhasana, both take him literally and as a result they do not grasp the metaphor. Realising that he has spoken past their ears, Cetshwayo explains that it is his heart that is throbbing painfully because the Whites have taken portions of his land without consulting him. There is a clash of tradition on the land issue. Cetshwayo, as the custodian of the land, has the sole right to distribute it. But, contrary to this thinking, the British have usurped the authority to assign it to whoever they want. Mnyamana cools the King down and tells him to completely rely on '*ubaba uSomtsewu*' (Lord Shepstone) for everything. Mnyamana is evidently short-sighted with regard to the issue of land distribution, and since Somtsewu has become the father to the Zulu nation, he has ironically secured the authority to distribute land. The most relied upon and trusted Somtsewu yet is part of the system and therefore

cannot be expected to act against other whites.

Cetshwayo is a law-abiding king who needs to be treated with honour and respect. But honour and respect is never deserved by a man who does not defend the rape of land. The possibility of losing the contested land makes him cogently say:

*Ngithi Mnyamana izwe yinto yokufelwa!*

(Mnyamana, I say land is something worth dying for!) (Msimang 1976:2).

The fact that the quoted words are repeated three times in the first three pages, is an indication that the king is in a bad mood. The way his speech threatens war makes us wonder what would have happened if he was directly talking to his offenders. For Cetshwayo land loss has to be prevented at all costs, even at the cost of life. He clearly indicates that were it not for the oath he made when he was installed, he would have taken action to rectify the situation.

*Angizikhohliwe izifungo engazenza eMlambongwenya.*

(I have not forgotten the terms of the oath that I made at Mlambongwenya.) (Msimang 1976:2).

Land is culturally the mother that gives life to and feeds everything and everybody. It is the body of the nation that is why Africans never sold or allowed it to be disposed of. But the new comers (Whites) do not understand it in this way. For them it is only an economic transaction that is why they have taken the Zungeni land (after the sacrilegious cession of Natal by Dingane and Mpande, which Cetshwayo never accepted) as their own, not as tenants for the king or the Zulu nation.

He regrets the day he made a present to Somtsewu. He realises that he should not have accepted Somtsewu on the day of his installation. He had thought they were sincere friends of his father, Mpande, but that implied his recognition of their authority over himself. The British wanted to introduce a system of patronage, regulated by a set of mutual rights and duties. The system works in time of peace, but not when hostility is encouraged by arrogant behaviour.

*Yeka izinkomo zami inyoni kayiphumuli engamnyathelisa ngayo mhlazane ezongibeka.*

(I regret ever presenting him with white cattle to dispose him favourably (usher him in) on the day he installed me.) (Msimang 1976:27).

Cetshwayo has not yet fully reached a stage of realisation. If he had he would not say: '*ezongibeka*'. He needs a person with a clear mind to remind him that an African king is never installed by whites. But, any way, he pronounces a total resentment of the white administration.

*Khumu! Sengiyakhumuka manje.*

(Hold on! I am breaking away from them now.) (Msimang 1976:28).

It makes Cetshwayo despair to learn that Somtsewu has seen it fit to support the Boers at his expense. He does no longer want to have anything to do with the white man. At this stage, although he is concerned, 'the related notions of "commitment", "choice" and "decision"', have not forced their way to the centre to make him more concerned (Bartley 1962:4). In that way he is going to find a simple substitute type of commitment. That is why Mnyamana can still plead with him to please try and find an alternative to going to war against the British. The king soon finds that he can no longer stand this open contempt by the British, as reflected in the words:

*Kukhona esebenyele umtapo. Ibumba selilibi, sibe sisalibumbe liyabhidlika.*

(Some people have relieved themselves in the clay supply quarry. The clay is now spoiled. Each time we try to mould something it breaks down.) (Msimang 1976:40).

Legally Africans must be free to run the country according to their own traditions and laws, without interference from the colonial powers. Africans must be consulted on matters pertaining to laws, especially those regarding them, for example, coronation laws, the death penalty, etc. Economically, the country must be free to use its own devices and resources to survive and prosper (e.g. regimental system for both economic and security reasons).

Morally, the king must be free to govern the country according to its own ancient customs and traditions, without outside interference, allowing for dynamic development of the local traditions. Without this, the country has no soul and no life. These are the main points of the ultimatum as raised and summarised in the play. Also the Soweto students' fight against Afrikaans was a battle for consultation, independence and freedom.

The incident between Mehlokazulu and Sihayo's wives (Mehlokazulu's incursion into Natal) is considered by the government in Pietermaritzburg as a deliberate violation of the 'coronation laws' and of the system of mutual understanding agreed upon in the 1873 coronation ceremony. As regard this violation, the two parties have different perspectives: Cetshwayo offers a reparation gift of 50 white cattle, hoping this would re-establish the balance and the friendly relations between the two governments. As if the British want to exacerbate the situation and force Cetshwayo to declare war on them, they impose a bigger fine of 600 heads of cattle, as well as the handing over of Mehlokazulu to be tried and punished according to Natal law, on the grounds that the crime has been committed on Natal soil.

If the English cannot be appeased, it means that everything is going to fall apart. It has become clear that the colonial administrators have a different view of justice. If the fine cannot appease them, what purpose is it meant to serve? The king has run short of choices, except to fight and die, if that is the necessary end.

*Ngiqoma ukufa kunokubizwa ngevaka elanikela ngabantu balo ngokwesaba ukulahlekelwa ngubukhosi balo.*

(I prefer to die rather than to be called a coward who betrayed his people for fear of the loss of kingship.) (Msimang 1976:42).

Cetshwayo is beginning to act and think selflessly and impatiently. But all along he has been a good leader, not acting in haste, and in control of the situation. We realise that, for every person, trying times may come and go, leaving one with very little choice but to commit oneself. Such times came twice for king Cetshwayo. First, when he had to accept Mpande-Mbuyazi's challenge and fight at Ndongakusuka; secondly, when he had to fight the British at Sandlwana. He makes a decision from which there is no turning

back, knowing well that it is going to be firearms against spears. But a British conquest should only come over his dead body:

*Kuleli lawoJama umlungu uyochachaza ngifile.*

(In this land of Jama, the white man will have his way only when I'm dead.) (Msimang 1976:60).

When Cetshwayo replies that it is impossible to comply with the demands regarding Mehlokazulu, the Natal government sends him an ultimatum that, if not accepted, would mean the loss of physical, moral, military and legal independence. Cetshwayo evidently cannot accept his nation's suicide, and war becomes inevitable. Thinking of the servitude he will have to endure under the British yoke makes Cetshwayo brave in his resistance against the advancing British artillery. That is why when he sends his army to Sandlwana he tells them that it's life or death: they should fight to the victory or die fighting, to avoid living under the fetters of British oppression:

*Le mpi ngizoyilwa ilanga libe linye, ngibachithe abafokazana ndini.*

(This war is going to take me one day to fight and defeat these despicable strangers.) (Msimang 1976:71).

Indeed the soldiers fight bravely to preserve their independence. They shock the British army by dealing them a heavy blow at Sandlwana. The British are the first ones to invade (the aggressor) the Zulu kingdom. This shows colonial arrogance and deception. Cetshwayo's diplomatic attempts to prevent the rape of the land by colonists as well as the imposition of their rule on him all fell on deaf ears, because Sir Bartle Frere wanted the federation of all republics under the British flag. Msimang's words in the preface are a testimony to this:

*Kwahlaluka ukuthi empeleni uCetshwayo wayengenaphutha lokuba aze ahlaselwe kuphela kwabe kuyinto ka Sir Bartle Frere ukuba ahlanganise zonke izifunda ezikwelomzansi neAfrika zibe ngaphansi kombuso weNdllovukazi.*

(It became clear that in actual fact Cetshwayo was not that guilty such he deserved to be attacked but it was Sir Bartle Frere's plan to

unify all South Africa regions under the Queen of England.)  
(Msimang 1976: Preface).

On the other hand Shepstone wanted to win popular support. He had initially allied himself with Cetshwayo in opposition to the Transvaal Boers, but soon switched his support to the Boers' cause. Shepstone had hoped that the crowning and some flag-waving acts would merely subdue the Zulus and persuade Cetshwayo to accept his terms. When the diplomatic Sir Theophilus Shepstone's self-proclaimed crowning achievement failed to accomplish the desired outcome, Cetshwayo's cheap tinsel crown proved to be a farce (Edgerton 1988:13). When Shepstone's diplomatic trickery miscarried, he decided to resort to force.

Cetshwayo had mistakenly agreed to be crowned, thinking that British troops would protect his interest in future. But as soon as he realised that it was not to be so, he backed down. The king had miscalculated and flawed but he could not be easily made to cede his country's autonomy. Cetshwayo was alarmed by the influx of British troops on the disputed Zungeni area while his own were ordered to retire. That was when it dawned on him that he had trusted the wrong man.

Mpande's (Cetshwayo's father) subservience to the white men had brought this sorry pass to his heirs. Cetshwayo had to battle to restore Zulu independence in its fullness. The nation is aware of the king's loss of influence and that the main cause was his shortsightedness on the day of his installation. Two warriors reflect on Cetshwayo's limited powers resulting from his acceptance of Shepstone's so called 'coronation laws'. They say (Magemfu's words):

*INgonyama isiyingonyama ngegama, eqinisweni lonke iboshwe  
izandla nezinyawo.*

(The king is still a king in name, but in fact he is hands and feet  
bound) (Msimang 1976:6).

Msimang is part of the community that is affected by this tragic event. The author does not approve the taking of land without any justification—the use of the word '*phangwa*' (Preface) by the author shows his attitude towards the new dispensation, that divides the king's land amongst his *indunas*,

making them equal to him. Even Cetshwayo did not approve of the division. The word '*Isikhundlwana*' used in relation to Dinuzulu in *Insumansumane*, could also be used for Cetshwayo with regard to his loss of power. It would seem he was considered unfit and unable to shoulder the kind of responsibility that kings used to carry in terms of the tradition. Msimang is committed to expressing the feelings of the people about Cetshwayo's treatment by the Natal government. He seems to have absorbed the need to give vent to their feelings.

It is also a struggle for control of land and its economic resources. The economy of the black people was based on cultivating crops of maize, sorghum, pumpkins, beans, etc. Cattle farming provided meat and milk for sour milk (*amasi*). Socio-culturally and socio-politically the importance of the cattle was on its being the medium of exchange or appeasement to fathers-in-law and sealing political alliances through kinship ties. The loss of land means the loss of source of all the above-mentioned. That is why for Cetshwayo land means everything.

A writer's work implicitly reflects his political leanings as his writing is coloured by his culture and philosophy. There is no neutrality. The point of neutrality is challenged here when we consider the meaning behind Lindenberger's (1975:6) words:

The dramatist could seek out areas whose essential conflicts seemed to point forward, in fact to anticipate those later stages of the historical process with which the audience might experience some emotional identification.

Msimang, for instance, has chosen the events leading to the battle of Sandlwana as a base for his drama, and ends up by telling of the important victory of Sandlwana. He never touches on the other skirmishes of the war for fear of denting the image that he has so skilfully built. He has avoided telling about the defeat in order to make it acceptable to his audience. The mood during the time of writing was so volatile that dampening it by talking of defeat would have been an act of cowardice. He had to be engulfed in the popular feeling of the period. He only briefly mentions the plan that miscarried, the plan not to cross the Tugela River. But before the British could claim a victory in their insatiable thirst for power, they learned a bitter

lesson at the hands of the Zulu army.

Critical assessment of sources objectively written together with artistic interpretation of characters and events implies historical commitment on the part of Msimang. Cele (1997:13) says history grants a work of art acceptance as a possible interpretation of a period in the world of history. The use of historical characters, events, settings could possibly convince the readers that what they are shown is the truth of history. Msimang has selected and manipulated the historical material to his own end. He has used it as a metaphor of the political situation at the time of writing. The past is considered as exemplary to the present in order to throw light on present day developments.

A dramatic performance unites the audience, the actors and the playwright into a unity of intent and ideals, especially in Africa where theatre is open to the participation of the audience. Rhythm, music, dance, gestures, are imitative and invite people to take part, and so to be transformed into the atmosphere of celebration that pervades everything and everybody.

When the play is a historical drama, the spectators become proud of belonging to the nation that has produced such heroes, and are stimulated to imitate their glorious deeds. Simply reading Msimang's play one can feel the exaltation of feelings, the rage of the king, the courage of the people, and nearly the sounds of the battle at Sandlwana. But since the play has never reached the stage, the message of resistance launched by proud King Cetshwayo only reaches us through the pages of a book and radio (play was once broadcast by Radio Zulu).

The reasons of Cetshwayo's war, however, were still felt by the people of 1976, especially by the students of Soweto that marched and died to protest against Afrikaans cultural hegemony, against the injustices of land reforms that stole from the blacks to give to the wealthy whites, against destruction of African cultural and historical heritage.

## **Conclusion**

Msimang's play should be seen as the desperate cry of a people oppressed and at the end of its tether, a people that can look back on a very glorious past to draw strength for coping with the present. It seems to say: yes we are

under a very oppressive government (in the 1970s), but we shall overcome it, as we did in 1879 when our oppressors drove us to despair. The land on which we live is ours, not that of the white people. We draw strength from it: it is worth dying for its independence. Physical independence is meaningless without a cultural, religious, social and economic independence. We must work for the preservation of what is good in our culture, customs and traditions. Cetshwayo won the day because he was a thoroughly upright person, trusted by his people who stood united behind him. Our moral fibre will eventually lead us to victory, the fibre shown by the Robben Island prisoners. The acquisition of such moral superiority is the task of every individual, be it in a leadership role or not. And we do not need tremendous exterior incentives to achieve this: the strength must come from within.

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School of Language, Literature and Linguistics  
University of KwaZulu-Natal

# The Quest for 'Malay' identity in Apartheid South Africa

**Goolam Vahed**

This study examines identity construction in twentieth-century South Africa, where successive white minority regimes attempted to define individuals according to reified notions of race and ethnicity, and demarcate 'race' groups deemed to have essential origins from other similarly constructed groups. Strong sanctions were imposed on those transcending narrowly inscribed race boundaries. This narrative of the life of cricketer, school teacher and Imam Sulayman Kirsten, popularly known as 'Solly', considers the meanings of being 'Malay' in this context. How were racial stereotypes formed and sustained? How important was culture, religion, class and other factors in shaping identities? Was differentiation purely a result of the racial project advanced by the apartheid regime, or did racial and ethnic identities pre-date apartheid? Did race discourse have a discursive power and was it internalised by those to whom labels were attached? How crucial were racial and ethnic identities in interpreting social behaviour in everyday life? Do such racial and ethnic identities continue to have everyday meanings or have they dissipated with the installation of a new democratic non-racial order.

This biographic narrative focusing on formative aspects of Solly's past and present life relies heavily on popular memory. The research process began with Solly recounting his life in a non-directive manner, and was followed by specific queries during the writing process to fill gaps and clarify issues. Solly, well-educated and self-assured, was instrumental in determining the flow of research, a methodology that holds dangers, as Edward Said (2000:178f) warns:

The art of memory for the modern world ... is very much something

to be used, misused, and exploited, rather than something that sits inertly there for each person to possess and contain .... People now look to this specifically desirable and recoverable past, this refashioned memory ... to give themselves a coherent identity ... a place in the world.

Individuals 'reorder and 'redeploy' memory to gain a coherent place in the world. They may also manipulate certain information, and elevate events in a functional way for specific purposes (Said 2000:181). This danger has to be balanced against the effacement of the majority from South African history. As Harrison (1993:409) reminds us, for too long, the

language of objectivity and value neutrality has served to mask and obscure mechanisms of silencing, alienating and subjugating the voices of ... descendants of the colonially conquered people denied history.

Used with appropriate caution oral history is an indispensable means of bringing to light the 'silenced' voices of Black South Africans like Solly.

### **'Malay-ness'**

In the South African context 'Malay' refers to Coloureds of the Muslim faith, many of whom were descendents of slaves imported to the Cape from South and Southeast Asia. Until the twentieth century, they were referred to as 'Mohammedan', 'Malay', 'Mussulman' or 'coloured Muslims' in British and Dutch records and unofficially as *slamse*, a corrupted form of 'Islam' with pejorative connotations (Jeppe 2001). An Malay ethnic identity, according to Jeppe (2001) was constituted from the 1920s, largely as a result of the work of anthropologist Izak David Du Plessis of the University of Cape Town, whose book *The Cape Malays* (1944) formally isolated Coloured Muslims from the broader Coloured community by presenting them as a separate 'race', 'Malay', even though this 'community' comprised descendents of slaves from South and Southeast Asia, Arabs, Khoi-San and Mozambique.

Haron suggests that the notion of Malay distinctiveness predates Du

Plessis' work. He points out that during the nineteenth century Coloured Muslims were seen by Colonial authorities as 'respectable persons who did not drink and were hardworking and reliable; they were thus different from other 'Coloured' groups and seem to have maintained those distinctions mainly because of their religious and cultural traditions'. The term Malay was given further authority during the 1910s and 1920s when it was used by the Cape Malay Association (CMA), which sought political favours for Malays from the then South African government (Haron 2001).

The few cursory references also suggest that a distinct Malay identity had formed in Durban during the early decades of the twentieth century, and that there was contact with the wider South African Malay community. The following report in *Latest* (29 January 1927) attests to this:

Mr Abdullah Mahomed, the genial Chairman of the Durban Malay Association, informs me that a party of 50 Malay pilgrims for Mecca sailed from Durban on Tuesday last. They are expected to reach their destination on or about the 27<sup>th</sup> of February next. During their brief stay in Durban the pilgrims were the guests of Hajee M. Jaffar of 68 Lorne Street, a prominent leader of the local Malay community, and Mr B. Marley, also of Lorne Street, Durban. Some of the pilgrims domiciled at Mr Abraham's residence.

D.F. Malan, prime minister in apartheid South Africa during the 1950s, commented on the closeness of Malays and Afrikaners in 1925 when he was Minister of Interior and Education:

The Malay community ... form one of the oldest elements of the South African nation. They came virtually at the same time that the white man and experienced the same history as the white man .... The white man did not come here to give the Malays civilisation. They were always civilised, and came here after they had adopted the white man's civilisation .... Together with the Dutch-speaking white man they developed that language [Afrikaans] (in Jeppe 2001: 85).

Malan's speech suggested an essence to Malayness, a coherent and whole culture transplanted at the Cape. By the time the Nationalists came to power,

Malan's position had changed. The Population Registration Act of 1950 divided South Africans into four race groups, Whites, Indians, Africans, and Coloureds. Coloureds were defined as 'not a white person or a native', and sub-divided into 'Cape Malay', Other Coloureds, Khoisan, Bastards et al. Cape Muslims were placed into the 'Cape Malay' category. This designation was carried by Cape Coloured Muslims who migrated to other parts of Southern Africa (Haron 2001:3).

Malays began arriving in Durban from the turn of the twentieth-century as tailors from Johannesburg and Kimberley, and artisans from the Cape. They were cohesive because of their small number and close proximity. Cassim Jaffar of the Cape Malay Vigilance Society described the Malay community to the Town Clerk in October 1962 thus:

The Malay community of approximately 700 adults is not a wealthy one, and consists mainly of the artisan class. Owing to their religious and racial structure, they have always based their activities on a communal basis.

In Durban most Malays lived in Block AK in Greyville, in an area bordered by Mitchell Road and First Avenue. According to Solly physical proximity resulted in a 'deep identity of being Malay'. This changed under apartheid when the Group Areas Act resulted in the dispersion of Malays throughout Durban.

### **Being 'Malay' in Durban**

Solly Kirsten was born on 22 April 1932 in Vrededorp, known popularly as 'Fitas', in Johannesburg. He was the third of five children of Muhammad and Khadija, sandwiched by elder brothers Achmat and Ebrahim, with Abdurrahman and sister Amina following. Solly's mother Khadija Kimmie hailed from the small Malay community that moved to Rhodesia in the late 1890s. The Kirstens and Kimmie's were intimately connected by marriage. Solly's father's sister Maryam was married to his mother Khadija's brother Sulayman. The Kimmie family of Rhodesia achieved huge publicity when Khadija's brother Ebrahim Kimmie became the first person to travel overland from Rhodesia to Saudi Arabia for Hajj in the early 1960s in the now vintage Volkswagen Kombi.

Fitas, where Solly spent his formative years, was relatively mixed. Whites lived on streets one to eleven, Indians, Coloureds and Malays from streets twelve to 22, and Africans from streets 23 to 28. The first mosque in Fitas was built on 23<sup>rd</sup> street and bordered the African section of Fitas. Solly attended Krause Street School. The school's enrolment included African, Malay, Coloured and Indian children. The Kirsten family was beset by heartbreak in the mid-1940s when Mohammed, an upholsterer by trade, and Khadija parted ways. Both remarried and remained in Johannesburg. Achmat, who had married by this time, also stayed in Johannesburg, but Solly, Ebrahim, Abdurrahman and Amina moved to Durban with their father's sister Amina and her husband Rushdie Boomgard. Amina was known in the community as Ouma Tittie, 'Tittie' being a term of respect and endearment among Malays, signifying a person of high stature. 'Ouma' added to her status.

In Durban, Solly lived at 75 Prince Edward Street, where the famous Kismet Arcade was later built. Solly tried unsuccessfully to enrol at the nearby Anjuman Islam in Leopold Street. Even though the Kirsten's were Muslim, he was refused admission because Malays were classified 'Coloured', while Anjuman was strictly for Indian Muslims. Solly attended Umbilo High and subsequently qualified as a teacher at Umbilo College. Teaching and medicine were 'the' thing for people of colour at the time', according to Solly. Malay parents, mainly working-class, emphasised education, hard work and perseverance. Kirsten remembers his father always stressing: 'Don't try your best, make sure you do your best so you do not end up like me'.

Malays were in an ambivalent position. They could not easily integrate with Coloureds because of religion, and with Indian Muslims because of race, the latter referring to them pejoratively as 'Bushmen Muslims', according to Solly. Straddled between Indians and Coloureds, Malays negotiated several cultural and political identities. Their ambiguous position in Durban is illustrated in the naming of their children. Since Malays were required to attend Coloured schools, parents gave their children non-Arabic names to avoid being ostracised or denied entry. For example Rahma was registered Rachael, Hafsa as Mona, Ebrahim as Abie, Anwar as Enver, Yusuf as Joseph, and Sadick as Dickie.

The family name 'Kirsten' added to Solly's ambivalence. The

## *The Quest for 'Malay' Identity in Apartheid South Africa*

Kirstens are one of South Africa's most famous cricket and rugby families. Peter and Gary Kirsten, who are 'white', represented South Africa, following the country's readmission to international cricket in 1990. Solly's great-great grandfather was white, Jan Frederic Kirsten from Marico. In 1969, a copper mining company, commemorating a century of its existence, randomly chose the Kirsten name and presented family members with a plaque tracing the Kirsten ancestors. Jan Frederic Kirsten is listed on the plaque. Company representatives were flabbergasted when they discovered that Solly was not white, but presented him with a plaque nonetheless. Kirsten also recalls that as a child his grandmother Magiesa Kirsten spoke fondly of Gesiena Kirsten, Muslim name Hasiena, a distant relative of hers whose name appears on the plaque.

Solly asserted his Malayness, unlike fellow Malay pupils at Umbilo who downplayed this aspect of their identity. He recalls that in his first year at school, at the end of the Ramadan, the month of fasting, he expected to get the day off to celebrate the festival of Eid. Fellow Malay pupils advised him to take the day off and produce a 'sick certificate' rather than request official permission to be absent. Uncle Rushdie would not hear of this. He argued that Muslims were entitled to a day off on their religious festival and instructed Solly to speak to Coleman, the principal. Coleman was surprised there were 'Malays' in the school, and asked Solly: 'Aren't you Coloured?' He also asked Solly whether 'there were others like him' in the school. Coleman admired Solly's honesty and gave him the day off. They developed a frank and open relationship and Solly went on to become the school's first Malay head prefect. Solly cited this incident to illustrate that while young Malays practiced Islam in private spaces they were ambivalent about declaring this identity publicly. Some Malays preferred being identified as 'Coloured' rather than 'Indian' because of the stigma attached to Indians who were not considered permanent citizens and for whom the threat of repatriation remained real until 1961.

Growing up in an atmosphere of cultural and religious ambivalence, a visit to Cape Town with Rosslynns Cricket Club in December 1948 had a huge impact on Solly. He was 'overawed' among 'my people, their mosques, culture and way of life':

It was nice being part of a large majority community. In Durban we were drowned by Indian Muslims and Coloureds. On Friday, when

we went to Black River mosque, every Muslim wore a fez. This was a completely different scene. I felt really at home. It made me more conscious as a Muslim. There were so many of us and yet they made us feel so welcome. We renewed old family ties. We attended religious and cultural festivals every night, the ratieb, moulood and so on. I remember that we had to attend a moulood on New Year's Eve. We youngsters pleaded with the elders to finish quickly so that we could go and welcome the New Year in District Six!

Durban's fledgling Malay community formed the Cape Malay Vigilance Association (CMVA) in 1959. Baku Domingo, who had taken care of most matters affecting Malays, felt that younger members of the community should pull their weight. They had acted informally as a loose knit organisation but constituted into an organisation to ensure that the 'Cape Malay' in Durban was given his 'rightful' status. When Group Areas was promulgated Malays were determined force the City Council to set aside an area for them as they did not want to live with Coloureds. They identified Asherville, which bordered the Indian area of Overport, and took up the cause with the DTC and Group Areas Board, but to no avail because the authorities ruled that they should occupy areas set aside for Coloureds. This upset those Malays who saw themselves as different to Coloureds because of their Muslim religion.

One of the anomalies of the fluid race situation was many Indians became 'Malays' and took out registration cards from CMVA. By registering as Malays, they became Coloureds, which meant they could go to better schools, buy at more stores, travel to Transvaal without a permit, and so on. Solly recalls that in 1958 he was stopped by police at Volksrust en route to Johannesburg and forced to return to Durban because he had not carried his registration card and was taken by the police to be 'Indian'. Indians were regarded as a 'foreign element' by successive white governments and treated as an immigrant community that had to be repatriated. It was only in 1961 that the nationalist government officially recognised Indians as a 'permanent element' of the population of South Africa.

### **Cricketer 'Par Excellence'**

'Apartheid' existed long before the Nationalist Party (NP) came into power

in 1948. Africans, Indians, Coloureds, Malays and Whites lived separate lives, and even played their cricket separately. The 1820 settlers in the Eastern Cape, competing for land with the Xhosa, had formed all kinds of stereotypes about them—unassimilable, lazy savages, etc., and attacked liberal philanthropists who advocated integration (Dubow). After the South African War of 1899-1902, Alfred Milner, self-proclaimed British 'race patriot', set out to safeguard British values by creating a stable political and economic order through uniting Whites and segregating Africans. The 1905 South African Native Affairs Commission set out an ambitious programme to achieve race separation, though it was only implemented by the time the Hertzog Bills were passed in 1936 (Dubow). Race awareness and stereotyping was in place long ambitious legislation took effect.

Cricket was *THE* game among Malays. Even community Imams, purveyors of religious wisdom and knowledge, had a deep cricket culture, as supporters or being nominated in honorary positions. Sheik Sharif Ali, popular Imam during the 1940s, was never seen without his green Roslyn's cricket blazer at public functions. Cricket reflected the racial and cultural divisions prevalent in the wider society. In October 1914, the Durban Indian Cricket Union (DICU) barred Coloureds from participating in its activities, while Malays were allowed to partake 'as a matter of privilege' (*Latest* 29 October 1914). Thus, while the state did not officially distinguish between Malays and Coloureds, individuals had embraced separate identities.

The 'privilege' of playing with Indians was short-lived. In November 1924, S.L. Singh's proposal that Malays be barred from 1925 was adopted by the mainly Indian Muslim delegates who felt that because Malays had a different legal status from Indians, and were exempt from many of the restrictions on Indians, they should not be allowed to play sport with Indians (*Latest* 24 October 1925). Ephrahim Thomas, an Indian teacher and cricketer, objected to the decision:

I have found the Malays, generally speaking, form a part of our community. They live, work, and indulge in common enjoyments with Indians .... In all our entertainments and socials we find the Malays figuring prominently. If the Malays are worthy to join us in the common walks of life, then let us not deny them also joining us on the field of sport (*Latest* 31 October 1925).

The appeal was in vain. Malays were barred from participating in DICU from 1925 with the Natal Indian Cricket Union (NICU) followed suit in 1926 (*Latest* 8 January 1927).

Expelled by Indians, and barred by Coloureds, Malays petitioned the Durban Town Council (DTC) for facilities, reflecting again a distinct Malay identity. In January 1926, the Malay Association of Durban wrote to the Mayor via its attorneys, Chapman and Didcott that it represented approximately 120 people,

... amongst whom are numbered certain voters. The Association is a well-organised body and is properly governed by the leading members of that community. The Malay community is particularly addicted to sport. The Coloured Grounds Association refuses to allow our clients to take any part on the grounds that Malays were Asiatics, with the result that Malays have no facilities to play sport.

The DTC Estates Manager met with the Coloured and Malay Associations on 22 January 1926 and reported that 'an estrangement existed between them .... The Malay section of the Coloured community will be subjected to ostracism under the present circumstances'. Yet the DTC resolved on 26 January 1926 that Malays should 'make the best arrangements they can'. On 14 September 1926 M.G. Sallie of the Malay Association wrote to the Town Clerk to 'protect our interest before coming to a final conclusion in granting a Sports Ground to the Coloured community of Durban, which our community are part and partial also'. Malays formed a Natal Coloured Cricket Union (NCCU) at the end of 1926. It is noteworthy that in choice of name, Malays emphasised their 'Colouredness'. NCCU's patron was Hajee A.K. Abdurahman, a well-known Malay political figure from the Cape, reflecting identification with Cape Malays (*Latest* 12 November 1926).

Sallie wrote to the DTC on 2 February 1927 that Arshud Garniet, visiting president of the South African Cape Malay Association (SACMA), wished to 'interview' local authorities to discuss the sporting needs of Durban's Malays. Sallie's request was turned down by the Mayor and Town Clerk. The Malay Association became prominent in the 1920s as schoolteachers played a key role in claiming special rights for Malays, the 'autochthonous' population of South Africa. As pointed out by Malan in

1925 Malays were seen as authentic 'sons of the soil' who, with whites, shaped South African history.

Malays again protested to the DTC on 10 October 1928 that the new ground in Stamford Hill, though 'granted to the Coloured community regardless of section, we were rejected unconditionally by the Coloureds'. A request by Malays for a round-table conference 'to reach settlement satisfactory to both parties' was rejected by Coloureds. Malay cricket languished in the absence of suitable facilities. P. Rose of the Federated Council of Social Workers (FCSW) wrote to Councillor Fyfe on 18 June 1935 for financial assistance to renovate Stamford Hill. Ed Rooks, secretary of the Natal Coloured Welfare League (NCWL), informed the Town Clerk on 11 July 1935 that his was 'the only organisation who truly represent the Coloured Community' because it admitted Cape Malays while FCSW disbarred them on the grounds that they were Asiatics. FCSW's constitution confined membership to Coloured 'persons of European descent, who enjoy the right of the European status, and are members of the Christian faith'. The DTC, however, continued to recognise FCSW. The Malay Rovers Football Club complained to the Town Clerk on 22 May 1936 that 'Cape Malays were not permitted to take part in any sport at Stamford Hill' and that FCSW had informed them that 'the Malay would not be allowed to participate in any form of sport while it held the lease'. Malay protest resulted in DTC dissolving FCSW and DCSGA being resuscitated with Malay inclusion.

Coloureds and Malays finally played 'together', just how 'together' is debatable since teams were divided along religious lines. Goodhopes and Roslyns were fully Malay; Pirates, Comrades, Silver Leaf and Universals fully Coloured, while Oaks had a few Malays. The first Malay to play in a Coloured team was 'Miley' Peck who joined Oaks, which had been founded by his father-in-law Joe Abrahams. Neither Goodhopes nor Roslyns could accommodate Solly Kirsten who joined Oaks when his family moved to Durban. Just thirteen, Solly scored a century on debut against Comrades. He joined Roslyns in 1948 when the team was going on tour to the Cape. He did not want to miss the opportunity to visit the 'spiritual home' of Malays. Boeta Peck understood Kirsten's predicament and blessed the move.

Solly's versatility earned him the title 'Ubiquitous Solly' in sporting circles. He was goalkeeper for Arsenal and New Orleans in the local Coloured Soccer League, and played for Thistles Tennis Club as well as

representing Durban in tennis. As administrator during the 1950s, Solly was secretary of the Durban Coloured Schools Football Association from its formation in 1953, delegate to the Durban Coloured Sports Ground association and Natal Coloured Cricket Board and selector of the Durban Coloured Women's Hockey Association. In rugby, Kirsten played wing for Oaks, and represented Durban and for the first-ever Natal provincial Coloured team which played Border in 1953. He was president of the Natal Rugby Board in 1961, managed Natal in 1961 and 1963, refereed the national rugby final between South-Western Districts and Eastern Province in 1965 and was selector of the South African Rugby Union (Coloured) in the same year, the first person from Natal to achieve this distinction.

But it was as cricketer that Solly made his greatest mark. Solly was just above medium height, strong and fit. He was a busy cricketer, aggressive with the bat, lively with the ball, with a bustling action, and safe in the field. Roslyns was dominated by the Jaffar, Schreuder and Domingo families. It was linked to the all-conquering Roslyns of Cape Town. The name derived from a castle in Scotland and the team's motif was a castle in red, white and green, its official colours. Most players were deeply involved in Malay social, cultural and religious affairs, formally through the Cape Malay Vigilance Society of Durban. In 1960, for example, the Societies' president was Solly Kirsten, honorary-secretary Cassim Jaffar and trustees Baku Domingo, Munchie Boomgard and T. Schreuder.

Roslyns was more than a cricket club; it was a close knit family. Annual picnics on New Year's Day and over Easter did much to cement community feeling. Buses were hired to ferry players and their families to La Mercy. Musical instruments were a 'must', and players and officials sung old Malay songs like 'Rosa' as well as the favourites of the day by Sammy Davis jnr., Elvis Presley and others.

Roslyns greatest rival was Goodhopes, formed in 1945 by Roslyns players Shafie and Toyah Nassiep, Aziz and Solly Hendricks, Ismail 'Mattie' Jacobs and Gamiem Gaffar to accommodate the rapid growth in Malay cricketers. Like Roslyns, 'Goodhopes' reflected orientation to the Cape, the name deriving from the Cape of Good Hope. Goodhopes was joined by Malay artisans from the Cape who began arriving in Durban from the late 1940s. Although family members played for both Roslyns and Goodhopes, rivalry bordered on hostility. Matches between Roslyns and Goodhopes were

a central feature of the Malay social calendar. For a week prior to the game, wives and mothers prepared rosettes and ribbons in the maroon and yellow of Goodhopes and red, white and green of Roslyns. Match-day had a marvellous festive atmosphere. The ground was packed, food and music being as significant as cricket. Music included 'Dutch Hollandse Lidjies' (songs) such as the famous Rosa as well as Gomma Lidjies ('fast' numbers), named after the musical instrument to which they were played. The 'gomma' was a drum over which buck skin was tightened.

**Rosa, Rosa (Laas toe ek een meisie bemin)**

Laas toen ek een meisie bemin  
Haar naam was Rosa Fern  
Sy was noemliks sestien jay oud  
Sy was een meisie van haar word

**KOOR-**

Sy seg sys al my nooit verlaat  
Sy volg my waar ek gaan  
Rosa Rosa diet een hart  
En sy volg my waar ek gaan

Dit was op een aand voorlaat  
Toe ontmoet ek Rosa op straat  
Spraak ek met Rosa een word  
Dit was die word van trou akoort

Dit was drie dae daarna  
Toe kom haar ouers na my vra  
As ek vir Rosa sal bemin

Al met myn hart siel en sin

While matches between Rosslynns and Goodhopes were hostile, those between Pirates and Rosslynns were very competitive. Reggie Montgomery of Pirates recalled that 'Rosslynns were good, but so were we, so were we'. Pirates, in fact, won the Knockout Cup 7 years in a row during the 1950s.

Roslyns won the league as many times. Reggie fondly remembers Solly's gamesmanship: 'Solly was a very competitive cricketer. He would say something every now and then. He even tried to pull the wool over our eyes by speaking Afrikaans. But we also spoke a bit of Afrikaans and coped with him' (Interview).

Roslyns broke away from the Coloured Board as a result of a dispute in 1958. When Roslyns beat Pirates the latter protested that Roslyns had fielded two ineligible players. When the cricket union ruled against Roslyns, Baku Domingo felt it was being pedantic to hand Pirates an advantage. Baku withdrew Roslyns from the association, and formed a separate Barnato (Malay) Cricket Union with 5 teams, Roslyns, Young Roslyns, Violets, Caledonians and Victorian, comprising around 90 players, mostly Malay. The president of Natal Cricket Board (Barnato Trophy), as the new association was known, was Baku Domingo with Solly Kirsten as secretary.

The Barnato League fostered Malayness. A Malay representative team was chosen to play against Indians and Coloureds in a Natal inter-racial tournament in 1960, and a team was also chosen to represent Natal Malays against Malays from other provinces for the national Barnato trophy. This tournament had been taking place since 1897 but catered solely for Malays from 1926, when Indians and Coloureds broke away. Natal's Malays represented the Natal Coloured team against Coloureds from other provinces for the David Harris Trophy, which had begun in 1927. Solly made his Natal debut in Port Elizabeth in 1952-53, where Natal finished last and Solly's all-round performances were the only bright spot. He scored a century and two half centuries, and took 14 wickets. Solly achieved three honours: highest individual score (109), highest run aggregate (356) and highest average (44.50). The *South African Non-European Almanac* (1953:148) described him as 'one of the up and coming batsmen. He has all the shots and when in full rein attacks the bowling with venom. I presage that we shall see a great deal of him in the future'. Kirsten was the marquee player in Natal Coloured cricket during the 1950s. he was, in fact, the only Natal member to represent the South African Coloured team in inter-racial competition against other black 'race' groups.

Natal Malays played in the last Barnato tournament in Port Elizabeth in 1960, the only time Natal participated in the tournament. The team, managed and captained by Solly, beat Griqualand West but lost to Eastern

Province and Eastern Transvaal. Solly, with a batting average of 27 and nine wickets, was the leading all-rounder at the tournament and the only Natal player chosen for the representative South African Malay team. He thus had the unique distinction of playing for both Coloured and Malay national representative teams.

Solly's experience shows how identities were continually constructed and re-constructed. Among Blacks, separate national cricket bodies controlled African, Indian, Coloured and Malay cricket. At a Council Meeting of SAICU in Durban on 25 January 1945 a committee was mandated to create a national cricket board for all Blacks (Govender 1952: 25). Two years of negotiations resulted in the convening of a meeting in Johannesburg on 10 July 1947 at which a South African Cricket Board of Control (Sacboc) was formed. Sacboc was constrained by the intensification of apartheid and segregation, paucity of facilities, meagre financial resources, different cricketing cultures and traditions and fears among many players and administrators that change would threaten vested interests. The comfort zones of many were challenged. Fear and anxiety were as much part of the process of change as excitement and anticipation. While cricket was played mainly along inter-racial lines during the 1950s, though a number of impulses spurred non-racialism.

At national level Sacboc organized four racially defined tournaments between 1951 and 1958. Indians and Coloureds dominated the tournament, with Indians winning in 1951 and 1955 and Coloureds in 1953 and 1958. Though Malay, Solly represented Coloureds in 1953 alongside legends like Basil D'Oliveira and Basil Waterwick. He finished third on the Coloured averages in 1955. Against Malays he scored 39 runs batting at number nine in the first innings, his undefeated tenth wicket partnership yielding an invaluable 55 runs. With Coloureds needing quick runs to win on the double innings the aggressive Solly was promoted to number 4 in the second innings. Coming to the wicket with the score 3 runs for 2 wickets, Solly was involved in a partnership of 48 with D' Oliveira to secure victory. Solly scored 25 to D' Oliveira's 23.

Malayness resurfaced when Tills Crescent was being developed in Overport as a sports field for Coloureds. The Cape Malay Vigilance Society (Durban) wrote to the Town Clerk on 26 October 1960 to request that two playing fields be set aside specifically for Malays. The Society wrote that the

Coloured Grounds Association had refused them permission to use Tills 'because of their Islamic faith and some members having intermarried with members of the Indian community'. The request by the Vigilance Society was turned down by the DTC and Tills was developed as a sports field for Coloureds.

The challenge to racial segregation of cricket during the 1950s led eventually to the birth of a non-racial Natal Cricket Board on 15 October 1961 under the presidency of S. Bridgemohan, with Solly given recognition as secretary. The formation of the NCB was significant at a time when apartheid South Africa was consolidating race boundaries and identities. Natal's Coloured and Malay cricketers, who had split in 1959, merged in 1961 to form a separate unit, Marban, within the NCB, rather than play with their Indian counterparts. Coloureds had their own ground at Stamford Hill from 1962, the lease of which specified that it was to be 'occupied by persons of the Coloured Race Group only', which included Malays. Solly recalls that some Coloureds were uncomfortable with change:

the formation of non-racial cricket was a sore point because some Coloured players were worried about not making the grade, while others were opposed to mixing with Indians.

Marban was one of nine affiliates of the Natal Board, comprising Coloured and Malay teams from Durban and Pietermaritzburg.

Solly, however, was elected captain of Natal's first non-racial team which took part in the first inter-provincial Dadabhai tournament in Cape Town in December 1961. This honour came as a great surprise to Solly: 'I never, never, imagined this in my wildest dream because we [meaning Coloureds] were in the minority. I did not have any problems with the Indians. It may be that many of them were Muslims and I saw them regularly in the mosque'. Natal beat the highly fancied Western Province, but finished second behind Transvaal in the tournament. Beating 'arrogant' Western Province, according to Solly, was one of the 'greatest moments' of his' cricketing life. Solly retired from competitive cricket after the tournament, mainly because he transferred to Howick as school principal. He would return as administrator in the late 1960s.

### **Kirsten: Dedicated Teacher**

Solly was a teacher for four decades from 1951 to 1991, principal for 32 of these years. His first appointment was as Afrikaans teacher at Clairwood, the largest Coloured primary school in Natal. Being 'Coloured' meant that he could not teach at an Indian school. One of Solly's first actions was to formally request time-off from the Education Department for the midday Jumuah prayer on Fridays. As a result of Solly's action Muslim teachers were given time-off for Jumuah by the Department. Solly married in the late 1950s. He met his future wife Maryam Bardien while playing cricket in Port Elizabeth in 1957. Solly and Maryam have three sons, Faez a medical doctor, Adil a lawyer and Razin a businessman, and a daughter Suraya, a merchandiser with a leading retail chainstore.

When Clairwood was declared an Indian area in 1961 the school was 'given' to Indians. Coloureds were relocated and became part of Durban East. Around this time Johnson, the principal of Clairwood Primary, died. Nel, chief inspector of Education, called the staff together to elect a principal from within the school rather than appoint an outsider. Solly was elected principal in a secret ballot. In June 1962 Renton of the Education Department asked Solly to apply for the position of principal at Howick West advertised in the *Education Bulletin*. He was interviewed in October 1962 and took up the position on 1 April 1963. Solly lived in Maritzburg and travelled to school daily in the back of Baker's Bread delivery van.

This was a difficult assignment as the school catered for a very poor community. Not a single pupil had passed the external examination set by the Natal Education Department (NED) since the school's opening in 1952. This changed in Solly's first year. He recalled vividly that on 10 January 1964 he received a call from Stampf of NED, while he was holidaying in Port Elizabeth with his in-laws, who congratulated him because the school's pupils had passed the external examination for the first time. Solly also initiated programmes to cope with poverty. He attained contributions of bread from the local Rubber Factory, grew vegetables at school, and gave kids cool drinks in summer and hot cocoa in winter. From Howick, Solly was transferred to Briardene, south of Durban, as principal in 1968. He remained here until his retirement in 1991. In term of the ratings assigned to schools by NED, Briardene was five jumps up the scale. It was unheard of for individuals to jump so rapidly up the promotion ladder, and this was

testimony to Solly's excellent work at Howick.

Controversy and Solly were inseparable. As principal of Briardene he was concerned about improving the sporting standards of the largely underprivileged children and accepted an offer from Barclays Bank in 1978 for white cricketer Paddy Clift to coach pupils. For this, Solly was suspended by the non-racial Natal Council of Sport, which shunned contact with whites. After his return to Durban in 1978 Solly was involved in cricket administration. He was variously secretary of the Natal Cricket Board, selector and manager of the provincial team. He was banned from all involvement in sport. Politically, this was a sensitive time. Non-racial cricket bodies were determined to root out contact with white sporting organisations. The NCB, in fact, took a resolution in September 1978 that 'any player who participates in or is a member of any sporting club whose national body is not a member of SACOS cannot be a member of the NCB or any of its affiliated units'. Solly was upset and hurt by the decision, especially because the 'very people who suspended me were in the Durban racecourse every Saturday under permit from the racist authorities' (*Muslim Views* October 1998:31). Solly recalls his brush with NACOS' 'double-standards' rule:

In early 1977 I visited Mr Fraser, branch manager of Briardene, to discuss ways of investing the school's surplus money. While waiting outside his office I heard him instructing Paddy Clift to coach in Durban North. When Clift, Fraser explained that he was employed by Barclays and coached on their behalf. I questioned Fraser as to why my school did not receive similar free coaching. Fraser's reply was that I had never asked. I asked him. Fraser built a cricket net and pitch at Briardene and sent Clift to coach my boys. After a few sessions I got a call from Archie Hulley, who said that I had to appear before a disciplinary committee of the Natal Primary Schools Sports Association. I was chairman of the association but was being summoned. Anyway, I went. I was told that I had to appear within two hours at a NACOS hearing, which was chaired by Krish Mackerduhj. They accused me of breaking the law by seeking the assistance of white cricket. I denied the charges because Clift was not an employee of a white cricket body but Barclays. They said that

it was the same thing and they did not care about such technicalities. I asked them for a coach to replace Clift and they said that they would get me one within two weeks. I am still waiting for that coach! So I got Clift back. I was called to another meeting and told that I was suspended from NACOS. That was the lowest point of my sporting life. I never thought they would do this. I had given my life to cricket, rolling pitches, carrying mats, and so on, and suddenly they got rid of me. I called Sybil Hotz, the mayor of Durban, to ask where my children could play. She said that NACOS should be the last to adopt such an attitude because its members were attending the Durban Greyville Racecourse with a special permit. I called NACOS and asked them about these 'double standards' and told Krish Mackedhuj that he was a hypocrite. Do you know what his response was? That horseracing was not a sport. I called Hassan Howa<sup>1</sup> but he did not even listen, he spoke about the political situation and said that sport was irrelevant in our conditions. Howa was a great man but very parochial and narrow in his vision. He was not prepared to listen to other viewpoints. I did not get anything out of Clift. I only wanted to do something for the youngsters. I could see the unity would come and was trying to give the youngsters a kickstart. And who was right in the long run? Anyway, that was the end of my association with sport.

Solly believes he has less to answer for than administrators who punished him but subsequently 'sold out' to Ali Bacher in post-apartheid South Africa (*Muslim Views* October 1998:31).

Solly's most-prized memento is not one of the many awards he received as sportsman and administrator, but a poem written by an African Silus Langa whom he had admitted to the Coloured Briardene School in the face of censure from the education authorities and opposition from parents:

Mr Kirstin, I had no school to attend  
You admitted me

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<sup>1</sup> Hassan Howa was president of the South African Council of Sport, NACOS' mother body.

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What I am today is through you  
You helped us emotionally, spiritually, socially, intellectually  
You have been a wonderful team leader  
All your products are a challenge to others  
You are so good to me, to us all (17 July 1971).

The career of this dedicated and devoted teacher came to an end when he retired in 1991. How sad, then, that on the whole only 'Coloured' children benefited from what Solly had to offer.

### **Kirsten: Community Imam**

Solly regarded his suspension from cricket as a 'blessing in disguise'. He began to study Islam more deeply and extended his responsibilities as Imam. Solly had always been involved in community and religious affairs. As a young man he attended 'Ratipoel Ga'dat', a particular form of *zhikr* or recitation of praise for the Prophet, derived from the name of a saint. This tradition was started among Malays in Durban around 1950 by Boeta Ismail Fredericks, captain of Rossllynns and first *Khalifah* ('leader') of Ratiboel Ga'dat. *Zhikr* was held at different homes on Thursday evenings and attended by forty to fifty men and women. When Fredericks died in 1959, Solly became *khalifah*. His responsibilities included leading the congregation in *zhikr* and making a communal *dua* or convocation at the end of the *zhikr*. Ratiboel Ga'dat consisted of 28 short *zhikrs*, the following being typical:

Those who verify things and the learned who practice their knowledge and all the Saints and Martyrs of the world both East and West.

The *faatigah* (convocation) for the Scribe of this Ratib, the inviter to righteousness and benefactor, to the countries and worshippers of Allah.

The *faatigah* for us and you. O you who are present, and for our parents and grandparents and for our learned, and those of us present, and those of us who are now absent, and for the dead and the living and those who are constant on this Ratib.

## *The Quest for 'Malay' Identity in Apartheid South Africa*

May Allah forgive them and Exalt them, and make us benefactors in Knowledge and Secrets and enjoy us with them in goodness, ability and health. And illuminate our hearts with their light and on the Earth and the Hereafter.

*Zhikr* was one of many activities that Malays engaged in communally. They also organised the *Meelad* or birthday celebrations of the Prophet at Kajee Hall in Leopold Street. The 'spiritual leader' of Malays during the 1950s was Solly's cousin Oupa Taliep of Kimberley. When Taliep died in 1958, Imam Reid of Overport assumed the mantle of spiritual leader until his death in the late 1980s. Imam Reid, like Oupa Taliep, was not attached to a particular mosque, unlike Indian Muslims, Malays did not have a separate mosque. Imams undertook community work and led the *janazah* (funeral) prayers, conducted marriages, and attended to social and marital problems.

On the Sunday prior to the Prophet's birthday, the community engaged in *rampie-sny* at Kajee Hall. While men socialised, women cut small pieces of kite paper into triangular shapes. In it they placed orange and lemon rinds and *attar* (incense). Once the triangular shapes had been prepared, they were placed in a basket, and *oejered*, that is, the basket was placed close to burning *lobaan* (*mi'ang*) so that the smoke of the *mi'ang* blew onto the triangles. Proceedings were overseen by Titti Fiya Jaffar, who rendered a communal invocation (*dua*) when the activities of the day were completed. At the end of proceedings on the birthday, each man was handed a *rampie-sny*, which he usually carried around for months. According to Solly, the *rampie-sny* was a perfume with a sweet and beautiful scent, thought to symbolise the aroma that emanated from Amina, the Prophet's mother, when she was pregnant with him. According to Solly, the *rampie-sny* was handy at a time when deodorants were hard to come by, and especially valuable when one went out to meet young woman.

*Doepmal* was a ceremony to name a new born child. *Doepmal* is an Afrikaans word that means thanks or *shukur*, in this case the parents and family thanking God for blessing them with a child. The family settled on the name by the sixth day in conjunction with the Imam, and the child was named at a formal ceremony on the seventh day. Thankful parents and family members usually invited the entire community to express their *shukur*. At the 'House of Birth', the child was placed on a beautiful

embroidered pillow covered by a *medoura*, a special white and silver cloth with lots of gold braiding, brought especially from Makkah. It was expensive and rare, rare because few people went for Hajj during the 1950s and 1960s. As a result, a few such *medoura*'s circulated in the community. Malay brides also covered their head with the *medoura* as a sign of their virginity. The baby was placed on the *medoura*, with lots of flowers, usually pink, red and white roses, scattered around. The baby, whether boy or girl, was dressed in a *doepmal rok*, a white robe crocheted and passed down from generation to generation.

The Imam sat in the middle of the room with his two assistants (*khatiebs*) seated on either side. The baby was brought to him by a family member especially chosen by parents. This was an important choice on the part of parents because the individual appointed such would be 'responsible' to take care of the child in the event of anything untoward happening to the parents. The Imam then gave the call to prayer or *azaan* in the right ear of the child, the *iqamah*, the call immediately preceding the prayer, in the left ear, and recited several *ayahs* or verses from the Holy Quran as protection against evil.

Thereafter the Imam placed something sweet, usually sugar or honey, into the mouth of the child, indicating that the child will be a 'sweet' human being when he or she grows up. He then took a scissor and cut off a small piece of the child's hair, as per Islamic tradition. The Imam then formally named the child and rendered a short discussion on the meaning of the name. Finally, he would make a special invocation (*dua*) that the child would be obedient to his or her parents and the will of God, and be among the pious of God's creations. Food and refreshments were then served to the gathered crowd.

Imams were not paid for their work. In Solly's case his involvement was purely voluntary as he had a career as teacher. Those for whom the imamate was a vocation, it was etiquette for hosts to give a *slavat* or gift as a token of appreciation. Money was usually collected, placed in an envelope and privately handed over to the Imam.

Kirsten's Islamic functions attest to the fluid race dynamics at play. At Howick, where he was for most of the 1960s, Kirsten lectured at Howick mosque, at which Indians predominated, every Friday as well as at the 'middle' Mosque in Church Street, Maritzburg. This was instigated by

cricket colleague Tar Dada and Ganie. Again, this was an Indian mosque. This contact marked, in Solly's case at least, increasing contact with Indians which broadened his identity. In his talks, Solly focused on ending ethnic division and consciousness among Muslims.

Solly's continued his involvement among Indian Muslims when he returned to Durban. He lived at Randles Road, Overport, when he taught at Briardene and regularly attended Sparks Road mosque, where the 'sparks literally flew', according to Solly. Shortly after his move to Durban, the well-liked and popular Mawlana Naseem was dismissed by Abdullah Khan of the Mosque Committee. The congregation demanded his reinstatement. A committee of five was formed under a lawyer Mr. Suleman with the congregation roping Solly in because of his standing as principal. They called up a meeting attended by 300 people at which Solly was appointed chairman of a Committee tasked to ascertain who was responsible for dismissing Naseem. It emerged that the decision to dismiss the Mawlana had been taken by Abdullah Khan, who simply informed other trustees. They did not hold a meeting to discuss the issue. When Solly visited the chairman of trustees Baboo Paruk he discovered that not a single meeting had been called since the mosque was opened in 1952. At a meeting at Paramax Wholesalers, all the trustees, Baboo Paruk, A.G. Paruk and Joosub said that Khan had phoned them and they had agreed to his decision telephonically. Khan was the secretary but did not keep any records. Everything was done by phone. The reason for dismissal was that Naseem had requested three months leave to visit Makkah but actually visited Pakistan. Under Solly, elections were held for the first time with Khan as trustee and Solly as secretary. Thus began his long association in an official capacity with the mosque.

When a mosque opened in Avoca in 1984 Committee members led by Gaff Manaff visited Briardene and told Solly that they would like him to officially open the mosque. He was honoured to have given the first Friday kutbah at the mosque. Solly saw this as indication of the esteem in which he was held considering the large number of competent and respected Indian imams. Solly preached regularly at the mosque until he suffered a heart attack in 1987.

After his retirement in 1991, Solly decided to settle in Cape Town, his spiritual home. There, he continued his religious work at Madrassah Gheedma-Tul Islamia in Rondebosch East, where he was principal and

deputy-Imam from 1996, and lectured at Eagle Park Mosque. Solly feels he achieved new spiritual heights during these years. Solly realized his life ambition when he went on pilgrimage to Makkah in 1992. He was forced to return to Durban in 2001 on medical advice. He was suffering from arthritis and medical practitioners felt the warmer climate in Durban would suit him. He found very vibrant spiritually. In Durban, he resumed giving talks lecturing at Avoca, Sparks Road and at mosques in Phoenix.

## **Conclusions**

This paper examined the construction of identity under an apartheid order that attempted to impose rigid and essentialised race identities. A newspaper headline 'Sulaiman Kirsten: Hero or Villain?' (*Muslim Views* October 1998: 31) sums up Solly. He always acted on the basis of what he believed was correct, even if this upset others. He once told an Australian television reporter that 'if blacks were given an equal opportunity, there would be no whites in the South African team' (*Muslim Views* October 1998:31).

This narrative illustrates that lived reality was complex and fluid under apartheid, and did not fit in with fixed nationalist creations. There were no clear-cut race boundaries, no beginnings and certainly no ends to the construction of identity. Solly's identities have been continually forming and transforming. Depending of the context, he was variously 'Malay', 'Coloured', 'Indian', 'Black' and even mistaken for 'white'. His identities were heavily shaped by the political and cultural milieu in which they were constructed. Context was crucial.

The individual is joined to the world through social groups, structural relations, and identities. These are not inflexible categories to which individuals can be reduced. Context is not a script. Rather, it is a dynamic process through which the individual simultaneously shapes and is shaped by her environment. Similarly, an analysis of context, which emphasises these dynamic processes, is an interpretive strategy, which is both diachronic and synchronic (Personal Narratives Group 1989: 19).

Solly's story shows that distinctions between people, based on biology, culture or religion predated apartheid, and that it would be a misnomer to

draw a distinction between the colonial and apartheid periods. In the case of Malays, it is evident that from the early decades of the twentieth, and long before David Du Plessis published *The Cape Malays* (1944), the category 'Malay' was a clearly distinguishable identity in Durban, both among Malays as well as non-Malays. While Malays were distinguishable from Indians on the basis of biology, the distinction between them and Coloureds was on the basis of culture and religion. Such notions of classification became taken-for-granted and were crucial in shaping, interpreting and giving meaning to social behaviour in everyday life.

Solly expediently moved between identities. To begin with he was flabbergasted to be tagged 'Coloured' when he moved to Durban in the 1940s. He played 'Coloured' cricket but primarily as Malay. At national level he was a 'Coloured' as he represented Coloured representative teams in inter-racial competitions that included matches against Malays. Later he became Malay and competed against Coloureds. Coloureds, after 1960, played non-racial cricket as Coloureds. All this shows that even under apartheid, identities were never fixed and boundaries were always in a state of flux. They were often contradictory, and involved struggle over definition and self-definition, and were mostly a combination and assortment of identities. Sometimes these were essentialised as in 'Coloured', 'Malay' or 'Muslim'; at other times they could be political, as in 'black' or 'non-racial'.

Malays have certainly been attempting to assert their Malayness since 1994. The transition to a non-democratic state has further fragmented political identities and revived religion, culture and ethnicity. This has been very marked in the Cape. It was emphasised during the April 1994 festival in the Cape commemorating 'Three hundred years of Islam in south Africa', where Islam was presented as a religion of the Malays of Cape Town. According to historian Achmat Davids, 'when we [Cape Malays and Malaysians] rediscovered each other there was total amazement on both sides that the culture had been so well preserved'. Malaysian defence minister Datuk Seri Mohammed claimed that 'the evil system of apartheid separated us for three centuries, but now we have found you, we will never let you go' (*Mail and Guardian* 25-31 August 1995, in Jeppe 2001:81). In November 1997 then president of Indonesia Muhammad Suharto visited South Africa on an official state visit. He was awarded the highest state honour, the Order of Good Hope. Researcher Achmat Davids wrote in the

*Cape Argus* (21 November 1997) that Indonesia was 'the ancestral homeland' of the 'greater majority' of the Muslims of the Western Cape who 'can trace their roots to one or other island of the Indonesian archipelago' (in Jeppe 2001:81). The roots of Malay Islam was thus presented as not being of local origin but wholly foreign. This was a mythical construction of community because few of those who consider themselves 'Malay' are actually from Malaysia. However, it would be wrong to consider these simply as 'invented traditions' and 'imagined communities' because the resurgence of 'Malay ethnicity' in the post-1990 has very strong historical roots.

Solly is ambivalent about this re-assertion of Malay Diaspora identity. He now considers himself first and foremost a 'Muslim'. He does have a desire, a very slight one he emphasises, to visit Malaysia and trace the roots of his paternal grandmother. But he is now in his seventies and he feels that it is unlikely that he will ever fulfil this ambition. If the opportunity does present itself to travel abroad Solly would like to travel once more to Saudi Arabia. In fact, while Malays in the Cape have been reasserting their Malayness Solly feels that the opposite is the case in Durban. The position of Malays has changed since the 1970s. Apartheid reshaped urban space. As a result of forced urban removals Malays were relocated from their close-knit community setting in Greyville to Coloured suburbs like Sparks Estate and Greenwood Park. Communal activities gradually decreased. Solly's own involvement is very limited. Certainly the public aspects of being Malay are less evident. The Meelad is no longer a public event, the *zhikr* is held on special occasions rather than every Thursday, while farewells to Hujjaj (pilgrims), once a major community activity, is a low key and personal event. Notwithstanding, this, however, Solly believes that he cannot be stripped of his heritage and culture. Though perhaps constructed, and certainly fluid and permeable, this study also suggests that such identities became essentialised over time, and hence explain why they continue to have emotional appeal in non-racial, democratic South Africa.

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School of Social Sciences and Development Studies  
University of KwaZulu-Natal

# Archive Fever

Shane Moran

Sophisticated self-deception, some will say; others: an absence of discernment; and no verdict will be reached (Freud 2002:251).

Once a year a judge has the opportunity to grant amnesty to one prisoner. When the allotted time arrives there are three recently convicted prisoners standing before him. Each is no less guilty than the others and he soon wearies of their pleading and incessant oaths of loyalty. Anticipating such a situation, experience had taught him to be prepared. Yawning, he shows the prisoners five small, engraved disks, each threaded on a leather string. 'You will see that three of these circles are white and two are black. You will sit in a triangle and close your eyes. The jailer will fasten one fetish to the forehead of each of you. Then you will open your eyes and remain silent. The first of you to correctly name the colour of your own *uphawu*, and provide a convincing account of how you reached that conclusion, can leave'.

The first possibility is that you see two black disks, and so conclude that yours is white. The second is that you see one black and one white. You reason that yours could be white or black. But if yours is black then the prisoner with the white disk would see two black disks and leave. Since he does not do so, you therefore conclude yours must be white.

However, after some time the three prisoners simultaneously and correctly shout out 'I am white!'. How did they reach this submission?

The third possibility is that I see two white disks. If mine is black then the other prisoners would each see a black and a white disk, reasoning

that if their own is black then the prisoner with the white disk would leave immediately. Since he does not, and since the others hesitate, it means that mine is white too.

This sophism foregrounds, among others things, the desire for recognition whereby more complex processes of reasoning are involved in determining one's symbolic identity through the other via an anticipatory recognition. I am X through the perceptions of another, and the interplay of this overlapping interaction is as irreducible as it is open to reinvention. In other words social identity has a performative dimension whereby the act of recognition strives to create that which it claims to identify<sup>1</sup>. In this parable the gamble of understanding amounts to a phantasmatically synchronized hesitation and reciprocal anticipation, a precipitous subjective gesture, that produces yet another problem for the judge. It can also be read as an allegory of reading whereby the identity of both author and audience is set to work.

In what follows I shall indicate aspects of this problematic in two texts that have taken up the formidable challenge of interrogating South African archival and academic discourse. The first, *Refiguring the Archive* edited by Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, June Taylor, Michele Pickover, Graeme Reid and Razia Saleh, introduces itself as seeing in archival transformation an opportunity to correct the selectivity of official memoriality within the context of the new South African political dispensation. The second, Carli Coetzee's essay 'Creating an Audience', focuses on one element of the existing archive to argue for the ameliorative and uniting effects of the work that archivists and academics can do.

I argue that a compressive and mobile complex of misrecognition links *Refiguring the Archive* and 'Creating an Audience', and has consequences for the claim to legitimacy and responsibility motivating the rhetoric of both texts. Here the avoidance of certain determinate complicities, or at least a choice between them, distinguishes post-apartheid critical theory. As you will see, the following profile of post-apartheid *méconnaissance* is also a self-portrait in which progress and regression, consent and dissent, are intertwined.

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<sup>1</sup> See Slavoj Žižek's (1993:74-5) discussion of Lacan's 'Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty' in terms of identifying oneself with a symbol that is potentially one's epitaph.

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## I

... like the outcome, the origin of every contract also points toward violence (Benjamin 1986:288).

The eighteen essays collected in *Refiguring the Archive* form an extension of thirteen seminars that attracted twenty-two speakers, including Jacques Derrida, hosted in 1998 by the University of the Witwatersrand Graduate School for the Humanities and Social Sciences. In their introduction Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris and Graeme Reid claim to want 'to engage the idea of the taken-for-granted, often implicit, 'archive' that is the foundation of the production of knowledge in the present, the basis for the identities of the present and for the possible imaginings of community in the future' (Hamilton *et al* 2002:9). The project created the opportunity for the National Archives 'to participate in a partnership which promised to open that institution to transformational energies and to provide a forum in which it could reach out to new constituencies' (Hamilton *et al* 2002:10).

A key figure in the opening section of the collection is Derrida's presentation, 'Archive Fever in South Africa'. This opening part of the book is, according to the 'Introduction', concerned with 'extending its [the archive's] boundaries and theorising its exclusions, thereby setting the scene for the two sections that follow' (Hamilton *et al* 2002:14). Derrida's title 'Archive Fever in South Africa' refers to his short book on Freud, memory and psychoanalysis, *Archive Fever. A Freudian Impression*, itself based on a lecture delivered in London. In that text Derrida (1996:1-3) points out that 'archive' is linked to *arkhe* as origin and commencement, the place and moment of a new beginning or departure, where authority and social order are exercised via legitimate hermeneutic authority. In contrast to Foucault's idea of the archive as the law of what can be said, this nomological and legislative force is tied up with the citizens who hold and signify political power and possess the power to make or to represent the law<sup>2</sup>. This signals a productive labour tied to valorization and the slide between a proxy and a portrait that has auxiliary (subaltern rather than plenipotentiary) facilitators

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<sup>2</sup> See Sandya Shetty and Elizabeth Bellamy (2000:28) on the difference between law as discursive formation and law as violence of identifiable inscription.

such as academics and archivists. These participate, however indirectly and subject to mediation, in the inscription of the mystical foundation of authority that can also be held up for scrutiny. As Gayatri Spivak (1999:205) suggests, the desire for power in the relation between practices in the past and historical accounts of them can be usefully refigured as transferential; a repetition of the past into the present as it necessarily bears on the future.

In his contribution to *Refiguring the Archive*, 'Archive Fever in South Africa', Derrida (2002:44) shuttles between Freud's account of the psychic apparatus and the nature of the archive to argue that 'the social and political power of the archive', its selectivity, arises, in part, from a question of economy or 'finitude'. After all not everything can be preserved. This constitutive limitation of the archive is contrasted with the death drive, the radical desire for the destruction of the archive, for the erasure of the traces of memory. You will recall that in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud argues that development and involution are part of the same dynamic of expenditure and conservation. Development consists in part of an impetus to regress to an earlier stage—for Freud the state of inanimate, dead matter from which life evolved—that is the object of desire that must be repeated. The repression of this repetition compulsion or 'death instinct' is the motor of actual development. Rather than a triumphal procession Freud offers an ambivalent picture of forced progress, resignation even, and compensatory achievement. On an individual scale this is the war of human development as 'the only war without memories or memorials' (Althusser 1971:206) with which psychoanalysis is concerned.

In Derrida's (2002:44) reading, what threatens the archive as memory trace is not finite time and resources but also 'something in the psychic apparatus [that] is driven to destroy the trace without any remainder'. Without this threat there would be no archive, it is what makes the desire for archive a burning one. Out of this conflict or competition comes a sense of the orientation of the archive to the future: 'And this future-oriented structure of the archive is precisely what confronts us with a responsibility and ethical and political responsibility' (Derrida 2002:46). Subsequently ethical and political responsibility is defined by Derrida as a responsibility to articulate the law and justice to one another: 'to make the law more just and to make the justice more effective. That's the ethical and political responsibility' (Derrida 2002:76). In short, the existing practice of

the law does not accord with justice. Responsibility demands, as a necessary step not unrelated to the dream of the philosophy of praxis, the possible and always useful desedimentation of the superstructures of law that both hide and reflect the economic and political interests of the dominant forces of society.

Derrida focuses these issues on the TRC as archive and as therapeutic healing of 'wounds from which this country, and these nations [!] in this country, suffer' (Derrida 2002:52)<sup>3</sup>. Noting that it is possible to experience reconciliation without justice and to subject truth to the need for reconciliation, he emphasises that 'the archive is also an act of forgetting' (Derrida 2002:77f). The death instinct, the fever of destruction and its preservation, does not come to the archive from outside. There is a perverse desire for forgetting within the economy of the archive itself: 'The death drive is not simply at work in killing, in producing death, but in trying to save, in a certain way, the memory' (Derrida 2002:68)—no forgetting without memory, no preservation without destruction. When we write, when we archive, we produce a substitute for what is represented, and this mnemonic trace is also the means of erasure, repression, and forgetting of what it is supposed to keep safe. And, as the deconstructive lesson runs, to attempt to be free of all mediations and grasp the living presence of the thing itself is also a desire for pure life that is death.

To accumulate documentary monuments and artefacts is an act of mourning that seeks to internalise, to swallow and keep it safe, rather than simply preserve, and this is why mourning must have a time limit. Imagine, says Derrida (2002:54) in hyperbolic mode once again, that one day South Africa will have accomplished the full archive of its history and it could be locked away in a safe, never to be lost again, so everyone could just forget it:

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<sup>3</sup> Ranjana Khanna's (2003:271) comments on Derrida's meditation usefully foreground the stakes for the nation and nation-building: 'Memorialization thus assists in assimilation because of the apparent introjection of traumatic events that highlight conflict and betrayal. But they become archived precisely at the moment when they fail to exist in memory, that is, when they must appear to be accounted for in the national narrative. The creation of a collective memory is thus an instrument of laying to rest, or of not needing to remember, remembering to forget'.

And perhaps, perhaps, this is the unconfessed desire of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. That as soon as possible the future generation may have forgotten it .... just let us forget it to go on, to survive.

The archive is subject to Nietzsche's active forgetting, for the sake of life and health. Such is Derrida's provocation in the context of South Africa's official commitment to expanding an inclusive commemorative archive.

It is clear that for Derrida 'archive' has an extended and multi-faceted extension beyond the usual meaning. It plays over a number of paleonymic resonances as well as weaving through Freud's texts and, equally importantly, Derrida's own archived corpus, particularly 'Freud and the Scene of Writing' and 'Force of Law: The "Mystical Foundations of Authority"' Such intricate intertextuality is slippery ground on which to orientate the essays gathered in the opening section of *Refiguring the Archive*. Susan van Zyl (2002:39) adopts the wisest strategy by staying close to Derrida's 'Archive Fever' and resisting the temptation 'to identify with Derrida, to enter into the spirit of his text by adopting his style and method'. As she comments, there are other alternative readings that psychoanalysis could contribute that might trouble the archive in 'less mysterious ways' (Hamilton *et al* 2002:59). This guards against the sway of the paternal metaphor and a vaporous Derrida-fever<sup>4</sup>.

Two expository essays are printed on the right hand page while Derrida's address and answers to questions run on the left, forming a centrepiece of the collection. In their 'Introduction' Hamilton, Harris, and Reid explain the reason for this elaborate presentation:

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<sup>4</sup> For example: 'Derrida in the archive is as Derrida is wherever he chooses to be—relentlessly, radically, subversive .... Bob Dylan expressed it well in his "Ballad of a Thin Man" ...' (Verne Harris 2002:79). 'Gordimer herself has said, quoting Nietzsche in an utterance of ontological significance, that "truth begins in dialogue"' (Roberts 2002:317). 'Like the archive, this essay creates the illusion of constituting a single corpus but unlike the archive I attempt to perform this failure by acknowledging it'. (Brent Harris 2002; 165, note 30) 'We begin our ending—for this is our editorial summation—with a lexical interlude' (Hamilton *et al* 2002:7).

It is our intention to present the essays figured by parallel, supplementary, superimposed and juxtapositional texts—writing and images, reproduced either partially or fully. This is an intellectual (re)figuring using as vehicle a technical (re)figuring. The resulting intertextuality—which both acknowledges and plays the blurred boundaries between form and content, text and context—provides a shifting space for multiple voices (Hamilton *et al* 2002:14).

Stress falls on the existence of an archival contract: ‘His [Derrida’s] etymological analysis demonstrates that every archival deconstruction must both respect and work with the stuff of tradition’ (Hamilton *et al* 2002:16). Transposed to a context in which the reality principle coincides with the realm of necessity this is read as the imperative that ‘archivists should aim to engage new realities with a passionate commitment to fulfilling the archival contract’ (Hamilton *et al* 2002:17). In emblematic fashion the introduction to *Refiguring the Archive* stages, for the record, its own prescriptive moment of contract and reveals what has been hidden:

This book challenges that silence: what is it that archivists undertake to do in return for the enormous power invested in them by society? (What constitutes an acceptable exercise of what Derrida calls ‘archontic power’? What does it mean to ‘preserve’ a document, lapel badge or dress?) Everything in this book, indeed the book’s very rationale, assumes the contract to be indispensable .... This book represents a challenge to the assumptions that underpin their [archivists’] activities, suggesting that a refigured archive might escape the kinds of boundaries they enforce, and find expression in new sites and in new forms (Hamilton *et al* 2002:16f).

Given the diagnosis that there has always been a contract and an exercise of power, the desire to make the present a new *arkhe* faces a formidable contamination. If archivists have in the past defaulted on the spirit of that contract, then the present diathetic re-inscription is both necessary and fragile. Exactly how to reconfigure or sublimate the previously broken contract—moving from bad faith to authenticity—is the challenge. In the context of post-1994 South Africa the advocacy of

inclusiveness and representivity plays a key part<sup>5</sup>: 'Such commitment is much needed in a South Africa that seeks to imagine itself and its past in ways not constrained by the colonial and apartheid pasts' (Hamilton *et al* 2002:17). Within the ceremonial of this discourse of rights and duties the self-reflective contract, considered performatively, initiates a hypothetical future and has the illocutionary mode of a promise. And since a performative force is always an interpretative force what is invoked is a future that deflects the instability threatening the construction of present legitimacy<sup>6</sup>.

The parties to the 'archival contract' are archivists and academics who mine archives and construct their own via research, and a more general public: 'We wanted to ensure that the project was not confined to two circles, researchers and academics on the one hand and practising archivists on the other' (Hamilton *et al* 2002:14). Capitalising on the resonance of (social) contract and the fiction of consenting parties submits the interconnection between State, property relations, archivists, benefactors, their capital and institutions, to a compelling indirection<sup>7</sup>. Yet, while endowments and bequests may result from social capital accumulated at the expense of the very people now being represented, one may hope that the advent of a more benign and representative state might hold out a future

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<sup>5</sup> 'The apartheid regime was not overthrown. The revolution fought for by the liberation movements over nearly three decades did not happen .... The nature of the transition to democracy meant that there would be no dramatic dismantling and reconstruction of the apartheid archival system. Rather, the new would be built out of the old' (Harris 2002a:142).

<sup>6</sup> Verne Harris (2002a:143f) points out that the transformational National Archives of South Africa Act (1996) only came into operation on January 1, 1997, and 'most of the transformational programmes defined by it are still in their infancy, and many of the system's elements are not yet operative'.

<sup>7</sup> Achille Mbembe (2002:19) observes that, except for private documents, 'the majority of documents deemed archivable are related to the general work of the state'. To some extent it answers Bhekizizwe Peterson's (2002) plea for the inclusion of marginalised knowledges and experiences in the refigured archive. Pointing to the funding difficulties of centres that have been on the cutting edge of black creativity, Peterson implores archivists to innovate and glosses over the role of the state in this dereliction.

organic reciprocity between archons and those they desire to ultimately serve<sup>8</sup>. A foundation, after all, is a promise. Before the law exhortation carries away commitment:

The figuring by our apartheid and longer pasts must be challenged, and spaces must be opened up in the archives by a transforming society. Undoubtedly *Refiguring the Archive*, the book, can be positioned within this imperative. However, it is our hope that it will invite—and deserve—other positionings (Hamilton *et al* 2002:7).

Appeal to good standing or credit endorses a talismanic ‘transformation’ that is never defined. The debate about along what lines, at what cost and to whom, this particular form of ‘transformation’ precedes is shelved. Any hope of dissension is met by the dogmatic realism of the banausic assertion that this is where we begin/continue from, so let’s get to work on anything but interrogating the violent configuration of this new departure. A forgotten but familiar figure digs in on the perimeter, like the enemy in front of a beleaguered city, and starves it out.

Despite the heralding of ‘a post-apartheid critique’ this metonymic functioning of the archive is perhaps not radically different from the frigidity of the bad ‘positivist assumptions of the apartheid era’ (Hamilton *et al* 2002:10). Spaces within the archive will be opened up as the archive reflects a transforming society and thereby contributes to the transformation of society by reorganising the hierarchies of representation<sup>9</sup>. A mirrored

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<sup>8</sup> According to Phaswane Mpe (2002:229): ‘In the apartheid days some of them, working for the National Archives and other institutions, would have been committed to archiving material in ways that were of positive use to the separatist, discriminatory ideology .... After the April 1994 general elections and the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, this commitment assumed a new face: rather than collect and document data and narratives for the apartheid government, these archives are now archived for other political purposes’.

<sup>9</sup> If ‘[t]he positivist paradigm posits archival records as providing a reflection of reality’, then freeing oneself from ‘a positivist paradigm rooted in the nineteenth-century birth of “archival science”’ (Verne Harris 2002a: 149) surely must involve examining the concept of representation.

relationship of arbitration and circular reappropriation marks the process of archive formation and excludes its previous pathological form. The rearrangement of constituents within the old structure in the name of the law of equivalence constitutes an interminable process of self-preservation. Honesty demands that accord with the force of the law as *Real politik*—grasping transformation as ameliorative reticulation—is not yet a common sense that has become sick with its health. However, it is a lure that has implications for the claim to ethico-political responsibility before the heterogeneity of law and justice.

I would like now to try to intensify the borders of these theoretical debates by turning to a cameo that sharpens the issue of legitimate hermeneutic authority, foregrounding representation as both tropology and rhetoric. Reparative apologetics are cast aside together with the organizational and connective functions associated with the manufacturing of consent integral to political governance. What ought perhaps to have remained concealed steps forward, as mundane as it is uncanny.

## II

Every nation, every race, has not only its own creative, but its own critical turn of mind; and is even more oblivious of the shortcomings and limitations of its critical habits than those of its creative genius (Eliot 1972:13).

Carli Coetzee's 'Creating an Audience' defends Pippa Skotnes' various representations of the San 'Bushmen' from the charge of colonialist complacency. Coetzee is responding to the critique by Okwui Enwezor (1997:33) that locates Skotnes' 'Miscast' exhibition within the context of other 'redemptive colonial errands':

Thus to examine the charged descriptive detail and what strikes at the mortal heart of the 'New South Africa'—multilingual, and hopefully, multivocal—is to keen one's ears to the new uses and revindication of whiteness (in very subdued and barely registered forms) as an idiom of cultural identity, that is, as a renewed and

authoritative presence in the country's iconographical text.  
(Enwezor 1997:22)

Coetzee's (2002:94) *antistasis* is mounted despite conceding Skotnes' clumsy exposure of herself to criticism; she ended up inadvertently 'encouraging the kind of reception that had her on trial for being white'. The ethics of individualism are at stake both in Skotnes' work and in the historico-racial attacks upon it:

Here Skotnes restates her position of the singularity of each individual, of the dangers of generalizing that she refers to in her work on tracing and its depletion of the individual artwork (Coetzee 2002:101).

This is an aesthetic that 'Creating an Audience' notes has its roots in Skotnes' interest in T.S. Eliot's seminal essay of 1919, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'<sup>10</sup>. In short, the rebuttal goes: while Skotnes herself has tried to resist the masquerade of generalisation, she has been subjected to compulsive stereotyping of her own social identity. The one that sees the other looking is not the same as the one that is seen.

The problems with the 1996 exhibition opening at the South African National Gallery and the events surrounding it have overshadowed Skotnes' attempt to bring the 'Bushmen' into view as our artistic contemporaries. As 'Creating an Audience' puts it, 'while the exhibition may have had as its structuring idea multiple viewpoints and conflicting versions, it proved unable to address audiences with competing expectations' (Coetzee 2002:94). Specifically, the title of the exhibition (which mentioned 'History and Material Culture') and its invitation lead a section of the audience to expect 'the exhibition and its curator to intervene in land rights and contemporary political struggles' (Coetzee 2002:100). Even if it cannot and should not ever be total, politicization is seemingly interminable. The price paid for this activist misdirection is part of a larger battery of inquisition.

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<sup>10</sup> See Skotnes (1996:235). This interest in the historicity of the artwork, aesthetic relations of production, and the dialectical process of canon formation points to an affinity with reception aesthetics.

The sheaf of accusation that Coetzee sets out to rebut is centred on representation and is, I think, familiar enough to tolerate repetition: Skotnes is replicating the power of colonialism by mediating the representation of its victims; even if she foregrounds the violence of colonial representation (and problematises her own role), she entrenches the continuity of power residing in the hands of the beneficiaries of colonialism; she has not succeeded in recovering the authentic voice of those who have been silenced and 'miscast'; if she had attempted to recover such an authentic voice this would confirm the charge of presumptive (neo)colonialism. This kind of kettle logic<sup>11</sup> that guards an epidermal schema invites ridicule and Coetzee gestures the resistances with some restraint.

What is valuable is the tendency of 'Creating an Audience' to accumulate its own questionable assumptions in the process of deriving a general lesson from Skotnes' tribulations. An argument against invidious forms of identity politics provides a useful means of appreciating the hostility behind identitarian attacks on white intellectuals inscribing communality. We shall see that an intimate economy is secured concerning a taxonomy apparently so wounding and so raw, yet so homely.

The psychic wound of Skotnes' mock trial serves as a kind of pass or entry ticket, purloined in parenthesis, in the process of self-legitimation:

Her exhibition has as its ideal (although of course not only) viewer an academic interested in issues of representation, of mutuality and collaboration. When she talks of the 'presence' of the Bushmen, it is less land rights that she invokes than a spiritual presence informing the way she (and we) see ourselves and others (Coetzee 2002:96).

What is the subject-effect, and who is the premonitory 'we', here? 'Creating

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<sup>11</sup> In *Jokes and the Unconscious* (1905) Freud rehearses the trial of the borrowed kettle: A borrows a kettle from B, to whom he returns it. B points out that the kettle has been returned damaged. A replies: I never borrowed a kettle from you; I returned it to you unbroken; the kettle was already broken when I got it from you. In the present context the accumulation of contradictory arguments to bring about a satisfactory decision is more often the logic of the prosecution rather than the defence.

an Audience' informs us that we ourselves are primarily, but not exclusively, 'other intellectuals interested in questions of representation and the asymmetrical relationships of the colonial encounter' (Coetzee 2002:101). The intended audience is also described as that 'group of academics and literate viewers who share her interests and concerns' (Coetzee 2002:96). While we know that not all intellectuals are academics, and still fewer academics are consistently intellectuals, the demarcation of audience here raises some crucial questions. What collusion are you and I, legatees all in the parasubjective matrix reader-as-audience, countersigning here? Does the deeply meshed company of this arrogated 'we' include all of you?

The concluding paragraph of 'Creating an Audience' illuminates the nodal point of desire:

Finally, many have speculated on the appeal of the Bushmen for contemporary South Africans, and on the persistence of images drawn from Bushmen rock art .... I want to suggest that the Bleek and Lloyd archive offers (white) South Africans something in addition to a stock set of images for what is most 'South African' about us, namely a way of talking about issues of loss and reconciliation, about contact and recognition (Coetzee 2002:101).

The incorporated identity of the plenary audience has now shifted beyond 'intellectuals' and 'academics' (although it was never limited to us) to '(white) South Africans'. A displacement from Skotnes' audience to the current audience renders a dispersed and differentiated subject as a transparent place onto which loss is projected and through which it is simultaneously disavowed. One can speculate in kind that, beyond the psychic topography of the individual subject, a stranger returns across family history arriving to consolidate an imaginary inside<sup>12</sup>—a step by which a text proclaiming solidarity with the ethic of individualism seen as antithetical to homogenizing racialization exhibits and archives its own implosion.

Let us rejoin the quotation, the final words and emblematic destin-

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<sup>12</sup> See Abraham (1994:175) on trans-generational haunting: 'The phantom which returns to haunt bears witness to the existence of the dead buried within the other'.

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ation of the essay:

It is not coincidental that the interest in the archive was so strong in the early 1990s, against the momentous backdrop of the South African political transition. The Bleek and Lloyd archive places white transcribers central, or at the very least next to the Bushmen narrators. The moment of the transcription of the narratives becomes a benevolent allegory of the work that white academics can do, to remember and transcribe and collect, and the archive itself offers up a hopeful vision of our past and the historical development of our academic disciplines in South Africa (Coetzee 2002:101).

The seductive self-image of the scholar as intermediary between past and present, fashioning reassuring allegories from the amber of the archive, goes some way toward deferring recognition of the historical forces that have determined exactly who is in a position 'to remember and transcribe and collect'. In our war of development hope lies in the regressive anticipation of mythic insight on behalf of a tradition of 'white academics' blinded by the unmistakable aura of legacies. At a glance a decision is made: the dangerously compressed image of the symptom is switched, as if by magic, into a token of the cure.

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Shane Moran

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English Studies  
University of KwaZulu Natal

# History from the Outside: Of La Guma's Dialogics, 'Coloredism' and Other Shenanigans

Jabulani Mkhize

## Review Article

*Alex La Guma: Politics and Resistance*

by Nahem Yousaf

London: Heinemann, 2001, 164pp

ISBN 0-32500189-8

*A Passion To Liberate: La Guma's South Africa—Images of District Six*

by Fritz H. Pointer

Trenton and Asmara: Africa World Press, 2001, 292pp

ISBN 0-86543-818-8

There seems to be a proliferation of book length studies on Alex La Guma's writing lately and, curiously, most of these studies are written by scholars abroad. So far the only book length study written by a South African is *Alex La Guma* by Cecil Abrahams (1985)<sup>1</sup>. Coincidentally, even Abrahams wrote his book while abroad. Of course, one of the reasons for this lack of studies on La Guma's oeuvre within the country, it could be said, is the fact that La Guma's works have, until fairly recently, been banned. The result was that access to his works was extremely difficult if not impossible.

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<sup>1</sup> Other early studies by scholars abroad include Asein (1987), Balutansky (1990) and Chandramohan (1992).

The most recent of these studies published abroad are Nahem Yousaf's (2001) *Alex La Guma: Politics and Resistance* and Fritz Pointer's (2001) *A Passion to Liberate*. Both of them seem to have been initially conceived as doctoral dissertations which were then developed or amended for the purposes of publication. To their credit, both of them attempt to break new ground in terms of their focus on previously overlooked aspects of La Guma's work. Whether they succeed in their endeavours is, however, a moot point.

### **La Guma's Dialogism**

Yousaf's avowed intention in his study is to provide a Bakhtinian reading of La Guma's novels while using Frantz Fanon's endorsement of violence as an important element of what underpins La Guma's response to apartheid repression. The rationale for a Bakhtinian reading, we are told, is that 'Bakhtin provides a critical language with which to discuss the ways in which fictional and political praxis are combined explicitly in La Guma's narratives' (Yousaf 2001:x). As Yousaf points out, his 'primary interest lies in the dialogism of the novel in the face of the monologism of apartheid (Yousaf 2001:x)'. According to him, La Guma 'deploys a dialogic approach in his fiction in order to elucidate the daily realities of the oppressed majority and the various subject positions his characters may adopt in opposition to the monologism of apartheid' (Yousaf 2001:xi).

To my knowledge, a Bakhtinian reading of La Guma's novels has, prior to this never been done, and, therefore, it would seem that Yousaf's approach is, in this regard, a novelty in La Guma studies. Having said this, however, one needs to point out that Bakhtin's notion of dialogism, on which Yousaf's study hinges is itself still a contentious issue amongst literary critics and is continuously the subject of interrogation as a result of its ambiguity. For example, Sue Vice (1997:45) quotes Hirschkop's argument that 'contemporary critical debate over the meaning of dialogism' stems from 'Bakhtin's own ambiguity over whether it is a relation among utterances or styles, or whether it is a relation between any two intentions or an "authorial" and a "heroic" one'. She adds that it may mean 'the intersection of two or more "contexts" in an utterance, that is, the interaction of the social and historical context of heteroglossia'. The fact that dialogism

is also sometimes conflated with polyphony renders more visible the need for clarity on the use of the term.

Now, given the still unresolved debate on the ambiguity of Bakhtin's concept of dialogism one would have expected Yousaf to explain the sense in which this term is used in his study in the next chapter. Yousaf defies these expectations; instead, in the following chapter entitled, 'Writing and Resistance', he provides the socio-historical context within which La Guma wrote. The problem is compounded in chapter two, on La Guma's *A Walk in the Night*, in which Yousaf justifiably and convincingly defends this text from being labeled 'naturalist', for a Bakhtinian reading in this chapter is conspicuous by its absence. Bakhtin is in fact not mentioned at all, not just in the argument *per se* but, also, in the notes. Perhaps it would have sufficed just to acknowledge that a dialogical reading of this text is somewhat problematic—but this would obviously have negated Yousaf's thesis.

Chapter 3, entitled 'Border Crossings: *And a Threefold Cord*', provides a detailed analysis of La Guma's text and convincingly shows how La Guma manages to demonstrate how 'the different and discordant voices ... speak and conflict' (Yousaf 2001:x) in the novel, in its examination of the interaction between Ma Pauls, Uncle Ben and Charlie Pauls who are trying to grapple with their fate which sees them steeped in poverty. Drawing on Charlie Paul's political rather than religious explanation of their poverty, Yousaf (2001:54) concludes that Charlie 'functions as a hero in the Bakhtinian sense precisely because La Guma does not interfere in his coming to consciousness'. This view, rightly in my opinion, contrasts sharply with that of Gerald Moore (1980:112) who sees Charlie's 'recollections' of the rooker's comments as contrived and, thereby, weakening La Guma's attempt 'to show in [him] the dawns of an ideological consciousness'. But once again a Bakhtinian analysis is minimal here.

Yousaf returns to a Bakhtinian analysis in a more sustained way in his chapter on *The Stone Country*, in which he attempts to use Bakhtin's concept of carnival.

According to Yousaf, La Guma uses the prison as a 'political space' in which to launch the transgressive power of carnivalesque to subvert the racially conceptualized hierarchy of apartheid discourse. He cites the de-crowning of the self-avowed prison king, Yusef the Turk, after a mock trial

and a subsequent fight as an example of La Guma's creation of a carnivalesque situation. This argument is further developed in the examination of the role of George Adams whose incomprehension of the prison system and interaction with inmates is read as suggestive of his role as a fool in the Bakhtinian sense. Indeed, in his exploration of the role of George Adams, Yousaf (2001:83) continues to advance his thesis on La Guma's dialogism by arguing that it is precisely Adam's 'incomprehensiveness' that facilitates a dialogical interaction of a polemic nature between him and the other prisoners as he interrogates the monological prison belief system that the prisoners otherwise take for granted. Here he employs Bakhtin's definition of dialogism as the interface between one's consciousness and someone else's consciousness quite convincingly.

Chapter 5, entitled 'Making History: Politics and Violence in *In The Fog of the Season's End*', seems to me to reverse the gains made in the previous chapter in terms of living up to the expectations of the avowed intention, reading dialogism in La Guma's text. Instead, its central thrust seems to be a postcolonial reading of La Guma's novel, using Fanon and Bhabha as a point of departure. The bulk of this chapter focuses on the divergent readings of this novel by critics with whom Yousaf effectively engages. Where the concept of dialogism is picked up, it is cryptically tucked in at the end of the chapter, as if it was just added as an afterthought, and, to be sure, it confuses more than it illuminates. For here monologism and dialogism are interchangeably read to mean undemocratic and democratic respectively; for how else can one read this statement: '... La Guma indicates that the desire to replace a monologic system of government with a dialogic model will prove difficult ...' (Yousaf 2001:109). Having argued that apartheid was monologic in the sense of being deaf to other anti-hegemonic discourses, Yousaf (2001:109) goes further to say 'La Guma advocates an alternative dialogic future for South Africa...'. As can be inferred, the elasticity of the term dialogism as used in each chapter of Yousaf's book justifies the need for some intellectual rigour because of the challenges it poses to the potential readers.

Acknowledging 'the heterogeneity of voices and subject positions that La Guma incorporates' (Yousaf 2001:121) in *Time of the Butcherbird*, is the pretext for Yousaf to launch his reading of dialogism in this novel.

Examining how the different histories between different population groups intersect despite disjunctions in this work, Yousaf (2001:122) rightly argues that La Guma 'does not intend to produce an aesthetics of coalition [in this work] but, rather, to reproduce the circumstances in which the actions and movements of separate and unequal subjects are orchestrated to depict fractured and fractious at the point of breaking down'. Engaging with Abdul JanMahomed and David Maughan-Brown's reading of the novel while taking cognizance of the valid points they make, Yousaf (2001:125) asserts that his reading of 'the structuring [and] characterization of the novel is more open and dialogical than JanMohamed's'. True to his argument, in his examination of the text's dramatization of the tensions between population groups and his attentiveness to the 'constellation of voices and positions' (Yousaf 2001:129) in the novel, Yousaf goes some way towards bringing to the fore the dynamics of dialogism in this work. I am, however, amazed that after alluding to the Bakhtinian notion of polyphony in an analogy between the novel and cinematographic techniques, this idea, which would have strengthened his argument, is not further pursued. For if there is one La Guma novel which acutely lends itself amenable to a dialogic reading, and perhaps even comes closer to embracing polyphony in Bakhtinian terms, it is arguably *Time of the Butcherbird*.

Clearly, then, Yousaf's analysis of the different chapters is not always consistent with his avowed intention, namely, convincing us of the dialogism of La Guma's fiction. I have already referred to the fact that there is no evidence of a Bakhtinian reading of *A Walk in the Night*, let alone an attempt to prove the existence of dialogism in this text. The fleetingly oblique delineation of his analytic tools does not make things any easier for Yousaf's cause. And if one takes into consideration the fact that Yousaf's book was first presented as a doctoral dissertation, then these factors cannot be overlooked. For a dissertation by its very nature requires not only an explicit definition of theoretical paradigms but also, subjects one to the tyranny of theory which compels one to prove one's thesis. How Yousaf could have escaped this tyranny boggles the mind. Even then the publishing of the dissertation in book form opens the final product to a broad range of readership and thereby subjects it to a more rigorous scrutiny. It is with this in mind that one thinks these loopholes in the book could have been tightened.

### **Afro-centric Readings and the Image-making Process**

Fritz Pointer brings another important dimension to the increasing studies of La Guma's oeuvre. Starting from the premise that 'one feature of La Guma that has received little attention is his use of imagery', Pointer (2001:ix) points out that it is for this reason that he has decided to devote his study to La Guma's 'use of imagery as an instrument of analysis and communication'. As is usual with La Guma studies, Pointer commences his book with a brief biographical background of the author, bringing to the fore the socio-historical context that produces La Guma the writer and freedom fighter. Entitled 'Alex La Guma: The Apprentice and The Press', this introductory chapter also examines very tentatively, albeit illuminatingly, La Guma's apprenticeship in journalism and convincingly shows how La Guma owes 'to his journalistic career the gift of synthesizing social issues and visual experience in a compact and vivid manner' (Pointer 2001:ix).

Unlike Yousaf, who is somewhat cryptic in defining the modalities of his Bakhtinian paradigm, Pointer is at pains in his attempt to set out clearly what his conception of image is in the context in which it is being used. 'It is often tempting to think of imagery as mere decoration', Pointer (2001:2) contends, 'but a successful image is not simply an accessory; it evokes setting, mood and theme—the moral message implicit or explicit in a work of art, while it creates vivid impressions of characters, objects and environment'. He goes on to point out that '[in] fact, much of the meaning in the creative fiction of Alex La Guma is in his imagery' (Pointer 2001:2). According to Pointer, putting aside 'specific types of imagery, predicated on some sensory experience, there are four particular purposes to which [La Guma's] imagery corresponds that reveal basic tendencies of his narrative techniques; these are:

- (1) Images that play a vital part in the development of the themes in the stories: man's relationship to man, to environment, to morality.
- (2) Images that play a role in the portrayal of character: including dialogue, interior monologue and behavior.
- (3) Imagery as a means of portraying setting, the chronological and the physical environment, and that particularly La Gumian
- (4) imagery of the desecration of physical bodies (human and non-human; animate and inanimate) (Pointer 2001:2).

In his poignant examination of La Guma's *A Walk in the Night* Pointer (2001:8) effectively demonstrates how this work shows 'the exceptionally close integration of the images into the narrative' as well as how these images are 'firmly attached to the dominant theme of the book', thereby, playing 'a dynamic part in conveying its meaning and deepening artistic effect'. Focusing predominantly, but not exclusively, on a plethora of images of dirt, nausea and vomiting as La Guma's way of delineating 'the idea of physical and moral poverty [of a] rotting South African society' (Pointer 2001:7), Pointer proffers that it is through these images that La Guma subtly but effectively hopes to win the ideological assent of his readers. His analysis prompts him to surmise that the main function of imagery in La Guma's fiction 'appears to be to elucidate certain political and socio-economic themes' (Pointer 2001:2). Pointer's broader impressions on *A Walk in the Night* are epitomized in the following words: 'The internal unity of *A Walk in the Night* is achieved by selection of characters, selection and organization of events, choice of narrative and dialogue, as well as the imagery used to portray this particular setting and physical environment' (Pointer 2001:23). In my view, this is so far the best analysis of the use of imagery in La Guma's first novel.

Chapter two, which tackles as its subject La Guma's second novel, *And A Threefold Cord*, begins by discussing how the dominant image of rain is used by the author to build up the tension in the unfolding of the plot from the beginning to the end. As Pointer (2001:57) puts it: 'The rain motif begins at the beginning of the novel and is sustained to the end .... [The rain] becomes a major factor in the motivation of Ronnie Paul's crime, providing a kind of incentive or psychological explanation for his murder of Susie Meyer'. Perhaps more significantly is the fact that Pointer sees La Guma as having succeeded in integrating this natural imagery into the meaning of the story. There is, however, more to this chapter than this but, I shall come back to the other aspects that Pointer touches on in this chapter later.

'[I]magery is an important vehicle for La Guma in conveying the theme and meanings of his novels, as well as deepening their artistic effects', avers Pointer (2001:133). With this in mind, Pointer argues, with regard to La Guma's next novel, *The Stone Country*, that the image of prison, which is not only the setting of this work, but also, the dominant image in this text, is a metaphor for the South African situation at the time La Guma is writing.

As he aptly puts it: ‘... a dominating image of *The Stone Country* is that life in a South African prison is a mirror image, a lucid reflection of life in the larger social-political reality of South Africa’ (Pointer 2001:126). In line with the suffering and agony of the prisoners, Pointer argues that, perhaps more than in the other La Guma’s novels, *The Stone Country* underlines ‘the desecration of human bodies as a metaphor for the South African situation’. (Pointer 2001:171)

With regard to *In the Fog of the Season’s End*, Pointer (2001:206) proffers (rightly in my opinion):

It is, in fact, in the quality of imagery of the setting or physical environment rather than in its frequency that *In the Fog of the Season’s End* marks very real progress and shows Alex La Guma at the peak of image-making power. Here the images are remarkably wide in range and varied in tone. The earlier works formed a closed stylistic universe, and the imagery in each was fairly homogenous, although it differed greatly from one book to another. Here we have a multiplicity of styles and corresponding diversity of images within one novel.

This ‘fantastic richness and diversity of La Guma’s imagery’ (Pointer 2001:224,237) culminates in ‘the image pattern of *Time of the Butcherbird*’, which, according to Pointer, ‘strikingly accounts for [the] pluralistic, intra-national struggle within South Africa, as each national group fights the other two in different ways’. Needless to say, then, Pointer seems to have captured the significance of imagery in La Guma’s oeuvre with admirable lucidity. But, as already intimated, there is more to Pointer’s book than the focus on La Guma’s imagery and it is to the other aspects that I now want to turn.

More than anything, *A Passion to Liberate* attempts to provide a critique of the ideological underpinnings of La Guma’s fiction. Pointer takes great pains to make known his objections to the Marxist paradigm that informs La Guma’s writing. This is more obvious in his examination of *And A Threefold Cord*. In Pointer’s view, La Guma unjustifiably gives ‘a measure of importance [to] class consciousness’ to such an extent that he (Pointer) finds the use of this theme in this novel ‘monotonous and repetitive’ (Pointer 2001:87). He goes on to argue in relation to this work:

In fact, the intensity of the message is so concentrated, so narrowly focused on the Marxian concepts of class consciousness and class unity that it threatens, perhaps by design, to obfuscate entirely the racial and color dimensions of oppression in South Africa and the world (Pointer 2001:88).

This claim seems to downplay the author's attentiveness to both race and class contradictions at play in this novel, as well as the unobtrusive nature of la Guma's implied message in the text. The overemphasis on this point is in fact as good as suggesting that La Guma is churning out socialist propaganda. Hence in the next statement Pointer's lamentation of the way in which 'La Guma promulgates his ideological bias' leads him to the following statement:

It is not just an economic system (capitalism) against which African people struggle, as many Marxists (including La Guma) would like to have it; rather, in South Africa, color and race—and not class—is the real determinant of status. A purely class based interpretation of South African society does not square with an African's most infantile awareness of reality (Pointer 2001:88).

The unfair criticism against La Guma's Marxism continues but his ideological leaning is now, with the enlistment of W.E.B. DuBois, attributed to a supposedly inherent identity crisis in the 'Colored' community that inclines them to gravitate towards this ideological position. Pointer's (2001:91) argument deserves to be quoted at length here:

The history of the South African Colored is also the history of this strife, to merge his African self with his European self. This dichotomy encourages the amorphous Marxist ideology that informs La Guma's works and particularizes his character's' intellectual physiognomy, despite the lack of references to their specific ethnicity. The South African so-called Colored becomes a communist or Colored nationalist because it seems for reasons of an identity imposed on him and which he has subsequently assumed, he refuses to become a Pan-African or African nationalist.

This reading of an ostensibly 'Colored' ideological inclination in monolithic terms is soon brought closer to home, in line with the logic of the presentation of the argument. Here is Pointer's conclusion:

There are two social realities: La Guma is a Colored and he is a communist. As a so-called Colored, in DuBoisan terms, his consciousness is divided; thus, restricting and limiting his potential commitment to African nationalism and Pan-Africanism (Pointer 2001:93).

Pointer's tendentious and simplistic critique of La Guma's ideology forms the bulk of the argument and threatens to undermine the useful analysis of the imagery.

It soon becomes clear that there is a specific agenda to Pointer's objections and this is an Afro-centrism that seeks either to confine La Guma to 'Coloredism'—'one obvious responsibility of a Coloured writer like La Guma, is to clarify the ethos of a self-aware, Coloured population' (Pointer 2001:xxviii) or to convert him to African nationalism that is devoid of Marxist 'impurities'. For, in an argument that is reminiscent of Ayi Kwezi Armah's famous statement that 'Marxism is the whitest of philosophies', he enlists Lewis Nkosi's<sup>2</sup> (1975:97) statement on La Guma's commitment to socialist ideals:

La Guma's fierce and uncritical commitment to communism blinds him to the fact that communism is simply another brand of white nationalism, if not, the Kremlin and Peking would certainly be closer together. Neither capitalism nor communism is designed for African people; both have ruling classes that oppress and exploit the masses of their people. And intellectuals and writers are fed and filled with the ideals and principles of both systems. For these they fight and die, screaming and regurgitating these ideals as if they were intoxicated ...[!].

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<sup>2</sup> Nkosi (1975:110) who was with La Guma on the latter's first visit to the Soviet Union had argued: 'Alex La Guma is a man fiercely and humourlessly committed to his ideology—communism. I was surprised to discover how conservative and uncritical he was in his commitment...?'

What is surprising is that Pointer's reaction above is prompted by the fact that La Guma imbues Charlie Pauls with what is arguably a nascent class consciousness, instead of exploring his 'color consciousness' via the interior monologue technique as Pointer would have it (Pointer 2001:98). Moreover, in his persistence that La Guma should have focused on colour consciousness, Pointer's critique borders on the inanely prescriptive and betrays somewhat his version of an African-American reading of the South African historical context.

Marxist ideology is not the only aspect of La Guma's fiction that Pointer finds unpalatable. Instead, Pointer's critique is extended to include La Guma's depiction of African women in his novels. Admittedly, this is an aspect of La Guma's writing that has been glossed over; whether this is by design or it is just oversight on the part of the critics, is of course a moot point. Describing La Guma's portrayal of African women as 'an open wound, a deep scar on La Guma's portraits', he takes La Guma to task for this depiction which he regards as 'derogatory' (Pointer 2001:102). Indeed, Pointer takes issue with La Guma on this score, in his own words: '[La Guma's] political and social commitment have not been enough to exorcise the demon of race (color) preference and demeaning portraiture of African people, particularly African women' (Pointer 2001:102). Acknowledging that La Guma's African women are humane, compassionate and even revolutionary, Pointer contends that it is not so much what they do but rather how they look that raises problems for him. Pointer provides a few examples from La Guma's novels—ranging from Miss Nzuba in *And A Threefold Cord* to MmaTau in *Time of the Butcherbird*—to decry what he calls the author's 'de-feminization' of African women. The tone of Pointer's (2001:105) argument below aptly captures his sentiments on the issue:

La Guma's stereotypic, caricatured images of African women, as huge, as massive black currant jelly, as vast mounds, and all other metaphors, images and myths, he uses to satirize, nay desecrate the physical appeal and beauty of African women, false though they may be, become central in determining political and cultural values, criteria and standards of beauty, and general attitudes towards African women.

It does not come as a surprise, therefore, that after comparing this to La

Guma's portrayal of 'Colored' women he opines that this author's depiction of African women smacks of 'Colored racism' (Pointer 2001:107). On this basis he concludes, 'one can say La Guma is a man who is committed, but in whom the cancerous poison of the white supremacist monster comes out, as if in an act of creative exorcism' (Pointer 2001:109). And in line with this conclusion he advises: 'As the African revolution matures, writers like La Guma must put away those terms and identities which belittle this struggle and are suggestive of an identity crisis, and ideological infantilism' (Pointer 2001:111). The remedy to this apparent 'ideological infantilism', according to him, and he is at his prescriptive best here, is that writers such as La Guma 'should embrace unequivocally, in spirit and in pride, an African identity' (Pointer 2001:112). For in accordance with Pointer's logic, "'African" is the only identity, it seems to me, that brings dignity, that speaks of a history, a land, a people, a culture' (Pointer 2001:111).

Interestingly, Pointer's endorsement of Afro-centrism precludes him from subjecting his own ideology to the same kind of scrutiny, the same degree of interrogation that he directs at La Guma's Marxist discourse. Instead his own standpoint hinges on some organic mythical mysticism that is taken as a sacrosanct given to which La Guma is expected to subscribe. For how else would one describe this statement from Pointer (Pointer 2001:175):

Africans, *I read somewhere*, are the 'children of the sun', God's original creation. Their very blackness is religious, a blessing and honor (e.a.).

The anomaly of quoting from an unidentified source ('I read somewhere') in an academic book does not even warrant a comment! The issue I am trying to raise about Pointer's book is that the point about La Guma's Marxist leanings is rather too belaboured. His attitude to La Guma's ideological orientation is succinctly epitomized in his own words: 'The multiracial communism fostered by La Guma's theme-images is untenable, if not, at times, *detestable*' (e.a.) (Pointer 2001:132). Pointer may have been trying to move away from what he perceives to be solidarity criticism on the part of La Guma critics, but the result is that his useful study of the significance of image in La Guma's writing is overshadowed by his tirade.

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Department of English  
University of Johannesburg

# Reading the Unpublished, or, 'the university in the eyes of its pupils'<sup>1</sup>

**Sikhumbuzo Mngadi**

## **Review Article**

*Poetry*

by Mandisi Silver  
Unpublished, 2004

Untitled collection of poems  
by Dillon Govender  
Unpublished, n.d.

The Principle of Reason: The University in the Eyes of Its Pupils  
by Jacques Derrida  
*Diacritics: A Review of Contemporary Criticism*, fall 1983

## **Introduction**

Today, how can we not speak of the university? I put my question in the negative, for two reasons. On the one hand, as we all know, it is impossible, now more than ever, to

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<sup>1</sup> This article offers an extended review of Jacques Derrida's 'response' to some of the philosophical traditions that have pondered the "principle of reason" and its vicissitudes since Immanuel Kant's response to the question *Was ist Aufklärung?* that the German periodical, *Berlinische Monatschrift*, had put to its readers and/or contributors in November 1784. It then concludes by considering two unpublished poetry collections to assess the implications of Derrida's 'response' for some of the ways in which the "principle of reason" has continued to inform writing about the problematic of thought and phenomenon.

dissociate the work we do, within one discipline or several, from a reflection on the political and institutional conditions of that work. Such a reflection is unavoidable. It is no longer an *external* complement to teaching and research; it must make its way through the very objects we work with, shaping them as it goes, along with our norms, procedures, and aims. We cannot not speak of such things. On the other hand, the question 'how can we not' gives notice of the negative, or perhaps we should say *preventive*, complexion of the preliminary reflections I should like to put to you. Indeed, since I am seeking to initiate discussion, I shall content myself with saying how one should not speak of the university. Some of the typical risks to be avoided, it seems to me, take the form of a bottomless pit, while others take the form of a protectionist barrier (Derrida 1983:3).

'Tell me, good Brutus, can you see your face?'  
(Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*).

The university students' publication is the stock of the university's claim to enlightenment and, perhaps, the spoils that it claims for its enlightenment project. So is the unpublished work in the same context. It is partly for this reason that I am undertaking to consider two unpublished collections of poetry by Mandisi Silver and Dillon Govender<sup>2</sup>, both of which have on separate occasions been passed onto me by their authors. The other reason is that, since receiving these manuscripts, and reading widely of and on (the phenomenon of) students' writing, I have pondered its implications for the broad debates on what Derrida terms 'the university in the eyes of its pupils', in an essay that appeared in the Fall 1983 issue of *Diacritics*. This essay taps into, by responding to, some of the questions that have circulated the 'principle of reason' in which the university both participates and from which it recoils, and perhaps which, as Derrida (1983:3) puts the question to the university, is its '*raison d'être*'.

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<sup>2</sup> Both are students at the University of Johannesburg.

Speaking from such a place, namely the university, it is Immanuel Kant who, perhaps against current opinion at the time, introduced into the scene of the history of ideas a different spirit to one that prevailed on the question of enlightenment (*Aufklärung*). Responding to the question, *Was ist Aufklärung?* (What is Enlightenment?), that a German periodical, *Berlinische Monatschrift*, had in November 1784 invited its public to respond to, Kant invoked the principle of the negative: for Kant, *Aufklärung* was a 'way out' (Rabinow 1984:34). However, for Kant, this was not a 'way out' of darkness as a term to which the light of *Aufklärung* is in ordinary speech opposed but, rather, a 'way out' of the darkness with which a certain *Aufklärung* casts its light; in short, like Derrida, albeit not with the same end in view, Kant was writing about 'how one should not speak of' *Aufklärung*.

Having come to Cornell University to speak 'on the subject ... of the essence of the University', as seen from 'the eyes of its pupils .... What American English calls 'the faculty', those who teach, ... in French *le corps enseignant*, the teaching corps (just as we say 'the diplomatic corps') or teaching body'<sup>3</sup>, Derrida (1983:5,6) invoked Kant's *Conflict of the Faculties*, in which 'Kant averred that the University should be governed by "an idea of reason", the idea of the whole field of what is presently teachable [*das ganze gegenwärtige Feld der Gelehrsamkeit*]']. Derrida asks: 'What can the University's body see or not see of its own destination, of that in view of which it stands its ground? Is the University the master of its own diaphragm?' (Derrida 1983:5) Derrida (1983.6,5) uses the word 'diaphragm' in two related senses: as the Greek word which literally means 'partitioning fence' and as the literalisation of his injunction that we must ask of the University its 'reasons for being and its essence'—its *raison d'être*:

If the University is an institution for science and teaching, does it have to go beyond memory and sight? .... To hear better and learn better, it must close its eyes or narrow its outlook? .... Man can lower the sheath, adjust the diaphragm, narrow his sight, the better

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<sup>3</sup> Because those who are taught have in various ways responded—indeed, the dialectic cannot be closed between teacher and taught—the students' publication thus becomes another vantage point—another eye—from which the university sees and is seen.

to listen, remember, and learn. What might the university's diaphragm be? The University must not be a sclerophthalmic animal, a hard-eyed animal; when I asked ... how it should set its sights and adjust its views, that was another way of asking about its reasons for being and its essence (Derrida 1983:5).

'What is terrifying about an animal with hard eyes and a dry glance', Derrida (1983:5) avers, 'is that it always sees'. 'Man', by contrast, 'can lower the sheath, adjust the diaphragm, narrow his sight, the better to listen, remember, and learn' (Derrida 1983:5).

Needless to say, this is all metaphorical or, as Derrida puts it, 'figurative': 'Shutting off sight in order to learn is of course only a figurative manner of speaking ... I am resolutely in favor of a new university Enlightenment [*Aufklärung*]' (Derrida 1983:5). Yet it is the import of this figure of the 'diaphragm'—of the sheath or eyelid—that is at the centre of Derrida's warning about 'the risks to be avoided' in speaking of the university: 'one should not speak of the university [as] a bottomless pit [or as] a protectionist barrier'. Unlike those 'animals lacking eyelids', the University has eyelids, 'a sort of sheath or tagumental membrane [*phragma*] which serves to protect the eye and permits it, at regular intervals, to close itself off in the darkness of inward thought or sleep' (Derrida 1983:5). Recall that when Derrida speaks of the University, he speaks of 'the faculty, those who teach'; however, as I point out above, to speak of those who teach, is to speak of those who are taught simultaneously.

Perhaps the question of the university's *raison d'être* is as urgent in South Africa today, against the background of the new continentalism, and particularly with the new call from the men of politics for the orientation of research towards set goals—useful research—as it was at the time that Derrida (1983:12) was pondering it against the background of the homogenisation of 'all the technologically advanced industrialized societies'. However, whatever its impetus, it is a mean question, and in pondering it in 'The Principle of Reason: The University in the Eyes of Its Pupils', Derrida, not unlike Dick Hebdige in 'The Bottom Line on Planet A', (*Hiding in The Light* 1988) makes it no less so. What could be the basis of the relationship between the university's *raison d'être* and what such a phrase as 'useful research' proposes and presupposes?

I want to track this question by considering the import of the philosophical landmarks that Derrida revisits, among which are Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* ([1781] 1964) and Martin Heidegger's *The Principle of Reason* ([1957] 1991), and what such landmarks mean for my consideration of the same question that Derrida asks of the university's modes of existence. From the point of view of the call for the re-orientation of research in Africa towards greater usefulness, in which researchers are implored to propose solutions for Africa's problems, rather than simply identify these problems, it would seem that going over some of the issues that circulate and/or re-circulate the question to which Kant was responding, namely, *Was ist Aufklärung?* (What is Enlightenment?), is imperative; indeed, the university in South Africa, as elsewhere in the world, participates in this question. Derrida postulates that:

Neither in its medieval nor in its modern form has the university disposed freely of its own absolute autonomy and of the rigorous conditions of its own unity. During more than eight centuries, 'university' has been the name given by a society to a sort of supplementary body that at one and the same time it wanted to project outside itself and to keep jealously to itself, to emancipate and to control. On this double basis, the university was supposed to *represent* society. And in a certain way it has done so: it has reproduced society's scenography, its views, conflicts, contradictions, its play and its differences, and also its desire for organic union in a total body (Derrida 1983:19).

On the last point, namely 'organic union in a total body', Derrida (1983:19) avers:

Organicist language is always associated with 'techno-industrial' language in 'modern' discourse on the university. But with the relative autonomy of a technical apparatus, indeed that of a machine and of a prosthetic body, this artifact that is the university has *reflected* society only in giving it the chance for reflection, that is, also, for *dissociation*. The time for reflection, here, signifies not only that the internal rhythm of the university apparatus is relatively independent of social time and relaxes the urgency of command, ensures for it a great and precious freedom of play. An empty place for chance: the invagination of an inside pocket. The time for

reflection is also the chance for turning back on the very conditions of reflection, in all the senses of that word, as if with the help of a new optical device one could finally see sight, could not only view the natural landscape, the city, the bridge and the abyss, but could view viewing.

The call, therefore, for research to be useful, is not foreign to the university as an apparatus for the reflection of 'political and institutional' demands that, from the point of view of the university's 'absolute autonomy and of the rigorous conditions of its own unity', may appear utilitarian and/or an 'external complement to teaching and research'. I have already pointed out that my concern in this essay is not so much the call for research to justify its usefulness, which on my view is a moot point, as what it means to make such a call in the broader context of the 'double basis' of 'emancipation and control' in which such a call participates.

### **What is Enlightenment? Legacies**

In '*Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?*', his response to the question, *Was ist Aufklärung?*, Kant defines Enlightenment as 'man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's understanding without the guidance of another person'. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno state that by 'understanding without the guidance of others', Kant means 'understanding guided by reason', which, as Kant argues, 'has ... for its object only the understanding and its purposive employment' (quoted in Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* 1979:81). In *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant (1964:25) elaborates on reason—on 'the difference between Pure and Empirical Knowledge':

That all our knowledge begins with experience there can be no doubt. For how is it possible that the faculty of cognition should be awakened into exercise otherwise than by means of objects which affect our senses, and partly of themselves produce representations, partly rouse our powers of understanding into activity, to compare, to connect, or to separate these, and so convert the raw material of

our sensuous impressions into a knowledge of objects, which is called experience? In respect of time, therefore, no knowledge of ours is antecedent to experience, but begins with it.

But, though all our knowledge begins with experience, it by no means follows that all arises out of experience. For, on the contrary, it is quite possible that our empirical knowledge is a compound of that which we receive through impressions, and that which the faculty of cognition supplies from itself (sensuous impressions giving merely the *occasion*), an addition which we cannot distinguish from the original element given by sense, till long practice has made us attentive to, and skilful in separating it. It is, therefore, a question which requires close investigation, and not to be answered at first sight, whether there exists a knowledge altogether independent of experience, and even of all sensuous impressions? Knowledge of this kind is called *a priori*, in contradistinction to empirical knowledge, which has its sources *a posteriori*, that is, in experience.

Kant (1964:26) concludes his opening remarks by stating that:

By the term 'knowledge *a priori*', therefore, we shall in the sequel understand, not such as is independent of this or that kind of experience, but such as is absolutely so for *all* experience. Opposed to this is empirical knowledge, or that which is possible only *a posteriori*, that is, through experience. Knowledge *a priori* is either pure or impure. Pure knowledge *a priori* is that with which no empirical element is mixed up. For example, the proposition, 'Every change has a cause', is a proposition *a priori*, but impure, because change is a conception which can only be derived from experience.

From the above, it is possible to conclude that, for Kant, knowledge is fundamentally independent from experience, and can exist in pure and universal form. 'Empirical universality', unlike the *a priori* universality of knowledge (or cognition/Reason), which is valid in all cases, 'is, therefore, only an arbitrary extension of validity, from that which may be predicated of a proposition valid in most cases, to that which is asserted of a proposition

which holds good in all' (Kant 1964:26). I want to return to this point. However, let me pose its other appearance in Leibniz, via the path of the critical pressure under which Heidegger puts it in *Der Satz vom Grund* (*The Principle of Reason*), which is the text of a one-hour lecture course that he gave at the University of Freiburg from 1955 to 1956, and also of the address that he delivered twice in 1956. Heidegger (1991:117f) observes that:

[T]wo thousand three hundred years were needed in the history of Western thinking, which began in the sixth century BC, before the familiar idea 'Nothing without reason' was expressly posited as a principle and came to be known as a law, recognized in its full import, and made unquestionably valid. During this period the principle of reason slept, so to speak. Even up to the present hour we have scarcely thought at all about this curious fact, nor even asked why it may be that this little principle needed such an extraordinarily long incubation period. For it was only in the seventeenth century that Leibniz recognized the long-since commonplace idea 'nothing is without reason' was a normative principle and described it as the principle of reason.

Heidegger (1991:118) then asks:

But was something unique and grand supposed to come to light through this general and little principle of reason? Is the unusually long incubation period a preparation for an unusual awakening, a quickening to a wakefulness that no longer admits of sleep, least of all, an incubation, an ocular slumber[?].

Heidegger's concern here is with the manner in which Leibniz gave the 'general and little principle of reason' the status of an Ur principle. Leibniz's *nihil sine ratione* (nothing without reason) becomes the '*principium rationis*':

The principle is now a Principle. The principle of reason becomes a fundamental principle. But it is not just one fundamental principle among others. For Leibniz it is one of the supreme fundamental

principles, if not the most supreme one .... Leibniz calls it the *principium magnum, grande et nobilissimum*: the grand, the powerful, the most eminent Principle (Heidegger 1991:118).

It is, thus, the broader implications of the claim that Leibniz makes for the distinctiveness of the principle of reason—as ‘the grand, the powerful, the most eminent Principle’ (Heidegger 1991:118)—that are at stake in Heidegger’s critique. One of Heidegger’s (1991:121) concerns is that:

[T]oday humanity runs the risk of measuring the greatness of everything grand only according to the reach of the authority of the *principium rationis*. Without really understanding it, we know today that modern technology intractably presses toward bringing its contrivances and products to an all-embracing, greatest-possible perfection. This perfection consists in the completeness of the calculably secure establishing of objects, in the completeness of reckoning with them and with the securing of the calculability of possibilities for reckoning.

The perfection of technology is also the echo of the demand for *perfectio*, which means, the completeness of a foundation. This demand speaks from out of the *principium reddendae rationis sufficientis*, from the fundamental principle of rendering sufficient reasons ....

Modern technology pushes toward the greatest possible perfection. Perfection is based on the thoroughgoing calculability of objects. The calculability of objects presupposes the unqualified validity of the *principium rationis*. It is in this way that the authority characteristic of the principle of reason determines the essence of the modern, technological age.

The logic of Heidegger’s critique of Leibniz’s instrumentalisation of reason as a Principle of all principles, the *principium reddendae rationis sufficientis*, should lead us back to the terms of Kant’s *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?* and of his *Critique of Pure Reason*. What, in other words, does Kant mean by knowledge *a priori*? Is it knowledge sufficient to itself, that is, knowledge guided by the Principle of Reason that,

as Adorno and Horkheimer put it, has 'for its object only the understanding and its purposive employment'? (quoted in Adorno and Horkheimer 1979:81). Indeed, it would appear so, particularly since, for Kant (1964:26), there exists 'a *criterion*, by which we may securely distinguish a pure from an empirical cognition'. And,

Of far more importance ... is the consideration that certain of our cognitions rise completely above the sphere of all possible experience, and by means of conceptions, to which there exists in the whole extent of experience no corresponding object, seem to extend the range of our judgments beyond its bounds. And just in this transcendental or supersensible sphere, where experience affords us neither instruction nor guidance, lie the investigations of *Reason*, which, on account of their importance, we consider far preferable to, and as having a far more elevated aim than, all that the understanding can achieve within the sphere of sensuous phenomena (Kant 1964:28).

Of course, the logical question is, what, then, validates these 'certain cognitions' that 'rise completely above the sphere of all possible experience' and in which 'lie the investigations of *Reason*', if it is not experience? Kant (1964:29) turns to 'pure mathematics' as a 'science [that] affords us a brilliant example, how far, independently of all experience, we may carry our *a priori* knowledge'. It is because, even though it is 'synthetical' in its appearance, pure mathematics participates in the '*transcendental ... all knowledge which is not so much occupied with objects as with the mode of our cognition of these objects, so far as this mode of cognition is possible a priori*' (Kant 1964:38).

From Heidegger's concern above, it is clear that, for him, the idea of Reason as a Principle poses serious problems. He avers:

And today humanity has gone a long way in following the surge toward something that never before in its history could have happened. Humanity enters the age to which it has given the name 'the atomic age'. A book that just appeared and that figured on having a broad readership, bears the title: *We Will Live Through*

*Atoms*. The book is equipped with a blurb by the Nobel Prize winner Otto Hahn and with a preface by the current Minister of Defence, Franz Joseph Strauß. At the close of the Introduction, the author of the work writes:

The atomic age can become a prosperous, happy age full of hope, an age in which we live through atoms. It all depends on us! (Heidegger 1991:121-122).

To this, Heidegger (1991:122) responds:

Certainly—it all depends on us; it depends on us and a few other things, namely whether we still reflect, or whether in general we still can and want to reflect. If we still want to enter on a path of reflection, then above all we must come to terms with the distinction that holds before our eyes the difference between mere calculative thinking and reflective thinking.

The ‘apparently harmless naming of an age “the atomic age”’ is, for Heidegger, the ascendance not so much of materialism as of the materialist ‘mind-set’, which is ‘the most menacing mind-set because we most easily and for the longest time mistake the insidious nature of its violence’ (Heidegger 1991:123):

Therefore we ask anew: what, after all, does it mean that an age of world history is moulded by atomic energy and its unleashing? It means, precisely, that the atomic age is dominated by the force of the demand that threatens to overpower us through the principle of rendering sufficient reasons (Heidegger 1991:123).

Let me pause to reflect on the broad implications of the longstanding philosophical exchange that I have re-staged. Indeed, Heidegger says we must ‘reflect ... enter on a path of reflection’, lest we get ‘overpower[ed]’ by a principle (of reason) that in reality reduces thinking to mere *mathesis* or ‘calculative thinking’ (Heidegger 1991:122). In *Hiding in the Light: On Images and Things*, Dick Hebdige stages this exchange by constituting two imaginary worlds made up by two British magazines, *Ten 8* and *The Face*.

He tells us that when Alan Hughes, who had come to West Midlands College to give a talk on magazine design to students on a Visual Communication course, 'asked how many of his audience read *Ten 8*... the response was muted and unenthusiastic and prompted the following exchange':

A.H.: 'What's wrong with *Ten 8* then?'

Students: 'It's not like *The Face* .... It's too political .... It looks too heavy .... It's too left wing .... What use is it to someone like me?' (Hebdige 1988:156)

Thus, in 'The Bottom Line on Planet One: Squaring Up to *The Face*', Hebdige (1988:155-180) reflects on the broad implications of the students' response, and does so from the point of view of *Ten 8*, a magazine that, as far as he is concerned, thinks—reflects 'on images and things'—rather than, like *The Face*, 'looks', because there is 'nothing underneath or behind the image and hence there is no hidden truth to be revealed' (Hebdige 1988:159). Even though Hebdige and Heidegger could be said to be arguing the same thing, the tenor of Hebdige's argument is one that knows that the stakes in this debate are high. Heidegger is confronting a phenomenon the insidious nature of the violence of which is still very much a matter that can be countered with reflection. The difference in the tenor of Hebdige and Heidegger's 'squarings up', as it were, their charge against the insidious violence of unreflective atomisation of knowledge, is significant, if at least insofar as one can already discern in the desperate tone of Hebdige's charge/framework—i.e. 'squaring up to *The Face*'—the weakening of the opposition between 'looking' (*The Face*) and 'seeing' (*Ten 8*), 'sensing' (*The Face*) and 'knowing' (*Ten 8*). Whereas Hebdige speaks as someone who has at least already conceded defeat on some (significant) fronts, namely that *The Face* is simply one instance at an advanced stage of the irreversible logic of the 'atomic age', and thus speaks like the commander of the army of bitter-enders<sup>4</sup>, Heidegger's speech is heraldic; he is at the initial stages of assembling an army that would confront *not* Hebdige's post-modern 'motley gang of bricoleurs, ironists, designers, publicists, image

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<sup>4</sup> Hebdige informs us that the circulation figures for *Ten 8*, which is the older of the two publications, are 1,500 - 2,500, and for *The Face*, 52,000 - 90,000.

consultants, *homes et femmes fatales*, market researchers, pirates, adventurers, *flâneurs* and dandies' (Hebdige 1988:159) but, rather, a book called *We Will Live Through Atoms*, its supporters Otto Hahn, the Minister of Defence, Franz Joseph Strauß, and/or 'modern technology' generally. Nonetheless, despite their location at the beginning of the atomic age and at its consummate moment, respectively, Heidegger and Hebdige speak from the same position of the critique of what they consider the *disastrous* consequences of reason as a principle sufficient to itself—the *principium reddendae rationis sufficientis*. If, for Heidegger, *We Will Live Through the Atom* is the logical consequence of this principle, for Hebdige *The Face* is also such a consequence, particularly against the backdrop of the view of one of its supporters, Paul Virilio, whom Hebdige quotes as having contributed to the 'Disinformation Special' fifth anniversary issue of *The Face*, entitled 'The End of Politics', the view that 'Classless society, social justice—no-one believes in them any more. We're in the age of micro-narratives, the art of the fragment ...' (Hebdige 1988:160).

It would seem that the next logical question is: what is/are the alternative/s to what appears to be an impasse between 'two worlds', namely thought and phenomenon? Yet another, perhaps more trenchant, question would be: if the consequences of Enlightenment of which Heidegger and Hebdige speak are inherent in the idea of reason of which Kant and Leibniz speak, as many others have agreed, most notable of whom are Adorno and Horkheimer, is the alternative another 'world', as Hebdige proposes? Let me consider Heidegger's alternative and, then, Adorno and Horkheimer's (1986:3) paradoxical statement that:

In the most general sense of progressive thought, the Enlightenment has always aimed at liberating men from fear and establishing their sovereignty. Yet the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant.

Heidegger (1991:117) observes in the opening remarks of his address:

The principle of reason reads: *nihil est sine ratione*. One translates this with: *nothing* is *without* reason. What the principle states can be paraphrased as follows: everything has a reason, which means each

and every thing that *is* in any manner. *Omnes ens habet rationem*. Whatever happens to be actual has a reason for its actuality. Whatever happens to be possible has a reason for its possibility. Whatever happens to be necessary has a reason for its necessity. *Nothing is without reason.*

The *principium reddendae rationis sufficientis*, Heidegger argues, trades on giving sufficient reasons for every being's being and, thus, places emphasis on 'nothing' and 'without'. This, for Heidegger, implicitly erases 'is', so that in reality the principle of reason becomes '*Nihil sine ratione*, nothing without reason'. Heidegger asks us to listen—to 'hear' what the fundamental principle of reason says, namely *nihil est sine ratione*—so that we may challenge the atomic age not by installing another age but, rather, by unmasking its collusion with the *principium reddendae rationis sufficientis*' surreptitious erasure of 'is'—of 'est'—in *nihil est sine ratione*. In effect, Heidegger asks us to shift the emphasis from *nihil est sine ratione* (*nothing is without reason*) to *nihil est sine ratione* (*nothing is without reason*), the better to account for being as reason/ground *tout court* ('is' or 'being' is reason), rather than as reason's being. Because we may be asked the question: 'what after all does "being" mean'? (Heidegger 1991:125), which, instead of producing an answer may lead to another question, namely 'what, after all, does "ground/reason" mean'? (Heidegger 1991:126). Heidegger asks us to take 'another path in order to at least open an outer gate', a path that 'may possibly be given to us by the poet whose verse circumscribes that cognition which stands under the sway of the fundamental principle of rendering sufficient reason' (the *principium reddendae rationis sufficientis*) (Heidegger 1991:126). 'Goethe', Heidegger (1991:126) avers, 'says of modern science':

But research strives and rings, never tiring,  
After the law, the reason, *why* and *how*.

To this, Heidegger (1991:126) says:

The 'but' at the beginning of the first line sets research over against another attitude and demeanor that no longer tirelessly strive after

the ground/ reason for beings. Whenever we pursue the ground/reason of a being, we ask: why? Cognition stalks this interrogative word from one reason to another. The 'why' allows no rest, offers no stop, gives no support. The 'why' is the word for the tireless advance into an and-so-forth that research, in the event that it simply and blindly belabors itself, can take so far that it perforce can go too far with it.

Research, if it asks 'why' as the principle of *nihil sine ratione*, that is, without 'is',—without 'est'—can advance tirelessly into an and-so-forth which, perforce, means that it can go too far into the abyss—into Derrida's 'bottomless pit'. We must invoke 'is', which is:

The word of being [that] says: being—itsself ground/ reason—remains without a ground/reason, which now means, without why. If we attempt to think being as ground/reason, then we must take the step back, back from the question: 'why?'

But then what are we supposed to stick to?

In the 'Collected Sayings' from 1815 Goethe says:

How? When? and Where?—the gods remain mute!

You stick to the *because* and ask not *why*? (Heidegger 1991:126).

We stick to the 'because', Heidegger says, which 'guards against investigating the 'why', therefore, against investigating foundations. It balks at founding and getting to the bottom of something. For the 'because' is without 'why', it has no ground, it is ground itself' (Heidegger 1991:127). 'If the word of being as the word of grounds is a true word', Heidegger continues, 'then the 'because' also points to the essence of being' (Heidegger 1991:127). The next logical question for Heidegger is: 'Yet what does the "because" [*weil*] really mean?':

It is the shortened word for *dieweilen* [whereas]. An older manner of speaking goes:

One must strike the iron while [*weil*] it is hot.

... 'the university in the eyes of its pupils'

Here the 'while' in no way means: 'since—because', rather 'while' denotes *dieweilen* [whereas], which means, as long as—the iron is hot—during. 'To while' [*Weilen*] means: to tarry', 'to remain still', 'to pause and keep to oneself', namely in rest (Heidegger 1991:127).

Again, Heidegger (1991:127) cites Goethe, who says, 'The fiddle stops and the dancer whiles', and avers:

'Whiling', 'tarrying', 'perpetuating' is indeed the old sense of the word 'being' [*sein*]. The while that every founding and every 'why' guards against names the simple, plain presence that is without why—the presence upon which everything depends, upon which everything rests. The 'while' names the ground. But *qua* the Whereas, 'whiling' also names 'the abiding': being. 'Whiling' names both: being and ground; it names the abiding, being as the ground/reason. Being and ground/reason—in whiling—the same. Both belong together.

It is now evident that, for Heidegger (1991:127), as he puts it:

The little principle of reason—'Nothing is without reason'—at first speaks as the grand fundamental principle, the *principium grande*. The principle is grand by virtue of the force of its demands on all cognition.

But, given the shift of emphasis within the very same principle that I have already noted, where 'is' becomes the place at which such a shift takes place:

The little principle of reason—'Nothing is without reason'—both speaks as a word of being and names this as the ground/reason (Heidegger 1991:127).

If we must avoid the 'typical risks' that are likely to occur when we speak of the university, Derrida warns, we must learn 'how not to speak of the university': not as 'a bottomless pit' or as 'a protective barrier'. Does

Heidegger, in avoiding the first risk, fall into the trap of the second, namely that we must *halt* the question 'why?' which advances tirelessly 'into an and-so-forth that research, in the event that it simply and blindly belabors itself, can take so far that it perforce can go too far with it'?; which is to say, create a protective barrier—a 'because'—that would keep the university—research—from falling into the abyss of this 'tireless advance into an and-so-forth'? Heidegger (1991:129) does not think so, because he believes that 'Goethe's words', namely 'You stick to the *because* and ask not *why*'?

[A]re a hint. Hints only remain hints when thinking does not twist them into definitive statements and thereby come to a standstill with them. Hints are hints only as long as thinking follows their allusions while meditating on them. Thus, thinking reaches a path that leads to what has from time immemorial shown itself in the tradition of our thinking as worthy of thought, and simultaneously veils itself.

Thus, for Heidegger (1991:129), 'Perhaps something simple belonging to what is worthy of thought has drawn a bit closer. We name it when we say: being is experienced as ground/reason. Ground/reason is interpreted as *ratio*, as an account'. Research, for Heidegger, owes its dues to the *ratio*, because 'humans are the *animal rationale*, the creature that requires accounts and gives accounts. According to this determination, the human is a reckoning creature reckoning understood in the broad sense of the word *ratio*' (Heidegger 1991:129). It is 'this thinking [which] brought the world into the contemporary era, the atomic age', and, in view of this, Heidegger (1991:129) asks:

Does the above mentioned determination that humans are the *animal rationale* exhaust the essence of humanity? Does the last word that can be said about being run thus: being means ground/reason? Or isn't human nature, isn't its affiliation to being, isn't the essence of being what still remains, and even more disturbingly, worthy of thought? If this is the way it's going to be, may we give up what is worthy of thought in favor of the recklessness of exclusively calculative thinking and its immense achievements? Or are we obliged to find paths upon which thinking is capable of responding

to what is worthy of thought instead of, enchanted by calculative thinking, mindlessly passing over what is worthy of thought?

He then answers:

That is the question. It is the world-question of thinking. Answering this question decides what will become of the earth and of human existence on this earth (Heidegger 1991:129).

On the shift of emphasis from 'Nothing is without reason' to 'Nothing is without reason', depends, for Heidegger (1991:129), the future of 'human existence on this earth' and 'what will become of the earth' itself. The question is, thus, on what, according to Heidegger, depends the future of human existence, beyond the 'imagification' and/or 'thingification' of human existence in *The Face*? In other words, how can humanity exist otherwise than as the logical consequence of the atomic age, of what Heidegger calls the interpretation of 'historical existence on the basis of the rapacity for, and the procuring of, a natural energy'? If, for Heidegger, it is what it means to 'live through the atom' that must drive 'thought' and/or 'thinking' in the direction of something more 'worthy of thought itself', for Heidegger, it is, as it were, what it means to 'live through the fragment' that must be the preoccupation of Planet One or, as he puts it, 'the bottom line on Planet One':

I shall go on reminding myself that this earth is round not flat, that there will never be an end to judgement, that the ghosts will go on gathering at the bitter line which separates truth from lies, justice from injustice, Chile, Biafra and all the other avoidable disasters from all of us, whose order is built on their chaos (Heidegger 1988:176).

This is the bitter end which concludes an essay in which, perhaps inevitably, *Ten 8*, which must be the bottom line, becomes only a few convulsive gestural lines in an essay that, save these few lines, belongs to *The Face*. Writing against the tide of modern technology's consummate moment, namely post-modernism, it would seem Heidegger cannot afford the heraldic

tone of Heidegger's 'is', which Heidegger proffers without the weight of defeat that marks Hebdige's alternative. Indeed, Hebdige (1988:173) introduces us to the alternative, planet *Ten 8*, that is all but dead, save the sentiment of its former glory:

Many people of my generation and my parents' generation retain a sentimental attachment—in itself understandable enough—to a particular construction of the 'popular'—a construction which was specific to the period from the inter-War to the immediate post-War years and which found its most profound, its most progressive and mature articulation in the films of Humphrey Jennings and on the pages of *The Picture Post*. We hardly need reminding that that moment has now passed.

The community addressed by and in part formed out of the national-popular discourses of the late 1930s and 1940s—discourses which were focused round notions of fair play, decency, egalitarianism and natural justice now no longer exists as an affective and effective social unit.

Adorno and Horkheimer (1991:124) make the same observation about Enlightenment Reason as Heidegger, particularly where they echo Heidegger's view that, 'So now, research must in a new way direct its prospects to taming the unleashed energies of nature'. In 'The Concept of Enlightenment', Adorno and Horkheimer (1979:9) argue that:

Enlightenment behaves toward things as a dictator toward men. He knows them in so far as he can manipulate them. The man of science knows things in so far as he can manipulate them. In this way their potentiality is turned to his own ends.

Like Heidegger, Adorno and Horkheimer draw upon the intransigence of 'thought' as the hope that, because it is not external to, but the flipside of, Enlightenment, will be Enlightenment's 'dissolution' (1979:42). In the same way that, in Heidegger, the principle of reason, 'Nothing is without reason', is undercut not by a new principle but, rather, by a shift in the emphasis within the same principle, for Adorno and Horkheimer (1979:42):

[K]nowledge, in which Bacon was certain the 'sovereignty of man lieth hid', can now become the dissolution of domination.

They also say:

[T]he true revolutionary practice depends on the intransigence of theory in the face of the insensibility with which society allows thought to ossify (Adorno & Horkheimer 1979:41).

Let me return to the opening questions of Derrida's essay, 'The Principle of Reason: The University in the Eyes of Its Pupils', his attempt to address them in his essay and, with this, ponder the implications of his views for the views that I have represented so far by some of the university's pupils. Derrida asks: 'how can we not speak of the university?' which, as I have already pointed out, asks us that, in speaking about the university, we must (1) not ... dissociate the work we do, within one discipline or several, from a reflection on the political and institutional conditions of that work and (2) avoid the typical risks, which take the form of either a bottomless pit or a protectionist barrier. This is a precarious demand, which asks discourse about the university to stand over the 'abyss'—the bottomless pit—but not to descend into it. Another way of thinking this demand is to consider it to mean that discourse about the university must learn how to 'blink', to use the figure of the '*phragma*', but never close its eyes. Derrida (1983:18) observes that, even though Kant and Heidegger do 'not say exactly the same thing ... they also do say the same thing'. This is because:

Even though he admits the industrial model of the division of labor into the university, Kant places the so-called 'lower' faculty, the faculty of philosophy—a place of pure rational knowledge, a place where truth has to be spoken without controls and without concern for 'utility', a place where the very meaning and the autonomy of the university meet—Kant places this faculty above and outside professional education: the architectonic schema of pure reason is above and outside the technical schema (Derrida 1983:18).

'As for Heidegger, in 1929, in his inaugural lesson entitled "What is Metaphysics?"', Derrida (1983:18) avers:

[H]e deplores the henceforth technical organization of the university and its compartmentalizing specialization. And even in his *Rector's Speech*, at the very point where he makes an appeal on behalf of the three services (*Arbeitsdienst*, *Wehrdienst*, *Wissensdienst*, the service of work, the military, and knowledge), at the very point where he is recalling that these services are of equal rank and equally original (he had recalled earlier that for the Greeks *theoria* was only the highest form of *praxis* and the mode, par excellence, of *energia*), Heidegger nonetheless violently condemns disciplinary compartmentalization and 'exterior training in view of a profession', as 'an idle and inauthentic thing'....

Such are the stakes in the consideration of Enlightenment Reason—both the consequences of its celebration in Kant and its critique in Heidegger and Adorno and Horkheimer (which nonetheless never leave the domain of reason)—that, for Derrida (1983:18f):

Desiring to remove the university from 'useful' programs and from professional ends, one may always, willingly or not, find oneself serving unrecognized ends, reconstituting powers of caste, class, or corporation. We are in an implacable political topography: one step further in view of greater profundity or radicalization, even going beyond the 'profound' and the 'radical', the principal, the *arkhe*, one step further toward a sort of original an-archy risks producing or reproducing the hierarchy. 'Thought' requires *both* the principle of reason *and* what is beyond the principle of reason, the *arkhe* and an-archy. Between the two, the difference of a breath or an accent, only the *enactment* of this 'thought' can decide. That decision is always risky, it always risks the worst. To claim to eliminate that risk by an institutional program is quite simply to erect a barricade against the future. The decision of thought cannot be an intra-institutional event, an academic moment.

Derrida (1983:19) concludes by arguing that:

All this does not define a politics, nor even a responsibility. Only, at best, some negative conditions, a 'negative wisdom', as Kant of *The Conflict of the Faculties* would say: preliminary cautions, protocols of vigilance for a new *Aufklärung*, what must be seen and kept in sight in a modern re-elaboration of that old problematics. Beware of the abysses and the gorges, but also of the bridges and the barriers. Beware of what opens the university to the outside and the bottomless, but also of what, closing it in on itself, would create only an illusion of closure, would make the university available to any sort of interest, or else render it perfectly useless. Beware of ends; but what would a university be without ends?

Let me, then, come to the second part of my essay, namely a consideration of two instances of the phenomenon of university students' writing. I must state straightaway that, whatever claims to the contrary, my view is also that university students' writing and publication, like the university in which they occur, enjoy 'the relative autonomy of a technical apparatus, indeed that of a machine and of a prosthetic body', and, again like the university, they have 'reflected society only in giving it the chance for reflection, that is, also, for *dissociation*'. Thus, university students' writing and publication have also sought, and made claims of, 'organic union in a total body' at the very moment that they have remained acts of *writing*—of 'dissociation'. Whereas to speak of university students' writing as a *phenomenon*, that is, as though its diversity was reducible to a single form and perspective, may rightly be construed as antithetical to the reality of this type of writing, a case can nonetheless be made for a *kind of phenomenology* of university students' writing and publication. I want to confine my comments to one aspect of this phenomenology, which the two collections immediately lend themselves to, namely the dialectic—call it tension—of openness and closure or, to put it another way, of thought and phenomenon. The first seven-line poem in Mandisi Silver's *Poetry*, entitled 'Poetry', signals such a tension by placing on the agenda of the collection the question of its justification or, in the words of the poem, of the 'justification of [poetry as] senseless syllables'. (line 6) It is also the poem that frames the collection, as it were, that proffers it—'This is it' (line 7)—as it places the question of its justification on the

agenda of its readership<sup>5</sup>. Because the collected poems exist and are proffered beyond the scope of the conventional view of the term 'senseless' as meaning devoid of sense or, as Derrida warns, the 'irrational', a certain amount of provocation is placed on the term itself. This provocation is further enhanced by the warning of the first line, i.e. 'I am composing', which, by its precession of the term senseless, places even more pressure on the sense of 'decomposition', that is, of the emptying of the meaning of the syllables that will become the poetry's ill-fitting frame. Thus, in the first poem, one reads a promise, namely that one is in the presence of both the 'abyss' and the 'barrier', the '*arkhe* and an-archy'. The question, however, is whether or not this is the case beyond the promise of the introductory poem, namely that we must stand over the abyss—the 'senseless syllables'—but also behind the barrier—'This is it'—in order that we may see both the abyss and the barrier.

A cursory reading through Silver's poems reveals a pattern—not necessarily neat—of the 'I' reflecting on itself and, then, on others and back on itself, and so on. Where it reflects on itself, a certain uncertainty suffuses the terms of its reflection. The opening poem, to which I have already alluded, sets the tone for this kind of uncertainty:

I am composing /what is generally called /a poem /some call it verse,  
/But I call it /a justification of senseless syllables /This is it.

This is, of course, a poem, spoken of as if it was not, but, rather, a mere introduction to 'real' poems which, however, are also not so 'real'. I want to pursue this dimension of Silver's poetry, for, aside from that the double reflection which characterises all the poems marks the tension (or dialectic) to which I have deliberated at length in the first part of this essay, there is good reason to examine just to what extent Silver takes the Kantian idea of abstraction and, indeed, to what extent those poems in which the self reflects

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<sup>5</sup> There are two senses of resistance that are fastened upon the term poetry in this poem; one is the persona's resistance to poetry and, the other, the resistance of poetry itself to notions of sense, meaning and clarity, at the very moment that both senses of resistance proffer poetry and sense respectively.

on what lies outside of its ego interrupts its strange self-indulgence. It is a strange indulgence in which the 'I' participates, primarily because, in its uncertainty, it is very much in control of the advantages that accrue to its purview the moment it takes on a subject that is not its own doubts, hopes and self-distancing mockery. Even on those occasions when the subject is the persona's own doubts, hopes and self-distancing mockery, there is a sense in which it seems another persona is staging it all, without necessarily being part of it.

'Goethe', avers Heidegger (1991:129), asks research to 'stick to the because and ask not why', not because such is the fate of research but, rather, because we are 'obliged to find paths upon which thinking is capable of responding to what is worthy of thought instead of, enchanted by calculative thinking, mindlessly passing over what is worthy of thought'. What is 'worthy of thought' from the point of view of Heidegger's critique of thought *per se*, is 'responding' or, put another way, the responsibility to something outside of thought itself. In this sense, we cannot be exercised by endless self-reflection by dissociation but, as a matter of course, by hints to worthy causes, provided 'thinking does not twist them into definitive statements and thereby come to a standstill with them'. This is the bottom line in Heidegger and Hebdige's positions. So, when Silver's poem posits the irrational/senseless as the fate, or the lot, of poetry, care must be taken also to read the hint in the same poem that this is not necessarily the case. Let me sample at least two poems in this connection. 'If Only' ponders the anxiety of writing in the aftermath of 'great poets', however, with the same distancing irony and double reflection that makes 'Poetry' a poem and a commentary on poetry simultaneously:

I would like to be a poet .../Only to be Shakespeare's pupil, he my  
teacher /Would I write timeless poetry, living a charmed /life of  
glory, romance, sweet memories and bitter /death that has cast out its  
colored tentacles in mud /Oh, only to be a poet. Gently stroking my  
letters /on colored paper... /Epitomizing in honesty abstract matters,  
/declaring my love in prolonged sonnets... /... to be a poet, what  
alphabetical battles I'll gladly fight.

Again in 'If They Ask', a poem about departure/leaving:

At the break of dawn, only my prints will awake /to make coffee in  
tattered minutes, leaving in rushing noises. /Echoes of a voice once  
heard will ring off these walls. /My bed, done: any stranger's guide  
to wonderland, /my papers in scrupulous writing, keep well /for  
these words, death's enemies live still. /I, in acquaintance with him  
travel further /At his expense

In these and many other poems in Silver's collection, it seems to be the poet's fate always to seek compromise with words and for words equally to seek compromise with the poet's gentle strokes. Words are 'death's enemies', in ways not unlike Roland Barthes' view of the photograph as 'death-mask'<sup>6</sup>, and the poet, condemned to travelling, can only leave his lover/'dear' (and, by extension, reader) the legacy of words; they embalm time and the opposite is death in its multiple manifestations—symbolic and material. Thus:

This travel worn face /Memories I keep still /Selfishly glaciated by  
death's breath-taking miserable touch. /At odds and ends in this  
world /But the tears I ne'er cried wet now this paper /And soil your  
fingers. /The waves ne'er shook are ferried on the winds' wandering  
wings /the farewell ne'er ushered by these life-weary lips /disturbs at  
length your conscience. /And yet if they should ask you where I am  
/Tell them. Tell them I am gone.

In these poems, words frame the traveller-poet's 'worn face' inasmuch as his 'tears ... wet now this paper /And soil your (the dear one's) fingers'. In this sense, the traveller-poet's *physical* flight has no primacy over the prints that his tears have left behind, which are the words of the poem that now soil the dear one's fingers. There is, thus, a theory, as it were, a cohesive standpoint, that these three poems define. Like Heidegger's shift of emphasis to reveal the paradox in the fundamental statement of pure Reason, at the basic level of the word, 'Poetry', 'If Only' and 'If They Ask' enact such a paradox

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<sup>6</sup> This is a description that John Tagg, in *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (1988:1), gives to Barthes' idea of the photograph in *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1984).

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between poetry as 'senseless syllables', namely that they are senseless insofar as their sense cannot be found on the surface of the syllables but, rather, in their materiality: in the way in which they touch and/or are touched and in the way in which they soil and/or leave a trace. Even in the playfulness of the hustler's testimony to his lover in 'Untitled', the wares that he goes out to hustle are:

... words and letters, pictures /And scenes, painted with thoughts  
/Vending words, letters, dramatic pauses, /And commas, stops and  
images /Multi package ngwana (baby) /For the price of one ...

Needless to say, not only do words define a materiality but, they also participate in the material culture in which the persona is implicated.

Returning to Heidegger's reading of the significance of Goethe's lines, namely, 'But research strives and rings, never tiring, /After the law, the reason, *why* and *how*', and 'How? When? and Where?—the gods remain mute! /You stick to the *because* and ask not *why*?', what the poems 'If Only' and 'If They Ask' so obviously illustrate is the interplay between conditionals ('*why* and *how*' in Goethe above), which frame the poems, and the assertions ('*because*' in Goethe above) which succeed the poems' conditional framework, 'If', only in giving it substance/inflection. Thus, in reading the two poems, one has first to rebut the assumption that conditionals are not in their own right assertions. Let me, however, turn to Dillon Govender's poetry and, then, return to the broad significance of the two collections in the context of my opening remarks, namely that students' writing and publication fall within the ambit of the general legacy of Enlightenment.

What, then, is the dominant framework (and/or motif) of Dillon Govender's poetry? It would seem that, if at least in part, the answer lies in the question that one of the poems ask, namely, 'Is this affair of body or of mind' (?) In 'Broken Mould' the 'fates conspire' and 'destiny may bend the mind', so that *system* underpins the *inevitable* in much the same way that the *inevitable* underpins *system*. As the title indicates, 'Broken Mould' is an attempt to speak after a certain mould of self-representation has broken:

The winds of change have /Moulded me into the ... man /That I see

*Sikhumbuzo Mngadi*

in this Mirror. /The razor edges cut /Away at my soul and hides /My true self. /It runs with my blood, /Out of my body /for the world to sneer at.

But you, /You. /Your gaze stares into my /Most inner being, /Your soft blue stare, /To you whom I share /My inner sanctum with /To you who sees 'Me'.

The poem folds the terms of intransigent being—'My true self ... my blood'—into those of 'mirrors', of 'my soul', of the world's 'sneer' and of the 'gaze [that] stares into my ... [m]ost inner being. But there is also no reason why the latter terms cannot be folded into the former in a permanent dialectic which the very title of the poem prefigures. Indeed, what seems to me to frame the entire collection is the difficulty on the part of the persona to make up his mind about the allocation of value/meaning between the mind and the body. The poems 'Confused' and 'Lost Control' do extend this metaphor of productive indecision. In 'Confused', the anguished persona projects onto a 'puddle' created by his tears his desire for speech:

I saw my reflection in the puddle and wept more; /Carrying a thousand burdens upon my shoulders; /I try open clamped eyes; /Nothing ....

How long can I bite my tongue; /Hide behind a Mask; /and you will still have your eyes shut tightly; /I will keep on wearing my Mask and jester's cap;

And in 'Lost Control':

A sliver of light touches my face, /Raising Unused muscles, /A (brief) smile. /Only to then watch the dark filter the joy.

The dialectic and, it could also be said, tension, between the terms that touch identity and those which penetrate it— even transcend it—are integral to the value and/or meaning of these poems.

The poems that I have considered from the two collections make up a small number of each collection, even of the poems that address themselves to the same or to similar concerns to theirs. What I have done is

focus on a few poems that foreground their own place in the exchange that I have staged between Kant, Heidegger and Derrida. Derrida makes three related points about (1) the university, (2) views from the university and (3) the status of research that I want to recall. About the university, he asks: 'Today, how can we not speak of the university?' because 'it is impossible, now more than ever, to dissociate the work we do, within one discipline or several, from a reflection on the political and institutional conditions of that work'. Concerning views from the university, 'The time for reflection is also the chance for turning back on the very conditions of reflection, in all the senses of that word, as if with the help of a new optical device one could finally see sight, could not only view the natural landscape, the city, the bridge and the abyss, but could view viewing'. This is over and above the constraints of 'social time' and 'the urgency of command' within which the university will always operate. And finally, regarding the status of research, 'Desiring to remove the university from "useful" programs and from professional ends, one may always, willingly or not, find oneself serving unrecognized ends, reconstituting powers of caste, class, or corporation'. Whereas on the last point Derrida appears to differ from Heidegger's critique of the instrumentalisation/usefulness of knowledge, I do not believe that Heidegger is unaware of the responsibility of research to Derrida's 'social time' or his 'urgency of command'; as such, I do not believe that Derrida reads Heidegger very attentively as I have tried to in highlighting Heidegger's emphasis on 'worth', instead of 'useful'. I would thus, in considering the third point above, namely the status of research, align my comments more with Heidegger's notion of 'worth', as it seems to me particularly apt for the present review.

If the general expectation and, as such, critique, of writing (and publishing) in South Africa has been that it must service a cause—and I shall not belabour the Ndebele-Sachs debates here, suffice simply to acknowledge their currency in this connection—then the poems I have considered define a different kind of 'usefulness' and 'cause'. Even those poems in Silver's collection in which the persona appears settled and generous in his reference, such as in 'Educate me, my brother' or 'To the Youth of Jo'burg', the singularity of the poem's place of enunciation is no less marked as in the poems in which such a place is most deliberately inhabited. Consider this extract from 'To the Youth of Jo'burg':

Watchers of these streets, this life, this horror! /When ill-cautioned steps cross black and white streets /and open doors swallow swiveling stringy arms /and white-walled taxis hurriedly carelessly spit you out. /... this is your home. Your town.

Needless to say, the persona clearly speaks from another place than the one inhabited by the addressee, namely the youth of Jo'burg. This distance is not only marked by the titular 'to the youth ...' but, also, by the sense in which the youth as 'Watchers of these streets' is, in turn, watched by a watcher-persona who is not quite one of them, at least not in the way in which they are implicated in 'this horror!' of which he is not part. It is 'as if with the help of a new optical device [he] could finally see sight, could not only view ... the city [Jo'burg] ... the abyss [this horror!], but could view viewing [watchers/the youth]'. Yet this being the case can no longer mean that the *dissociated* persona lacks the *organicism* of *collective* suffering. Even at a time when the 'organic intellectual' was in vogue in South African critique, literature could not keep up appearances under forensic scrutiny. Is this not the direction that writing in South Africa can now claim with more vigour and research take up with more rigour? That is, rather than call writing to the dubious responsibility of being 'useful', should research not now raise the question of 'worth' in the Heideggerian sense?

## **Conclusion**

What I have tried to address in this review is the active process of students' writing in South Africa, against the background of the long history of the question: what is enlightenment? Whereas research exists on the entry of South Africa and South African writing into a certain kind of (Anglo-Saxon) Enlightenment—the colonial library is increasingly being revisited and Tiyo Soga, amongst others, is being dusted up—a close critique of the seminal philosophies of Enlightenment, carried into South Africa in the writings of churchmen and anthropologists, remains under-represented.

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Department of English  
University of Johannesburg

# Book Reviews

## *The Lotus People*

### **Book Review**

*The Lotus People*

by Aziz Hassim

Durban: Madiba Publishers

ISBN: 1-874945-17-9

Reviewed by Pravina Pillay

Postgraduate Student

Literature, Languages and Culture

English Literary & Cultural Studies

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Aziz Hassim's debut novel *The Lotus People* earned him the prestigious Sanlam Literary Award for Fiction of an unpublished work in 2001. This novel encapsulates a Durban family saga in the context of political struggle and recalls Pepetela's novel, *Yaka*, which charts in rich detail Angolan history through the saga of the Semedo family. Hassim uses as his literary backcloth the experiences of a family of indentured Indians, creating an eclectic mixture of politics, romance, the underworld of gangsters, merchants and the lifestyle that prevailed in Durban from the turn of the century to the late 1980s with particular emphasis on the Casbah area.

The story traces the experiences of the Suleiman family, commencing with the arrival of Yahya Ali Suleiman—a Pathan—in Durban from India. He forges a bond of friendship with the Naran family that sustains itself through succeeding generations:

Famed for their fierce independence and ethnic pride, they subscribed to one law only: Paktunwali—the way of the Pathan. The

chief obligation of this code of honour, its binding force, was Badal, or revenge, which stipulated an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. In many ways it was this very quality that was so revered by all Indians, for the Pathan was the natural guardian of the Khyber Pass, the gateway through which many times in the course of history invading armies had attempted to breach its defences on their way to the conquest of the Indian subcontinent. Their success was measured only in the degree by which they failed (Hassim 2002:3).

Yahya represents not only the struggles of the Indian immigrants who - endured economic and political difficulties but also their resolute will as they diligently applied themselves to making money against great adversity. Yahya and his wife are killed during the 1949 riots. His son Dara becomes a prosperous businessman, triumphing against what seems like insurmountable odds. A major focus of the novel revolves around the lives of two of his sons, Jake and Sam. These two characters are juxtaposed. Jake chooses to join Umkhonto, the military wing of the ANC and becomes active in acts of sabotage. He is nicknamed Aza Kwela—a name which achieves legendary status amongst the oppressed—because he has escaped death many times. Sam becomes a successful capitalist and it is only at the end that his character undergoes a political metamorphosis when he realizes that every person of colour has to make a meaningful contribution in the fight against apartheid. Characters like Nithin Vania and Karan Naran, friends of the Suleiman family, also feature prominently. The novel spans four generations, accentuating the differing perspectives of each and highlighting the way in which the younger Indian generation has absorbed the culture of Africa, its lifestyle and its struggle.

Hassim foregrounds politics, blending truth and art, and evaluates the Indian community and their stance in the struggle for liberation. In this regard, Nithin Vania, one of the central characters, states:

There are three types of Indians: there are those that openly defy the system, to the point of losing everything they possess. They deserve our admiration. There is a second group that is so completely intimidated into servitude that all they have left to fall back on is their dignity. Old man Soobiah in the Postal Department is a very

good example. He stoically accepts the reality of his existence and, denying himself even the simplest of pleasures, commits himself to providing the best education for his children. He forfeits his own future comforts to the realization of an all consuming dream—that his offspring will, hopefully, escape the miserable existence to which he himself has been relegated. He deserves our sympathy. Then there is the third kind, the despicable wretch who energetically reduces himself to the level where he resembles a clone that not only imitates his oppressors but actually outclasses them in his effort to emulate their behaviour. His every action, even his private thoughts, are solely devoted to obtaining his master's approval. It is by his behaviour that the rest of us are judged. To treat him with contempt is not enough. He should be completely ostracized from our ranks (Hassim 2002:364).

Fiction is woven with rousing speeches by activists such as Kesavaloo Goonam, Yusuf Dadoo, Monty Naicker and Fatima Meer. The following is an extract of a speech by Fatima Meer:

Who do these people in government think they are? They have the nerve to tell the African that he cannot exercise the franchise because he belongs to a barbarous, uncivilized people. Then they have the bloody cheek to tell the Coloured that he has no place in the human race. And now these arrogant idiots tell us that our culture is a threat to them. Smuts, that supreme hypocrite, argues that the purpose of the Bill [Ghetto Bill] is justified to maintain European culture (Hassim 2002:87).

Hassim also juxtaposes the two options confronting Indians with regard to political resistance: continue to engage in Passive Resistance as purported by the great Mohandas Gandhi or participate in the armed struggle. This dialectic is encapsulated in the following dialogue:

'The alternative is to blow the State to hell', Jake said coldly. 'Give those bastards a taste of their own medicine'.

'Violence is not our way -'.

'Bulldust!' Jake said bluntly. 'You, Uncle Lou, are like my father and my grandfather. You're all dreamers. Your way has failed. It's time you accepted it and stood aside' (Hassim 2002:387).

At a time when the Indian community is complaining about being marginalized and there is frantic lobbying by various political parties to secure the Indian vote, Hassim offers the following via his characters:

'I'll answer that for you, Karan', the doctor said, 'and I guarantee your kids won't be a problem after that'.

'Ya? You have a magic wand?'

'No. Just a magic phrase', the doctor said with a smile, 'four simple words'.

'I suppose you'll get around to telling us what they are', Sandy said.

'Just tell them this: "We've joined the A.N.C."' (Hassim 2002:525).

The Indian community was predominantly a patriarchal society in the time warp of the novel and feminists will welcome Hassim's emphasis on the pivotal role played by women in the politics of resistance. This is succinctly conveyed by the activist Zainub Asvat:

Throughout the country Indian women are mobilizing. Our men, leaders such as Doctor Dadoo and Doctor Naicker, are already marked men. They are not deterred by the threat to their lives. We women, and that includes each of you, are made of equally stern stuff (Hassim 2002:83).

*The Lotus People* documents the Inanda riots and the destruction of the Gandhi settlement with all its historic archives and documents, curfew laws governing non-whites, the unfair taxes imposed on Indians, the Asiatic Land Tenure, Indian Representation Bill and the Riotous Assemblies Act. Hassim engages the reader by detailing how these laws affected not only the upper echelons of the Indian community but ordinary people. Like Mongane Wally Serote in *Hyenas*, he is critical of the immoral stance adopted by the white South African media who failed to give adequate coverage to the massive resistance of the oppressed. However, Hassim lauds the *Leader* newspaper which openly defied the government.

Whilst Hassim succeeds in enamouring readers with a colourful metropolis, fiery politics and romantic interludes, *The Lotus People*, whilst beginning with a great promise of a challenging story-line, lapses into mediocrity. This can be attributed to the predictability of the plot. There is a transient moment when the reader is treated to an element of the unexpected when Jake who is expected to be freed from detention is delivered home in a casket. This episode does offer the promise of a garnered complexity but soon thins into predictability. Melodramatic dialogue has the power to enrich a novel and captivate the reader, but overuse can lead to incredulity:

‘You see what I mean’, Nithin said, his voice frustrated. ‘I try to be everything to everybody. And for who? Damn! If God’s rules are demanding, women’s leave them in the shade’.

‘I’m going to hit you, Nithin Vania!’

‘I’m married to a bloody thug -’

‘Whoa’, Sandy quickly intervened, ‘Hold on. Sit down, Kathy. Please’.

‘Whoa yourself, Sandy Murugen! You tell your friend there to stop swearing or I’ll break this bottle on his head’ (Hassim 2002:356f).

Perhaps the value of the novel is embodied in the truism voiced by Yahya Ali Suleiman: ‘You must remember your past before you can build a future’ (Hassim 2002:140).



## *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*

*The Quiet Violence of Dreams*

by Sello K. Duiker

Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2001, 457pp.

ISBN 0795701209

Reviewed by Sibongile Mogale

Postgraduate Student

English Studies

University of KwaZulu Natal

Born in 1974, the late Sello K. Duiker was a script writer for e-tv's popular show, *Backstage*. His first novel, *Thirty Cents*, was awarded the 2001 Commonwealth Prize for Best First Book in the African region. *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* is Duiker's second book and it was also awarded the 2001 Herman Bosman Prize for English Literature.

*The Quiet Violence of Dreams* is about a journalism student, Tshepo, who is on an involuntary quest of self-discovery. Along his journey he encounters a number of scenarios, rude awakenings, people and situations that make an impact on him in one way or another. Some of the experiences have a positive and some have a negative influence, but all the same, each encounter is necessary and contributes to his overall journey. His best friend, Mmabatho, is an independent female who can be described as a modern woman who sets her own boundaries. She mostly dates white men (perhaps coincidentally), and she subsequently does not think she is racist or discriminatory. But interestingly she sees nothing wrong with calling blacks from outside of South Africa by derogatory terms like 'makwere-kwere'. As the story unfolds she also has her own issues to grapple with, but they are nonetheless not as severe as Tshepo's.

Tshepo is a private individual, and at some point Mmabatho comments on how little she actually knows about him. One cannot blame him for not being open about his life because some of the things that Tshepo

him for not being open about his life because some of the things that Tshepo has experienced would seem farfetched and incredulous to the next person. The elements of his story are: his father is the member of the mafia; the people that murdered his mother were his father's connections; one of the inmates at Valkenberg mental facility that he eventually befriends is actually one of the men who raped and killed his mother; one of his many flatmates (Chris) raped him after he had helped him on numerous occasions; and that he actually works in a massage parlour (Steamy Windows), not a restaurant as he had told Mmabatho; and that he is gay.

*The Quiet Violence of Dreams* is riveting. Duiker's descriptions of Mmabatho's inner thoughts and feelings are uncanny, and one gets the impression that he was once a female himself. He reveals emotions that even women when gathered together, do not disclose to one another. And when they are revealed, it is done so sparingly because on most occasions the individual is uncomfortable and scared to reveal them to herself, let alone other people.

When he writes about the mental facility, Valkenberg, the reader is plunged into the world of the inmates. The feelings of boredom, nothingness, pessimism, doom, and the fact that the institution seems to do more harm than good, are expressed in a manner that makes the reader experience the emptiness and the futility that the inmates feel. These pages are not an easy read and the tedium comes across as incredibly unbearable. The irony about the mental facility is that the inmates are there in the hope of getting better—to find themselves—and thus move on into society and be acceptable and be well-balanced individuals. Instead, they are permanently drugged, and thus numbed into limbo rather than facing their issues.

The doctors diagnose Tshepo as having 'cannabis induced psychosis', and they fail to realise that there are underlying and deeper issues for his state of being. They do not appreciate the fact that he used cannabis to escape or camouflage the pain, the feelings of loneliness and alienation. Tshepo needed to discover who he was and during those moments when he was 'high' he felt like he belonged. He needed to fit in, be part of something, and to some degree he found solace in madness. Duiker poses serious questions about the efficacy of at least some approaches to mental health.

*The Quiet Violence of Dreams* does deal with racial issues, but these are not foregrounded. It is this marginality of racism that brings it to the centre. As much as Tshepo tries to escape or denies that racism still exists, it always seems to slap him in the face one way or another. What Tshepo has managed to achieve is to make sure that racism does control him, and subsequently he does not think about it until it happens. Duiker shows that being constantly angry and consumed by racism can have retarding effects in one's personal growth, as exhibited in Chris. Chris remains bitter, miserable and he blames the system and not himself for what has happened to him and where he is now in his life. Chris's anger about the system is destructive to a point where he is sadistic: he resents Tshepo for being educated.

The book is written in a very accessible style, and Duiker does not hold back on the profanities which make the characters authentic. The way Duiker writes makes one feel part of the story because there is a kaleidoscope of characters: there is a character that each individual can identify with from the range of homosexuals, heterosexuals, mentally ill individuals, criminals, Rasta's, the elite, prostitutes, business men, students, mafia personae, doctors, etc. If some readers have never been 'high' on cannabis, by the time they are done with the book the experience is made real for them. It is indeed a fascinating idea to tell the story as told from the different characters' points of view, i.e. that Tshepo interacts with. This brings to the fore different narratives, not just the one from the main protagonist. One cannot escape the fluctuating emotions encountered by the different characters to a point where this reader at least felt drained by the end of this emotionally demanding book.



## *A Duty of Memory*

### **Book Review**

*A Duty of Memory*

by W.P.B. Botha

Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1997, 229pp.

ISBN:

Reviewed by Vasanthe Padayachee

M.A. Student

University of KwaZulu-Natal

W.P.B. Botha's book, *A Duty of Memory*, set in South Africa after the Second World War, does not only provide an insight into the Afrikaner's fears, hatred, loyalties and passions; but is also an exposé into the nature of his family life. On the surface, the text has all the ingredients typifying South Africa, such as the issues of race, master-servant relationships, Afrikaner patriotism, the perpetuation of Afrikaner blood and culture and the deep-rooted fear and suspicion of black insurgency. However, a closer scrutiny of the text reveals violence and destruction, not just between the black and white races, but also, within the confines of the Afrikaner family. This text of secrecy, deception and betrayal illustrates the illusionary nature of the family and individuals.

The protagonist, Andries Hartzenberg, a swarthy, athletic rugby player goes on a sporting tour of England where he meets Caroline Hines, a young English woman. Caroline, an only child, is subject to extended periods of loneliness by her parents, whose interests lie in their respective professions, as well as the war. So, at the beginning of the war, she is sent to live with her uncle and his family on their farm at the foot of Sperrin mountain in northern Ireland. Deeply unhappy and resentful, she returns to

London where she finds employment in a bacon factory, where she makes a brief acquaintance with Andries. She confides in him her sense of abandonment by her parents, her alienation in an England ravaged by war and her determination to succeed on her own. For Andries, a foreigner and non-European, the war had little impact and interest. In an effort to comfort her, he casually suggests that she forgets her past and starts somewhere afresh, perhaps in Africa. This invitation sows for Caroline the seeds of new beginnings not just for her but also for Andries and his people. Shortly after Andries's return to South Africa, a pregnant Caroline arrives in the eastern Transvaal, seeks out Andries and becomes his wife.

It is this union that shocks the Hartzenberg family into reality and shatters their perception of a perfect family living out the Afrikaner idealism. They alienate themselves from the newly wedded couple and wallow in misery. For the close-knit Afrikaner *volk* (nation) who are exceptionally proud of their Springbok sporting heroes, this unpardonable marriage of a full-blooded Afrikaner son to an English-speaking woman spells dejection and disloyalty as it eternally mars Andries's career and their opportunity to celebrate honour and rejoice in their nationalism. This feeling of despair arising from the piercing of the armour of patriotism is expressed in the following reaction:

Ag, said everybody, it's just politics. By politics meaning Ma. Meaning that by marrying an Englishwoman Pa had thrown away his chance of ever representing his country, because as far as the selectors were concerned Pa was a traitor to the volk (6).

As a result of his betrayal, Andries is ostracized by his siblings who 'blamed him for their parents' sudden ill health, for the blackening of the family name' (43). By marrying a woman from an opposing upbringing, Andries had committed, not only a filial, but, a national crime. Taken even further, for Andries's family, this marriage was a cardinal sin against God. The typical hypocrisy of an Afrikaner family that upholds a religion which for them does *not* advocate the brotherhood of man, becomes apparent in the ensuing lament:

The shame, the betrayal of everything they and their parents—God-fearing Christians—had ever stood for. They reproached him for dishonouring the church. Making a mockery of the ceremony of holy matrimony (43).

To the Afrikaner community of eastern Transvaal, English-speaking people were regarded as outsiders and neither their culture nor their language was welcomed and any liaison with them meant keeping Satan as a bedfellow and this heralded damnation. The only redeeming force was the power of their Christian prayer in the Afrikaans vernacular.

The text constantly alludes to the Afrikaner's sense of superiority, arising out of his own self-perception as belonging to the chosen race. However, the time dawns for the Afrikaner to change, to yield—to shed off his cloak of elevation and face the reality, a stark reality that exposes him as a whimpering, withering coward. This is aptly described by Eeben:

... we are a cold-blooded people. Frozen with fear. Because we know, deep down we know God has fooled us ... still we must pay the price. For pretending we didn't understand. Pretending we didn't see it when we did (45).

The text shatters the stereotypical notion of the Afrikaner family life as being peaceful, loving, moral and content. Andries's family is plagued by the social evils of violence accompanied by physical, emotional, sexual and alcohol abuse. Considering that the Afrikaner is often exemplified by his love for his fatherland, which is farmed with the blood and sweat of its Afrikaner sons, the text showcases Leeufontein, the farm inherited by Andries, being subject to neglect and disinterest, becoming an economic waste.

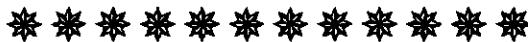
The story, recounted extensively through the eyes and mind of Eeben, vacillates between past and present. The narration is disjointed and the reader is often exposed to Eeben's flow of consciousness or is allowed to preview the lives of Jo and Beth in terms of their own revelations. Where Eeben adopts the role of protagonist or first-person narrator, he adopts a conversational, colloquial mode, relying greatly on the Afrikaans vocabulary to convey meaning. In the text, the personal letters of Caroline and

Mafimane become important tools, which, not only link the story, but also offer insights into their character and their lives. The reader interacts with fragmented pieces of related events, which are expected to fit into a coherent whole. This narrative technique of weaving the past with the present is relevant as the past shapes and influences the events of the present.

The text highlights a life where hostility, destruction and isolation are the norm. The absence of real Christian values and morality leads to emotional sterility and self- destruction. The characters are incapable of developing strong, loving bonds; especially in an atmosphere that stifled, depersonalised and desensitised them.

Botha's text encases the inability to shake off one's past. This is not just for the Hartzenberg family but also for the Afrikaner who jealously and protectively guards his identity, heroes and monuments, only to have the dream of Afrikaner nationalism and a Boerestaat crumbling upon him. For the Afrikaners who believed that unity is strength, this was just a pipedream for the land eroded beneath their feet. But what does remain, is the presence of the past with its threatening and haunting memories, scars, secrets, ghosts and fears. No matter how one tries to disguise and rearrange the truth, it always returns to nag. But from the ashes of this past, hope, rejuvenation, growth and transformation can emerge as long as the individual confronts truth.

There is a duty ... to bring all those hidden crimes out in the open, so those who have suffered can begin the healing process, which will bring us all back together as one nation (199).



# Recently Reviewed South African Life Writing Publications IV

Reviews Editor: Judith Lütge Coullie

## List of Publications Consulted

All publications are from South Africa, unless otherwise indicated with \*\*.

Most prices are quoted in South African Rands.

Reviews which were originally published in Afrikaans are marked with \* and have been translated into English by Judith Lütge Coullie.

** <i>African Book Publishing Record</i>	<i>Quarterly Bulletin of the National Library of South Africa</i>
<i>African Review of Books</i>	<i>Rapport</i>
<i>Cape Times</i>	<i>Saturday Dispatch</i>
<i>Die Burger</i>	<i>Sowetan</i>
<i>Fair Lady</i>	<i>The Star</i>
<i>H-Net</i> ( <a href="mailto:H-Safrica@h-net.msu.edu">H-Safrica@h-net.msu.edu</a> )	<i>The Sunday Independent</i>
<i>The Herald</i>	<i>The Witness</i>
<i>Mail &amp; Guardian</i>	<i>This Day</i>
<i>Pretoria News</i>	<i>Weekend Post</i>

### **Abrahamson, A.E.**

*The Moon Can Wait*. Paul Clingman. Johannesburg: Penguin, 2004. 249pp. R140.

This book traces the eventful and illustrious life of the Honourable Abe Abrahamson, from his boyhood in Bulawayo as the son of Polish Jews who emigrated to Africa at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to escape the pogroms and discrimination against Jews, to his eventual retirement in South Africa.

His political career, which began at the age of 31 in 1953, saw him rise to become a minister in the government of Edgar Whitehead in what was then Southern Rhodesia. He was modest and principled throughout his life.

Referring to the breaking of the space barrier as a great advance for mankind, Abrahamson told the ILO in Geneva in 1962: "The moon can wait, but social justice cannot tarry."

His story, rich in anecdote, political intrigue and travel, is also a fascinating historical record of the erosion of colonial rule and the emergence of the African nationalism which led to independent Zimbabwe.

Unnamed reviewer. *Sowetan*. June 30 2004: 20.

### **Accone, Darryl**

*All Under Heaven: The Story of a Chinese Family in South Africa*. Darryl Accone. Cape Town: David Philip/New Africa Books, 2004. 283 pp. R149.95.

*All Under Heaven* is the poetic name that the Chinese nation used to describe itself. It is thus a fitting title for a book that lovingly chronicles three generations of an extended Chinese family. Accone, one of the children of the last generation, has used the symbols of the four elements to divide his book into readable chunks: Sky describes the old country; Sea takes us through the transient periods; Earth finds the family settling; and Fire sees them through the refining horror of the worst of South Africa's apartheid years. The resilience of the family is at once humbling and uplifting. We are reminded that prejudice is a universal failing—Accone describes Chinese anti-Eurasian sentiment as unflinchingly as the larger horror of institutionalised racism. This book is fascinating.

Kelly Vos. *Saturday Dispatch*. July 3 2004: 4.

### **Baker, Florence**

*The Stolen Woman: Florence Baker's Extraordinary Life from the Harem to the Heart of Africa*. Pat Shipman. London: Random House, 2004. 428pp. R150.

The life of Florence Baker would put lead in the pencil of any biographer. Orphaned at four, she was raised in an Ottoman harem. At the age of fourteen, she was taken to auction to be sold as a white slave. But fate had

other plans for her. Attending the auction was the maharajah, Duleep Singh, and his companion, Samuel Baker, a broken-nosed, hirsute Victorian widower. Despite the difference in age, Sam Baker and Florence fell in love and he smuggled her out of the Ottoman territory in his carriage. Together, they travelled in search of the source of the White Nile, which Sam Baker named Lake Albert N'yanza. Although Florence was shunned in England as a loose woman (and Queen Victoria refused to receive her at court), Sam was knighted for their explorations.

"All biography is ultimately fiction," writes Pat Shipman. "I consider it my job to portray the deeper truth of [Florence Baker's] character and a more insightful perspective ... than can be conveyed by mere facts." In this Shipman succeeds admirably, occasional Americanisms notwithstanding.

Caroline Hurry. *The Sunday Independent*. July 4 2004: 18.

### **Barnard, Christiaan**

*Celebrity Surgeon: Christiaan Barnard—A Life*. Chris Logan. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2003. 340pp. R169.95.

Perhaps the most extraordinary aspect of the world's first heart transplant was the 2.20am argument the three South African surgeons had at its most critical moment when about to remove the donor's heart. Denise Darval was declared "brain dead", but after she had been taken off the ventilator her heart continued beating for at least another twelve minutes. The doctor who insisted that they wait until the ECG was flat eventually won out.

The mid-operation argument is one of many revelations and insights in an objective and highly readable biography of the world's first heart transplant surgeon. Chris Barnard was complex and contradictory, and this was as apparent in his treatment of people as in his politics. In the late 1960s and early 1970s he was critical of apartheid, comparing Afrikaner Nationalists to Nazis, but then later defended South Africa's policies and even published a propaganda book which described "one-man-one-vote" as national suicide. Later still, he supported the opposition Democratic Party.

John Scott. *Cape Times*. November 28 2003: 16.

*Celebrity Surgeon* is a fascinating read. Logan interviewed more than 100 people to gain the insights he did, including Barnard's last wife, Karin Setzkorn, and his daughter Deirdre. The book is a serious look at an astonishing event—the world's first heart transplant—that happened in Cape Town largely because of one man's determination. The book is no hagiography, and Barnard is portrayed charm, warts and all.

Vivien Horler. *Cape Argus*. November 14 2003: 12.

### **Barnard, Deirdre**

*Fat, Fame and Life with Father*. Deirdre Barnard. Cape Town: Double Storey, 2004. 243pp. R150.

This is the first book of champion waterskier and daughter of pioneering heart surgeon, Chris Barnard, simultaneously published in English and in Afrikaans. In this wise and funny book, Deirdre tells it like it is—about life in the Barnard family as they coped with the successes and losses that befell them, about the painful intrusions into privacy that were the flip-side of fame, about bereavement and true friendship and the sustaining power of family. An entertaining and courageously forthright storyteller with a wicked wit, Deirdre has woven a moving account of her sometimes painful but ultimately uplifting personal journey. Its compassion and humour will touch us all.

Unnamed reviewer. *Pretoria News: Interval*. October 31 2003: 1.

*Fat, Fame and Life with Father* is not well written; the book is sorely in need of a good editor. But it provides interesting details about one of South Africa's most famous sons, and that of his extended family, and to the more cynical among us, is a reminder of the redeeming qualities of love, loyalty and devotion.

Vivien Horler. *Cape Argus*. November 14 2003: 12.

This is one of the most disarmingly honest books I have ever read. And it is not only the sheer honesty about her life that Deirdre shares with her readers,

Judith Lütge Coullie

it is also her honest, no-nonsense style. Deirdre's story is as much about the confusion of being famous heart surgeon Chris Barnard's daughter, as it is about being in the spotlight as a champion waterskier, and then a fat girl. The sense of being a daughter doing the right thing, in the right way to unite a family and bury a man who loved many, was loved by many and disliked by many, is conveyed exquisitely in *Fat, Fame and Life with Father*. In this book she pays tribute to her father and shares her vision of what it is to be human, and a very good and joyful vision it is.

Jennifer Crocker. *Cape Times*. December 2 2003: 7.

Barnard's book is utterly disarming and delightful, although, at times, appallingly written. Some sentences are absolute clangers, non sequiturs abound, she leaves an idea at a tangent never to return and repeats entire themes quite regularly. Thankfully, the publishers saw fit to leave it that way. The end result is a book that you hear, rather than read. This biography is proof that a book doesn't need to be immaculately written to be an unputdownable read.

Katy Chance. *ThisDay*. December 11 2003: 8.

### **Cassidy, Michael**

*African Harvest*. Anne Coomes. London: Monarch Books, 2002. 552pp. R179.95

Michael Cassidy was born in Johannesburg in 1936. Forty-two years ago, he started African Enterprise with the aim of spreading the Christian gospel to all corners of Africa. Biographer, Anne Coomes, captivates the reader from the very beginning of this inspiring biography of a dedicated Christian who has helped to win millions over to Christ and also helped to feed many of the starving masses. At the conclusion of the book Michael states that it continues to be an overwhelming privilege in his life to be in the work of evangelism, adding: "If God has called you to preach, do not stoop to be a king."

Cyrus Smith. *Pretoria News*. July 19 2004: 8.

## Dacey, William

*Borderline*. William Dacey. Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2004. 287 pp. R120.

Very occasionally, a book comes along that is so stunningly original in concept, and so compelling a read, that it leaves one with what scientists call an “aha moment”. *Borderline* is one long “aha moment”.

On the surface it is the story of a kayak trip down the Gariep (Orange) River in South Africa that Dacey and two companions undertook. Woven into the narrative is an eccentric cast of characters and vivid descriptions. But it is in what starts as a subtext and rapidly becomes the main text that the real power of this book lies. Dacey uses the river as a metaphor for his fascination with a search for “coloured” (in apartheid terminology) identity. He weaves into his tale the writings of a host of adventurers, historians, naturalists, explorers, geologists and others to trace the history of this vast, arid region and of the origins of the “coloured” people.

This book is very readable, enormously entertaining and often funny.

Tony Weaver. *Cape Times*. October 15 2004: 9.

## Duff, Diana

*Leaves from the Fig Tree (from Ireland to Africa)*. Cape Town: Double Storey, 2003. ix + 304pp. R110.

Diana Duff recounts her childhood in Ireland, on the estate of her grandparents, and her moves to Kenya when she was 18, and then, once married, to Dar es Salaam and then to apartheid Johannesburg in the 1960s. She recalls much of her past with clarity, vivid detail and with passion. This is an absorbing memoir that has the richness and depth of a life lived to the full.

Robyn Bentley. *The Herald*.

Diana Duff’s heart-warming tale takes in the anachronistic eccentricities of Ireland, the vastness and beauty of Kenya and the devastation of apartheid South Africa over more than 60 years. Duff writes brilliantly of the Kenyan

*Judith Lütge Coullie*

conflict between the Mau Mau and the British. One of the touching stories in this book is that of six-year-old Nico, Duff's domestic assistant's child, a black child in apartheid South Africa who somehow manages to attend school with white children. However, I did have problems with early parts of the book: she includes a lot of historically inaccurate, misleading sepia-hued nonsense about the "Oirish". But once you get to the parts about sun-drenched Kenya and stunning South Africa, you'll not put this book down.

Peter Cardwell. *Cape Argus*. October 10 2003: 15.

### **Du Preez, Max**

*Pale Native: Memories of a Renegade Reporter*. Max du Preez. Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2003. 286 pp. R204.

The memoir of South African reporter, Max Du Preez, is not only about his identity and his complicated relationship to his Afrikaner "tribe" whom he claims to hate and love and not understand. It is also about his achievements, for instance his editorship of the anti-apartheid Afrikaans newspaper, *Vrye Weekblad*, and his investigative work for State television, the SABC. There are no compromises for the journalist who was once loved by the Mandela government, but later considered a menace by that of Thabo Mbeki. His account of his accomplishments and conflicts is compelling; less interesting is his fixation on the superficial differences between blacks and whites and his reiteration of events that often relies on the inclusion of tracts of previously published columns by Du Preez and about Du Preez.

Tanya Jonker-Bryce. *Daily Dispatch*. October 10, 2003: 14.

### **"El Negro"**

*The Return of El Negro*. Caitlin Davies. Johannesburg: Penguin, 2003. 260 pp. R140.

The author, Caitlin Davies, follows the fate of the remains of an early 19<sup>th</sup> century African man, perhaps a Tswana, who came to be known as El Negro. She outlines what evidence she can track down to identify El Negro's movements before he was placed on exhibition in Banyoles, Spain and then

traces the efforts to have his remains repatriated to Botswana. In this wonderful, quirky book, Davies muses over how people have used, abused, protected or been fascinated or repelled by human remains.

J. Brooks Spector. *The Sunday Independent*. September 12 2004: 18.

### **Emslie, Betty L.**

*An Autobiography: One Beggar to Another*. Betty L. Emslie. Durban: Privately published, 2002. 322pp. Price not available.

Emslie works through her memories in chronological sequence, beginning with her Jewish grandfather's story (he left Czarist Russia for Lithuania, then Britain and finally South Africa) and then moving on to her own formative years in Durban, South Africa. The turning point in her life came in 1941 when she was just 16: her acceptance of God in her life ushered in an itinerant life committed to missionary work, mostly in southern Africa. Emslie offers some overview of apartheid South Africa and the ways in which this impacted on missionary work. She was critical of the system but admits that cowardice prevented her from taking any pro-actively anti-apartheid action.

The book is recommended: it shows how a Christian life of self-sacrifice can be fulfilling, but also how hard it can be.

Gillian Bowden and Judith Lütge Coullie. *AlterNation* 10 (2): 2003: 348-354.

### **Ghandi, Mahatma**

*Ghandi in his Time and Ours: The Global Legacy of his Ideas*. David Hardiman. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press: 2003. 338pp. R155.

Of the many books written about Mahatma Ghandi, this is considered to be one of the very best. It covers almost every aspect of the life of Ghandi and his influence on the world and many of its leaders. He was the creator of a radical style of politics based on a larger vision of an alternative society which believed in mutual respect, lack of exploitation, non-violence, and ecological harmony. Hardiman devotes a number of pages to Ghandi's stay

in South Africa and his influence on Nelson Mandela. While the book covers a wide field and repeats well-known facts (albeit in an interesting manner), it also includes a lesser known aspect of Ghandi's views on celibacy and discusses the fact that Ghandi was himself influenced by the writings of Tolstoy.

Cyrus Smith. *Pretoria News*. June 28 2004: 6.

### **Greef, Jack**

*A Greater Share of Honour*. Jack Greef. Alberton: Galago, 2001. 172pp. R143.

Written by a much-decorated member of 1 Reconnaissance Regiment of apartheid South Africa's Special Forces, this is another example of "bush war writing". Although the identities of some of the participants are hidden, the book does have value: it provides detail of Pretoria's incursions into southern Africa and the extent to which operations—attributed at the time to UNITA (in Angola) and RENAMO (in Mozambique)—were in fact South African. The book also throws light on the mid-1970s invasion of Angola (an event still poorly documented in spite of its historical importance), and on joint operations between Rhodesia and South Africa on the Mozambican Gaza front, the history of small infiltration teams in Zambia and the link between special operations and game ranging.

The author takes a generally unrepentant approach to this history, arguing that all operations were militarily justified but he makes a frank admission: "There were no victors in [the bush] war. We all lost some way or the other".

The text, which should have been better edited, is a useful representative addition to a collection of southern African history and politics, and essential to any literary history.

Christopher Merret. *African Book Publishing Record*, Vol. xxx, No. 1. 2004: 33-43.

### **Hastings, Beatrice (Emily Alice Beatrice Haigh)**

*Beatrice Hastings: A Literary Life*. Stephen Gray. London: Viking Penguin, 2004. 730 pp. R184.

By the end of Gray's biography of Beatrice Hastings, she emerges as one of the most remarkable women of letters of the last century. Hastings pops up as a character in works by Cocteau, Wells, Max Jacob, Apollinaire, Katherine Mansfield and—especially—in biographies of the latter and of Modigliani, Hastings' lover during the 1920s. A large part of Gray's purpose is to counter the many distortions and ill-informed accounts of Hastings that are currently available.

I can only locate a handful of slips in this stunningly well-researched and insightful biography.

Chris Dunton. *The Sunday Independent*. October 10 2004: 18.

It is not often that one can endorse the encomiums that publishers choose for their book covers, but this biography is a notable exception. When Margaret Drabble calls *Beatrice Hastings* "A treasure house ... researched with true scholarly passion" she does not exaggerate. What Stephen Gray has done in this exhaustive study is to retrieve from obscurity a distinctive literary talent and an intriguing personality. One of the main strengths of this biography is the way in which, at every turn of fortune in Hastings' life, Gray builds up a wonderfully evocative context. Through substantial quotation, Gray demonstrates that she was a fine writer whose work deserves to be saved from oblivion.

Shirley Kossick. *Mail & Guardian online*. (<http://www.chico.mweb.co.za/art/2004oct/041008-woman.html>) October 8 2004: np.

### Jacobs, Rayda

*Confessions of a Gambler*. Rayda Jacobs. Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2003. 240 pp. R130.

*Confessions of a Gambler* is a glorious romp. The trials and tribulations of a Capetonian Muslim woman who takes to gambling like a duck to water are heart-wrenching, eye-opening and just plain fun. It's the perfect read for people who take risks when they think no one else is looking.

Unnamed reviewer. *FairLady*. January 2004: 112.

*Judith Lütge Coullie*

### **Jaffer, Zubeida**

*Our Generation.* Zubeida Jaffer. Cape Town: Kwela Books: 2003. 164 pp. R125.

When former Cape Times (South Africa) journalist was 22, she was detained under the apartheid government's draconian security laws, detained and drugged. Five years later she was detained again, but this time she was pregnant, and this was exploited by the security policeman who told her that unless she talked she would have to drink a chemical concoction which would kill her baby. Jaffer bravely deals with her personal struggle against apartheid: the struggles of motherhood; marriage to an activist and then a painful divorce; her relationship with her parents; her Muslim faith; and then her collapse with depression.

Barry Streek. *Cape Times.* August 15 2003: 9.

Jaffer's book is a useful corrective to widespread cynicism about anti-apartheid activists arising from the new—seemingly daily - allegations in South Africa about people using what are called “struggle credentials” to enrich themselves illegitimately. In a low-key tone, Jaffer describes the selfless struggle of many ordinary people; they paid a heavy price and were left with many scars. The power of Jaffer's book lies in its honest confrontation of intimate choices and fears.

Raymond Suttner. *The Sunday Independent.* September 7 2003: 18.

### **Jardine, Bill**

*Now Listen Here: The Life and Times of Bill Jardine.* Chris van Wyk. Johannesburg: STE Publishers, 2003. 263pp. R179.

People who make a significant difference in the life of a country are often ordinary men-in-the-street who see injustice being perpetrated and begin in a small way to fight back. The playing field becomes bigger and bigger and the work of these people has wider and wider impact. Such a man was South African, Bill Jardine. He started out as a fanatical rugby player and coach in the coloured suburbs of Johannesburg, during the apartheid era when sport

was strictly segregated. Through his involvement in sport he moved into anti-apartheid activism, helping to smuggle funds into South Africa for the Africa National Congress.

Chris van Wyk is a writer rather than an historian, and there are a couple of historical inaccuracies. Van Wyk interviewed dozens of Mr Jardine's friends and family—and this anecdotal style of writing is lively and entertaining. More than 40 black and white pictures add to the enjoyment of the book.

Susan Stead. *The Herald*. February 4 2004: 4.

### Jenkin, Tim

*Inside Out: Escape from Pretoria Prison*. Tim Jenkin. Johannesburg: Jacana, 2003. 333 pp. R205.

On December 11 1979 three white activists—Tim Jenkin, Stephen Lee and Alex Mounbaris—escaped from Pretoria Central Prison. They had been imprisoned for underground work on behalf of the African National Congress, and were the first and only activists to escape from the jail's "political" wing. First published in the 1980s and banned in South Africa, Jenkin's book has been updated to include his life in exile and return to South Africa. Vivid and pacy, it is well worth reading or rereading.

Anthony Egan. *Mail & Guardian: Friday*. December 5-11 2003: vi.

### "K"

*Scribbling the Cat: Travels with an African Soldier*. Alexandra Fuller. Johannesburg: Picador, 2004. 269 pp. R142.

This is the tale of a tortured character called K who was a member of the Rhodesian Light Infantry, a unit of "highly trained white boys whose 'kill ratio' and violent reputation were a source of pride for most white Rhodesians". It is a tale that grips you from the very first page and doesn't let go until long after you've put it down. What makes this book so utterly compelling is the sheer brutal honesty of it all: Fuller makes no concessions to political correctness, reproducing her subject's racist terminology and

Judith Lütge Coullie

opening up the dark secrets and grief that lie beneath the scars of an entire generation.

Alex Dodd. *This Day*. September 23 2004: 8.

*Scribbling the Cat* is a fresh take on the quest by white southern Africans to understand the dehumanisation that racism dictated. When Fuller met K at her parents' farm in Zambia, she was warned by her father that curiosity scribbled (killed) the cat. Undeterred, Fuller and K embark on a journey back into the dark past of the man who had allowed himself to become a state-endorsed killing machine. Fuller's gift for description relieves us from the dialogue and K's excruciatingly limited vocabulary. Fuller's thesis is that circumstances determine identity; that nobody asked for war—war is shit—but it makes people understand death and therefore life.

Maureen Isaacson. *The Sunday Independent*. August 29 2004: 18.

This book takes on some serious issues. At times it seems an extended apologia for (mainly white) former soldiers such as K, for the many appalling things done by them in the name of defending a lifestyle. Some of these are so extreme that this reader fervently hoped that some retribution was in store for K, but Fuller shows that he is merely a *muzungu*, festering in his own post-war trauma, neither absolved nor forgiven, despite his new-found faith in the Almighty.

However, Fuller makes it plain that K and his mad friends are not the only ones in need of forgiveness, understanding and absolution. Clearly, she considers herself, and by implication all the indifferent and propaganda-fed whiteys of Rhodesia, South Africa and good old England, to be as guilty as the soldiers who used the guns.

The writing of *Scribbling the Cat* lacks the economy and consistent freshness of her first memoir, *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight*. Yet it's a good yarn.

Jane Rosenthal. *Mail & Guardian, Friday*. September 30 2004: 2.

**Kathrada, Ahmed**

*Memoirs.* Ahmed Kathrada. Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2004. 416 pp. R199,95.

The *Memoirs* of South African freedom fighter, Ahmed Kathrada, offers readers “a whole new, deeper level of the reality” of apartheid and liberation. In the experiences laid open in his life, “the solar plexus where the full impact is revealed is the Rivonia Trial and his resultant life sentence to Robben Island.... The depth and sensitivity of Kathrada’s account of 26 years of political imprisonment establish how this is, indeed, nothing less than ‘the other life’ that exists in exclusion of virtually all that makes a life.... If the unexamined life is not worth living, Kathrada’s memory does not spare himself. He examines where he thinks he made mistakes, failed his high standards in behaviour towards others.... In the tribunal of this book, beyond the great testimony to his bravery, he clearly has reached that priceless achievement, truth and reconciliation with oneself.”

Nadine Gordimer. *The Sunday Independent*. August 15 2004: 18.

Kathrada’s story of his own struggle against apartheid and his observations of the other leading players in the struggle is as important and uplifting a piece of writing as Nelson Mandela’s *The Long Walk to Freedom*. He recounts the humiliations imposed upon black South Africans; his own humiliations started when he was a child: as there was no school for Indian children like him in his small town, the tear-stained eight year old was dispatched to an Indian school in Johannesburg where he stayed with a distant aunt. He hardly saw his parents again.

In the liberation movement, Kathrada himself was not a leader; he was a worker bee, an organiser, one of those who got things done. He did, however, pay the same price as his more senior colleagues. His book is the most moving and informative book ever written on the struggle for freedom in South Africa.

Chris Home. *Weekend Post*. September 25 2004: 11.

### **Keren-Krol, Shmuel**

*Mulik the Zulik*. Shmuel Keren-Krol. Cape Town: Privately published, 2004. 232 pp. R150.

*Mulik the Zulik* makes riveting, often shocking reading. It is about a lost and later a “bad” boy making good in Africa. The author was born in Pabrade, a *shtetl* in what was then Poland but is now Lithuania on an unknown date. Zulik is Russian for “naughty” and this is what he claims he was—and still is.

Keren’s mother and six brothers and sisters were killed. As an orphan, he was shipped to Israel, later joining the army. His military career ended when he shot his first wife’s lover. At the end of his jail term, he settled in South Africa and there built up a successful jewellery business.

There is something of the motivational book style which creeps into the narrative, but on a deeper level, the author grapples with identity and cultural dislocation. His candour is unnerving.

Robyn Cohen. *Cape Times*. August 6 2004: 9.

### **Khuzwayo, Zazah**

*Never Been at Home*. Zazah Khuzwayo. Claremont: David Philip, 2004. 154pp. R140.

A thought-provoking chronicle about battery and abuse, *Never Been at Home* is a disturbing record of the down-side of patriarchal culture. Khuzwayo highlights a culture where the breaking of rules is punishable by an accepted form of battery; where women are viewed as property legitimately “bought” with *lobola* (a Zulu word meaning, bride price). With classic gender stereotyping firmly entrenched in the South African psyche, African women—both rural and urban - remain disempowered by stringent mores. Khuzwayo’s delivery is blunt, and her account of Zulu culture is one that we don’t often have access to.

Jane Mayne. *Cape Times*. April 8 2004: 12.

That Zazah Khuzwayo - born in rural KwaZulu-Natal in the 1980s - retained sufficient sanity to write this book is testimony to her strength. She herself attributes her survival to her mother and sister whose love pulled her through. This account is full of anger. She rages not against her abusive father (whom she describes as “a pig”), but also against Zulu tradition and the Catholic Church, for fostering patriarchal dominance and the belief that to end a marriage, however, terrible, was wrong.

Though it is fluently written, the content makes this important autobiography difficult to read.

Jane Rosenthal. *Mail & Guardian: Friday*. April 30—May 6 2004:2.

### **Krog, Antjie**

*A Change of Tongue*. Johannesburg: Random, 2003. 376 pp. R180.

Poet/author/journalist/translator Antjie Krog manages, in this her new book, to blow one away on every level. Krog seems to span all the genres of writing, but also deals with the many intricacies of living in South Africa where a white woman criticising is seen as a racist—but if she didn't point out what she believed could be improved, she would be denying her own truth. It would, in fact, be a change of tongue for this forthright author. She has an illuminating way of capturing the emotional chaos that is part of the South African psyche. *A Change of Tongue* should have exactly the same impact as *Country of my Skull* and, fortunately, Antjie always takes it a step further—a blessing for both author and reader.

Diane de Beer. *Pretoria News: Interval*. October 27 2003: 3.

In *Country of my Skull* Krog held a mirror to South Africa's fragile, fragmented new society - *A Change of Tongue* is a reminder of how far South Africa has come, without travelling too far. Part biography, part small-town musings, it's a powerful albeit challenging look at where South Africa is, and where it's going. Highly recommended.

Unnamed reviewer. *Saturday Dispatch*. November 22 2003: 4.

In her acknowledgments, the narrator states that “the ‘I’ is seldom me” and earlier she quotes Anne Sexton: “I use the personal when I am applying a mask to my face.” Thus is the reader warned against simply equating the narrator with the author, alerting us to the fact that what we have here is not so much autobiography as auto-fiction in which known facts about her life are interwoven with fictional techniques.

Her theme is transformation, personal and political, and the role of language in this. This is a book that disturbs, that angers and becalms, that provokes tears and laughter. Krog’s book opens up a space for difference and community.

\* Johann Rossouw. *Die Burger*. November 17 2003: 7.

### **Kruiper, Belinda**

*Kalahari Rain Song*. Elana Bregin and Belinda Kruiper. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2004. 110pp. R145.

Apartheid South Africa has provided ample evidence of the truth of Napoleon’s dictum that history is written by the victors. If the majority of African people were marginalised, the Khoisan were almost pushed over the edge of historical consciousness. Now we’ve entered a new phase in which their remote, shadowy figures are moving into the foreground. Compelling us to question past assumptions, in *Kalahari Rain Song*, Belinda Kruiper tells us of her love for her husband, for his people, the Khomani Bushmen, and for the land they belong to. Because she is now accepted as one of them, her depiction of the Bushmen has none of the mystic gloss of a Laurens van der Post. The reality of people struggling not only for survival and for land but also for identity is far more complex, including profound spirituality on the one hand and the brute fact of drunkenness and abusive behaviour on the other.

It is a grippingly authentic account. Belinda Kruiper’s story is only one element; in the book there are also a number of powerful photographic studies of Bushmen life, a selection of Belinda’s poems, and representations of the art of her husband, Vetkat Kruiper.

The whole is at once intellectually stimulating and aesthetically pleasing.

John Boje. *Pretoria News*. August 9 2004: 8.

**Levin, Adam**

*The Wonder Safaris*. Adam Levin. Cape Town: Struik, 2003. 222 pp. R143.

Adam Levin's spirit-filled book—spirits of West African marabouts, of lost settlers, of ordinary and extraordinary people, of thugs and human angels—is at once weepy, hilarious and ultimately engaging. Through his travel narrative you realise that Africa is indeed wretched, bloody, intriguing, beastly, but also mysterious, spiritually wealthy, and culturally diverse.

Bongani Madondo. *Sunday Times*. December 14 2003: 6.

**Lobengula, Peter and Kitty Jewell**

*Kitty and the Prince*. Ben Shepherd. Johannesburg and Cape Town: Jonathan Ball: 2003. x + 278 pp. R152.00.

Kitty Jewell and Prince Peter Lobengula, respectively the middle-class daughter of a mining engineer and a man who claimed to be the son of the Matabele king, are the central figures in this book. Lobengula was in the cast of the show, *Savage South Africa*: this was a melodrama, such as was popular a century ago, based on historical events, but combining the horrors of the freak show with spectacular action. The story of the doomed marriage of Lobengula and Jewell is not the whole tale. The main fascination of this account lies in its exploration of popular entertainment and press hysteria around 100 years ago. While Shepherd does not solve all of the mysteries, including exactly who his protagonists were, he has written an interesting piece of social history.

Margaret von Klemperer. *The Natal Witness*. July 1 2003: 11.

The man who claimed to be Prince Peter Lobengula was part of *Savage South Africa*, the spectacular, if highly exploitative, show which Frank Fillis brought to Victorian England. In this account of the thwarted love affair between Lobengula and Cornish belle Kitty Jewell, historian Ben Shepherd traces the social responses to miscegenation.

Loren Anthony. *Sunday Times*. September 21 2003:13.

## **Luyt, Louis**

*Walking Proud: The Louis Luyt Autobiography*. Johannesburg: Don Nelson, 2003. 352 pp. R171.50.

This is the story how a very poor boy from the Karoo progressed to become one of the richest men in South Africa. Luyt tells of his involvement in the Information Scandal involving top Nationalist Party officials in the 1970s, his experiences as leader of the Transvaal Rugby Union and other episodes in a life that is almost larger than life-size. Having experienced extreme deprivation and denigration as a child, he becomes obsessed with ensuring that this never occurs again, for himself or his family. The personality that emerges is one of a hardheaded man who will brook no opposition. Some facts seem to be misrepresented, and in the end, this book leaves a bitter taste in one's mouth.

\* Fritz Joubert. *Die Burger: Boekeblad*. December 22 2003: 7.

## **Machobane, J.J.**

*Drive out Hunger: The Story of J.J. Machobane of Lesotho*. J.J.Machobane and Robert Berold. Johannesburg: Jacana, 2003. 110 pp. R120.

This co-written autobiography of J.J. Machobane covers the life of a man with a vision: the hungry being able to feed themselves. In the 1940s and 1950s in Lesotho, Machobane spent 13 years in isolation germinating various combinations of crops until he found a way to plant a hectare of land in such a way that it yielded crops all year round. Machobane, Berold says, developed permaculture long before it was called that, but he also had a uniquely African way of teaching and sharing his skills. Machobane's garden is above politics, it is a personal space to grow your own food and to sustain yourself. Nevertheless, due firstly to outgoing British rule and then the new Lesotho government, Machobane and the people applying his agricultural system were forced to go into hiding from the mid-1960s to the 1980s. Both governments were more interested in the people of Lesotho

producing exportable harvests. Machobane would not accept this when most of the population was starving.

The book has a Zen-like quality; the rhythms make it sound like oral literature; the twisted litanies make it sound like grass growing. The ironies make it sound real.

Nadine Botha. *ThisDay*. January 22 2004: 8.

### **Mandela, Winnie**

*Winnie Mandela: A Life*. Anne Marie du Preez Bezdrop. Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2003. 287 pp. R199.95.

The author narrates Winnie Mandela's life from her birth in 1934 in the Transkei through her student days in Johannesburg, her career as a social worker, her courtship with Nelson Mandela, the protests of the 1950s and then Nelson's incarceration. In 1969, Winnie herself was detained for 17 months, leaving her 10 and 9 year old daughters without any parental care. In the 1970s, Winnie was first detained and then banished to a town in the Orange Free State. We learn of her estrangement from Nelson a few years after he was released in 1990.

One leaves this book wishing the story could have been happier. One wonders what Winnie would have been had she rejected Nelson's advances and had had her life to live fully on her own. It is likely she would have been a force to reckon with.

Lisa Combrinck. *Sowetan*. December 12 2003: 11.

This second biography of Winnie Mandela is a sympathetic yet realistic look at the life of one of South Africa's most controversial figures. Her life was clouded by the imprisonment of her husband, Nelson, and her own spells in prison. The author tells us that Nelson found his own three-day encounter with solitary confinement "the most forbidding aspect of prison life"; Winnie was held in solitary confinement for 13 months. Then she was banished to Brandfort.

But, the author suggests, Winnie's physical and emotional torture turned into post-traumatic stress disorder. Back in Soweto, Winnie would

often wear khaki military-style outfits and make highly inflammatory statements, such as, "Together, hand in hand, with our boxes of matches and our necklaces, we shall liberate this country." At the Truth and Reconciliation Commission she would again be implicated in the murder of 14 year old Stompie Seipei.

An interesting book that gives a human face to one of South Africa's most formidable women.

Christi Naude. *The Witness*. December 22 2003: 8.

It is ten years since Emma Gilbey's, *The Lady*: its sheer volume of detail made it an almost definitive biography of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela. Gilbey barely appears in Du Preez Bezdrob's footnotes as she eschews academic conventions. If she had referenced her sources properly it would become quite obvious that this book rests quite heavily on Gilbey's text and on other standard works, those by Nancy Harrison, Fatima Meer and Madikizela-Mandela herself. Du Preez Bezdrob has invested very little real research in constructing her narrative. Convinced that Madikizela-Mandela has been unfairly treated by today's political leadership, she has accordingly been very selective in her use of sources. This biographer presents the banished Winnie as displaying unambiguous nobility of spirit; Gilbey, on the other hand, spoke to people who lived in the town she was banished to and she tells of a community divided by Madikizela's-Mandela's presence. Instead of any effort to establish the extent of Madikizela's-Mandela's culpability in the affairs of the Mandela United Football Club, Du Preez Bezdrob merely recycles, without comment, the conclusions of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Winnie Mandela certainly merits serious consideration as a public figure but this book does not even begin to engage with her complexities as a tragic heroine.

Tom Lodge. *The Sunday Independent*. December 14 2003: 18.

### **Masekela, Hugh**

*Still Grazing: The Musical Journey of Hugh Masekela*. Hugh Masekela and D. Michael Cheers. New York: Crown Publishers, 2004. 394pp. R180.

This must-read autobiography of globally acclaimed South African trumpeter Hugh Masekela is a bitter-sweet musical journey through the anti-apartheid system, a struggle with addiction, hardship, bewilderment, womanising and tragedy. The story, told in brutally frank style, is divided into three parts. The first is entitled “Home” and is about growing up in apartheid South Africa, prior to Masekela’s going into exile in the 1960s. In it he tells about his romantic association with “Mama Afrika”, Miriam Makeba, and how he became a musician. His first trumpet was courtesy of Louis Armstrong via Masekela’s mentor, the anti-apartheid campaigner, Trevor Huddleston. In the second part, called “The World”, Masekela accepts an invitation to study music at the Manhattan School of Music, rubbing shoulders with jazz greats like Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, Harry Belafonte, Otis Redding and Marvin Gaye. While in exile, Masekela sank into drug and alcohol abuse. He recorded over 30 albums and later conceived the musical *Sarafina* with Mbongeni Ngema. In the third part, “Africa”, Masekela kicks the addictions and then returns home.

Jimmy Matyu. *Weekend Post*. August 28 2004: 21.

In this autobiography, Masekela’s blissful nonchalance sometimes lays him open to charges of lack of context. There are several unsubstantiated claims and, sometimes, sheer myths. There are, for instance, large unsupported claims like, “Even Hitler’s Nazi machinery never equalled the timely responses of the police forces to disruption, or the swiftness with which black ‘lawlessness’ was defused”, and the claim that dead miners’ bodies were used by medical researchers. Also, solecism and sheer editorial oversights abound.

But all of this seems mere carping in the light of his anal retentive memory (he seems to remember verbatim all conversations with Miles Davis, Marlon Brando, Don King, Nga Machema and many others), the carefree vigour and sheer cleverness of Masekela. Strangely, Masekela’s life—in which seeds of distrust for journalists were planted by *Drum* journalist, Lewis Nkosi—is quintessentially sleazy tabloid.

Mduduzi Dlamini. *Sowetan*. August 27 2004: 23.

## **Mashinini, Tsietsi**

*A Burning Hunger: One Family's Struggle Against Apartheid.* Lynda Schuster. London: Jonathan Cape, 2004. 451pp. R275.

Tsietsi Mashinini was a student leader in the 1976 riots in South Africa. This account, written by a foreign correspondent for the *Wall Street Journal* and *Christian Science Monitor*, tells the remarkable story of black South Africa through the Mashinini family. It embraces just about every facet of the liberation struggle and makes the point that if the Mandelas were the generals in the fight for black liberation, the Mashininis were the foot soldiers. Their story is one of imprisonment, torture, separation and loss. It is also a story of dignity, courage and strength in the face of appalling adversity. Readers will also get a glimpse of Tsietsi's life in exile, and of his subsequent death of AIDS in Guinea. The book also mentions that it is painful for his parents to watch the ANC government heap honours on all manner of freedom fighters—except their son.

Ali Mphaki. *City Press*. July 11 2004: 1.

## **Meldrum, Andrew**

*Where We Have Hope: A Memoir of Zimbabwe.* Andrew Meldrum. London: John Murray, 2004. 272pp. R220.

In *Where We Have Hope*, journalist Andrew Meldrum (who was deported from Zimbabwe in 2003) gives us a fascinating and fast-moving memoir of his 23 years in Zimbabwe, a time in which he observed the nation decline from democracy to virtual dictatorship. He is not naïve, or some rightwinger. Matters such as land reform and economic equality are real issues. The question that he raises is how to deal with these effectively—and here we could have done with much more analysis.

Despite the repression, we see a different Zimbabwe through Meldrum's eyes, one of courageous journalists and lawyers, honest political analysts, brave MPs, an opposition movement that persisted under increasing repression, and ordinary people who somehow manage to survive. It is such people who offer the hope of Meldrum's title.

Anthony Egan. *Mail & Guardian: Friday*. July 30—August 5 2004: 3.

*Where We Have Hope* is one of those rare books that achieves a symbiosis between personal experience and political fact and analysis. Written by America-born journalist, Andrew Meldrum, part of the strength of this book is that Meldrum does not snatch the entire story for himself. The book is inhabited by the stories of his friends, colleagues and even enemies. If you want an update on what has happened in Zimbabwe since liberation, this book will provide it.

I read *Where We Have Hope* in one night. It's a wonderful book that pays tribute to a country and a people.

Jennifer Crocker. *Cape Times*. July 7 2004: 7.

### **Motsei, Mmatshilo**

*Hearing Visions, Seeing Voices*. Mmatshilo Motsei. Bellevue: Jacana, 2004. 89 pp. R140.

It is difficult to slot this collection of musings and recollections into an existing genre: as an inspirational journey, an engaging autobiographical account and a rallying cry for an affirmation of African identity and tradition, it stands alone. Seldom have black women's experiences been investigated in South Africa writing with such frankness and scope. This is a book that will speak to men and women who want to make sense of the "African Renaissance", the complexities of male-female relationships, the violence of the times we live in, and the interplay between traditional African spirituality and modernity. *Hearing Visions, Seeing Voices* occasionally descends into glib aphorisms, and to gain from this book one must approach it with tolerance of a certain brand of earnestness.

Henrietta Rose-Innes. *Mail & Guardian*. August 6-12 2004: 37.

In *Hearing Visions, Seeing Voices* Motsei takes you on a journey of her life, how she dealt with the violence in her own marriage, the pain she caused her son while going through the divorce and her decision to embrace her calling as a healer. The book is full of warmth and compassion. The descriptions,

*Judith Lütge Coullie*

the language, the pictures she paints of her experiences are very moving and this is a book that stays with you long after you have put it down.

Nosipho Kota. *Saturday Dispatch*. October 2 2004: 4.

## **Mugabe, Robert**

*Brothers under the Skin: Travels in Tryanny*. Christopher Hope. London: Macmillan, 2003. 279 pp. R163.

*Brothers under the Skin* is supposed to be a journey through and a meditation on tyrannies around the world, including Mugabe's. The underlying premise is that all dictatorships have similar traits. As Christopher Hope describes his many sojourns in Zimbabwe, he recounts his impressions of the Soviet Union, East Germany, the former Yugoslavia and Vietnam, stressing their similarity to Mugabe's reign of terror. Sadly, what promises to be highly edifying juxtaposition from an obviously knowledgeable and talented writer ends up as a mishmash, albeit one with some value.

*Sousa Jamba*. Mail & Guardian, Friday. *September 19-25, 2003*: iv.

## **Nuttall, Michael**

*Number Two to Tutu*. Michael Nuttall. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2003. 178 pp. R90.00

This is a story of camaraderie in bad and good times between two of South Africa's best-known and best-loved Anglicans, Emeritus-Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Michael Nuttall, the former Bishop of Natal and then Dean in the Church of the Province of South Africa—a post that made him effectively the Archbishop's deputy. Working together during the harrowing 1980s and beyond, the two were offered the opportunity to assist with the great changes that were to come to South Africa under F.W. de Klerk's presidency. However, the great issues of the day are not what this book is about: it's about love, friendship, professionalism, and the hard and busy work of the priestly calling. This explains, perhaps, why it is not a dry and wooden text.

*Peter Christopher. Grocott's Mail. November 2003: 5.*

**Pagé, Lucie**

*Conflict of the Heart.* Lucie Pagé. Cape Town: David Philip, 2003. 370 pp. R179.

This memoir is really a story of longing and love with, as backdrop, the South African liberation struggle in its final moments, the transitional period, the historic 1994 elections and the first five years of the new democracy. It is a woman's story in a country dominated by men. It is an autobiography which conveys a sense of the larger reality out there, the biography of a people and the stories of those who migrate between Canada and South Africa.

Lisa Combrinck. *Sowetan.* November 11 2003: 27.

This is an awful book. No matter how worthy, how sincere, French-Canadian Lucie Pagé's writing of her love affair with Jay Naidoo in Africa isn't romantic: it's embarrassing. There is some history of the struggle and the new South Africa, but being an electronic media journalist doesn't make a writer. And she is not.

Beverley Roos Muller. *Cape Argus.* November 28 2003: 18.

**Pinnock, Don**

*African Journeys.* Don Pinnock. Cape Town: Double Storey, 2003. 224 pp. R185.

These unusual adventures will take readers into new worlds. Pinnock has a marvellous way with words and a restless spirit which takes him—by means of many different modes of transport - to strange places such as Tristan da Cunha (between South Africa and South America) where he has strange encounters.

Diane de Beer. *Cape Times.* March 2 2004: 10.

What a stunning book! In the startling and vivid photographs of Africa, from the dusty Karoo in South Africa to the lake of stars in Malawi, Don Pinnock captures the essence of Africa, born out of a clear love of the continent. No ordinary coffee table glossy book of photographs, *African Journeys* takes the reader on an unusual journey that includes tracing the footsteps of legendary missionary David Livingstone, canoeing across the Okavanga Delta and cycling through the Knysna. The book showcases incredibly rich, detailed and often humorous travel essays.

Taralyn Bro. *Saturday Dispatch*. March 6 2004: 4.

### **Plaatje, Sol T.**

*Peaceable Warrior: The Life and Times of Sol T. Plaatje*. Maureen Rall. Kimberley: Sol Plaatje Educational Trust, 2003. Xvi + 314 pp. R265.

There is something inspiring, intriguing and remarkably complex about Sol Plaatje: a largely self-taught man who establishes an international reputation as a journalist, interpreter, translator, writer, politician and statesman. He speaks several languages fluently, translates Shakespeare, collects Setswana proverbs and folklore, collaborates on the first phonetic study of an African language and is a pioneer of Africa-language journalism—all this while he tirelessly defends the dwindling rights of African people in post-Union South Africa. Nevertheless, Plaatje's work remains relatively unknown beyond a small circle of dedicated scholars.

In this book Maureen Rall, who worked as curator at the Plaatje Museum in Kimberley, South Africa, attempts to provide a popular account of Plaatje's life. At times, Rall succeeds admirably in her attempts to draw Plaatje's enormous output and varied interests into the confines of a single book: for instance, we get a real sense of the people with whom Plaatje interacted in Kimberley. Unfortunately, this passion and acute sense of place and period is not apparent throughout the text and, at times, the scholarship becomes sloppy. Large chunks of the book are comprised of verbatim quotes from Brian Willan's meticulous and scholarly biography and in some instances, Rall's choice of editions when discussing Plaatje's work is troubling. Furthermore, Rall's text itself is in need of editing and proofreading and several photographs are poorly reproduced. While this

book does cover all the bases, it often does so in a cursory fashion and with little enthusiasm.

Peter Midgley. [H-Safrica@h-net.msu.edu](mailto:H-Safrica@h-net.msu.edu). March 2004.

**“Rachael”**

*Rachael: Woman of the Night*. Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2003. 248pp. R139.

Offering a firsthand look at the sex trade in South Africa, these memoirs tells the story of Margaret (a.k.a. “Rachael”) who becomes a prostitute at the age of 38 in order to save her family from poverty. This sobering tale of abusive husbands, addiction, bereavement, a traumatic stay in a psychiatric ward and a family torn apart by bureaucracy is told with a wicked wit and remarkable depth.

Maria Mikolchak. *The African Book Publishing Record* 30 (2), 2004: 116.

**Rhodes, Cecil John**

*Cecil Rhodes and his Time*. Appolon Davidson. Pretoria: Protea Boekhuis, 2002. 324pp. R199.95.

In this very different biography of the money magnate and imperialist, Cecil John Rhodes, Davidson studies Rhodes as both the product and personification of the greatest wealth in history. But for Rhodes, the acquisition of millions was never enough. His ideal was always to establish an “African Empire” under the British flag.

Davidson describes the tragic course of Rhodes’ political life and his growing ill-health. Although Davidson does not give a psychoanalytic interpretation and broaches Rhodes’ emotional life cautiously, he does introduce the reader to the main points regarding Rhodes’ way of thinking and acting. Only those who are averse to historical biographies will be able to resist the attractions of this book.

\*Tienie van Schoor. *Die Burger*. April 12 2004: 7.

## Sachs, Albie

*The Free Diary of Albie Sachs*. Albie Sachs (with occasional counterpoint by Vanessa September). Johannesburg: Random House, 2004. 232 pp. R150.

South African Constitutional Court Judge, Albie Sachs, was almost killed by a car bomb planted by agents of the apartheid regime in 1988. In this book Sachs pens a post-liberation diary of the journey he and his life partner, Vanessa September, went on to places of former exile (London, Belfast, Berlin, St Petersburg). The aim was for him to “move beyond disaster” (solitary confinement, detention, sleep deprivation, the car bomb) and to write about “joy experienced”. In pursuing his theme of what Sachs refers to as Late Life Love, Sachs acquits himself brilliantly. He is too balanced, sensitive and self-deprecating (in a healthy way) to fail. He is also a remarkably elegant and clear writer, and always charming.

This book is not only about Sachs’s private life; the best parts are those where his experiences as an activist collide and interact with the world and other people, or where his recent journeys and experiences are counterpointed by his memories of his earlier life.

The book could have been pruned here and there, and I found Vanessa September’s commentaries increasingly predictable and also too ingenuous. But Sachs’s voice is truly remarkable. He represents the acme of a certain generation of South African: activist, thinker, writer, legal brain, loving and forgiving human being.

Jeremy Gordin. *The Star*. September 16 2004: 15.

Some authors have the knack of taking almost anything and making it sound exciting simply by virtue of their ability to write. Albie Sachs is one such writer. In his earlier works, Sachs wrote of his experiences of detention, exile and survival of an assassination attempt. This new book deals with happier subject matter - Sachs’s travels with his partner through Europe.

Although in content and emotional intensity these “diaries” do not match his earlier books, this narrative holds attention by its sheer wit and quality of description. Characterisation is one of Sachs’s strengths. He takes ordinary events and turns them into delightful portraits. And the contributions by September are mostly illuminating.

Anthony Egan. *Mail & Guardian*. September 24-30 2004: 3.

This brave book is a vehicle for aligning past and present; it is also a remarkably good-to-read gallop through several of Europe's most beautiful cities, which were the main centres of support for the struggle against apartheid. South African freedom fighter, Albie Sachs, is able, for the most part, to maintain a deft touch, weaving a spirited chronicle around his core image: sometimes a "riddle", sometimes a "paradox". It is "the riddle of how to encourage respect for the past without condemning people to live in the shadow of its burdens". And "the great paradox of my generation was that we had fought with all our passion to create a boring society", one which it is "normal" "simply to enjoy the ordinary things in life".

Hugh Lewin. *The Sunday Independent*. October 3 2004: 18.

### **Sharp, Chrystal**

*In Fool Flight*. Chrystal Sharp. New York: Penguin, 2003. 240pp. R90.

These tales of the experiences of Chrystal Sharp and her veterinary husband Dave continue on from those in her previous book, *Dog in my Footsteps*. Living in South Africa, in the Eastern Cape town of "Dolphin Bay", Sharp and her husband have some amazing relationships with some unforgettable animals. Sharp's writing style and narration are positively charming. Her animals are as human as the people in her life and her descriptions of the beautiful scenery around "Dolphin Bay" are breathtaking. *In Fool Flight* is a must read for anyone who loves animals.

Samantha Bartlett. *Cape Times*. January 16 2004: 7.

A new collection of Chrystal Sharp stories is reasonably priced and a real treat. If you are an old softie you might shed a tear or two as she relates the stories behind some of the hurt creatures who come into her vet husband's surgery. However, the narrative is leavened with loads of light wit. Sharp has a wonderfully self-deprecating sense of humour and manages to avoid being "twee", a trap that animal writers can all too easily fall into when they are so involved with their subjects—as Chrystal so obviously is.

All in all, just delightful.

Gillian McAinsh. *The Herald*. December 24 2003: 4.

### **Stern, Irma**

*Remembering Irma—Irma Stern: A Memoir with Letters*. Mona Berman. Cape Town: Double Storey, 2003. 184 pp. R174.

This account of the woman who has been referred to as “the supreme South African painter”, Irma Stern, is based on 30 years of intimate letters from Stern to author Mona Berman’s parents, as well as the personal memories of the author. The book reveals part of Stern’s life few people knew about, from the depths of despair to the heights of her triumph as an artist. What Berman has done skillfully is to put into context the difficulties experienced by Stern and the difficulties she sometimes caused for those around her. I loved this book from the moment I picked it up. It is like a family scrapbook, and you get to see the pictures as well.

Jennifer Crocker. *Cape Times*. September 12 2003: 7.

The brilliant, willful Stern was one of the greatest Expressionist painters of her time. In this captivating “memoir with letters”, Berman describes with disarming frankness her childish resentment of Stern’s extended visits to their home. More than insight into the artist, *Remembering Irma* also presents an intriguing portrait of a liberal immigrant Jewish family, the sort that has so enriched South Africa’s history. My only complaint about this book is that there is not enough of it.

Michele Magwood. *Sunday Times, Lifestyle*. October 5 2003: 15.

### **“Taffy”**

*See you in November: The Story of an SAS Assassin*. Peter Stiff. Alberton, South Africa: Galago Publications, 2002. 312pp. R180.

The title, *See you in November*, is from a code-phrase to authorize the assassination of the Zimbabwean freedom fighter, Joshua Nkomo. This

autobiographical account (as told to Peter Stiff) of a British SAS soldier who served the Rhodesian Central Intelligence Organisation was first published in 1985. Written in a “hectoring cliché-filled style”, this lurid story of intrigue, assassination and treachery in service of UDI Rhodesia is not supported by reference to any verifiable evidence.

The book is of interest as the record of a certain kind of approach to the travails of southern African racial oligarchy in its dying days. For this reason it should be in the libraries of institutions that aspire to comprehensive coverage of modern southern African historiography.

Seán Morrow. *The African Book Publishing Record* 30 (2), 2004: 120.

### **Taylor, J.B.**

*Lucky Jim: Memoirs of a Randlord*. J.B. Taylor. Cape Town: Stonewall Books, 2003. 205 pp. R123.

First published in 1939, these intriguing memoirs of the pioneering South African mining entrepreneur tell, with gripping immediacy, of that rapacious band of get-rich-quick, supremely racist, quasi-aristocratic, always fascinating brigands—the self-serving Randlords. In this narrative, we are in the heartland of opportunistic, racially fertilised colonialism. We are among the precursors of apartheid. It is an absorbing historical portrayal.

Alan Lipman. *The Sunday Independent*. August 3 2003: 18.

*Lucky Jim* offers a first-person account by one of the Randlords who knew both sides of the gold-mining equation in the old Transvaal Republic—Cecil Rhodes’s crude capitalism on the one hand and president Paul Kruger’s farm-based republican virtue on the other. Taylor’s language reflects the rough and tumble of the frontier, exudes an almost unconscious arrogant articulation of racism and imperialism, but is equally speckled with quaint Victorian expressions. In this sense, *Lucky Jim* is a time piece that shows South Africa at the advent of its industrial and racial order.

Cornelius Thomas. *Daily Dispatch*. September 6 2003: 4.

**Turkington, Kate**

*Doing it with Doris.* Kate Turkington. Johannesburg: Penguin, 2004. 254pp. R95.

In this memoir, Turkington reminisces about her mother, Doris, and recounts her own life journeys. Her mother, she says, was liberated before the term was invented and always encouraged to her daughters to accept no boundaries. Both mother and daughter believed that it is never too late to have an adventure. This is a book that inspires. Her enthusiasm is catching, her storytelling has you turning the pages, and when you have finished you will want to get out there and do it!

Diane de Beer. *The Star: Tonight.* June 17 2004: 9.

**Van Houten, Gillian**

*The Way of the Leopard.* Gillian van Houten. Claremont: Spearhead, 2003. 169pp. R165.

Animal-lovers of all ages will delight in this true-life account by one-time TV newsreader and photojournalist Gillian van Houten of how she reared, and eventually reintroduced into the wild, two orphaned leopard cubs at South Africa's Mpumalanga's Londolozi game reserve. Many of the anecdotes are humorous, and the scientific and personal observations interesting, but her attempts to analyse the twins' personalities—especially through the use of astrology—seem to be a bit fanciful.

Sheila Hadden. *The Herald.* May 19 2004: 6.

**Van Wyk, Chris**

*Shirley, Goodness and Mercy.* Chris van Wyk. Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2004. 333pp. R162.

Chris van Wyk was born in Soweto, South Africa, in 1957 and grew up and still lives in the poor “coloured” suburb of Riverlea, Gauteng. His award-winning poems have been published in several countries and six years ago, he published his first novel. Van Wyk grew up in an apartheid world in

which he is not only poor, but is a second-class citizen. During the struggle years, he is arrested a couple of times and once is beaten by the police. But he gets his reward: in 1994, he performs his work in front of Nelson Mandela.

Here and there, van Wyk has interspersed his childhood memoir with his poems, and they slip into place like a hand in a glove; they are personal, tender, pertinent. This is a wonderfully crafted childhood memoir.

Beverley Roos Muller. *Cape Argus*. July 17 2004: 12.

If you delight in stories of childhood and growing up you will delight in *Shirley, Goodness and Mercy*. It's the tale of growing up in Johannesburg in the suburb of Riverlea. It's an amazing sense of place and time that van Wyk brings to this childhood memoir that raise it a generous cut above many other books in this genre. Van Wyk's prose is wonderfully fleshed out, without resorting to maudlin sentiment or adjectival excess. Although it has documentary value pertaining to the socio-political climate, the last thing I would want to do is reduce van Wyk's work to a stereotype of "what it was like to grow up in a coloured township in the apartheid years". The book is simply too much of a joyful celebration of life. But it is a memoir that does give general access to a reality that has not been well-documented in the past.

That van Wyk loves words is evident from his writing, that he remembers his past in a way that makes you feel like you are stepping into memories, is stamped all over his work. A lovely book, well told and beautifully executed.

Jennifer Crocker. *Cape Times*. June 11 2004: 10.

This is a text in which self-deprecating humour and punning are let loose. Driven by an unassuming verbal dexterity in which everyday occurrences are transformed by spontaneous, anarchic wit; as if by magic, it reads like an outrageous running gag. The writer's skill in seeking out and amplifying moments from his experiences with a keen sense of the ludicrous, the absurd, the abject and the marvellous makes it read like a risky bar-room yarn. Yet it is all pure narrative wizardry.

The “magic” here is not the exotic, crypto-religious variety of the epigones of Latin American fiction. Van Wyk’s magical aesthetic is grounded in everyday experience gathered among the exploited in a society blighted by prejudice. His text speaks unflinchingly of the ugly realities of life in South Africa between the late 1950s to the early 1990s, but avoids the curdled staples of South African autobiographical writing. Most strikingly, it does not fabricate a narrative nor does it invent a fictional consciousness to give a literary gloss. In mimicking memory, it accentuates a random selection of incidents and enlarges fragments to cohere marvellously by virtue of its sustained humour. This is a memoir not to miss.

Andries Oliphant. *The Sunday Independent*. June 6 2004: 18.

### **Weinberg, Paul**

*Travelling Light*. Paul Weinberg. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2004. 109 pp. R265.

One of South Africa’s best photographers has launched this reflection of his 25-year journey from the 1970s. The photographic journey is presented as a lyrical narrative of 90 images, complemented by private observations from Weinberg’s diaries. Most of the images are previously unpublished because they were taken at a time when there was no space for the ordinary.

Patience Bambalele. *Sowetan*. May 25 2004: 21.

This selection of photographs makes for an interesting retrospective of South Africa’s toughest times during apartheid. The narrators he has chosen illustrate how successful apartheid was in creating a people apart, alienated. Weinberg has not overlaid his subjects with meaning, but his work is intense; it draws one into his experience. Yet he is unobtrusive, which earns him the intimacy essential to his detailed narrative. The absence of super-effects and gimmicks reveals an honesty that renders his poetic interludes unnecessary.

Maureen Isaacson. *The Sunday Independent*. July 25 2004: 18.

**Wende, Hamilton**

*Deadlines from the Edge: Images of War from Congo to Afghanistan.* Hamilton Wende. London: Viking, 2003. 291 pp. R154.

War correspondent Hamilton Wende takes the reader from the chaotic streets of Lumbumbashi in the former Zaire during the fall of one of Africa's most ruthless dictators, Mobutu Sese Seko, to the Kuwaiti desert, where American soldiers await the go-ahead to invade neighbouring Iraq. Wende (who was born in the US but grew up in South Africa) shares his fears and frustrations of working in war zones around the globe. This insightful account is written with simplicity, but its message is powerful and it brings to life the full horror of war as seen through the eyes of a man, rather than the lens of a camera.

Lucas Ledwaba. *ThisDay*. October 30, 10:9.

**Younghusband, Peter L.**

*Every Meal a Banquet, Every Night a Honeymoon: Unforgettable African Experiences.* Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2003. 347pp. R140.

In this collection, Peter Younghusband looks back on a long and evidently harrowing career as a foreign correspondent in Africa. The book consists of 23 stories culled from these experiences. There is no easy coherence here: the stories vary from wry insights into the fraught married life of a foreign correspondent to highly coloured accounts of farcical and not-so-farcical revolutions and other upheavals all over the continent. But there are also quieter pieces. Some seem to be faithful accounts of Younghusband's own experiences; others are near-fictionalised accounts of third-person protagonists, often with a good deal of imaginative extrapolation.

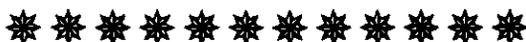
Younghusband does not shirk the excesses, the sleaze, the opportunism of reporting, but he insists on these as the price paid for the conditions under which these people work. His book testifies, in a most engrossing way, to a life of courage and initiative. More unusually, it reflects a humanity sobered but not embittered by experiences so extreme as to be thinkable for the rest of us only as news reports.

Judith Lütge Coullie

Michiel Heyns. *The Sunday Independent*. December 21 2003: 17.

Younghusband is in many ways the quintessential “old Africa hand” that the British media love to romance about. He has been there and done that. But in this wonderful collection of short stories, vignettes and novellas, he has chosen not to write his own history (this has been done too often, he says), but rather to tell 23 quirky stories from a long history of reporting. The result is a very good book, a cracker, in fact. It’s a rollicking, quirky, very funny, very sad and fairly eccentric look at Africa.

Tony Weaver. *Cape Times*. December 12 2003: 7.



## Mutiple Subjects

### **AIDS victims in Africa**

*I Die, But the Memory Lives On: The World AIDS Crisis and the Memory Book Project*. Henning Mankell. London: Harvill Press, 2004. 120 pp. R80.

The Memory Book Project, which Mankell - a Swede with a conscience - supports, aims to keep alive the memories of parents who are dying of AIDS, for the children they leave behind. Mankell, an actor who works in Mozambique, travels to Uganda where he attempts to come to terms with the virus on the continent. Here, he gets close to people who are living with AIDS, with their waiting and then their wasting stages. He tackles his immense subject with passion, but his approach is nonetheless delicate. The additional essays by Rachel Baggely, the head of Christian Aids’s HIV unit, and Anders Wijkman, a member of the European Parliament, add a certain weight to this slim, uneven volume.

Maureen Isaacson. *The Sunday Independent*. September 19 2004: 18.

This is a wonderfully-written book that reflects the constant fears, suffering and hopes of people living with HIV/AIDS. The writer documents the lives

of people in Kampala, Uganda, who are living with this dreadful disease. He writes with compassion for ordinary people.

Nosipho Kota. *Saturday Dispatch*. September 18 2004: 7.

### **Citizens of Johannesburg**

*Johannesburg Portraits: From Lionel Phillips to Sibongile Khumalo*. Mike Alfred. Houghton, South Africa: Jacana Press, 2003. 131 pp. R169.00.

*Johannesburg Portraits* is a series of 10 succinct biographies intended, according to the author, "as an accessible, informative read for those who wish to learn more about the city of Johannesburg and some of its citizens". Alfred's range is broad and eclectic, and includes a famous Randlord, political activists, writers, artists, a musical family, an illustrator-ornithologist and a lone but high-profile scientist. *Portraits* is a comfortable weekend read and will provide most readers with brief, but never shallow, pen portraits of the subjects and a sense of the times and environment in which they lived, worked and struggled.

Mike Berger. *Cape Times*. September 12 2003: 7.

### **Hermer, Bennie and Olda Mehr**

*The Piano War: A True Story of Love and Survival in World War II*. Graeme Friedman. Claremont: David Philip, 2003. 287pp. R159.

Talented young South African pianist, Olda Mehr, and the young doctor, Bennie Hermer, met in Johannesburg in the 1930s. Then, in 1938, Olda and her mother Ida sailed to London so that Olda could take up a music scholarship at the Royal Academy. In August 1939, on her summer break from her music studies, they went to visit relatives in eastern Europe and were caught up in Hitler's Holocaust: Olda and her mother were taken to Pawiak, Warsaw's primary terror centre. At this time, Olda took courage from the letters of the loyal Bennie, who was now a captain in the South African army fighting in North Africa. Later, Bennie was taken as PoW. Amazingly, they met in Egypt and married, returning to South Africa and enjoying nearly 50 years of married life together.

Judith Lütge Coullie

The narration is at times a tad overblown but this does not hamper an extraordinary story.

Caroline Hurry. *The Sunday Independent*. February 15 2004: 18.

## Journalists

*Something to Write Home About*. Claude Colart and Sahn Venter. Bellvue: Jacana, 2004. 279pp. R200.

This collection of pieces from a wide variety of journalists and correspondents focuses on telling the story of getting the story. It gives an alternative, often very personalised and sometimes indulgent view of conflict the world over. But it makes an interesting read, and you will certainly learn things that you didn't know before. The collection is something to dip into rather than to read in one go. The Foreword is by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. His describes the stories as "deeply moving" written by "wonderful, sensitive human beings".

Jennifer Crocker. *Cape Times*. June 8 2004:7.

Modern information technologies have given us almost boundless access to information, yet these same technologies mean that there is a danger of information overload; also, many can remain secure in their comfort zones and wish away the harsh realities on their screen with a mere flick of their remote control. Sometimes, images appear so unreal that the viewer feels as though this is a fiction. Then, too, the images repeat themselves day after day on different channels until the ways of the world seem both monotonous and also hopeless. Furthermore, the journalists at times seem so detached and anaesthetised to the reality around them, that one imagines them as civilised visitors to rather strange, unfamiliar, barbaric and exotic worlds. This increases the viewer's alienation from the vents taking place and often serves to reinforce a notion of the "backwardness" of people in the developing world.

Given all of this, *Something to Write Home About* is a breath of fresh air. The journalists in writing about their experiences in working in war zones or places very different from their own do try to empathise and can

bring out the very real humanity of the people they meet and work with. They make meaning out of seemingly absurd situations or articulate their inability to make meaning. They capture the banality of evil that is often left out of newscasts. The stories take us around the world. All the royalties from this book go to the special funds of two of the journalists who were killed.

Lisa Combrinck. *Sowetan*. June 25 2004: 13.

### **“Sher, Harry and Jack Rubin”**

*People who have Stolen From Me*. David Cohen. Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2004. 181pp. R150.

This story relies upon fiction for style, narrative tension and flow, but it deals with real events and real people, even if the names have been changed to protect the innocent—or even the guilty. *People who have Stolen From Me* is a funny, poignant tapestry which chronicles the lives and circumstances of a pair of retail furniture dealers in southern Johannesburg.

Cohen has spun a great, delicious tale, in which he examines the inventive criminals who prey on Rubin and Sher, searches for a psychological dimension for this crime, and then places the “blame” for this growing criminal activity on the collapse of the apartheid strictures that had held crime and its perpetrators in seeming check.

But this is a story with a hole in the centre. Sher and Rubin’s furniture empire relies for its profits on its offering of store credit to customers. By contrast to people who have the money or who can get a bank loan, store clients end up paying much higher rates. In effect, it can be argued, the real business of the Sher/Rubin empire isn’t furniture at all. It is non-bank credit. Cohen does not consider this aspect.

J. Brooks Spector. *The Sunday Independent*. May 30 2004: 18.

The author of this book, a South African living in London, examines his country’s crime wave through the story of Harry Sher and Jack Rubin, partners in a small chain of furniture stores in Johannesburg. They and their stores are subjected to every kind of acquisitive criminality, from fraud to

smash and grab and armed robbery. Despite this and their ages (77 and 68), the two partners have decided to soldier on. While it is alarming to read of such widespread criminality, it is correspondingly uplifting to read of people who refuse the blandishments of dishonesty.

The author lets all the characters, including the thieves, speak in their own voices and tell their own stories. David Cohen's prose is easy to read. The book could easily have been unremittingly gloomy, but it is an inspiring testimony to the human spirit.

Anthony Daniels. *The Herald*. March 24 2004: 8.

### **South African women: anti-apartheid activists**

*Strike a Woman Strike a Rock: Fighting for Freedom in South Africa*. Barbara Hutmacher Maclean. Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 2004. 339 pp. R220.

*Strike a Woman Strike a Rock* is a powerful collection of narratives: life stories, love stories and death stories, of the women of all race groups who, often behind the scenes, made a stand against the apartheid state. The American author takes the title from the slogan, Wathint' abafazi, wathint' imbokodo, adopted by the ANC's Women's League when they marched to the Union Buildings on 9 August 1956 in protest against the law which would force women to carry passes. If there is one criticism of this book it is in the detail - incorrect spelling of place names and misspelling of Afrikaans words—however, the content is gripping.

Lisa MacLeod. *African Review of Books*. (<http://www.africanreviewofbooks.com/Reviews/maclean0409.html>) September 17 2004: np.

### **South African Women: Careers**

*Inspirational Women at Work*. Lisel Erasmus-Kritzinger. Pretoria: Lapa, 2003. 490pp. R210.

This compilation of interviews is an empowering handbook, a groundbreaking guide to success. The author says that the women—all of whom are South Africans, representing a cross-section in terms of geography, age,

cultural background, business experience and lifestyle—have in common their tenacity, caring and optimism and all are achievers who are making a difference in the lives of other women and in South African as a whole. The responses of the women to the interview questions remain in their own words.

Easy to navigate, the book is divided into sections taking you through many spheres of business. Each chapter closes with a workbook section which you can use to take yourself forward. I found particularly helpful the sections “taking it a step further” where strategic skills are identified for achievement within the discipline discussed. In addition, a list of resource books gives you more options for improvement.

With a foreword by Graça Machel and special messages from Oprah Winfrey, Irene Charnley, Albertina Sisulu and Yvonne Johnston the author says that the world can learn a lot from the stories of these women.

Beryl Eichenberger. *Cape Times*. April 2 2004: 12.

### **Travel Writers, South Africa**

*The Wind Makes Dust: Four Centuries of Travel in South Africa*. Ben MacLennan. Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2003. 378 pp. R250.

MacLennan’s anthology includes attractive as well as disturbing extracts and anecdotes by travellers, explorers, convicts, entrepreneurs, people of title, naturalists, missionaries and native peoples. This is not a once-off read, but rather a book to dip into selectively. MacLennan helpfully gives introductions to each author and the context in which the extract was written.

M.B. (Full name not given.) *Quarterly Bulletin of the National Library of South Africa*, Vol. 56, No.1. January—March 2004: 39-40.

This collection of travel writings by writers who visited South Africa between 1497 and 1900 demonstrates just how insightful the accounts of ordinary travellers can appear to readers a hundred years or so later. This anthology is a valuable and readable asset for collectors of Africana, although the absence of an index is troubling.

\*Pieter Malan. *Rapport: Boeke*. March 14 2004: 17.

## **Twelve South African children**

*The Story of my Life: South Africa seen through the eyes of its children*. Han Lans. Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2002. 132pp. R175.

This is a most unusual and wonderful book. Twelve South African children, aged between ten and thirteen, tell their stories. They invite the reader into their homes and schools to see their daily lives. These children from all over South Africa, are from different cultural backgrounds, speak different languages and have different religious beliefs. They are the epitome of the rainbow nation.

The compiler, Han Lans, a professional photographer, in collaboration with Annari van der Merwe of Kwela Books compiled a list of children all chosen by someone in their communities. Lans provided each child with a camera and instructions on how to use it. They had to keep a diary and write down what they had photographed over three months. All the photographs are reproduced as they were taken by the children and the captions and short family histories were also written by them. Each section begins with a brief description of the region or town in which each child lives, written by Annari van der Merwe.

The book is beautifully produced. The charm of this book rests with the honesty and fresh vision of the children. It is highly recommended for public library collections, schools and as a model for other countries, regions and towns to emulate and think about.

Cécile Lomer. *African Book Publishing Record*, Vol. xxix, No. 2. 2003: 125.



## 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 stiffie in Word Perfect, or Word for Windows. 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.s.) = 'emphasis added'; (e.l.o.) = 'emphasis in original'; (i.s.) 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, Geina 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.