Introduction

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This issue of *Alter*nation consists mostly of articles presented as papers at a conference on Intercultural Communication held in June 2000 at the University of Zululand. The conference was wider-raging than this issue suggests, including workshops on multicultural teaching, on translation and interpreting and on the development of intercultural communication as an academic discipline. Nevertheless, the main themes of the conference are represented in this issue of *Alter*nation, as well as some related themes introduced in four additional articles.

    Annette Combrink's article, 'Mediating Intercultural Communication: The Cultural Filter and the Act of Translation/Interpreting', is placed first because it introduces the concept of cultural mediation, the facilitating of communication between individuals and groups that identify with different cultures. The article develops this concept in relation to translators and interpreters, whose task, it claims, ought to be seen not as simply linguistic—exchanging words of one language for those of another, substituting formal structures for equivalent structures in the other language. Rather, the translator/interpreter should be visualised as a cultural mediator, creatively modulating a broad range of cultural expectations in each act of translation. The task of translator/interpreter carries a great responsibility, for it involves an understanding of, and ability to express without prejudice, a broad number of sociocultural factors in every act of translation/interpreting. Leading off from these considerations, the article goes on to deal with the issue of language rights, which include the right to adequate translation/interpreting. This right is particularly relevant to participation in the legal system, in which speakers of non-dominant languages have been and often still are at a disadvantage. The importance of having a voice in order to get a fair chance in court leads Combrink to the consideration of the training, accreditation and status of court translators/interpreters.

    This article is followed by Bobby Loubser's 'Many Shades of Orality and Literacy: Media Theory and Cultural Difference', a wide-raging article whose examples are drawn with equal ease from the ancient world and from modern cyber-culture. Loubser applies a broad definition of 'media studies', based on Roman

Jakobson's use of the term 'medium' in his model of communication, in which a 'message' passes from a 'sender' to a 'receiver' in a 'code' via a 'medium'. Taking his cue from Marshall McLuhan, Loubser urges that attention be paid to the medium (orality, writing, print, etc.) of messages during the process of decoding or interpretation. His article relates habitual usages of particular media to specific cultures and foresees fertile sources of cultural misunderstanding caused by different medium-based expectations.

The next article focuses on orality, which it sees as the appropriate medium for communicating and implementing development in specific cultural contexts. Written by Kennedy Chinowa and entitled 'The Liminal Function of Orality in Development Communication: A Zimbabwean Perspective', the article describes the use made of oral traditions in a performance-based project by the TfD (Theatre for Development) in rural Zimbabwe in 1983. What is recommended is not *inter*cultural so much as *intra*cultural communication, for communities are seen as possessing the knowledge and power to transform themselves, without overt intervention by external forces. This knowledge and power may be unleashed by the ludic, 'as if' scenarios played out in dramatic traditions already included in these communities' repertoires.

Taking an anthropological angle on intercultural contact, Gina Buijs' article, entitled 'Gender and Person in African Societies: The Role of Hermeneutics', focuses on a specific type of cultural misunderstanding. She reveals the ways in which the status of women in African societies has been diminished in the minds and writings of male colonialist anthropologists, who have brought their own gender stereotypes and expectations into the field of interpretation. The article is full of fascinating examples of powerful women in various African societies, especially the Venda. It includes some examination of the phenomenon of female husbands, women who, because of their wealth and status, obtain their own wives by paying bride-price for them.

The next four articles are all mainly literary in focus. Placed first because it is arguably the most general, my 'Island Encounters: Intercultural Communication in Western Literary Tradition' attempts to problematise the use of Caliban and Friday as archetypally colonised people by investigating the meaning of islands and island encounters throughout the literary canon. The article includes brief discussions of Homer's *Odyssey*, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Byron's *The Island*, Melville's *Typee* and Conrad's *An Outcast of the Islands* in addition to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. These texts all depict intercultural communication between a Western visitor and at least one indigenous Other in an island setting. Interestingly, the communication between these protagonists takes a large variety of different forms, none of them a stereotypical colonial encounter.

Harry Garuba's article, 'Mapping the Land/Body/Subject: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies in African Narrative', deals head-on with intercultural communication's dark side, the colonial project of subduing and exploiting cultural Others. The article emphasises the importance of maps in this colonial endeavour. Mapping is a process of naming, 'laying out' and in a sense appropriating land, people and space. Garuba's extremely erudite article proceeds by means of analysis of a number of prose narratives, including Achebe's *Arrow of God* and Farah's *Maps*. Clear demarcation of boundaries and of ownership, necessary to the making of colonists' maps, leads directly to the tragic *denouement* in *Arrow of God*. In *Maps*, the drive toward 'good' mapping and the classification of people according to geographical/ethnic origins is not conducted by colonists but by African nationalists, in this case a Somali liberation movement. And yet Somalis are traditionally nomadic people. Thus, this impulse, like other nationalist initiatives in Africa, has a paradoxically colonial origin, deriving from the colonists' concept of the national map. Developing Farah's ironic exposure of this nationalist project in the novel, Garuba speculates on the possibility of escaping the tyrannies of existent maps, with their built-in hegemonies and exclusions, by regarding mapmaking more creatively as 'wayfinding' and maps as provisional structures, forever open to reconstruction in the light of the intercultural drifting, mixing and reconfiguring that has always been the truth about Africa and its borders.

'Mistakes in the Contact Zone', by Gillian Gane, anatomizes the concept of the 'mistake' made by a non-native speaker of English and shows that such anomalies are often highly creative uses of language and as such enrich English rather than impoverish it. Gane proceeds by examining numerous works of literature in which non-standard speech is registered, as well as some instances of real-life speech. Her article gives many examples that astonish the reader with their aptness, humour and ingenuity. Her argument, that for native speakers to deride or suppress such uses of a language is to assert a linguistic hegemony whose time is long past and to debase one of the language's best productive resources, is abundantly demonstrated by her examples. True communication between members of different cultures, as with all communication, is dependent on the autonomy of both parties. This autonomy includes the right to appropriate the language of communication creatively.

Last of the literary articles, Andries Visagie's 'White Masculinity and the African Other: *Die werfbobbejaan* by Alexander Strachan' broadens the scope of intercultural communication to include the encounter between the Self and the gendered Other. His focus is Afrikaans literature and the ways in which the Afrikaans masculine self has reconfigured itself in relation to democratic rule (the Other) during the 1990s. The article is particularly concerned with Alexander

Strachan's (1994) novel, *Die werfbobbejaan*, in which a mysterious male figure, known only as 'the game catcher', is symbolically associated with a tame baboon, a newly circumcised African youth and a witch's familiar. Visagie sees these symbolic doublings as proof of a breakdown in the distinction between the Afrikaner masculine Self and the African Other on which the Afrikaner male used to depend for identity. The novel ends in death and disintegration, but the ironization of masculinity by Strachan—and its further dissection by Visagie—perhaps signal a reconfiguration of cultural and gender identities in the future.

The next four articles centre on issues of crucial interest to South African academics, both as teachers and as researchers. These articles are not as directly concerned with the theme of intercultural communication as the earlier ones, with the exception of Anand Singh's 'The Politics of Belonging: Socialisation and Identity among Children of Indian Origin in Secondary Schools in Durban'. This article, placed first in the section, examines intercultural communication among schoolchildren in post-apartheid South Africa. Focusing on children of Indian origin in both Indian-majority and White-majority schools in the Durban area, it analyses these children's attitudes towards peers and teachers as well as comparing their parents' expectations of the two types of school. Although no examples of overt racial conflict were encountered during the research described, the children and especially their parents were seen to establish firm boundaries between themselves and members of other race groups, as well as boundaries between themselves and followers of different religions. Since the demise of apartheid we might expect young people to begin socialising more freely together and breaking down the barriers between their communities, but Singh, observing that this is not the case with one group, speculates that it is not the case with other groups either. People of common origin have a sense of belonging together, according to Singh, which cannot easily be disrupted.

Robert Balfour's article, 'Critical Reflections on Language Curriculum Design in South Africa', shifts focus from the sociological aspects of education to the details of the academic curriculum. His article describes the design of a language course for entry-level university students whose mothertongue is not English. The article examines research on second-language learning both in South Africa and in other contexts and it regards curriculum design as an ongoing process. English is a global language whose benefit for millions of people world-wide is communication with other cultures. The main aim of Balfour's course, in use at present at the University of Natal, Durban, is to 'render English a more accessible and useful tool for intercultural communication'.

Two highly placed educationalists are the authors of the next article. Thandwa Mthembu is deputy vice-chancellor of the University of the Witwatersrand

and Prem Naidoo is a director of the Council for Higher Education's (CHE's) Higher Education Quality Committee. Their article, 'National Education's Research Benchmarks: Realistic Targets or Pie in the Sky?', is concerned with research performance at higher education institutions in South Africa. Offering some illuminating statistics, it scrutinises the current criteria for assessing academics' research performance, and finds them wanting. The present measurement of research performance is based almost entirely on the number of SAPSE-accredited publications produced per year. Although a great many other types of research-based activities take place at all institutions, these are not counted. The fact that Historically Black Institutions are under-resourced for research in comparison with Historically White Institutions has not affected the setting of benchmarks for tertiary education: according to the Department of Education, all universities should produce an average of one SAPSE article per academic per year, and all technikons should aim for an average of 0.5 of a SAPSE article per academic per year. No consideration is taken of differences in resourcing. The benchmarks, the authors assert, are in any case totally unrealistic, since not even the most productive institutions are at present achieving anything close to these goals. Moreover, the universities' overall research output has generally been declining, not rising, in the past few years—at least, in terms of the present assessment criteria. Mthembu and Naidoo advocate a major transformation in research evaluation in South African tertiary institutions. They argue for the scrapping of the SAPSE system and the substitution of a much more holistic approach which rewards research capacity building, gives credit for publications more comprehensively and flexibly, and takes cognisance of many research activities not now accredited at all. They also espouse an equalisation of funding and other resources and suggest various measures to develop incentives in underproductive institutions.

The last of these articles is Francis Galloway's 'Statistical Trends in South African Book Publishing During the 1990s', which accounts illuminatingly for the rise and fall of book publishing in the period of South Africa's political transformation. Galloway supplies a brief history of the book industry in South Africa and an account of the relationship between politics and book publishing up to the present. She goes on to give statistical breakdowns of book production according to year, language and genre, and an exploration of the effect of the new school curriculum on the output of textbooks. The present decline in reading and book-buying in the country is viewed with concern, as it is a sign that the government's efforts to create a better-educated and more informed society are not proving successful. Although she does not recommend too much political interference in the industry, Galloway believes that 'A democratic government should provide a suitable environment for the growth of the book sector'.

The final section of the issue, edited by Judith Coullie, is devoted to book reviews. The texts discussed are all examples of African life writing, being either biographies or autobiographies of visitors to or inhabitants of Africa. Nearly fifty brief reviews of recently published books are supplied at the end of the journal. Although not all of these books were produced in South Africa, those that were must represent a significant proportion of recent local output, judging by Galloway's comments in the previous article.

In her review article 'The Incredible Whiteness of Being', that prefaces the section, Coullie speculates about the relationship between individualism and autobiography. Though texts representing the lives of groups do exist, they are not usually as interesting to readers as narratives that set forth the viewpoints of specific individuals—especially unusual personalities with vivid, singular ways of seeing. In the process of discussing a number of recent autobiographies, Coullie suggests that the most memorable autobiographical writing combines a personal and idiosyncratic viewpoint with a sense of being representative, 'having significance *beyond* the singular and distinctive experiences of the narrating subject'. This combination, according to Coullie, is present in several of the books that she discusses, especially Alexandra Fuller's *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight*, published this year.