

# **Biblical Mythologies: Apartheid and Anti-Apartheid Readings**

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Abdul R. JanMohamed has argued that the transformation of racial difference into moral and even metaphysical difference is at the heart of the economy of the central trope of imperialist practice, the manichean allegory. He traces the phenomenological origins of this metonymic transformation ultimately to the 'neutral' perception of physical difference and amply demonstrates the insidious domination of every facet of imperialist mentality of the allegorical extensions of this transformation (JanMohamed 1985:61). With reference to South Africa, Gallagher (1991) has methodically indicated how the writing of Ralph Standish (1612) which represents the Black as a subhuman and mythical Other, is representative of a long tradition of colonial writing spanning the work of John Jordain (1608), Hondious (1652), Kolb (1719), Mentzel (1785), Barrow (1801) and Philip (1828), all aimed at the justification of European colonisation.

In a recent enquiry into the White perceptual system focused mainly on the White's reflexive perception of the black migrant worker, Michael Wade (1993:21) reveals its culmination in a 'distressing arrest in the development of White perception' and explains this as the result of the impossibility of the White South African to see the Black as an autonomous Other. Wade's historical provenance is mainly the years spanning the industrialisation of South Africa, after the discovery of diamonds in the north-western Cape in 1860. But his findings are typical: the roots of the Whites' self-perception of the Black are fully in economics. In the documents of the white imagination, the novel, poetry, drama, the newspaper, and other forms in which Whites engage themselves effectively in a dialogue (speaking only less effectively to Others),

the giant image of the migrant worker looms inscrutable, impenetrable; shafts of perception, energised by the urgency of the Whites' deepest insecurities and fears, bounce off the matt black of his skin. Little can be learned about the migrant worker himself from these accounts; but much may be garnered towards an understanding of the group that has dominated

the private sector of the South African economy since the discovery of diamonds more than a century and a quarter ago (Wade 1993:1).

This essay proposes to consider André Brink's frequent depiction of characteristic Afrikaner reduction of the Bible to a white mythology that complements the materiality of apartheid. Read in the self-regarding gaze of Afrikaner consciousness severely hampered and narrowed by its morbid obsession with its tribulations and even threats of extinction in a heathen land, the Bible is distorted to a justification of a racist ideology. Like historiography and cartography, theology too becomes a specie of myth-making, annexed into the formidable machinery specifically created to empower the Afrikaner Establishment by the presentation of an authorised version of reality.

Brink (1983:18f) has noted that in its anxiety and desperation to create for itself a self-validating image, apartheid had to annex realms of human value other than the overtly political:

For apartheid to be sanctioned as the definitive characteristic of the Afrikaner Establishment, it had to reach far beyond the domain of politics: It was not simply a political policy 'adopted' as a response to the racial situation in the country but had to be accepted as an extension of an entire value system, embracing all the territories of social experience, economics, philosophy, morality and above all religion. The Church itself had to provide the ultimate justification for the ideology (Brink 1983:18f).

If the 'Christianisation' of apartheid and the appropriation of religion was to the Afrikaner Establishment the ultimate temptation, the reason is quite obvious: the projection of Afrikaner imperialism onto the revealed Word of God as divine ordinance, in Afrikaner consciousness, gave apartheid the final legitimacy.

In *Looking on Darkness* Brink's Coloured actor protagonist, Joseph Malan, recalls Hermian, the White master's young daughter, reading

with great conviction, the story of Noah and his son 'and cursed be Canaan a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren'. Then she shut the Bible .... She said: 'You see, that's where it comes from. We Whites are the children of Shem and Japheth and you are the children of Ham and his son Canaan. That's why it is like that' (Brink 1984c:77).

In the White girl's oracular citation of the Bible to account for a social fact are concealed the facts of the possibilities of interpretation and their political motivations; the privileging as canonical the version of reality authorised by the

dominant group; and even the invocation of signs as revealed wonders. Brink's insight in fact is the hardening of colonial myths into metaphysical facts and the imperceptible obliteration of the origins of colonial myths even in the coloniser's consciousness. If imperialism is usually associated with inhuman violence and appropriation, a basic reason is that the coloniser soon forgets that myths of the Other's sub-humanity are his own creations taken as truths.

In *Rumours of Rain*, Aunt Lenrie's statement, 'God brought us to a hard land where we must labour in the sweat of our brow. And then he gave us kaffirs to help us with our work' (Brink 1984d:89) draws, of course, on the same 'Biblical myth' of apartheid. It is however, in *A Chain of Voices* that Brink explores fully the coloniser's horrified response at the prospect of the revelation of the falsity of this myth. The novel dwells on the inevitable impoverishment and erosion of the humanity of both master and slave, making the master inhuman in turning his full gaze to the ultimate temptation of power: the lure of the grandeur of the godhead, and dehumanising the slave to the level of a beast and wretched suppliant. Piet's Kurtz-like contemplation of all the earth as his possession is both symptomatic and illustrative of the former process: 'In those days whatever, I saw was mine. Farm, grazing lands, mountain, hunting fields. We were masters here, my sons and I' (Brink 1984a:33). The news of slave revolts in Koeberg and Swartland strikes him as the violation of a fundamental divine injunction 'for it was an awful thing that had happened, a blasphemy against God himself who had decreed that the sons of Canaan should forever be the servants of Shem and Japheth' (Brink 1984a:34). His response to his own slaves is predictably terror. In the recollection of torture and in the weals and scars of the master's sjambok, Piet seeks the bars that will hold his slaves forever in the prison of servitude.

It is in the character of Barend, Piet's elder son, however, that Brink gathers up his insight that the firm belief in the divine sanction of apartheid or slavery and of the inequality of men imperceptibly merges with the dream of God. His will to power expressed in his unrestrained aspiration to 'Baaship' is analogous to the will to God. Although Barend survives the Slave rebellion, he is defeated in his deepest aspiration. That slaves dared attempt a rebellion at all is a metamorphosis that completely transforms the earth and fundamentally alters human consciousness, and his metaphors for comprehending the experience therefore appropriately evoke cataclysms. He feels the ruins of an entire life crumbling around him and likens the experience to madness and death:

[I]t was indeed a form of madness; and a form of death. The death of everything I'd always taken for granted; everything that had made me what I was; everything that had kept me alive and secure (Brink 1984a:462).

Woven into the fabric of the white man's myth is the eternity of the black man's servitude, since it is of God. The Black's allegedly divinely ordained sub-humanity and the White's divine majesty are a fate which condemns the former's anger to more passivity, thus excluding even the possibility of rebellion. In the white man's myth, slavery is an unalterable destiny. Brink's anti-apartheid myth of a common humanity, however, finds validity and anchorage in his systematic refutation of the basic claims of apartheid. In reality, slavery, like apartheid, is a mutable evil human institution. But when we forget the origins of our myths, and forget even that they are our own creations, they harden into prison walls and take us in. The traumatic rebirth of consciousness that follows the revelation of the falsity of such a myth understandably evokes apocalyptic transformations:

... the fact of their shooting: a slave firing at his master. That frontier crossed, there was no end to what might yet lie ahead.

This was what I'd feared. Not just that they might kill me or massacre my family: but that a single shot would shatter an entire way of life, a whole world. God's own established order, God Himself, was now threatened. Everything was at stake; everything could be destroyed: nothing was inviolate to their flames. And it was in the nature of fire not only to burn but to change utterly in the process: wood into ashes (Brink 1984a:462).

Writing on the Afrikaners' appropriation of Biblical myths to create a doctrinal nationalistic mythology of Afrikanerdom as the second Israel, Gallagher (1991:30) has noted:

Taking the traditional Christian idea of history as a progression of events controlled and directed by God to establish his eternal kingdom, Afrikaners, in a distorted development of the calvinistic notion of election, have come to believe that they are a chosen people, specially selected by God to establish his kingdom in the modern world.

For the Afrikaner then, South Africa was a savage Canaan in the Dark continent given to him by God's ordinance to domesticate and possess; and its indigenous peoples were of course the new hostile and heathen tribes of Canaan, and their resistances the Devil's doomed efforts to frustrate the divine purpose. His tribulations further exacerbated by the humiliations and persecutions experienced at the hands of imperial Britain, the Afrikaner gazed ever inward in the laager in expectation of the messiah. The triumph of Afrikaner nationalism in 1948 in Dr. D.F. Malan's National Party's election victory was certainly perceived as God's compassion on his beleaguered people. Apartheid, aimed at the distillation of racial exclusiveness, self-

preservation, racial egocentrism, was presumably the dream Christian ideology to preserve the divine boon.

For Brink, however, the Afrikaner legend of a messiah did not come to a triumphant fulfilment in either Malan's election victory and his advocacy of exclusive legitimacy for Afrikaners, or in Dr Verwoerd's Transkei Constitution Act aimed at the perfection of apartheid's basic idea of the complete separation of the races by the creation of 'independent' 'black areas', 'white areas', 'coloured areas' etc. In the institutionalisation of apartheid, in fact, the Afrikaner's self-absorption and self-pity in the contemplation of his tribulations and his morbid dread of the Other seem to have set him almost irrevocably on the path to self-extinction. Aimed at the flagrant disregard for the liberties of the Other and his dehumanisation, apartheid, like Nazism, could only lead to a holocaust. Brink interprets the 1976 Soweto riots as a mere foreshadowing of this, and in *Rumours of Rain* and *A Dry White Season* both of which have the riots as the backdrop, he weaves an alternative legend. of the Afrikaner messiah, in which the saviour far from being an ideologue or agent of apartheid is instead an adversary of that ideology.

Brink's interest in the redemptive vocation was manifest as early as 1974 in *Looking on Darkness*. His conception of the persecutions of Joseph's family over two centuries reverberates with constant allusions to the fate of Christian martyrs. Prompted by an awareness of these correspondences, Joseph talks of:

my own gradual reconstruction of our story, so that, by now, every episode in it seems to have become a station on an endless *via dolorosa*—as if it had been destined that in each new generation all the sin and suffering of an entire society should find its sacrificial victim in our tribe. It is certainly no reason for pride! In fact, it is in the very ordinariness and unexceptionalness of our chronicle that I find the agony which propagates itself from century to century, assuming new avatars according to the demands of each new age (Brink 1984c:355).

Joseph's own persecution and eventual execution are imagined as a pattern in the fulfilment of that destiny, and the entire novel indicates Brink's sustained attempt at the appropriation of the virtues of the ascetic tradition to the political theme. Where St. John of the Cross is often cited to illuminate Joseph's experience, both he and St. Simon Stylites are often summoned as models in Joseph Malan's experience of self-mortification as a gesture towards the attainment of God. Christ himself is in fact often the model in terms of which Brink imagines Joseph's experiences. The stages of Joseph's tribulations are likened to the stations of the Cross; his ordeal is a cup that must be drunk to the last drop; at Joseph's trial, the white audience repeatedly screams: 'Hang him'; and Joseph thinks of the hostile crowd, 'take me, tear me to

pieces, eat my body, drink my blood' (Brink 1984c:14). He moreover says nothing in self-defence at his trial. When scourged by the Security Police, Joseph thinks of his plight: 'I hang crucified in their arms' (Brink 1984c:270).

In steadfastly imagining and, presenting in terms of Christian ideals of martyrdom Joseph who is detained, tried and condemned on a murder charge, Brink interrogates both Afrikaner moral values and system of justice. But Brink too had been exploring the applicability of asceticism to his political theme. The purification of the soul through privation and suffering is not a likely slogan for an activist fighting against apartheid. He therefore first awakens Joseph from self indulgence, inaction and withdrawal, leads him to cultural activism, and attempts fully only in detention to work out salvation in Christian ascetic terms for his atheist protagonist. Yet, in transforming torturers into purgatorial fire, Brink dehistoricises and desocialises the experience, projecting it instead on a metaphysical level. The irony is that his appeal against the banning of *Kennis van die Aand* (later translated as *Looking on Darkness*) would suggest that the specific South African situation determined essentially his mode of the exploration of the experiences of his protagonist. Brink draws attention to the indeterminacy that characterises the episode that apparently depicts the South African police as torturers:

The entire chapter is narrated as a sort of lyrical present, not as a chronicle of what happened, with a narration of atrocities in a manner which is linked to the mystical writings of St. John and others: was he (Joseph) tortured, or is he busy, as usual in his life, 'playacting', 'creating theatre' for himself like Richard II in his cell? The ambiguity of the narration, the fact that no one—particularly Joseph—can say 'for sure' whether he is telling the truth or lying constitutes the essence of this chapter (Brink 1985:94).

Brink's attempt at the deception of the censor apart, his consolation of the tortured by the evocation of a beatific vision which one attains through mortification can be of any relevance to the freedom fighter only when appreciated as an allegory.

The 1976 Soweto riots led Brink to a clearer discovery of his mission as an artist—a preoccupation with the possibility of the Afrikaner's redemption. With this too, he found clearer applicability of the virtues of asceticism in the realm of politics. Brink's more mature view of apartheid is that the oppressor not the oppressed was in greater need of spiritual purgation, of the cleansing of guilt consciousness, and of even liberation and redemption. Aware that the greater sacrifices demanded of Blacks and Coloureds enriched their humanity, Brink condemned apartheid basically because he was convinced that it impoverished the humanity of the Afrikaner and moreover was an illogical culmination of centuries of Afrikaner history, characterised by rebellion against tyranny, and affirmation of human dignity and freedom.

In *Mapmakers* Brink (1983:19) considers apartheid a denial of what is best in the Afrikaner himself and a revelation only of

that side of him which is characterised by fear, by suspicion, by uncertainty, hence by arrogance, meanness, narrow-mindedness, pigheadedness. What it denies is the Afrikaner's reverence for life, his romanticism, his sense of the mystical, his deep attachment to the earth, his generosity, his compassion.

The redemption of the Afrikaner is for Brink (1983:20) therefore an integral aspect of the dissident writer's mission:

his struggle is not just against what is evil in the Afrikaner, but for what he perceives to be his potential for good. In other words, it is not just a struggle for the liberation of the Afrikaner from the ideology in which he has come to negate his better self. The dissident struggles in the name of what the Afrikaner could and should have become in the light of his own history, had he not allowed adversity (both real and imaginary) to narrow down his horizon to the small hard facts of mere physical survival.

Brink's new insight was that Afrikaners had to abandon the Old Testament idea of themselves as God's chosen people and embrace the New Testament ideal of a suffering Christ, renouncing and emptying his God-head, choosing mortality and modesty, and electing in absolute freedom and love for crucifixion to offer mankind salvation. His messianic legend henceforth will tell stories of Afrikaner martyrs and paschal lambs: Bernard Franken (*Rumours of Rain*), Ben du Toit (*A Dry White Season*), Thomas Landman and Nina Jordeags (*An Act of Terror*). Renouncing kindred, political rights, and taking upon themselves the grim burden of testifying to Afrikaner high-mindedness and nobility in defiance of persecution and even death, they re-enact in Brink's fiction the role played in the struggle of South African liberation by prominent Afrikaners like Jan Hendrick Hofmeyr, Beyers Naude, Bram Fischer, and Others.

Brian Macaskill (1990:175) has drawn attention to the potential of textual interruption as an opposition to dominant oppressive hegemony, accounting for its internal operation in terms of its insertion of an oppositional wedge into the dominant discourse of the text, and its external operation by its intervention against the political hegemony with which the text engages. In *Rumours of Rain*, as Macaskill (1990:171) argues, the interruptive figures of Bernard Franken and Louis function structurally to intervene against Mynhardt, the odious exemplar of the hegemonic:

Franken's testimony from the dock and Louis's ideological rites of passage,

italicised in crucial positions throughout the text, provide an alternative to Mynhardt's conservative rationalisations.

And to give his interruptive 'true' vision of Afrikanerdom validity, Brink appeals to the authority of history: an almost journalistic account of the Angolan encounter, and especially the modelling of Bernard Franken on the historical Abram Fischer, an Afrikaner advocate and central figure in the South African Communist Party, twice serving as defence counsel for Nelson Mandela, and himself sentenced to life imprisonment in 1966 under the Suppression of Communism Act (Macaskill 1990:171f).

Macaskill, however, discerns serious ideological implications in Brink's mode of the transformation of Fischer into a mythic figure. Brink, he argues, codifies Bram Fischer as a Christ figure, locates him within an 'essentially human, metaphysical revolt', and aligns this Afrikaans dissident with the 'rebellious' company of Buddha, Christ, Mohammed and Paul Kruger (Macaskill 1990:172). In *Rumours*, Brink mythologises Fischer as Bernard Franken and draws from his trial statement to evoke a specific mythos of Afrikanerdom's positive aspects. This elaborate myth generated around the romantic vision of the 'true' Afrikaner as a dissident in the face of power and oppression is further reinforced by Louis, the other vehicle of interruption in the novel (Macaskill 1990:173). Macaskill contends that the interruptive function of Bernard's and Louis's testimony is twofold: to highlight Martin's treachery to family and friends, and equally his betrayal of the 'true' spirit of Afrikanerdom by not opposing the oppressive hegemony. *Rumours*, in propagating interruption as a vision of 'true' Afrikanerdom attacking the 'false' hegemony, offers only a re-definition rather than a refusal of the 'false' hegemonic terms: it can therefore offer only an alternate version devoid of an authentic counter hegemonic valence. Macaskill in fact concludes that:

*Rumours* provides ample testimony of ideological complicity between interruptive opposition and the hegemony it opposes ... interruptions ... remythologise an alarmingly romantic vision of the 'true' Afrikaner as fundamentally a dissident against the forces of external, and, gradually since 1948, internal oppression. That is to say, the relationship between principal and interruptive texts in this novel finally replaces what it sought to demythologise—the myth of innate supremacy—with another, equally suspect version of that same myth: the projection of a fundamental and 'true' sense of Afrikaner dissent ... intertextual framework serves to reduce historical complexity to an ideologically flattering myth, an eminently consumable story (Macaskill 1990:176).



Citing Raynond Williams, Michael Wade, Stephen Clingman and Gordimer, Macaskill acknowledges the abiding dangers of the implication of counter-hegemonic writing in the discursive structure it opposes, given its inhibition by hegemonic pressures and limits. He does not however identify this as Brink's dilemma. Macaskill reads *Rumours of Rain* as Brink's translation of Gordimer's *The Conversationist* in which, however, Brink's imitation of the interruptive technique employed in Gordimer's anterior text rather than being innocent is done along polemical and dangerously revisionist lines. *Rumours* deliberately participates in Afrikaner racism.

Revealing as Macaskill's argument definitely is, ... its basic limitation is its privileging of textual interruption as the monolithic technique par excellence of rupturing and dismantling the hegemonic. Macaskill therefore cannot take into cognisance the fact that even in *Rumours*, Brink does not appropriate dissidence as a distinctive virtue of Afrikanerdom. Brink's interest in rebellion is as a transcultural incessant positive human response to tyranny. In Brink, all nationalities affirm their humanity by a participation in this ideal: Bernard is in fact drawn to rebellion partly by his realisation at the 'Conspiracy Trial' where he acts as counsel to the accused, that the Afrikaner's exclusion of himself from the league of dissidents is in reality his self-exclusion from the humanfold. However, the ideals and experiences of the black Charlie Mofokeng, Beatrice Fiorini with her multi-ethnic background and the many other Blacks with whom Bernard Franken works, and who constitute one 'rebellious' fraternity fall beyond the scope of Macaskill's technique.

In Brink's stylistically pre-modernist realistic novel, the interruption of the dominant hegemony just as the corresponding legend of Afrikaner redemption, is negotiated mainly through the traditional embodiment of the positive ideals of the novel in the hero, Bernard Franken. Citing Gordimer, Macaskill notes the codification of Fischer as an Anti-Christ by the propagandists of Afrikaner nationalism. Brink reverses the logic fully: mythologises Fischer in Bernard as a Christ-figure, and codifies the apartheid superman, Mynhardt as the veritable Anti-Christ, and the foil against which Bernard's distinction is measured,

Martin's recollection of Dr. Malan's brief stopover at Kimberley on his triumphal journey to Pretoria indicates his knowledge of the Afrikaner legend of the messiah. At the arrival of Malan, the Afrikaner crowd, jubilant and ecstatic in spite of the long journey to Kimberley and the long wait, and in spite of the fact that Malan is hardly audible when he speaks, contemplates him in the image of Christ:

All the men had taken off their hats, pressing them against their chests, and the women stood up from the food-baskets on which they'd been sitting. In my young mind there was only one comparable image: the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. And looking at some of those old patriarchs with their great

beards and faces stained with tears and tobacco juice, one could well imagine them saying: Lord, now lettest thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation (Brink 1984d:53f).

Martin's father confidently foretells to his children on their way home the dawn of Afrikaner hegemony.

Martin is conceived as a contemporary Malan. His hypersensitive awareness of rivalry leads him not only to the adoption of ruthless survival strategies but also to the exaltation of the laager mentality. He asks his son, Louis:

How long do you think it took our people to find their feet in the cities? It's a full-time job to maintain our position. All around us are English and Jews just waiting to push us aside again. They've never forgiven us yet for beating them at their own game (Brink 1984d: 308).

The substance of Brink's meditation on the Soweto massacre, however, is that the morbid self-adulation often presented as the instinct of self-preservation is at bottom the root of genocides. Martin's interpretation of his life-mission as the preservation of Afrikaner hegemony therefore has as its ironic obverse the real possibility of the extinction of Afrikanerdom.

The jungle and hunting provide Martin with revealing metaphors in his conception of his vocation. But Martin is not only morally mired in a state of nature where only the fittest survive. In the context of *Rumours of Rain* where the presiding interpretative scheme of human experiences is religious and the central legend alluded to that of the messiah, the significance of Martin's beastliness can be grasped fully only in its apocalyptic dimension. The allusion is precise when Martin, after betraying Bernard Pilate-like, washes his hand. He is in reality the antagonist to Afrikaner redemption, the Anti-Christ. Brink traces the Soweto massacre to its ultimate source in Martin's symptomatic egoism which is the root of Afrikaner tribalism. But Martin also betrays and blights his own family kindred. At the end of the novel, when the symbolic apocalyptic downpour begins, Martin's response, predictably, is to ask for more:

Ceaselessly, irresistibly it came down from the dark skies. In a blunted stupor I resigned myself to the thought that it would never stop again. I didn't care anymore. Let it increase and grow worse and worse, a flood to soak the earth and uproot trees and split roots; causing the red earth to run down the hills, streaming, streaming endlessly, red water as if the earth itself was crying, as if the earth was crying blood (Brink 1984d:446).

Martin's deepest longing, however, is to survive the impending holocaust which he is the main agent of: 'But self-destruction is foreign to my nature, What matters is to survive, survive. To survive even the apocalypse' (Brink 1984d:374). But he suffers from a heart disease. Martin is mortally ill.

Brink's sketch of the life and career of Bram Fischer in his essay, 'Mahatma Ghandi Today', makes it obvious what he finds particularly striking and admirable about Fischer: his deep passion to salvage the Afrikaner from the holocaust he seemed poised to bring upon himself and to testify to the Afrikaner's humanity. This is prime in his evaluation of Fischer's significance in Afrikaner history:

His free life was devoted to a broadening of the image of the Afrikaner; and if Afrikaans is eventually to survive as a language, much of it will be due to the fact that men like Bram Fischer have been prepared to prove risking their all for it, that it is more than the language of one oppressive minority and of one frightening ideology—that it is indeed what many exiles call it today: *Menstaal*, 'the language of human beings' (Brink 1983:60).

Bernard's reminiscence at his trial of his experience of helping to transport people boycotting the bus services after an unreasonable hike in the fares identifies the demonstration of the Afrikaner's humanity also as the burning passion of his life:

my most important recollection of that experience is that of all the people I picked up, people who'd set out to walk ten or fifteen miles to work, starting at four or five o'clock in the morning—not one would believe me when I told them I was an Afrikaner. In their minds 'Afrikaner' and 'apartheid' had become synonymous. It made me realise, more than ever before, the obligation placed upon me by being an Afrikaner myself: an obligation towards all those suffering as a result of laws made by my fellow Afrikaners (Brink 1984d:138f).

Brink's interpretation of Fischer's and Bernard's presiding strategy of Afrikaner redemption illustrates the quality of Christian self-sacrifice even in its culmination as martyrdom.

Fischer renounces his prospects and privileges as the son of a prime minister of the Orange Free State and mediator between the Transvaal and Britain before the Anglo-Boer War (and as a particularly brilliant lawyer himself) to defend political activists. Bernard, likewise, resigns his sheltered job as a university lecturer in order to work as an advocate devoted essentially to the accused in political cases 'for the most trifling of fee' (Brink 1984d:113). Both, when all legitimate avenues for protest are criminalised, and given the state's increasing recourse to violence, are compelled

finally to pick up arms. Both too get the opportunity to escape to England but renounce exile, returning to certain imprisonment or death. Where Fischer jumped bail, Bernard escapes from prison to consolidate the armed struggle.

André Brink in fact interprets Bernard's distinctive selflessness as an aspect of his nature: 'It was much a peculiarity of Bernard's to get involved with others as someone else might have big ears or bandy legs or moles' (Brink 1984d:95). Where Martin interprets Afrikaner history to justify apartheid as Afrikaner salvation, Bernard condemns it as a negation of the Afrikaner's leading role in the struggle for human freedom in South Africa. Where Martin celebrates the prerogatives of the Afrikaner in the apartheid dispensation as a divine boon, Bernard renounces them as tainting and as a curse:

As a White, as an Afrikaner linked through the colour of my skin and through my language, to that group which is in Power in this country, my choice is different. I am free to reap the fruit of my White superiority while it lasts. Or I may choose to do nothing at all. But a third course is open to me. And as a thinking and feeling man my only freedom today lies in renouncing, for the freedom of others, everything I might otherwise lay claims to, not through any merit on my part, but through the condition of my birth—which is the epitome of bondage. No man is so completely oppressed by the oppressor as himself (Brink 1984d:134).

In comparing Bernard's spontaneous and unself-conscious creativity and generosity to the elements, Brink links it with the creativity of nature itself:

in spite of his incisive intellect and all his sophistication, Bernard primarily struck one like, well, a sort of elemental force, something as natural and basic as wind or water (35).

Brink points to the energy that remakes society as one that is self-forgetful, self-sacrificing, ever-flowing, like nature's fullness.

JanMohamed has implied that the white writer's transcendence of the barriers of fetishised racial difference is extremely difficult since the interrogation of one's own cultural values invariably entails the examination and decentering of the self constituted by those values in the presence of the Other. He discerns, however, in the White writer's creative exploration of the oral/ mythic culture of the African which is decidedly different from his own chirographic culture the willingness to be influenced by the dominated Other and therefore a step beyond the racial barrier (JanMohamed 1985:83). André Brink excludes a presumptuous appropriation of the Black voice: 'I'd never be so presumptuous as to say that I know what it's like to be

black in South Africa' (Brink 1993:7). But he self-consciously narrows the frontiers that separate the Black Other by increasing shared experiences. He speaks of the many black people that came to him for help on

hearing of the banning of *Looking on Darkness*: So I became increasingly involved in their everyday lives. In human terms it was a unique experience, and it opened up a new world for me. Some of the people who came to see me became very close friends. Through them I began to get a clearer idea of the black experience (Brink 1993:7);

and of his contact in the 1970s with the ANC:

I've spent all my life crossing frontiers, and this was a very difficult one to cross. Yet when I did cross it, I met remarkable people, warm and rich in experience, people who have taught me most of the things I know (Brink 1993:7).

His identification with a black slave in *A Chain of Voices*, Brink explains, was prompted by the so many close and violent, experiences that he had shared with Black people, and his acceptance as a writer of the challenge to imagine what it felt like to be in the place of Blacks in South Africa.

Brink's great theme is the Afrikaner's impoverishment of his humanity by his implementation of the ideology of apartheid, and the possibility of his redemption. He contends that the Afrikaner stands to gain more in mutual recognition between the races in South Africa. For, in the Afrikaner's recognition of the full humanity of his Black neighbour and in his creative response to Black ways and traditions, Brink discerns a path to the restoration of humanity to the Afrikaner himself. For Brink's Afrikaner protagonist in *A Dry White Season*, Ben du Toit, the moment of consciousness is the moment of the recognition of Afrikaner 'human' values, in his ignorance exalted as the virtues divine, as clearly anti-human and moreover a justification of evil:

Everything one used to take for granted, with so much certainty that one never even bothered to enquire about it, now turns out to be illusion. Your certainties are proven lies ....

'Humanity'. Normally one uses it as a synonym for compassion; charity; decency; integrity. 'He is such a human person'. Must one now go in search of an entirely different set of synonyms: cruelty; exploitation; unscrupulousness; or whatever? (Brink 1984b:161).

This questioning of tribal discourse and allegiance followed to its end culminates in the dilation of consciousness and the compassionate recognition of the humanity of all people. The narrow, arbitrary self-perpetuating myth of tribe rooted in self-interest and characterised by self-absorption gives way to the exhilarating reality of the humanity of all human beings anchored in fellow-feeling and love.

The point is that in Brink's fiction, Black culture is depicted as the embodiment of humane virtues. Maligned, humiliated, famished, scourged and shackled, the Black carries yet, like an undying flame, the vital spark of humanity. This virtue embodied by Brink's positive characters, he calls by its Xhosa name of *Ubuntu* in *An Act of Terror*. The novelist is at a loss whether to lament its non-existence or its loss in Afrikaans and English vocabularies: 'Ubuntu: sharing, generosity, hospitality, humanity. All of that, and more. Oh much more' (Brink 1991:179).

Writing on *Rumours of Rain*, Ben Obumselu has drawn attention to the correspondence between the messianic legend in the novel and in Andre Schatz-Bart's 1959 novel, *Le Dernier des justes*. He also comments that Bernard in his sacrifice illustrates a Christian ideal. But considering Brink a myth-maker who sees the typical experience of humanity in terms of complexes of poetic imagery, Obumselu argues that the ideal which Brink offers in *Rumours of Rain* as a counter-hegemonic valence is actually a Xhosa ideal. The Xhosa wanderer who frightens Martin when he is lost in the forest of the eastern cape, Obumselu, notes, is 'Brink's symbol of the free individual who follows a lonely vision wherever it leads' (Obumselu 1990:58). Ancient, shrivelled, homeless, he seeks after a vague glimpse of the vision of perfect beauty, the *Momlambo*. But his quest, though of Eros, is a metaphor of every ideal towards which humanity feels a compulsive, hypnotic pull. Commenting on what he tells Martin—'If a man desires the *Momlambo*, if you want to sleep with her under one kaross and untie her *inciyo*, then you must kill your own father in your heart' (Brink 1984d:257)—Obumselu (1990:58) writes:

The Xhosa ideal that is here expounded is the positive value in terms of which all the characters in the novel are conceived. It is the ideal value embodied in Bernhard Franken, and Beatrice Foirini, the value which makes Martin Mynhardt's son symbolically kill the father and leave home. But it must not be thought that in this beautiful novel, violence is presented as the unique badge of virtue. All men are lovers and follow the Muse. Martin himself does not merely kill the father; he massacres all his kindred as he follows the gleam of wealth and power. The test is whether violence is self-giving or merely an exploitative reflex.

Brink's interest in this Xhosa ideal very probably lies in its affirmation of Christ's own injunction to singleness of purpose and total renunciation of the world, an injunction Brink makes constant even if often only in oblique allusions to: 'If any man comes to me without hating his father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, yes and his own life too, he cannot be my disciple' (Luke 14:26-27). African wisdom coincides with what Brink finds positive in the Christian revelation.

Purely at the level of theory, the myth of the Afrikaner as the saviour is conceivably more ideologically dangerous than the myth of the African as the descendant of Canaan. In incessant Black rebellion, Brink recurrently ruptures the naive myth of the eternity of Black servitude, showing apartheid as a mutable Afrikaner hegemony not divine ordinance.

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