

# AFRICA



- \* *Alternation* is an international journal which publishes interdisciplinary contributions in the fields of Southern African Literature and Languages.
- \* Prior to publication, each publication in *Alternation* is refereed by at least two independent peer referees.
- \* *Alternation* is indexed in The Index to South African Periodicals (ISAP) and reviewed in The African Book Publishing Record (ABPR).
- \* *Alternation* is published every semester.

#### EDITOR

Johannes A. Smit (UDW)

#### EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Jaco Maritz (UDW); Jodith Coultier (UDW); Mande Mphahlele (Vista);  
Theresa Msimang (Unisa); Pieter Nkomo (UDW);  
Annetjie van Nulsk (Vista); Johan van Wyk (CSSA);  
Jean-Philippe Watis (CSSA);

#### EDITORIAL BOARD

Richard Bailey (UDW); Neville Channon (Gronin);  
Annie Coetzee (UDW); Leon de Kock (Unisa); Marianne de Jong (Unisa);  
Ian Glen (UE); Betty Govender (UDW); Dorcas Dierckx (Natal);  
Isabel Hofmeyr (Wits); Philip John (Unisa); David Lewis-Williams  
(Wits); Phele Mahunga (Natal); Isaac Mathonsi (Unisa); Shokunike  
Mogae (UDW); Simon Moyo (Unisa); Andrew Oshpan (Unisa); Jodie  
Pridmore (UDW); Rory Ryan (Wits); Mole Semela (Unisa); Marilee  
Simsen (UDW); Michael Samuel (UDW); Co. Thompson (Zulu); Alisa  
Therold (UDW); Marlene van Niekerk (Wits); Gertie van Vuren (UE);  
John van Zyl (Wits); Hildegarde van Zeevl (UDW); Tessa Voss (Natal).

#### NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ADVISORY BOARD

Vernon Leary (Leyden); Carol Bore-Davies (Birmingham); Simon  
Doring (Melbourne); Anony. Lashope (Manchester); Douglas P. Olson  
(Geophy); Andre Lefevere (Austin); Bessie Linders (Austin); Mphahlele  
Mzambane (Fair-Haraj); Jeff Opland (Birmingham); Graham Pothey  
(Birmingham).

#### CORRESPONDENCE ADDRESS

The Editor: *Alternation*, C85 B.L. Univ. of Western-Neatville,  
Priv. Bag NS4001, 1000 DE RIKA, South Africa  
Tel/Fax: 27-0931-8202345 e-mail: [waal@prowdsw.com](mailto:waal@prowdsw.com)

ISSN 1023-4787

Copyright Reserved: *Alternation*

## Introduction

Johannes A. Smit

Using the notion of 'face' from politeness theory in etymology which has its equivalent in the co-operative principle in pragmatics, Douglas Killam provides a critical analysis of Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* in the context of the historical event of the independence of Nigeria. Recognising that Eliot's poetry and prose writing during Achebe's degree years at the University College Ibadan must have influenced Achebe and extrapolating on Roger Sell's exposition and use of politeness theory in reading Eliot, Killam explores the effect of this novel as it forges readers on questions of society and humanity through a process of offending considerations of communal expectation. He concludes, stating that these concepts do not only importantly contribute to contemporary critical discourse and cross-cultural understanding of literature but also provide opportunities for the understanding of the socio-cultural situatedness of human action and interaction in both fiction and real-life intercourse.

After deconstruction and with the advent of the recognition that context is variable, broadly speaking, certain homologies do exist between the development of literature and socio-cultural realities. Using an interdisciplinary methodology, Sabry Hafez demonstrates a certain homology between the development of women's literature and socio-cultural reality. Developing a typology of women writing in modern Arabic literature, he puts the texts into their context, illuminates the textuality and narrative strategies of these novels and outlines some of the recent concepts dealing with the complex analogue between language, identity, feminist theories and narrative. He combines theoretical postulations and practical criticism to demonstrate how a number of the theoretical assumptions of modern critical theory require radical modifications when dealing with a different literary tradition such as modern Arabic and with the question of gender in a literature of countries at different stages of development.

Selecting gender-related narratives from the collection of Wilhelm Bleck and

Lucy Lloyd-Bellinda Pearson explores the portrayals of conflict between young women and traditional customs or rituals of the Xhosa. Central to the investigation is the definition of the relationship between the educative qualities of the puberty rites for young girls and the role which the supernatural being, *Ikhaya*, plays in these narratives. Pearson argues that the narratives function as warnings against disobeying the observances propagated in the rituals. Transgression or disobedience of the traditional customs leads to punishment, either by a supernatural force operating via the elements or by means of inter-personal violence.

Arguing that the most prominent meaning attached to the *izibongo* (*praises*) is that these are 'praise poems' which laud the feats, character and personality features of the person about whom the poem is composed, Kolleen Turner uses empirical evidence to show that the most striking feature of Zulu women's praises in urban areas is the dearth of praises generally accorded to women. Unlike the praises of Zulu men which are common and which may contain both positive and negative references, the *izibongo* of women which do exist are remarkable for the lack of noteworthy material they contain. She reasons that this lack may be a direct result of the role of women in society and the very composition of the patrilineal and patriarchal Zulu social structure.

The concept of tribe has been the subject of a sustained critique for many years in African studies and has been viewed as a product of the colonial enterprise. Using ethnography from southern Malawi, Adam Cheal suggests a more sophisticated analysis in which Africans are not taken to be the dupes of missionaries and colonial administrators. He argues that the social structures that developed in southern Africa before and after European intervention in the region that have been described as tribes or more recently by euphemism and poorly defined terms like 'ethnic group' and 'nation' – were in no sense so imposed upon Africans.

Jaqueline Jaffe employs a close reading of Arthur Conan Doyle's book *The Great Boer War* (1901) in order to see how a renowned writer of adventure stories uses the narrative conventions of romance and adventure to shape the telling of military history in support of imperialistic goals. As part of a continuing study about culture and imperialism in late Victorian England her paper attempts to raise questions about the nature of the link between history, literature and British imperialism.

Starting from the premise that vernacular, traditional Afrikaans – and other literary texts are the product of the socio-political power emanating from a colonial hegemony and that the very process of colonisation itself is a

product of a particular ideological network, Godfrey Masingas interrogates texts written before the *Kernwag van Nong* which used to be revered and which more recently have been revised. With references to Kroeber, Scholze and Barthés, he first discusses the notion *herloss*. He then examines the problems of contemporary historiography with regard to Kiegiel, Loucaut, Degenaar, Derrida, Hutcheon and Mollale and attempts to reconcile nationalism and poststructuralism under the aegis of Stephen Greenblatt's term *historiomania*. Masingas demonstrates his argument by providing a political re-reading, with reference to Maiberbe's *Hans die stapper* (1918), Van der Haar's *Sinnar* (1935) and Beemoot's *Boepies* (1938). Following Derrida, he concludes that fiction is indeed a form of history. Whether history is a kind of fiction as Derrida asserts, he intends pursuing in further research.

Providing evidence from several language families of the world for three possible roots, KAM, TAK and TAK' which probably date back to 4000 B.P. and which might have been present in the Proto-World of about 6000 B.P., Richard Bailey challenges the methods of historical semantics and suggests a refinement. From studying semantic development patterns present in the data, it becomes apparent that a generally predictable direction of semantic change is discernible. The regularity and consistency of these semantic patterns of change in available evidence in most of the world's languages, provide evidence for a universal tendency of semantic development in semantic areas such as the one illustrated by these three roots. These findings demonstrate that phono-lexical historical reconstruction becomes feasible at more remote time depths because of the identification of many more words as cognates than would have been possible without recognising the existence of these semantic areas.

Louis Molamu explores the origins and development of Tshivenda as *lingua franca* in the urban areas of South Africa. As historical account of a language used mainly by young black males, aspects of class, gender and ethnicity are considered. In the context of the study of Tshivenda as language, Molamu discusses the flexibility of the language, including innovation in vocabulary, phonology, grammar and pronunciation.

Departing from the presupposition that history provides evidence that the non-use of a language in the economic and social spheres may lead to the language's demise in favour of the language used in these public domains, Jeanne Maatens tentatively postulates that it is to be expected that the economic and social realities of the South African situation will eventually lead to the indigenous languages such as Afrikaans and Zulu being supplanted by English. Using Edwards' (1985) argument on the language

identity relation as a point of departure and exploring the implications of his view that language is not essential to group, she argues that although these languages which often fulfil a strongly divisive role in this society may vanish as markers of group identity, the identity itself can be maintained should the group so wish.

With questions on identity currently very much in the air—as is also evident in the contributions in this issue—Betty Govinden confronts identity-forming values of colonial canonical literature and apartheid's christian national and fundamental pedagogies and attempt to rethinking identity on a personal, group and professional level from feminist, post-colonial and historical contexts. Even though many people (like Indians) have been deprived of relating to the African context during the era of apartheid's cultural and educational hegemony, the challenges of a transformed pedagogy and the contribution to the building of a non-racial society may be partly met by utilising practices of re-memory. This amounts to individuals telling and retelling their stories in the context of a re-thinking, re-feeling and re-experiencing of the past in the light of different facts and a consciousness of circumstances which have been shrouded by the policies of past oppression.

Finally, David Hanson, reviewing Steve Biko's *I Write What I Feel*, argues that a final audit of the achievements of Black consciousness still has to be undertaken. Central to his argument is an appreciation of the wide variety of fronts on which Biko contributed in the midst of a situation of oppression devoid of political traditions which might have been used to counter it. Addressing themes in Biko's character and participation in the black student movement, Hanson weaves his argument through Biko's physical and intellectual courage, his arguments for and against the participation of white liberals in the struggle, his attempt to move beyond the 'two-faced' nature of African politics, purported racism and gender bias in black consciousness and his assertion of black pride, radical black leadership and various cultural issues which still remain in contention in contemporary African culture and politics. Addressing apartheid hegemony over blacks, Biko's arguments on the role of white testimony and the counterrole of African values are also elucidated. The most important contribution of black consciousness' political strategy was its opposition to collaboration with apartheid institutions, especially as it manifested in the creation of Bantustans. Biko's criticism of Dan-tuiston leaders is central here. Concluding, Hanson points to the important contribution of Biko himself as well as black consciousness as movement in the liberation struggle but also poses the question as to how this history and more particularly black identity, can be related to the event of the negotiated settlement in South Africa.

## The Interdisciplinarity of Pragmatics and Politeness Theory with Reference to Chinua Achebe's *No Longer At Ease*

Douglas Killam

This paper explores the relationships between Pragmatics and Politeness Theory as an apparatus for accounting for the dynamics of post-colonial texts whose intention is to redefine and reshape post-colonial societies. The paper proceeds from a plenary talk presented at the 17th Triennial Congress of the FILIM held in Novi Sad in Yugoslavia in August of 1990 by Professor Roger Sell of Åbo Akademi University in Finland. The first part of my paper is an extrapolation of the definitions about Pragmatics' and Politeness Theory which he offered to the gathering and which he illustrated with reference to the poetry of T.S. Eliot. It occurred to me that this theory, new to me, might be applied to Achebe's second novel *No Longer at Ease* (1980). I chose his second novel because the application seems as if it will work most obviously. On reflection it further seems that all of Achebe's fiction, the novels and short stories, might be further illuminated by the application of the Cultural imperatives of the Pragmatics/Politeness conjunction. The stringing together and defining of the interconnectedness—the inter-disciplinarity—of pragmatics and politeness theory produces an enlarded syllogism which, when applied to Achebe's writing, extends our understanding not only of his method as artist but also of the relationship of that art to its historical placement and therefore to the purposes Achebe assigns to his writing.

<sup>1</sup> See also the edited collection of essays by Sell (1988).

Professor Sell says in two places in his FILLIN' paper that the aim of the Literary annexation, conjoining and application of the linguistic theories embodied in Pragmatics and Politeness theory is to attempt to

reconcile various branches of specialist knowledge in a widely intelligible language of scholarly discourse and so provide an antidote to the compartmentalising fragmentation so general of the humanities in this century.

Since Pragmatics is that branch of linguistic scholarship which studies the ways in which language utterances acquire meaning and interactive force through being used in particular contexts, it is most useful to break through these disciplinary boundaries. Interdisciplinarity is therefore unavoidable: the writing and reading of literary texts are in dynamic relationship to the linguistic and sociocultural context in which the processes take place. An illustration which comes to mind from recent reading in American fiction is from Coker Winter's classic novel of the American west, *The Virginian*. The Virginian, described as dressed in muted blues and greys, is on a cattle drive with, among other cowboys, his good-hearted friend Sonny, dressed in light colours and the evil cowboy Trampas, dressed all in black—appropriate to the situational convention for evil (sic). On one occasion and in response to some action of the Virginian, Sonny calls his friend a 'son of a bitch' and the comment occasions no response from the hero. Shortly thereafter and again in response to some action taken by the Virginian, Trampas calls him a 'son of a bitch'. 'Smile when you say that!', the Virginian responds aggressively. 'The effect that the utterance produces varies, depending on who the speaker is, his relationship to the person spoken to and the social convention determining the relationship.'

As 'the study of people acting verbally in a socio-cultural environment', Pragmatics, therefore provides an important avenue to the study of literature. It is often called Discourse or Discourse Study—when it is practical—because it focuses on the production and process of language and takes place when participants are in each other's physical presence. (It is not possible that it would be otherwise—people cannot engage in discourse, according to Pragmatic Theory, unless they share the same time/space configuration.)

Embedded in 'Discourse' is 'Text'. Text relates to the transient character of language and in its application to literature it denotes a piece or a body of writing which transcends limits such as time and space barriers under which discourse/speech operates. In a novel such as Achebe's, 'text' supplies the field against which discourse operates. Discourse in the novel promotes the novel's meaning.

Considering the question on where politeness functions in relation to

pragmatics in the discourse/text oppositional mode, politeness enters through the pragmatics of the situation or through the communally shared evaluation of social behaviour. The reasons why politeness considerations are important in literary activity is that they are fundamental in social behaviour of any kind. Sell says:

For the literary pragmatist, the reason why politeness considerations are important in literary activity is that these are fundamental in social behaviour of any kind. Politeness can be thought of as a communally sustained spectrum of evaluation ranging from extreme offensiveness, through neutrality, to extreme obsequiousness or flattery. In a given culture, all actions, including all use of language, will assume some or other position on the politeness spectrum; a behaviour or type of expression which does not register somewhere on the spectrum is impossible. This applies to literary activity—no less than to any other linguistic activity.

Any theme, no matter what, has a politeness dimension which will register on the politeness spectrum and will be to a greater or lesser degree positively welcome or to a greater or lesser degree unwelcome, perhaps even taboo. Between these extremes are degrees of neutrality and themes which are ordinary, acceptable or hardly worth discussing. These conditions apply to Eliot's poetry which Sell uses to illustrate his theoretical postulations. Even though it may appear as if they do not apply to Achebe's novel I will argue below that they do.

Eliot's poetry, especially the early poems, those on which his reputation was established, presents materials which were usually thematically offensive. Sell draws attention to Eliot's tasteless personal politeness—in an anecdote conveyed by Richard Aldington of a time when he and Eliot were walking past St James's Palace and Eliot tipped his bowler hat to the guardsman on duty; and in the attitudes held by Virginia Woolfe and her circle as embodied in an invitation to her brother-in-law, 'Come to dinner. Eliot will be there in a few-piece suit.' These are all acts or utterances which can only be understood if one understands them in terms of their social dimensions.

Eliot's fundamental unpleasantness is also found in, for example, the opening lines of *The Waste Land*. Here he subverts the associations of the farther of English poetry that contrary to the usually joyful associations of spring, April is not the time of 'shores south' but rather it is the 'wildest month'. He continues in the same vein and talk of human life and the human mind as a heap of broken images—and that is only the beginning. There is as well the sordid sterility and bleak despair of Prufrock, the unpleasantness made the more telling through associations with fleeting lyrical hints of beauty and love and fulfilment.

Interposed in these and at the other end of the politeness spectrum are themes which are wholly self-deprecating—of poetic alter-egos caught up in un-scholarly humility: Prottrock, for example, whose inferiority complex makes him see 'the crowned Footman hold my coat, and smucker'

Together with considerations of themes there are questions of literariness—of style and presentation, of diction, allusions, quotations and of treatments associated with themes.

The sequeway from Eliot into Achebe is in the title of the latter's novel. *No Longer at Ease* takes its title from the familiar lines in Eliot's 'The Journey of the Magi':

We were mad to our plots, these Kingdoms,  
But no longer at ease now, for the old dispensation  
With unsharpened edges, shuffling their feet,  
I should be glad a further cause.

I think it would be possible to extend a comparison between Eliot and Achebe along a number of lines, (or extend those few comparisons which have been published to date) suggesting now Achebe, through his close contact with Eliot's poetry and prose writing during his degree years at the University College Ibadan, recognises how Eliot's prescriptions and examples could be made coincident with his own aims as artist and social pragmatist: how, for example, thematic offensiveness in Eliot's poetry is mitigated (as I have suggested) with occasional bursts of love and beauty and fulfilment.

Rather than developing this argument, I want to test the proposition that Achebe, recognising the applicability of what we define as pragmatics and politeness and the inter-relatedness of the two to his own artistic purposes, writes a novel which offends considerations of continual expectation with reference to politeness to focus his readers on questions of society and humanity as trenchant as did Eliot and uses considerations of politeness as an artistic device to achieve these purposes.

What makes Achebe's achievement different from Eliot's is that there is virtually no neutral ground in the politeness spectrum in *No Longer at Ease*. There is no hint of love, beauty or fulfilment. There is only sordid stentility and bleak despair together with an almost endless confrontation in the discursive parts of the novel.

Written somewhere between 1954 and 1960 (the year it was published), *No Longer at Ease* initially formed part of but was eventually exempted from a novel which was published as *Things Fall Apart*. 1960 was the year of Nigeria's Independence. This was the year when two 'old dispensations' came into question: the dispensation of the recent 'alien gods' of British Imperial-Colonial rule which was about to give way to

autonomy in Nigerian national affairs and the older dispensation of a people who, ambiguously, would/bought continue to clutch not only the gods of their forebears—(all their pre-colonial gods)—but also possibly, in modified form, the prescriptions of the alien gods of the erstwhile colonial masters. The modern heirs of traditional culture would have to confront both these dispensations. *No Longer at Ease* is an examination of what is to be done with these alien gods.

Achebe might have been expected to write a novel which would advocate positive possibilities at the time of Nigeria's gaining of independence. Indeed, initial responses to the novel indicated that in the eyes of many he had wasted an opportunity or worse. He might have written a novel in the Horatio Alger mode—a bright young man, the best his village has produced, proceeds from humble and modest beginnings and through the application of intelligence, hard work and integrity achieves a position of leadership in his community and nation: thus becoming a model for those who come after and whose successes they will wish to emulate.

Achebe did not do this. Instead, he offended such expectations. He constructed a plot which acts in the opposite way. *No Longer at Ease*, as most of you will recall, tells the story of Obi Okonkwo. The son of a Christian catechist and the brightest boy in his village, he has obtained an overseas education. This was paid for by members of his village, Umuzofia, and most notably by the Umuzofia Progressive Union (U.P.U.) an organization of villagers who live in Lagos, the capital city of Nigeria, and who band together to protect their interests and those of their kinsmen who have left the home village. When Obi returns to Nigeria he wins a prestigious 'European Post' as Secretary to the government's Scholarship Board. He sets out with high principles and idealism. But the very nature of his position means that he accumulates a series of crippling debts: he must repay his loan to the U.P.U., pay for an expensive flat, repay a car purchase loan, and pay for expensive car insurance. He must assist his parents with their expenses (taxes and bills and medical care for his mother). He further agrees to pay school fees for a junior brother. While he lives extravagantly, his education and European job place unusual pressures on him; indeed he is expected to live up to his position as a mark of success—success which will reflect on the U.P.U. and which they take as their due. Obi's life is further complicated by his love for Clara, a nurse, whom he met on his homeward journey from England. Clara, however, is an ora and considered among the flu to be an outcast because she is descended from slaves within the community. The Union and Obi's father strongly disapprove of his relationship and Obi's mother threatens to kill herself should he marry Clara. The relationship is further complicated by Clara becoming pregnant by Obi. As pressures on Obi mount, Clara goes through a nasty abortion and disappears from Obi's

life. Obi's moral, intellectual and ethical convictions collapse. He accepts bribes, is forced out, tried in a court of law and found guilty. A promising career comes to a sad and humiliating end.

Such are the bare bones of the story. As I have mentioned, it did not please many Nigerian readers. The early responses suggested that Achebe ought to have presented a better picture of Nigerian potential than Obi, especially at a time when Independence was upon them. They were offended by Achebe's lack of politeness because his treatment did not match their expectations—expectations deriving from the hortatory euphoria declaimed by political leaders and announced in the popular presses at the time.

What a general and popular readership thought of the book is perhaps not apposite to what can be inferred from the book itself in terms of Achebe's intention. In one sense the book is self-contained and reveals in internal ways its own purposes. On the other hand reader response may also be seen as legitimate—this is what I see in the book and therefore that is what the book means. Collaboration, give and take, trade-off, reveals intention and legitimatises interpretation and therefore meaning.

For present purposes I am prepared to consign that sort of debate to another place and time. What one can see in the novel is Achebe/Obi. Achebe as writer making the text work externally and Obi, Achebe's agent, making the text work internally—unwittingly offending agreed upon canons of collaboration.

However, the question arises, how does a person from a foreign culture know that these canons of collaboration are offended? or how does one know that these are playing a role in the novel at all? At this point I have to pause because I find myself teetering on the edge of the hermeneutic gap. One is concerned with the interpretability of a text, a distinguished text by an author of international reputation, not to say renown. Interpretability proceeds from comprehension and comprehension in turn proceeds from the ability of the receiver—some say receptor—of a text to create a text-world around the text in which the text makes sense. The space between the receptor's real world—place, culture, time—and that of the text being addressed equals the hermeneutic gap. Hermeneutically speaking, the gap is always there (just as there are, in terms of literary communication, different readers with different purposes) and it is only a matter of how wide the gap is. But the question remains: can one bridge the broad cultural gap between for example Canada and Nigeria for interpretability purposes? Does the fact that I have lived in Nigeria only a half dozen years after the publication of the text and know with some familiarity those parts of Lagos that Achebe writes into the text—Loyi, Victoria Island, Lagos Island, Obalende, Apapa, Surulere, Isale Eko—assist me in coming to an understanding of the text? The same question can be raised concerning the fact that that I have visited

Achebe's village, Ogidi, which cannot differ much from Obi's Umuofia, that I met on several occasions Christopher Okigbo whose temperament is almost at one with the Christopher of the text: that I have read countless novels presenting colonial Nigeria (and a good many historical and other non-fictional texts describing the period as well) and so am pretty familiar with the context Obi is concerned with at the incipient dawn of independence. Does all this experience of the actual scene closes the gap sufficiently for me to be able to thoroughly understand that world for purposes of literary communication? Or does one need to close it: can one simply follow the line of the Formalist and the New Critics and say the text is timeless, self-contained and at the same time amenable to universalist analysis? One may also add the use of Reader-Response or Reception Theory. My contention is that there is something missing in these approaches.

One can argue that the experience of having been there and/or having some knowledge of the circumstances in which the novel is situated does assist me in understanding it. I may even be able to anchor a commentary of the text to some extent in knowing not only a good deal of the biography of the author—which some critical-theorists say is necessary to comprehension and interpretation—but also that I know him personally very well (since 1965) and have shared discussions with him which in their various ways may supplement a reading of all of his writing. I want to to argue that this is not sufficient if one wants to understand the novel's dynamics or pragmatics.

It is against this background that the determinants of politeness discourse may be brought to bear on *No Longer at Ease*. Self derives his literary appropriations of politeness theory from the work of two studies by two probably familiar anthropological linguists Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson. Their two seminal studies are based on their enquiries into the language cultures in Afghanistan, Papua New Guinea and Kenya. This research allowed them to pose with a certain confidence a prototypical model person, linguistically realised and universalised in terms of politeness across history and geography. This prototypical model person has two endowments, the person possesses a *practical reason* which enables the person to work out what means the person can use to achieve any given end and *face*. Face, Brown and Levinson say, has a negative and a positive aspect, negative because the person wants to be left free to do what he wants and to be left alone, positive because the person seeks approval from other people and wishes to be included in their circle. Because of his practical reason, The Model Person knows that other people are also endowed with negative and positive face as well and that the person's own goals are more likely to be achieved by taking this into account. Politeness aspects and options arise when the person wishes to say and/or do something which threatens another person's face. In Brown and Levinson's terminology, such



a person commits a Face-Threatening Act – an FTA!

There are basically four forms of face-threatening acts. The person cannot avoid committing the FTA, desirable as this is in theory, because to do so reduces the likelihood and possibility of the person realising stated goals. Secondly, Politeness and the FTA connect in the way in which the Person commits the FTA – the Person can commit it 'off-the-record' as it were by couching the FTA in hints, or metaphor, or irony, or understatement so that another person is not forced to recognise it; OR the Person can go 'on-the-record' and perform the FTA explicitly but in such a way as to acknowledge the other person's positive and negative face so 'this is still a form of deference'. Finally, the Person can employ a bald-faced on-the-record strategy in which the FTA is performed with no politeness at all. For the sake of brevity and clarity we can adopt the sort of formulaic shorthand characteristic of certain kinds of contemporary theory/criticism and call these FTA1, FTA2 (a) and (b) and FTA3.

The structure of *No Longer at Home* follows a pattern from FTA1s through various kinds of FTA2s (both the (a) and (b) types) and ends with a series of FTA3s. (Conversely, Reader-Responses to the novel as calculated by a careful and systematic assembly of discourses on the novel since its publication in 1960, reveals a reverse pattern – that is, from a general series of FTA2s through both types of FTA2s and ending with FTA1s which is where its current critical position is found. It is, that is to say, where Eliot's early poetry – *Poetryrock* and *The Waste Land* reside.)

We have determined that text, in terms of the interdisciplinarity of pragmatics and politeness concepts and these in relation to their acts to interpretability, has a basic internal oppositional character. It is made up of text and discourse (as we have defined them). The important distinctions are enunciated by levels or gradations of FTAs.

In *No Longer at Home*, the central ground is Text – matter consequent to discourse is provided. Further scholarship would call this 'background'. Paradoxically, narrative movement is not provided by narrative – this is text – but by discourse. In *No Longer at Home* forward movement towards resolution is essentially made up of FTAs.

I provide a few examples. Obi's first encounter with the U.P.C. after his return to Nigeria from abroad is an FTA1: he fails to dress formally and he deliberately fails to use 'impressive English' as is expected of an educated man, especially from someone with a B.A. Hons. in English. His second meeting begins safely with an FTA1 but moves quickly through FTA2 (a) and (b) to an explosive FTA3 where he storms out of the meeting. We have been prepared for this sort of action through references to Obi's impulsiveness and impetuosity as a schoolboy, for example, when he wrote a letter of support to Hitler. Achebe, further, employs an endless

number of words which imply confrontation from the beginning to the end of the book: betrayal, treacherous, disrespect, insult, blame, self-willed, shame, disgrace.

The most critical FTA situation in the novel is when Obi, on his second visit to Umuofia tries to win the support of his family for his plan to marry Clara. The fact that he would make such a plan is also possibly an FTA3 because he knows that his parents, despite their Christian beliefs, still accept the concept of *osu*. His father's lengthy defence of *osu* (an FTA against his alleged Christianity) through the elaborate analogy he draws between the place of the *osu* in King David's time and *osu* as a residual in modern Igbo society is plainly facile.

But Obi's mother commits the most devastating FTA3 in the novel when she announces simply that if Obi marries Clara she will kill herself. At this point Obi's will breaks. He finds he has no inner resources with which to confront the situation. From here he falls from fame and when his mother dies, all restraints are removed, his conscience is cleansed, he deserts Clara, renounces his responsibilities to the Union, takes bribes, is charged, tried, found guilty and ... the novel ends as Obi has unwittingly predicted it will.

With one exception, all of the discursive encounters in the novel are confrontational. The exception is Obi's relations with Mr. Green's secretary, Miss Marie Tomlinson – and even this looked at the outset as if it might become confrontational as revealed in Obi's reflection that she may be friendly to him in order to report any verbal misadventures.

I believe all of Achebe's fiction can be discussed, described, defined in terms of the binary oppositions implied in pragmatics/politeness and discourse/text formulations. Okonkwo is constantly committing FTA3s – the lesser sort are unknown to him from start to finish; Ezeulu commits the most monstrous FTA of all – he confronts the very source of life by denying his people food. The most recent novel is more complex but by now you have doubtless recalled those passages where FTAs can be identified.

This brief overview of the use of pragmatics and politeness theory within the context of interdisciplinary studies provides possibilities for not only the reading of Achebe's but also other novels. These concepts definitely provide an important contribution to contemporary critical discourse. They do not only provide opportunities for the cross-cultural understanding of literature but also form part of the critical purpose of foregrounding the socio-cultural situatedness of human action and interaction which function in both fiction and real life intercourse. It is a matter to be pursued.

Department of English  
University of Guelph



## References

- Auerbach, Erwin. 1968. *On Language and Literature*. Harmondsworth.  
Sells, Roger (ed.) 1988. *Literary Pragmatics*. London: Routledge.  
Sells, Roger. 1991. The Interdisciplinarity of Pragmatics and Post-structural Theory. Paper delivered at the 17th Triennial Congress of the *Fédération Internationale des Langues et Littératures Modernes* (FILLM), Novi Sad.

# Sexual Politics and Narrative Strategies in Modern Arabic Literature

Sabry Hafez

This paper<sup>1</sup> investigates the relationship between language, gender and identity as an introduction to its study of the nature of the literary discourse of women writers in modern Arabic literature. It offers a triadic typology of the development of feminist awareness in the Arab world and posits a homological relationship between this typology, changes in class background of the writers and their perception of national identity. Like any typology, particularly those concerning a body of discourse developed in a relatively short period of time, there are areas of overlapping and coexistence. The paper illustrates its theoretical claims by a close reading of three novels. In its practical part, the paper demonstrates the coexistence of the three distinct phases of female consciousness by deliberately selecting novels written in one decade, the 1980s, yet representing those different discourses. The change from one type to another does not constitute a clean break with all the qualities of the previous one; thus works containing heterogeneous qualities exist. But despite this interflow from one phase to another it is clear from the literary examples that the three different types are distinct in politics and textual strategies. The changes in female perception proceed from the passive to the active and from the simplistic to the sophisticated and those of narrative strategies correspond to them.

<sup>1</sup> It is important to state at the beginning that sexual politics in the title of this paper is a term concerned with the ways in which gender power relations are constituted, reproduced and contested, and not with sexuality or the erotic. Feminist literary theory has aptly shown that gender is not merely a biological difference but a core constitutive concept inscribed into all aspects of humanity from everyday language to the sub-conscious. Gender is both a socially constructed concept and an ideological force which acts at work in various types of discourse.

## Gender, Language and Identity

Gender and identity are socially constructed, culturally conditioned and verbally coded in various forms of discourse. Post-structuralist theory suggests that the common factor in the analysis of social organization, social ordering, power relations, and individual consciousness is language. Language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization are defined and contested. It does not reflect an already given social reality, but rather constructs social reality for us. It is not an expression of a unique individuality, but rather shares the individual's subjectivity in ways which are socially specific.

The assumption that subjectivity is constructed implies that it is not innate, nor genetically determined, nor socially produced ... Unlike humanism, which implies a conscious, knowing, unified, rational subject, post-structuralism theorizes subjectivity as a site of division and conflict, central to the process of political struggle and to preserving the status quo (Wooden, 1987: 21).

Neither social reality nor individual subjectivity have fixed intrinsic meanings. They acquire meaning through language, for

different languages and different discourses within the same language divide up the world and give it meaning in different ways which cannot be reduced to one another through translation or by an appeal to universally shared concepts reflecting a fixed reality. For example, the meanings of femininity and masculinity vary from culture to culture and language to language. They even vary between discourses within a particular language, between different feminist discourses, and are subject to historical change (Wooden, 1987: 21).

This makes language truly social and a subject for political struggle, for the manipulation of language is in a way a manipulation of both social and subjective reality. As for gender, the sexes stand in relation to each other not as two distinct entities, but as two different, often foreign, languages.

Michel Foucault has elaborated in his concept of the 'discursive field' the vital relationship between language, social institution, subjectivity and power. He proved that the manipulation of language through conflicting discourses, patterns of dominance and marginalisation, and systems of values and values of texts has social and political ramifications (Foucault 1972:21-76). The manipulation of language is nowhere clearer than in narrative discourse in which a literary text becomes an arena for debating, undermining and subverting the prevalent discourse and consequently the social and political order underlying it. This is so because the polyphonic nature of narrative text allows characters to correct, revise, or appropriate the views, and with them the inherent ideologies of other characters. With

the advent of modernistic sensibility, the waning of authorial control and the prevalence of fragmentation enhanced this process and turned narrative into an effective weapon in the war of the sexes.

The literary text itself is enmeshed in an elaborate network of intertextuality which engages the reader in an attempt to map the dynamic relationships by which the writer at hand has willfully recorded visions elaborated in other texts. The rubrics of narrative grant the writer a great freedom in this domain for it can easily subvert prior literary vision by placing it in a new hierarchical order. The organization of discourse in a narrative text reflects the awareness that within any given discursive field not all discourses will carry equal weight or power. There is a constant process of marginalisation of certain discourses in order to invigorate and enforce others, and narrative discourse is the literary text that recovers this delicate process in action. This is the reason for selecting Arabic narrative discourse for our inquiry into the complexity of the interaction between gender and both national and individual identity in order to elaborate the various modes of female consciousness and the development of their literary manifestations.

## Patriarchy and Logocentrism

Arabic narrative discourse has long been recognized as a reflection of the many political, national and social issues of the Arab world, but it has rarely been studied as a battleground for the war of the sexes that have been waged through narrative since the rise of its various narrative genres at the turn of the century. The persistent neglect of this issue participates in consolidating the status quo and positing it as the unquestionable norm. Modern Arabic narrative discourse has therefore played a significant role in shaping, influencing and modifying the existing power relations between men and women in society. In a patriarchal society the literary discourse reflects the social structure the dynamics of which are based on a power relationship in which women's interests are subordinated to those of men. In general patriarchy is a social order which structures norms of behaviour, patterns of expectations and modes of expression, but in Arabic culture it has acquired a divine dimension through the religious ratification of the supremacy of men enshrined in the *Qur'an*.

The divine is masculine singular and enforces the patriarchal structural order which permeates all forms of social interaction. The divinity bestowed on men also encompasses the masculine language of the *Qur'an*, and slight the feminine language of everyday life. The gender vision inherent in the diglossia of Arabic language has not been studied, nor has the encounter between the written and the literary and the system of connotations inherent

in the linguistic canon been investigated. The logocentrism of the written language is closely related to the patriarchal nature of society on the one hand, and the masculine character of the traditional establishment on the other. In its pure literary form, poetry, or in its other scholarly, linguistic and rhetorical endeavours, classical Arabic literature has been predominantly male controlled and oriented.

The strong patriarchal nature of both Arabic society and its traditional literary establishment made it extremely difficult for women's discourse to emerge within the tradition. Although there is the exceptional poetess, such as al-Khansa<sup>2</sup> (575-664?), her poetry was sanctioned by the establishment because she devoted her powerful elegiac talent almost entirely to immortalise men, her two brothers, Mu'awiyah and Sakhr, and urge her tribe to revenge them. The other major work which is presumably written by a woman or largely from a female perspective, *Alf Laylah wa Laylah* (The Arabian Nights), has been excluded from the literary canon and banished into the marginal domain of folk and oral literature, and even banned on occasions. It is ironic that such a rich and sophisticated literary work has been omitted from the literary canon for centuries, yet survived and continued to play a significant role throughout the Arab community from Iraq to Morocco and from Syria to the Sudan.

In their seminal book, *La Femme Née*, Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément (1986:65) have emphasised the solidarity between logocentrism and patriarchy which they call phallogocentrism in Christian tradition, not the condition in Arabic is even stronger, for such association is enshrined in the scripture. The emergence of modern narrative discourse in Arabic literature spelt the end of this association and of the male monopoly of literary discourse. It is therefore not surprising that women were among the most active pioneers of modern narrative discourse. At the turn of the century, 'A'ishah al-Taymuriyyah (1849-1902), Zaynab Fawwār (1860-1914), Sadiyah 'Aliyyah (1867-1918), Zaynab Muhammad, Labibah Hashim (1880-1947) and Malek Hifn Nāsif (1886-1918) were among the active pioneers of narrative fiction. This tradition continued throughout the twentieth century until the contribution of women writers gained currency and prominence in contemporary Arabic narrative and ended the old male monopoly on literature.

Another factor which undermined the sacred alliance between patriarchy and logocentrism is the diaphasic nature of Arabic narrative. From the early stages of the genesis of modern Arabic narrative discourse, diaphasia has been one of the major topics of controversy concerning the language of narrative fiction.<sup>3</sup> The dichotomy between the formal literary language and the spoken vernaculars as it has only been debated and

explained in literary terms. It is more than a mere linguistic or even literary issue for it involves a major restructuring of ideological and cultural representations. It is therefore no mere coincidence that the strongest opposition to the use of the spoken vernacular in literary text was waged by the traditional establishment who perceived it as a threat to both the social order and literary canon. They were aware that the acceptance of the vernacular in the literary canon amounted to relinquishing the monopoly of the male over the literary realm. They may also have suspected the secular nature of narrative discourse and by extension its democratic and liberating force.

Yet the emergence of modern narrative discourse as a new mode of literary expression has been effectively employed to consolidate the status quo and enhance the solidarity between patriarchy and logocentrism. Like its Western counterpart, Arabic narrative was used to enforce the patriarchal social order by ascribing its values in the major works of its genres. The trilogy (*Ram al-Qasr*, Palace Walk, 1956, *Qasr al-Shayq*, The Palace of Desire, 1957, and *al-Sukkarayyah*, Sugar Street, 1957)<sup>4</sup> of Najīb Mahfūz is the patriarchal novel par excellence. Its hero, the charismatic Ahmad 'Abd al-Jawwad, is both the father of the family and the pivot of the narrative world. From his loins all the protagonists emerge, and from his social and business activities other characters are brought into being. He is the prime mover of the text and the source of its life and in relation to him every character in the novel is hierarchically placed. Narrative structure, characters' motivation and spatial presentation are all mobilised to reflect and enforce the patriarchal order. Although the novel contains a detailed and vivid account of everyday life and interaction between characters from the middle and lower strata of society, its long text contains no trace of colloquialism. Its concern with the linguistic purity of its *fiṣṣa* (formal and standardised Arabic) is inseparable from its interest in the immaculate portrayal of the patriarchal order.

## Feminist Literary Typology

Since the early stages of the genesis of modern narrative discourse, women writers tried to undermine the solidarity between logocentrism and patriarchy. The question of language is closely linked to both gender and identity and the female writers' attempt to express their gender difference led to the development of certain syntactical mutations. They played an impor-

<sup>2</sup> For a study see Salim Hakeem (1992).

<sup>3</sup> The trilogy is now available both in English and French translations. See Mahfūz (1976, 1982a, 1982b).

but role in forging a new mode of linguistic expression which proved to be more felicitous to narrative discourse. They also exploited the secular and liberating qualities of narrative discourse to express their own views and enable feminine values to penetrate and subvert the patriarchal order that contains them. Feminist literary theory has strongly objected to the fitting of women between the lines of male tradition, and strove to free itself from the linear absolutes of male literary theory (Showalter 1985:131). It developed a different typology for the study of women's literature which is not dependent on systems of classification derived from male dominated writing. In order to study the literature of women writers in Arabic it is also necessary to develop a system of classification evolving from the study of their work and not imposed on it by expecting it to conform to the male one. Since no exhaustive study of women's writers novels in Arabic has been undertaken, I shall adopt with some modifications a typology developed by a feminist critic working on the English women novelists.

Feminist literary theory proved that women writers' attempt to comprehend and express their sexual difference generates an interesting subculture which manifests many of the symptoms of subordination and even forceful subjugation. In her study of the female literary tradition in the English novel, *A Literature of Their Own*, Elaine Showalter demonstrates how the development of this tradition is similar to the development of any literary subculture:

First there is a prolonged phase of imitation of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition and internalization of its standards of art and its views on social roles. Second, there is a phase of protest against these standards and values and advocacy of minority rights and values including a demand for autonomy. Thirdly there is a phase of self-discovery, a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity. An appropriate terminology for women writers is to call these stages: Imitation, Feminist, and Female (Showalter 1977-11; Moi 1985:56).

In her study these three phases seem to be neatly divided into equal historical periods, each of which lasts forty years.<sup>4</sup> Each period, was compartmentalised and socially, historically as well as literary distinct.

During the feminist phase, dating from 1840 to 1880, women wrote in an effort to equal the intellectual achievements of the male culture and internalise its assumptions about female actors... In the feminist phase, from about 1880 to 1920, at the winning of the vote, women are historically enabled to reject the accommodating postures of femininity and to use literature to a sensitive de-

<sup>4</sup> The book came out in the 1970s and although the last phase was open to the present and the future, it seems from the work studied that it is roughly forty years.

outlets of wounded womanhood... The purest examples of this phase are the Amazon utopias of the 1890s, fantasies of perfected female societies set in an England or America of the future, which were also protests against state government, male laws, and male medicine... In the female phase, ongoing since 1920, women reject both imitation and protest--two forms of dependency--and turn instead to female experience as the source of an autonomous art, extending the feminist analysis of culture to the forms and techniques of literature (Showalter 1985:138).

This typology corresponds to Julia Kristeva's conception of the various stages of the feminist consciousness and struggle for identity. She rejects both biologism and essentialism as explanations of gender and argues for a historical and political approach that perceives the development of the feminist struggle as a three tiered process:

which can be schematically summarized as follows: 1. Women demand equal access to the symbolic order. Liberal feminism. Equality. 2. Women reject the male symbolic order in the name of difference. Radical feminism. Femininity excluded. 3. Women reject the dichotomy between masculine and feminine as metaphysical (Moi 1985:12).

As various states of female consciousness, Kristeva's scheme is as relevant to the classification of women's narrative discourse in Arabic as the triadic typology of Showalter. Kristeva's is not a chronologically based system, thus allowing for a greater degree of overlapping and coexistence. This overlapping is particularly relevant to the experience of Arab women writers, for it explains why certain texts contain a mixture of qualities some of which belong to one phase and others to the following one. The presence of certain dominant features of a specific type does not necessarily result in the exclusion of all others. Dominance is a key word in differentiating between various types of feminist literary discourse.

## Homology and Interaction

The typology of modern Arabic narrative discourse is homologous rather than identical to that of its Western counterpart. Its similarity with its Western counterpart is considerably modified by a constant interaction with its socio-cultural context. Although the three types elaborated by Showalter can be identified in Arabic literature they do not fall neatly into equal historical categories. The experience of Arabic women novelists demonstrates that the condensation of these phases gives rise to an interdependence between them in a manner that makes each phase necessary for the emergence and development of its succeeding one. The completion of one or more of these

phases by one national literature does not make it possible for another to overlook it even if the latter is aware of what the former underwent. For a long time, the marginalisation of women's writing hindered the flow of their experience from one literary tradition to another. Although the first phase of feminine writing in Arabic literature started after the end of its English counterpart in 1850, it was inevitable for Arab women writers to go through it even if some of them were aware that the work of their English counterparts had finished with this stage and were engaged in the second one.

The brevity of the period in which Arabic narrative went through these three different phases created a certain overlapping in presentation and literary qualities, but the three phases remained as distinct and different in Arabic as they were in English and other literatures. In addition to the general continuum of any subculture, these three phases in the development of the female literary tradition in Arabic narrative were more stages of female consciousness in Kristeva's sense than autonomous periods of literary development. As such they were linked to two main factors: the change in the class background of the female writers and subsequently their formative experience, and the nature of the collective perception of the national identity. The perception of gender and/or individual identity is generally linked to the wider perception of the national-self and its place in the surrounding world. This fuses the individual and the social into a unitary condition which seeks to articulate its tenets in a particularised literary language capable of formulating alternatives. The change from one phase of women's literary discourse to another is both a manifestation of the wider socio-political conditions and an active force in the process of formulating them.

The homology and the interaction between these three sets of changes, the social, political and literary is part of a wider change in the literary sensibility from the traditional sensibility with its metonymic rules of reference to the modernistic one based on metaphoric rules.<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere, I have elaborated the nature of this change in the literary sensibility in modern Arabic literature, the transition from the first to the second and the different sets of rules of reference underlying each one (see Hafez 1990:116-183). What is relevant here is to mention that the first two phases of the feminine and feminist discourse in Arabic literature take place within the rubrics of traditional sensibility in which the literary text is perceived as an extension to or perfection of external and largely hierarchical reality. While the third one, the female discourse, is part and parcel of the modernistic sensibility which emphasises the autonomy and internal cohesion of the literary text and minimises its dependence on exterior absolutes or hierarchised reality. The

two different sensibilities provide each phase with its literary context, enable the reader to react to its products with the analogous interpretative responses and explain certain overflow of characteristics between the two first phases. They also locate women's work in a wider framework of secular Arabic discourse and dispense with simplistic arguments of imported feminism. The relevance of Showalter's and Kristeva's schemes is that they can be used as a starting point, then qualified and modified to suit the new context.

### Feminine Literature of Imitation

The prolonged phase of 'feminine' writing characterized the output of the upper class Franco-Circassian women in Egypt and the Levant. This period is characterised by what Margot Badran calls 'invisible feminism' (see Badran 1977 & 1990), a condition of minimum awareness of gender difference and an inarticulate demand for the bare essentials of feminine rights. The awareness of gender difference is normally confined to the areas recognized by the patriarchal order and indispensable for the preservation of its authority and hierarchical allocation of roles and space. The portrayal of the delights of domestic bliss and the joy of its protective enclave played an active role in enforcing the confinement of women to the harem and even raised it to the status of a desirable utopia. Women's presentation of the life in the harem has the authority of first hand experience and was more effective in communicating the patriarchal message to other women.

The books produced by women writers of this early period circulated in the harem and as a result centred around the experience of their prospective readers who fitted congenially in the patriarchal system. It is natural that the titles of these rudimentary novels were either of a highly traditional and moralistic nature (such as *Natā'ij al-ḥimāh li-ah-Aḡwal wa-l-Af'al*, 1888, *Ḥayāt al-Tā'ibah li-ah-Liḡar*, 1893<sup>3</sup>; *al-Fayḥ al-Munīf li-Tahāqut Rabḥat al-Khāḍir*, 1895, *Ḥayāt al-'Awāqib*, 1899<sup>4</sup> and *al-Fadāḥ Sirat al-Sa'ādah*<sup>5</sup>) or of an entertaining and sentimental quality (such as *Zaynab Ḥawwā's al-Ḥawā wa-l-Wifā'*, 1897<sup>6</sup> and *Ḥaḍḥakirāt Wasfāt al-Matayyib*<sup>7</sup>, 1907, a work of seven volumes some with sensational titles like

<sup>2</sup> These two maqāmat-type narratives are by 'Aḥmad al-Zaynūnīyāl.

<sup>3</sup> These two autobiographical narrative works are by Zaynab Ḥawwā.

<sup>4</sup> This is one of the titles of the seven volume work of narrative by Zaynab Muḥammad.

<sup>5</sup> This series of narratives are by Zaynab Muḥammad who probably was one of the maids in the Khedival Court. They all appeared around the 1920s and the last is approximately 1927.

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed discussion of the difference between metonymy and 'metaphor' in the typology of literature, see David Lodge (1977).

*Bārī wa-Muḥāḍḍīnā* 'Asrīq Uḥūdā, Dohāwā al-Qadār, Akharat al-Muḥāḍḍīn, An-ḥāḍḍī al-Ḥāḍḍī', etc.<sup>10</sup>). The rudimentary narrative of these women writers was not much different from that of their male contemporaries in its social or moralistic outlook or in its language and textual strategies.

This soon changed with the nationalistic stance of Ḥudā Shā'irāwī and others at the beginning of the twentieth century and their articulation of the need for women's participation in the country's struggle for independence. They called for granting women certain 'essential' rights so that they could manifest their support for the patriotic cause. The female role in the nationalistic struggle in which the polarisation was between a monolithic national 'self' and a foreign 'other' was completely subordinated to that of the male. The whole period was distinguished by the idealization of the beauty of the country and the romanticisation of patriotism. In this stage national interests and with them national identity were seen as unmitigated and abstract, a vision that was totally in harmony with the prevalent patriarchal world view of the predominantly bourgeois elite. The interests of women were not distinguished from those of men nor were the concerns of the rich from those of the poor. This reveals that one of the reasons for the failure of the nationalistic project at the time is the inherent contradiction in its quest for liberation: namely the desire to liberate the male from foreign domination but subject the female to the domination of the patriarchal system.

It is interesting that the feminine literary discourse which prevailed in Egypt and the Levant in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the early period of the twentieth are currently echoed in Arabia and the Gulf. This highlights the uneven literary development of various parts of the Arab world, and the coexistence of the three types of writing in the contemporary literary scene. In this type of feminine discourse (written by Wardah al-Yūzajī, Wardah al-Tark, Zaynab Lawwāz, Farīdah 'Adīyyah and Latīfah Ḥāshim in Lebanon, and 'A'ishah al-Taymūriyyah, Malak Hittī Nāsūt (Bāḥithat al-Bāḍiyah) and Zaynab Muḥammad in Egypt at the turn of the century and recently by Laylā al-Uthmān and Tharīyyā al-Baqasū in Kuwait, Fawziyyah Rasūf and Munirah al-Faḥl in Bahrain, Salma Maḥmūd Sayf in UAE and Ruqayyah al-Shahīb, Maryam al-Ḥāmidī and Lattīah al-Sālim in Saudi Arabia), female writers reproduced not only the world view inherent in the predominantly masculine discourse, but also adopted its version of the passive, docile, selfless female. In their works the value system encoded in the hierarchical social order which places the female at the bottom is adopted without questioning and even praised for its concern and protection of the meek, helpless female.

<sup>10</sup> Zaynab Muḥammad's novel also exploited nationalistic feelings. Part six of the novel was titled *al-Faḥm al-Ḥāḍḍī al-Ḥāḍḍī* with a clear reference to Sa'īd Zaghlūl.

The narrative works of this type are but a variation on the patriarchal discourse in which the nature and social role of women are defined in relation to norms which are clearly male. Gender and identity are perceived within the confines of the patriarchal order and their narrative representation is structured in a manner that serves the preservation of the prevalent hierarchy. Yet the female writers of this type, though conforming to the male views and canons were marginalised and their names were almost purged from the literary history of modern Arabic literature. The marginalisation of their writing is both a consequence of the gender relations which have structured women's absence from the active production of 'important' or 'serious' literature, and a direct result of their own discourse which made their writing no more than variations on the main patriarchal discourse whose strong presence renders any variation unimportant. Yet these imitative variations on the prevalent male discourse were the necessary first step without which subsequent development would not have been possible. It accustomed both the reader and the patriarchal establishment to the phenomenon of women writers. It also earned the women writers respect, a necessary prerequisite for taking their writing seriously, and more importantly made the 'invisible woman' clearly visible. Despite its conformity, or rather because of its ability to appease patriarchal fear by adopting its vision, it took a major step towards subverting the male monopoly on discourse.

## Feminine Literary Discourse

The feminine narrative discourse is represented in this study by the novel of the Kuwaiti female writer, Laylā al-Uthmān, *Fawziyyah Takhrīj min al-Baḥr* (Fawziyyah Emerges from the Sea, 1986). In this novel one finds a clear example of the internalization of the male perspective and its faithful reproduction by a female writer. Like the writers of the first phase of feminine discourse in Egypt and the Levant, Laylā al-Uthmān's work<sup>11</sup> appeared within the context of establishing a new national literature. Before

<sup>11</sup> She started her career as a journalist in 1965, then turned to the short story in 1974. Her first collection, *Imwāḥ al-Ḥāḍḍī* (A Woman in an Udd) appeared in 1976. Then came *Al-Rokh* (Departure) in 1979, *Bi al-Tayl Ta'āl al-Ḥayā* (At Night Swans Appear) in 1980, *Al-Ḥubb lahuḥ Shuwar* (Love has Many Forms) in 1982 and *Fawziyyah Takhrīj min al-Baḥr* (Fawziyyah Emerges from the Sea) in 1984. Her first novel, *Al-Mawḥ wa-l-Qadā* (A Woman and a Cat) appeared in 1985 and was followed by *Fawziyyah Takhrīj min al-Baḥr* in 1986.

1970, Kuwait had no narrative literature of any significance<sup>12</sup>, and al-Thumayn's narrative work can be seen as part and parcel of the process of establishing a new literary discourse capable of shaping a specific identity<sup>13</sup>. Although the work of the Kuwaiti writers started when the main stream Arabic narrative has moved away from the traditional sensibility towards the modernistic one, their work as well as that of the rest of the Arabian peninsula is produced within the rubrics of traditional sensibility and according to its dynamics and metonymic rules of reference.

*Wasaniyyah Takhruj min al-Bahr* is no exception. It aspires to reflect the reality of a changing Kuwait and the impact of this change on social interactions, roles and gender. The dominant narrative voice in this novel is not that of its heroine, Wasaniyyah, whose name is enshrined in the title, which reflects a male stereotypical vision of the female as a siren emerging from the sea, but of the hero 'Abdullah. The narrative oscillates between first and third person, in the former 'Abdullah speaks of his internal feelings and anxieties and in the latter he narrates the rest of the story and presents other characters. The identification between 'Abdullah's personal perspective and that of the third person narrative enhances his authority and presence in the absence of his direct voice. This creates a textual equivalent of the stereotypical male whose women conforms to his system of values and ideals regardless of his physical absence. The prevalence of his point of view throughout the narrative, and particularly when he is not involved in the narrated event, is a manifestation of the all embracing patriarchal order whose control over the world of narrative is seen as the natural norm.

The prevalence of the perspective of the male hero throughout the narrative is ostensibly intended to glamorize the female, but results not only in the male's manipulation of the narrative point of view, but also in structuring the absence of the female and denying her any narrative voice. The heroine of the text is the epitome of the silent woman who has internalized the male belief that the silent female is by definition a chaste one, for verbal intercourse leads inevitably to sexual intercourse. The idealization of the female through the eyes of the male narrator is a strategy that allows the text to reproduce in its heroine the desired female: the one

that internalizes the male perception of the feminine 'right' code of conduct, and enables the narrator to be the active agent who inspires and controls her action. The ultimate presence of the heroine is mainly achieved through her complete absence, her death by drowning which identifies her with both the sea and the siren of the title.

Her wilful death is presented as the conclusive form of submission to the behest of patriarchy, for she intentionally sacrifices herself in order to preserve intact the supremacy of the patriarchal code of conduct. Her death is enveloped in certain ambiguities regarding its voluntary or accidental nature, yet the structuring of the event which led to her death made it inevitable to select her rather than 'Abdullah for this fate. This is enforced by both her initiative to hide underwater and her failure to cry for help when she was engulfed by the waves to demonstrate her devotion to preserving the order that dictates her annihilation. Her reward for such selfless surrender in the patriarchal order is inscribed into every aspect of the narrative to allow her absence to prevail over the presence of 'Abdullah's wife who shows less than total capitulation to his vision. The absent Wasaniyyah becomes the ultimate object of desire while the present stereotypical plugging wife is presented as an objectionable obstacle in his quest for his desire.

At one level the novel contains a reproduction of an inverted form of the stereotypical female who uses her beauty to snare the men and/or powerful male, for it tells the love story of the poor 'Abdullah and the rich and beautiful Wasaniyyah. They were brought up together as children, the childish playfulness soon turned into adolescent passion that was curbed by the divisive social order. But this is far from what Kholdey calls 'inversion' which occurs when the stereotyped traditional literary images of women are being turned around in women's narrative works either for comic purpose, to reveal their hidden reality, expose their underlying prejudice, or connote their opposite (see Kholdey 1973:75-92). For the ostensible 'inversion' of the traditional stereotype has merely a sentimental connotation and conforms to the patriarchal conceptions. The inversion of the traditional tale serves the patriarchal control, for it enables the poor male, 'Abdullah, against the dictates of social class, to prevail over the rich female, Wasaniyyah, in a manner that allows the patriarchal order to prevail over social class.

This is confirmed through the allocation of space in the novel, for while a whole variety of space is open to the male narrator, the female is confined to the limited domain of the house. This is not seen as a prison, but as a haven from the devilish heat of the outside world and the contamination of its experience. Indeed her departure from its protective habitat exposes her to dangers and leads to her death. In addition, the association of the innocent love of childhood with the nostalgic past of pre-oil Kuwait that led a simple existence of fishing and tribal life is posited as a paradise lost. This

<sup>12</sup> A few rudimentary forms of narrative writing appeared in periodicals in the late 1940s and early 1950s, particularly the work of Khālid Khalaf, Ḥamad al-Rujayb, Fāḥid Khalaf and Fāḥid al-Duwayri. But these early pioneering work did not develop into mature narrative work and the 1960s witnessed the dwindling of these early attempts.

<sup>13</sup> The group of Kuwaiti writers who participated in this process all started their work in the 1970s, such as Sulaymān al-Shayḥ, Sulaymān al-Khalīfī, Jamāl Fāḥid Jamālī, Fayḥ al-'Udaynī and others. For a detailed historical account see 'Abdullāh (1973), Jamālī (1982) and Ghallūm (1983).



is contrasted with the materialistic ways of post oil society which is strongly divided by class consciousness. The loss of innocence is seen as the cause of corruption and disharmony, but the only way to regain the lost paradise is through death. Although one can detect a Freudian implication in positing death as the ultimate object of desire, as Nirvana or the recapturing of the lost unity and the final healing of the split subject, the presentation of the action in the moment of the hero's drowning longing to attain unity with his lost beloved offers conflicting implications. With its emphasis on the return to the happy days of yore, nostalgia has been identified as an antifeminist textual strategy proclaiming the return to the past when men were men and women were women.<sup>14</sup>

Another aspect of this nostalgic resistance to change in the novel is the representation of the present as degenerate, corrupt and ugly. The hero's acceptance of its rules is posited as a loss of authenticity and masculine superiority, for the woman who calls for its acceptance is presented as the nagging unattractive wife devoid of sympathy, love or understanding. She has no feeling for her husband, and is presented in the text as the devil incarnate (al-'Udhman 1986:8). Despite her association with the present, she remains nameless, faceless and characterless, and her time, the present, is depicted as the time of 'gushes of black gold which emit greed, hatred, malice and endless hostility' (al-'Udhman 1986:52). Her presence is purged from the text, whose core is the remembrance and glorification of the past. Her opposing character, Wasaniyyah, is not only named and her name is enshrined in the title, but she is also beautiful, tender, loving and understanding.

In nostalgic writings opposition past/present accumulates crucially important meanings. As we have seen, the term past is attached to other terms that make of it a locus of authenticity. So vivid does this constructed past become that the rhetorical strategies used to create it seem to disappear: the mythic past becomes real (Doan & Hodges 1987:9).

This is what the novel aspires to achieve, to make this mythic and highly imaginative version of the past real by purging the text from any real representation of the present.

### Feminist Inversion of Codes

The second and most prolific phase is that of 'Feminist' narrative discourse of protest against the standards and values of the patriarchal discourse and

its implicit system. In this phase which extends from the 1930s until the 1970s, women writers realized that literary discourse plays a significant part in the social and political life of their nation. They also became aware of its function as a propagator of a 'world view' and hence of its vital role in passifying the oppressed or inciting them to revolt against their lot. For without altering women's perception of themselves and their role, it is difficult to motivate them to undergo the required change. Thus coincided with the spread of education, progressive urbanization, the acceleration of social mobility and the rise of the middle class and its wide participation in the political quest for national identity. It is therefore natural that the majority of women writers of this phase are descendants of middle class families who felt, with the euphoria of independence, that their chance had come to play a significant role in the development of their country. The old aristocratic class of female writers who perceived of literary activity as a 'hobby' faded away to create room for the aggressive and aspiring middle class. The end of the colonial era in the Arab world and the emergence of independent states changed the nature of the nationalistic issues, and brought about a new agenda and a class and gender polarization. The retroactive nature of the nationalistic cause of the past when the monolithic national 'self' was contrasted with the colonial 'other' was over, and in its place a number of contending political visions competed for public attention, and gender issues advanced to the foreground.

One of the major contradictions of this phase is that the more the 'Feminist' writer rebelled against the prevalent norms, the more attractive she became to the ruling establishment which was in the habit of co-opting the propagators of change. This was so because the newly established nationalistic regimes were in need of a programme of social change which attracted wide support and, as a result, identified with the 'Feminist' call for reform. The main characteristic of the 'Feminist' narrative discourse of this phase, namely its desire to subvert patriarchal control of the distribution of roles, was seen by the nationalistic ruling establishments as directed against the old order, hence analogous to that of the new regimes. The association with the establishment gave the 'Feminist' discourse a boost, and enabled it to consolidate its grip on the educational establishment in many parts of the Arab world.<sup>15</sup> This resulted in opening new venues for women and enhanced their place in the literary world. The very number of women writers published in this period, throughout the Arab world and particularly in its old centres in Egypt and the Levant confirms this, from Sahar al-Qadawi and

<sup>14</sup> For a detailed study of this, see Doan and Hodges (1987).

<sup>15</sup> This reached its peak in the Tunisia in the 1960s where it was translated into legislation and succeeded in institutionalising many of the gains of the women's movement, thanks to the strong support of Bourguiba's regime.

A'ishah 'Abd al-Rahman to Umm al-Zayyat, Šufi 'Abdalla, Jadhbiyyat Sidiqi and Nawāl al-Sa'dawi in Egypt, Samirah 'Azam, Laylā Barabai, Imil Nasrallah, Laylā 'Usayfū, Kūh Khuri and Ghada al-Samman in the Levant and Nāzik al-Malā'ika and Dīn al-Aḥdī in Iraq. Yet many of their texts reveal a peculiar tendency to invert the prevalent patriarchal order without a clear understanding of the dangers involved. The inversion of an unjust order retains the inherent contradictions of its original system, albeit in an inverse form. They are recuperating the ideology of the system which they set to repudiate. The critique of a male-dominated vision becomes entangled in the metaphysical framework of male supremacy it seeks to dismantle.

This is evident in al-Sa'dawi's (1987) novel, *Suqūt al-Imām*. (The Fall of the Imam, 1988), which relates the story of an illegitimate woman who discovers that her real father is the Imam, a political leader who exploits religion for his own ends. The heroine, Bint-Allah, recalls the story of her problematic relationship with her father while she watches his assassination and the ceremonial preparations for his official funeral. The novel's structure is a structure of equivocation, selective and controlled by both the account of the public assassination, the preparation for the official funeral and the flashes of subjective memory which punctuate the current events and provide them with their historical dimension. The history aspires to 'inscribe in its subjective account both the education of the 'female' in the face of adversity and the general history of the corrupt political establishment of patriarchy.

On one level of interpretation, the novel is a female *bildungsroman* which cloaks to maximise the obstacles and constraints in the path of its female protagonist in order to elaborate the process of her cultural and sexual formation. The heroine is not an ordinary young woman, but the Imam's illegitimate daughter. She was wronged by her father, who left her mother and married another who shares with him the fruits of his success and the reins of power. The heroine and her mother are relegated to poverty and persecuted if they dare to reveal their relationship with the Imam. For a 'feminist' project, the wronged woman is an appropriate point of departure and the plot endorses this by making the very identity of her heroine the problematic issue in the novel. The revelation of the heroine's identity poses a threat to her father, the Imam, and his corrupt authority. The power of the Imam, or in other words of patriarchy, is based on the suppression of the identity of his daughter, or the 'woman'. The conflict between the woman's desire for self-expression and the realisation of her identity and the institution of patriarchy is given added weight by making the Imam the ultimate symbol of power and the seat of political, cultural and religious authority.

In order to push her heroine as the counter power in this multidimensional conflict and give her added religious significance, Sa'dawi presents her heroine as a female version of Christ. The text insists on calling

her 'Bint Allah (literally 'the daughter of God'), and endows her mother, who was a combination of a prostitute and a belly dancer, with martyrdom. But the fact that her father is a false God and her mother is no virgin Mary weakens the author's argument, for in order to sustain her role as a saviour, the novel needs to sever her relationship with her father, the false God. Yet suppressing her relationship with her father is exactly what the novel's patriarchal institution seeks to achieve. The conflict between these two strands in the novel's structure undermines its potency and highlights the equivocal nature of its project. The novel's challenge to patriarchy requires a reinforcement of the heroine's bonds with her father, while the added religious significance demands the weakening of these bonds. This structural equivocation is a product of the author imposing her ideology on her narrative. In her introduction to the novel, Sa'dawi (1987:9) discloses her unease in owning her main character in a manner that demonstrates her disposition of certain ideas on the novel's structure. It is indeed a bright 'feminist' idea to invert the story of Christ and posit the heroine as his modern female version. It is also viable to cast abused women and prostitutes to martyrdom. But to bring this from the realm of vague intentions into solid narrative realisation capable of imparting a symbolic layer of meaning requires a poetically creative and skilled presentation capable of integrating this into the narrative structure.

Although the very orientation of the narrative makes the daughter's the prevalent voice in the text, the author fails to articulate the motivations for her war against the Imam, whose recognition she neither seeks nor respects. Setting the daughter against her father and making her a major threat to his corrupt establishment requires very sensitive treatment and an elaborate process of education sentimental of which there is little in the Fall. The novel pays little attention to its heroine's social and cultural formation, so when she launches her crusade against the Imam she is lacking in motivation and credibility. As a result, the political and ideological objectives of her campaign against the Imam appear to be surgically implanted and the reader is asked to accept them as natural. Her feelings and views of her father lack the complexity of a love-hate relationship which one expects in a situation like this. One may surmise that the author's antipathy towards the Imam, and all male characters, is designed to help her heroine justify her behaviour towards them. The text has many obnoxious men, and a few less obnoxious women, but there is little interaction between all these characters to generate the dynamics of conflicting interests and clashing visions. The mere cumulative effect of the juxtaposition of situations and characters speaking in turn, dictated by narrating the selective past from the viewpoint of the present, fails to create the desired unity and the dynamics of opposing perspectives.

In addition, the Imam's despotic nature and fanatic views are portrayed as a product of an inferiority complex, for the Imam is not only

consistently vulgar, contorted, cruel and stupid, but he is also from a low and poor background. The author seems to equate poverty with immorality and wealth with good manners and solid ethical values<sup>6</sup>, a position that is incompatible with much of 'feminist' ideology. This hierarchical concept of organisation is not confined to the characterisation of the Imam but permeates the structure of the whole novel. Ordering social value and status on a hierarchical scale contains implicit patriarchal connotations, despite the novel's strong attack on patriarchy. Although the feminist's ultimate aim is the dismantling of the patriarchal system, Sa'dāwī's thinking, in its hierarchical and binary structure, is identical to that of patriarchy. As Cixous and Clément (1986: 65, 64) demonstrate,

organisation by hierarchy makes all conceptual organisation subject to dual. Male privilege, shown in the opposition between activity and passivity which he uses to sustain himself. Traditionally, the question of sexual difference is treated by coupling it with the opposition of activity/passivity, culture/nature, day/night, head/feet, intelligible/sensible, logos/pathos, man/woman always the same metaphor.

When it comes to man/woman opposition which Hélène Cixous sees as the core of the patriarchal binary thinking she insists on putting it on the page in its vertical and hierarchical form:

Man  
Woman

rather than in the horizontal juxtaposition which may imply opposition between equals. Hierarchy is the other side of the same coin of binary patriarchal thinking, and the two permeates every aspect of Sa'dāwī's novel.

On another level of interpretation, the Fall is a political allegory based on the Sadat era and made of thinly disguised characters which lack inner motivation and have little symbolic value. In spite of his weakness and abominable dispositions, the Imam read the 'man'—, has miraculously managed to attain power and employs a group of people who are more intelligent and better educated than he is to help him run a highly corrupt state apparatus. In addition he has succeeded in establishing a personality cult that enables his universally hated regime to survive after his death. This is so because most characters derive their credibility neither from the apt characterization, nor from the internal cohesion of the plot, but rather from their reference to real figures in Egypt's recent political history. The fictional

<sup>6</sup> Here the text perpetuates the worst part of regressive morality which sees the poor as despicable, sleazy and the source of all evil, and associates good values with the rich.

world of the Fall strives for plausibility and derives it from its constant reference to extrinsic data. For those who cannot relate its events or characters to their historical references, the Fall appears as an ambiguous fantasy, full of repetition and cardboard characters, and marked by a burdensome authorial presence which generates a heavy sense of didacticism and reproduces one of the worst aspects of patriarchal narrative.

The author's dedication of the novel and her preface attempt to suggest to the reader how to receive its events, and hints at both its political and feminist interpretation. Indeed Doris Lessing in her comments on the dust jacket responds to this and declares it 'a tale of women suffering under harsh Islamic rule'<sup>7</sup>, pointing out both its feminist posture and anti-Islamic stance. However, selecting bad patriarchs does not help Sa'dāwī's anti-patriarchal stance, for it is easy to trivialise her attack by arguing that good patriarchs do not behave in such an abhorrent manner. In this respect, the author resorts to easy solutions in supporting her argument, including the falsification of evidence. One such case is her use of the frame story of *The Arabian Nights* (al-Sa'dāwī 1988: 53), where she rewrites the story in a manner inferior to the original.

On the artistic plain, the author allows her different characters to speak in turn in first person narrative giving us their own versions of certain aspects of the story. Unfortunately, they all speak with a unified language, the language of the author and not that of the character, which takes into account neither their different socio-psychological backgrounds, nor their opposing ideological stances. What unfolds in the Fall is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single objective consciousness, but a group of fragmentary characters who are objects of authorial discourse, and not subjects of their own directly signifying discourse. This calls into question the author's motivation for using the device of first person narrative and the logic of using such a demanding technique for a task that can be achieved by resorting to the usual functions of characterization and plot development. Although the allegorical nature of the text, and its ideological implications necessitate a rich dialogue between the various arguments and viewpoints, Sa'dāwī's discourse, in the Fall, is of a monological rather than a dialogical nature in the Bakhtinian sense of the term.

Unlike the polyphonic narrative of Dosztoevsky which unifies highly heterogeneous and incompatible material, the compositional principle of Sa'dāwī's narrative is monophonic which reduces the plurality of consciousness in an ideological common denominator which is excessively simplistic. Sa'dāwī's road to literary creativity is paved with good causes

<sup>7</sup> See the English translation of El-Sa'dāwī's *The Fall of the Imam* (1988).

and honorable intentions. She aspires to achieve justice and wants to fight for her sisters' rights, equality and self-determination in a traditional and highly patriarchal society. But her one-dimensional approach to her data impoverishes her narrative. Introducing her new ideas to such a conservative milieu warrants certain exaggerations and didacticism which are by their very nature incompatible with literary presentation. This leaves her critics in a quandary and has led some of them to advise her to confine her writing to cultural, theoretical prose. Luckily here is not the last word in the Arab woman's discourse, for there is a third group of younger female writers whose work is gradually acquiring attention and respect.

### Sophisticated Discourse of Self-Realisation

The third type of 'Female' narrative discourse is the discourse of difference which expresses itself in a rich variety of different techniques. It emerged in the work of recent years as a reaction to the prevalent 'Feminist' perceptions that reduced the women's movement to a bourgeois egalitarian demand for women to obtain power in the present patriarchal system. It sees the feminists as women who crave power and social legitimization that grant them respect and a place in the prevalent but faulty system. Instead, the new female writers, such as Hanjan al-Sinikl<sup>16</sup> and Huda Barakat<sup>17</sup> in Lebanon, Radwa 'Ashur<sup>18</sup>, Salwa Bakr<sup>19</sup>, Iqbal Barakat<sup>20</sup>, L'aili 'Uthman<sup>21</sup> and Sabar 'Awfiq<sup>22</sup> in Egypt, 'Alyā al-Tibī<sup>23</sup> in Tunisia and 'Aliyah Mandoh<sup>24</sup> in

Iraq, are developing a fascinating narrative discourse of self-discovery. It is engaged with granting the voiceless female a genuine narrative voice that is truly her own. Most of the writers of this new discourse come from a background of voicelessness: such as the poor shi'a community in the south of Lebanon or the working and peasant class in Egypt, Tunisia and Iraq.

Their subtle, shrewd and artistically mature techniques for subverting the prevalent order result in the most interesting female discourse in the Arab world, for it offers its discourse in the context of changing national realities and is careful not to alienate the other gender. The main feature of this reality is the disintegration of the old nationalist project and the emergence of new forms of traditionalism. The national approach is rapidly making way for a new sectarian thinking whose rising forms of belligerency use the sacred to consolidate the shaky old order and manipulate a religious discourse to serve the patriarchal system. Fundamentalism resorts to the static religious discourse and fixed 'view of the world' to avert the danger of a dynamically changing society. Narrative discourse, by its very nature, is both secular and liberal and is capable of developing its counter strategies. In the varied and highly sophisticated narrative of these 'female' writers, the textual strategies capable of undermining the static discourse of traditionalism and furthering the secular are numerous<sup>25</sup>. One of these strategies is the glorification of the female; a literary strategy which aspires to break the male's monopoly on the divine and provide the sacred with a feminine aspect. This also humanizes the sacred and reflects a fundamental change to the perception of the female in the culture.

In the few works of this phase, the female writer has become increasingly aware of the inability of the 'Feminist' discourse to disentangle itself from what Hélène Cixous calls 'patriarchal binary thought' and its frozen male/female opposition with its inevitable passive/active evaluation as its underlying paradigm. The binary oppositions are heavily implicated in the patriarchal value system, and the new female writers posit a multiple heterogeneous *difference* against its scheme of thought. This is evident in Salwa Bakr's (1986) novel *Māqām Maryyah* (The Shrine of 'Abyyah), in which the narrative structure itself is based on the multiplicity of testimonies that make such *difference* capable of reflecting the two categories of the different and the deferred in Derrida's work. From the very title of the novel one becomes aware of the multi-layered structure, for the word *Māqām* in

<sup>16</sup> See her novels *Ḥakāyat Zakhrāh* (1980), *Atak al-Gharā* (1983) and *Bakā al-Bayt* (1992).

<sup>17</sup> See her novel *Ḥajjah al-Dalīl* (1990).

<sup>18</sup> In her novels *Hajar Dajj* (1983), *Khawf al-wa-Sa'at* (1989) and *Ḥarā* (1992).

<sup>19</sup> In her novels *Māqām 'Abyyah* (1986), *al-Ashsh al-Ḥakāyik* in *Tarāṭ al-Sama'* (1991) and *Wad al-Rubā* (1993).

<sup>20</sup> In her novels *Wal-Nasab al-Hal* (*How Asylum*) (1977) and *Layl wa-Ḥalqah* (1981).

<sup>21</sup> In her two collections of short stories *Ḥar wa-Ḥake* (1987) and *Wad al-Sama'* (1992).

<sup>22</sup> In her collection *al-Fanqār al-Nawā* (1985).

<sup>23</sup> There are several other Egyptian writers such as Tishah al-Badri, N'fāt al-Biḥārī and Sihām Bazzūl to mention but a few.

<sup>24</sup> In her novel *Zakhrat al-Shihā* (1991).

<sup>25</sup> In her novel *Ḥakāyat al-Nigār* (1986).

<sup>26</sup> The limited scope of the present article does not allow a detailed study of the rich literary contribution of this group. One can use this survey to give the reader a map for their itinerants. Their work deserves a more detailed investigation which I have attempted elsewhere and continues to be the subject of subsequent work. In Arabic, I have written several articles on their work, particularly that of Radwa 'Ashur, Hanjan al-Sinikl, 'Alyā al-Tibī and Salwa Bakr.

the title means both 'shrine' and 'status', and refers in addition to the musical structure which is inherent in the piece with its variations on the theme and final coda. The second word 'Atyyah' is the proper name of the heroine, a common Egyptian female name, as well as a reference to the age-old concept of the female being created from man's rib and 'given' as a 'present' to the male. The passive meaning built in the Arabic morphology of the name, 'Atyyah', is counterbalanced by its active grammatical role in the *hataf* structure in which the name, 'Atyyah', is the cornerstone of the grammatical structure of the title. This is enhanced by the selection of an androgynous name, 'Atyyah', which is used in Arabic for both men and women, a feature which the text is keen should not escape the readers' attention, and which extends this androgynous nature to the heroine<sup>20</sup>.

The narrative structure uses the polyphony of narrative voices neither to establish the various facets of truth nor to demonstrate its relativity, but to defer any application of patriarchal binary thought. The text posits narrative discourse against that of the media, seen as one of the main tools of what Louis Althusser calls 'the ideological state apparatus' and jettisons all the preconceived notions about the prescribed position of the female in the society. The novel resorts to a significant technique which acknowledges the absence of the woman and turns it with the dexterity of narrative treatment into a sign of its overwhelming presence. The main character of the novel, 'Atyyah', is deliberately absent, as if to conform with the prevalent social norm, in an attempt to investigate this norm by taking its tenets as its point of departure. The primary concern of the novel is to exercise this absence and turn it into a stark form of presence, superior in quality and significance to that of the omnipresent male. By taking absence as its point of departure the novel equates the writing of the story of the deceased 'Atyyah' with that of realizing the potential of the narrator of the story 'Azzah', in an attempt to suggest the vital connection between rewriting the story of their foremothers and reshaping that of the present generation.

The recourse to the technique of the novel within the novel (dating back in *The Arabian Nights* and which is one of the oldest forms of Arabic narrative structure) establishes the strong affinity between the novel and its deep rooted popular tradition. This narrative structure with its inherent intertextuality enhances the rich dialectics between the frame and the enframed stories on the one hand, and that of fiction and reality on the other. From the outset the text establishes both the perspective of narrative and the function of writing, as well as its ideological stance *vis-à-vis* the

establishment. The story is presented as the fragments of a suppressed text divided, like the body of Osiris, among various voices and scattered over a temporal plain that spans Egypt's modern history from the national revolution of 1919 to the present. It is also seen as the attempt of its collector (the narrator and young journalist 'Azzah Yusuf who is clearly an anti-establishment figure) to give meaning to her life after the death of her husband the Egyptian archaeologist, 'Ali Fahim. For the piecing of the various parts of 'Atyyah story corresponds to the emerging and evolving love story which results in her marriage to the archaeologist and carrying his promised son.

The multiple identification of 'Azzah' and 'Atyyah' with the ancient Egyptian Goddess Isis involves the reader in the relational network of the text and its intertextual implications. Although 'Atyyah' can be seen as Isis in relation to her own family, she can also be seen as a female version of Osiris in her relationship with 'Azzah'. The identification with Isis is in constant interaction with its presentation as the female version of Osiris, for the inversion of roles in the 'Female' stage of writing is achieved without alienating the woman from her female self. This is enhanced on the text's ideological plane by positing the popular belief with its feminine synthesizing name, in which the ancient Egyptian creeds are blended with the tenets of Christianity and Islam and integrated in their practice, against the dogmatic male version of Islam with its inherent fundamentalism. The shrine of 'Atyyah' is a continuation of that of ancient Egyptian gods while the religious opposition in it stems from both the male establishment that has been stripped of its utility by the rising and more potent fundamentalism and the media. Yet the popular beliefs in which many religious elements blend and harmonize, and which penetrate the testimonies of both male and female characters in the text, are victorious over the discredited official ones.

The novel succeeds in creating a textual equivalent of the social conditions in which sexual politics are structured around the suppression of the female voice, yet is able to write this voice into the very texture of the narrative. The presentation of narrative discourse reconstructs the textual space in a manner reproducing the structural order of patriarchy, while at the same time subverting its very authority. It gives the male voices the function of starting and ending the story, and squeezes the females, who are outnumbered by the males, into the middle. Men start the narrative and end it, ostensibly confident of retaining control, and leave the squabbling over its middle for women. Yet by cutting up the continuity of the male voice, and giving the female the interruptive role, it is possible to achieve the real inversion of the prevalent order by turning its structure against itself. In addition, grouping the female voices in the centre of the narrative sequence assures the continuity of their voices and the centrality of their action

<sup>20</sup> The text refers several times (e.g. on pages 21, 22, 27, 36, 40) to various characters from her father to her husband who perceived her as a man and to the different incidents in which she acted like one.

within the hierarchy of the textual order. Unlike the 'Feminist', the 'Female' writer does not aspire to cancel out the male voice, or to subject it to the rubrics of feminist oppression, but to create a new order in which the two genders relate a different story of the female.

These three phases or more precisely three types of narrative discourse – feminine, feminist and female – correspond to similar phases in the development of the quest for and perception of national identity in a manner that reveals the interaction between the national consciousness and the position of women in society, and the impossibility of realizing the aspiration of a nation adequately without assiduous realization of the full potential of both genders.

School of Oriental and African Studies  
University of London

## References

- ʿAbdullāh Muḥammad Ḥasan 1973 *Al-Ḥarakah al-Adabiyyah wa-l-Fiqhiyyah fi al-Kuwait*. Damascus: al-Mabʿaʾih al-Jadidah.
- Badrin, Margot 1979 *Ḥadā Shamsi and the Liberation of the Egyptian Woman*. Oxford, Phil Thesis.
- Badrin, Margot (ed.) 1990. *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing*. London: Virago Press.
- Bakr, Sahwa 1986 *Idghar Ammani*. Cairo: Dār al-Fikr li-l-Ḍiḥāʾ wa-l-Naḥl.
- Chen, Helen, and Catherine Clement 1986 *The Newly Born Woman*. Wg. Bore (trans). Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Cope, Joyce & Devon Hedges 1981 *Nostalgia and Sexual Difference: The Resistance to Contemporary Feminism*. London: Methuen.
- Foucault, Michel 1972 *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Sheridan Smith, AM (trans). New York: Pantheon Books.
- Ghann, Ibrāhīm ʿAbdullāh 1961 *Al-Qurʾān al-ʿAṣrī fi al-Khiṭṭ al-ʿArabi al-Kawth wa-l-Saḥrā*. Baghdad: Maḥaʾir al-Isās.
- Hayat, Sahry 1992 *The Genesis of Narrative Discourse: A Study in the Sociology of Modern Arabic Literature*. London: Al-Saqi Books.
- Ḥafīz, Sahry 1990. *Al-Ḥisāb al-Adabiyyah wa-l-Hazāʾih al-Diḥāʾ fi al-Ḥisāb al-Fiqhiyyah al-Adabiyyah al-Adabiyyah*. Baghdad: Dār al-Shaʾn al-Thaqāfiyy.
- Ismaʿīl, Imāṣīl Fāḍ 1983 *Al-Ḥisāb al-Adabiyyah fi al-Kuwait: Qarʾān Naḥḥiyah*. Beirut: Dār al-ʿAḍā.
- Kennedy, Annette 1973. Some Notes on Defining a Feminist Literary Canon. *Critical Inquiry* 2, 175-92.
- Lodge, David 1977 *The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy and the Typology of Modern Literature*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Mahfūz, Naḥḥ 1956. *Ḥisāb al-ʿArabi*. Huching, William S et al (Eng trans) 1990. *Palace Walk*. London: Doubleday. Vigoreux, Philippe (French trans) 1985 *Impasse des Jeunes*. Paris: Edition JC Laffès.
- Mahfūz, Naḥḥ 1957a. *Ḥisāb al-Ḥisāb*. Huching, William S et al (Eng trans) 1991. *Place of Desire*. London: Doubleday. Vigoreux, Philippe (French trans) 1987 *Le Palais du désir*. Paris: Edition JC Laffès.
- Mahfūz, Naḥḥ 1957b. *al-Saḥrā*. Huching, William S et al (Eng trans) 1992. *Sugar Street*. London: Doubleday. Vigoreux, Philippe (French trans) 1989. *Le Jardin du Poète*. Paris: Edition JC Laffès.
- Mai, Tami 1985 *Sexual Toward Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. London: Methuen.
- Naḥḥ, Naḥḥ al 1987 *Naḥḥ al-Ḥisāb*. Cairo: Dār al-Maḥaʾir al-ʿArabi. Huching, S. (English trans). *The Fall of the Imam*. London: Methuen.
- Shewalter, Elaine 1977 *A Literature of their Own: British Women Novelists from Brown to Leavis*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Shewalter, Elaine 1985. Towards a Feminist Poetics. In Shewalter, Elaine (ed) *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Weeder, Chris 1987 *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

# !Khwa and Menstruation in Narratives of the /Xam Bushmen

Belinda Jeurseu

The narratives referred to in this paper have been selected from the collection of Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd according to specific criteria. Firstly, they are stories involving the people of the Early Race, whom the /Xam referred to as the 'IXwe-na-shlu'ke' (Bleek & Lloyd 1911:73), and secondly, they describe conflict between an individual, usually a young woman, and traditional customs or rituals. They are distinguished from other narratives which appear in the Bleek and Lloyd colloquies because they all deal with gender issues. This does not exclude comparison with the other narratives in terms of characteristics of form.

All the /Xam stories and accounts recorded in the Bleek and Lloyd collection share the function of education in belief and survival. In addition, they all function as a form of entertainment and communication. The present selection focuses on the study of the educative qualities concerning the puberty rites of young girls. These served as a reinforcement of the tradition and custom of gender-based rites, with emphasis on appropriate behaviour. Above all, the narratives are warnings against disobeying the observances propagated in the stories. Ignorance or disobedience of the traditional structures leads to punishment either by a supernatural force operating via the elements, or by means of inter-personal violence. The importance of keeping to custom to avoid dramatic, or even tragic, consequences is emphasised, conflict arises when there is defiance of traditional roles, or ignorance of customary 'laws'.

I propose that through the use of extended metaphors the stories give mythological accounts of customs concerned with menstruation. There is no evidence indicating whether or not these were strictly adhered to in reality. Tension is skillfully built up, created by the temptation to ignore custom in

the face of discomfort, and show both the rewards for those who choose to obey, and the punishment meted out to those who choose to ignore the rules. The stories were probably used to persuade unwilling participants to adhere to tradition. These rituals were, according to Bleek and Lloyd's /Xam informants, very much a part of everyday /Xam life as were other rituals, such as rainmaking and trance healing by shamans. With reference to the gap between rule and practice, Roger Hewitt in his study *Structure, Meaning and Ritual in the Narratives of the Southern San* (1986), distinguishes between beliefs acted upon and beliefs used to make sense of the world. More importantly, he states that 'Whatever the status or belief of these narrators, their intention is at least clear' (Hewitt 1986:88).

It is important to recognise that within these stories, opposition in a ritual context does not occur between individuals, but between an individual and gender-biased traditions. Always strongly associated with /Xam traditions are two male supernatural entities, /Kaggen and !Khwa, who enforce tradition by means of trickery or punishment respectively.

Male characters in the /Xam stories are generally not punished for displaying ritual laws, they are merely threatened in their hunting. The punishment meted out to women who disobey includes their families and is often harsh. Responsibility weighs heavily on female characters to not only accept and obey the observances set out for them, but to do everything in their power to prevent the wrath of the supernatural being !Khwa from descending on them and their families. As will be illustrated, this requires discipline as well as wisdom.

Because the focus falls on women, and particularly menstruating women, the supernatural being !Khwa is a central figure in my analysis of the narratives. /Kaggen, the Manlis, who is a transter figure, is referred to mostly in connection with hunting observances in /Xam narratives.

The characters in these myths belong to the time period in the Bushmen mythology when all creatures were people.

The First Bushmen were those who first inhabited the earth. When the first Bushman had passed away, the Flat Bushmen inhabited the ground. Therefore, the Flat Bushmen taught their children about the stories of the First Bushmen (Bleek & Lloyd 191: 57).

The First Bushmen are referred to as the people of the Early Race, meaning those beings who were once people, before becoming the animals and heavenly bodies we are now familiar with.

The San had seen a man, he talked, they all talked, also the other one, the Moor. Therefore, they used to live upon the earth, while they felt that they spoke. They do not talk, now that they live in the sky' (Bleek & Lloyd 191: 67).



Barnard (1992:83) distinguished between the first and second creations:

After the first creation, the original animals and humans were individualized by species and lacking in their defining attributes (in the case of animals) or customs (in the case of humans). In myths of this type, the characters represented by animal species can just as well be taken as human. The second creation entailed a transfiguration, whereby animals and humans acquired their salient characteristics.

AKabbe, one of the informants who worked with Black and Lloyd (1911:73) in compiling the narratives, said that: 'These people are said to have been stupid and not to have understood things well'. It is their stupidity which results in their transformation into animal form. No clear distinction is made between those who remained people and those who became animals, unless they became frogs, as some do. The story of the Leopard Tamaris, which I discuss in this paper, is one example of the intermingling of human and animal traits. The narratives are, on the whole, a fascinating hybrid of fact and fiction, ritual and fantasy, filled with the magical transfiguration and transmutification of human beings, as well as the transformation of man-made objects. Unusual events are prevalent and the supernatural being Khwa slips in and out of the narratives with startling ability. Social boundaries and categories are upset, however,

these inversions, ambiguities, transgressions and hybridizations generally survive only until the end of the story where the accepted moral order is unequivocally reinstated (Hewitt 1986:36).

Khwa, whose name means rain or water, there being only one Xam word for both, (Woodhouse 1992:84), was one of two supernatural beings prevalent in the Xam oral tradition, and apparently in the everyday life of these people. He is portrayed as a highly powerful male figure, predominantly destructive in his actions. He was associated primarily with rain or water, and lightning, and could take on various forms, which were usually water-orientated. Khwa never appears in human form in the narratives, which serves to establish a distance between him as a supernatural figure and the human beings whom he punishes. Roger Hewitt emphasises that his presence is consequential on the action of others, that is, he appears only when there has been some transgression of menstrual observances (Hewitt 1986:60). He is also attracted by the songs of menstruating women, which required further ritual involving bushu and animal horns<sup>1</sup>. These rituals are elaborated on in 'A Woman of the Early Race and the Rain Bull' (Black & Lloyd 1911:193), discussed in this paper.

<sup>1</sup> Tricho, or *Agathosma betulina*, is a shrub of the rue family, found in South Africa. Its leaves, powdered and dried, yield a diuretic drug.

Besides rain, water and lightning, Khwa was identified with reptiles, especially snakes and frogs. Young girls did not eat snakes, and frogs were widely avoided as they were believed to have once been young girls. This belief originates in some of the stories considered in this chapter, where young women are changed into frogs for failing to comply with menstrual rites.

In a footnote to 'The Girl of the Early Race Who Made Stars' (Black & Lloyd 1911:77), AKabbe explained the puberty rites of young girls. He said that when a girl had 'grown', she was put, by her mother, into a new hut with a small door, which was closed behind her. If the girl left the hut, which she was only allowed to do for the purposes of defecation, she had to keep her eyes cast down to the ground until she returned. She did not walk far from her hut at this time. When she became a 'big girl', she was only allowed, on the occasion of her first exit from the hut, 'to look afar over her mother's land'. AKabbe also warned that during her time in the hut, the girl was not supposed to look at the springbok, in case they became wild.

The hut itself was built by the girl's mother and was isolated from the other huts. It was only big enough for the girl to lie prone. The confinement of the girl lasted until the next new moon, during which time she had to observe certain eating practices. (In 'The Girl of the Early Race Who Made Stars', instruction is given towards the end of the narrative on the eating of meat.) Furthermore, the girl was subjected to rationed food and water, being given only small portions of each. The 'xoakengn', or 'mothers', (elderly female relatives of the girl's mother), helped her mother to gather the selected roots the girl was allowed to eat. They helped to ensure that the girl observed the rules they had taught her through stories. The restriction of water, according to Lewis-Williams, was to show respect to Khwa, so that her people's waterhole did not dry up (Lewis-Williams 1981:50).

Upon her emergence from the hut, Hewitt (1986:281) says:

She had to treat all the members of her household with bream and give the women of the band red haemorrhoids with which they were to paint their cheeks and decorate their dresses. She was also expected to paint lacustrine stripes 'like a zebra' on the young men of the band to protect them from lightning caused by Khwa. Apart from the treatment of members of the band, the water source in current use also had to be thoroughly sprinkled with powdered bream to appease Khwa who, it was believed, might cause the pool to dry up completely.

In their anthropological study of menstruation, *Blood Magic*, Buckley and Gottlob (1988:3) point out that:

The symbolic potency so often attributed to menstrual blood and the exotic-seeming significance of rules for the conduct of menstruating women have

placed menstruation in the foreground of anthropological studies of 'taboo'. . . . Menstrual taboos have been seen by many as evidence of primitive irrationality and of the supposed universal dominance of men over women in society.

They go on to say that ethnographers have so often reported menstrual blood and menstruating women as 'dangerous' or 'contaminant' in societies which wish to oppress women that their findings have become truisms (Buckley & Gottlieb 1988:61). It is essential to note, however, that not all taboos surrounding menstruation are aimed at the women themselves; in many societies the behaviour of surrounding people is restricted.

Some taboos restrict the behaviour of menstruating women themselves, whereas others restrict the behaviour of other people in relation to such women. The directions that are culturally attributed to menstruation must likewise be a culturally separated. We need to ask: 'If a taboo is violated, will the menstruating woman harm someone else or herself' (Buckley & Gottlieb 1988:10)?

In Xiam society, as depicted in the recorded narratives, menstruating women were simultaneously a positive and negative source of energy. They were potentially creative as well as destructive, and were therefore 'dangerous' to themselves and others. Narratives in this paper are categorised according to these distinctions.

The power of women during menstruation was both confined and enhanced. The isolation of women can be likened to the isolation of the hunter who had shot an animal; the individuals concerned were treated with great respect. Their isolation did not indicate inferior status. Neither were women restricted from handling men's hunting equipment because they were deemed inferior; men were discouraged from contact with menstrual blood, as it was regarded as extremely potent, thus some rites enhanced the power of women and the hunter.

### Women Who Endanger Themselves and Others

'The Owl's Story, the Frog's Story' (Bleek & Lloyd 1911:198-205) told by Kwoiten-ta-ken, who heard it from her mother, #Kamrie-an, is a narrative in which a girl does not obey menstrual observances.

A girl lay 'ill' in her hut, not eating the food her mothers gave her. Instead she killed and ate the 'children of the water' (there is no clear explanation of the 'children of the water'). The women went out to look for Bushman rice (ant's eggs), they instructed a child to stay at home and advise her elder sister to see what she was eating.

Again the girl went to the spring and killed a water-child, whom she cooked and ate. The little girl observed her and told the mothers when they returned. They went out again seeking food, without saying anything to the girl. The clouds came up and her mother said, 'Something is not right at home, for a whirlwind is bringing (things) to the spring' (Bleek & Lloyd 1911:201).

The girl was the first to be taken to the spring, where she became a frog; afterwards, the *xkakonga* and her father also became frogs. All the family's possessions were taken to the spring and became again what they originally were: so their mats again became the reeds from which they had been made.

The account examines the repercussions of disobeying menstrual observances: the girl does not stay in her hut, secluded, as she should; she does not eat the food her mothers gave her; and she kills the 'water's children'. The 'water's children' may be fish, frogs or tortoises, but there is no definitive information on this, either from the informants themselves or other researchers. The events have disastrous consequences. Everything associated with the girl is affected by her behaviour: when she breaks the isolation rule, she has extreme potential to do *axam* which involves not only herself but others too.

The girl causes her family to be turned into frogs, rather than saving them, as the young woman in 'A Woman of the Early Race and the Rainbird' does. Not only the individual is punished; she brings about metamorphosis from human form into animal form onto her entire family. This reflects the importance of the puberty rites as an event for the entire community. The transformation of the family into frogs once again connects menstrual observances directly with the water, and therefore *Kiwa*. The transformation of their mats back to reeds in the spring (transforming manufactured objects back into their natural substances) is a common phenomenon in the ritual accounts where supernatural powers are shown to be operative. The removal to the spring of the family and their possessions illustrates the role of *Kiwa* or water in Xiam imagination, having retentive qualities at the transgression of menstrual taboos.

One is led to ask why the girl's mother did not speak to her daughter when she was told that the water's children were being killed and eaten. Immediately she sees the whirlwind she knows that something is wrong. She is thus also at fault, with her neglect serving in the narrative to emphasise the duty of parents to instruct their children. This is a strong and recurrent theme throughout the stories analysed in this study.

'The Story of the Leopard Tortoise' (Bleek & Lloyd 1911:38-41), told by Kwoiten-ta-ken, who heard it from her mother, #Kamrie-an, also pertains to instruction by parents and 'xkakonga', but the subtext addresses sexual

taboos in conjunction with puberty rites.<sup>3</sup>

A girl lay 'ill' while her people had gone hunting. She saw a man approaching her secluded hut. She asked him to rub her neck as it was aching. The man obliged and she immediately withdrew her head, taking to his hands and causing them to decay, leaving only the bones.

Another man approached, upon which the first man hid his hands behind his back and suggested the newcomer also rub the girl's neck. When the girl withdrew her neck, the man attempted to get free by dashing the girl, referred to now as the Leopard Tortoise, on the ground 'that he should break the Leopard Tortoise' (Bleck & Lloyd 1911: 19). At this point, the first man revealed his own hands and said, 'Feel (thou) that which I did also feel,' and then returned home, leaving the second man with his hands still caught. When his people asked him where he had been, the man showed them his hands and told them the story. They asked,

Are thou a lion? Did not (my) parents instruct (me)? The Leopard Tortoise always seems as if it would die, while she is deceiving us (Bleck & Lloyd 1911: 38-41).

Menstrual observances, and the dire consequences of not heeding them, appear as a subtle subtext in this story. The men approach the girl's hut while she is in seclusion. Physical contact takes place between the isolated female character and the men, with the result that their hands are eaten away. (The Leopard Tortoise and the girl are a single entity.) It is an unusual account, as the men are punished rather than the girl, although she is harmed by the second victim, who dashes her on the ground.

Jewitt (1986:282) notes that after a girl's confinement in the hut, and up until her marriage,

Custom forbids continued to be forbidden to her. These included certain kinds of vegetables as well as reptiles such as the cobra, the cobra-tiger, the tortoise and the water monitor. ... while she was allowed to gather tortoise for others she could not reach to it with her hands but had to put, say, a log she found into her bag, with the use of a stick, and this probably applied to any of the other creatures believed to be put aside for Kwara's use.

The tortoise is therefore closely associated with Kwara, identifying the narrative of the Leopard Tortoise as one dealing with menstrual femininities.

The first 'victim' deliberately tells the second man to rub the girl's neck, knowing the consequences, rather than cautioning him, so a tension is set up between the two men, rather than a grouping together against the girl, suggesting sexual rivalry. Thus there are two distinct incidents of deceit or

the narrative, firstly by the Leopard Tortoise (or girl), pretending that her neck aches and so trapping her first 'victim', and secondly by the first man, encouraging the newcomer to approach the girl. The two men respond differently to the situation however, with the first man wanting to see someone else suffer as he did, and the second attempting to kill the Leopard Tortoise. It seems as if the Leopard Tortoise is teaching the men a harsh lesson against breaking a taboo. The title of the story refers to the Leopard Tortoise, and by inference to a girl, which places her at the centre of events. The interchange in references from animal to human, for this story from Leopard Tortoise to girl, is common in the stories of the people of the Early Race, as these narratives are set in the time before some of the people became animals. The stories illustrate the animal characteristics of these people, and are therefore explanations of the origins of particular animals.

There is emphasis on the duty of parents to instruct their children. The first man is asked by his people if his parents did not instruct him about the Leopard Tortoise, namely about puberty rites and menstrual taboos. This is reminiscent of the duty of the 'xwakengu' (the mothers) of the group to instruct the young girls.

Moreover, the narrative has sexual implications. The context of the events is important, puberty rites indicate the entrance of the girl into womanhood, with marriage, and thus sexual relations, allowed after the first menstruation. The tortoise is physically evocative of both male and female sexual organs, with the neck and head being phallic and the withdrawn head and neck suggesting the containment of the female genitalia, while the trapping of the hands may be a metaphor for the sexual act itself. The narrative seems then to also be a warning against illicit sexual relations, it depicts great harm coming to men who disobey menstrual observances, the fate of the Leopard Tortoise remains unknown, although it is obvious that her second victim intends to do anything he can to escape from her, including breaking her.

## Women Who Harm Others

Among the vast accounts of narrative recorded by Bleck and Lloyd but unpublished, are two stories which take a somewhat different route. They depict people being transformed into stars and trees by menstruating girls, who do not seem to suffer themselves. The first story, 'Cairua Australia', was told by Akabba, who heard it from his mother, who had heard it from her mother (Bleck and Lloyd Collection, unpublished L.F. 3335-3343). The title refers to the stars into which the people are transformed.

<sup>3</sup> The Leopard Tortoise, or *Testudo pardalis*, is a large spotted African land tortoise.

A girl saw a group of people eating a rock rabbit. She looked at them and they and the house in which they were seated became transfixed, that is, frozen into position. (The girl is referred to as a 'new girl', that is, a girl who is undergoing her first menstruation.) She walked among the people and they and the house became stars, known as Corona Australis (Bleek & Lloyd Collection, unpublished I, II:333).

The story includes a diagram illustrating the position of the people as they sat around the fire with the pot of food on it. The semi-circle position of the people is that of the stars into which they were transformed, as seen from the earth. (Corona Australis is said here to be opposite Sagittarius.)

In the second story, (Bleek and Lloyd Collection, unpublished I, II:295-305), a menstruating girl looks at men and transforms them, upon which they become trees which have the ability to talk. The first man was drinking a mountain, playing the gourd, when a girl looked at him and transfixed him. The narrative goes into some detail concerning the way in which the man was transformed: his legs are those of a man, he is a tree, his arms are those of a man, he is tree, he holds the gourd with his mouth, he is a tree' (Bleek & Lloyd Collection, unpublished I, II:297). Although he seems to be a man, he has been transformed into a tree and cannot move. The narrative continues to describe the transfixing of a number of other men in much the same way. Unfortunately, there do not seem to be details regarding the narrator of the story, nor the date.

These are examples of narratives where a girl brings harm to others without harming herself. The narratives focus on the effects of the girls on others, rather than on the girls themselves. In the first story, the 'victims' are referred to as people, not men or women, while in the second story it is particularly men who are changed into talking trees. The processes of transformation and the events leading up to the transformation are narrated in minute detail, repeated numerous times with only slight changes in the wording.

The function of these narratives differs from that of the others in that it instructs people in the dangers of being looked upon by a menstruating girl. In these cases, the activities of others are imposed upon by a girl who has obviously left her isolation hut. Although there is no instruction to counteract the given events, the story functions as a warning to people in the group, who form the locus for transformation.

### The Wise Woman as Saviour

Another narrative which has menstrual observances as its basis, yet which stands in contrast to the stories where young girls cause harm, is 'A Woman

of the Early Race and the Rain Bull' (Bleek & Lloyd 1911:192-199), told by 'Hau'kasso, who heard it from his mother, 'Kapei-an'.

A young woman 'lay ill' in her hut. The Rain smelled her and came seeking her through the mist. 'The woman, lying with her child, smelled the Rain in rain, as it tickled up to her hut in the form of a Rain Bull, lowering its tail. He resembled a bull although 'he felt that (he) was the Rain's body' (Bleek & Lloyd 1911:193). The young woman asked, 'Who can this man be who comes to me?'. She threw bushu on his forehead and pushed him away, putting on her kaross. She put aside her child 'for her husband, while she felt that she was not going to live... she would go to become a frog' (Bleek & Lloyd 1911:195). She mounted the Rain Bull and told him to take her to a certain tree and set her down there 'for a while'. She then rubbed her back with bushu which caused him to fall asleep, upon which she quickly returned home. The Rain Bull awakened and, not knowing the woman was no longer with him, walked to the middle of the spring from which he had come. The young woman, meanwhile, burnt bushu to take the smell of the rain away. The old women burnt horns so that the rain should not be angry. Footnote, '(The young woman's) intelligence was that with which she acted wisely towards the Rain, hence all the people lived: they would (otherwise) have been killed, all (or them) would have become frogs' (Bleek & Lloyd 1911:192-199).

Once again, the narrative is linked directly to menstrual observances and has an educative as well as an entertainment purpose. The woman in the story is of the Early Race, so she is essentially setting an example for future women. The story is an extended warning, illustrating the dangers presented by Khwa, and thus the powers of women, both during and directly after menstruation. The uses of bushu and the burning of horns are illustrated. In this case, the woman uses her intelligence to the advantage of her people.

Instead of viewing her actions as merely preventative, I suggest that she has influence over Khwa in this instance. She is not breaking any rules when he seeks her out, rather, by observing the rules and heeding her mothers' advice to use bushu, she saves the entire group from being turned into frogs. She uses customs to her advantage. Hence the narrative is not only a way of teaching people about observances, but also an acknowledgement of women's power and the potential to use it wisely. However, as I pointed out earlier, women in these narratives generally have the ability to save or destroy, therefore their power is not unambiguous and they are limited to specific actions. (The last story discussed in this chapter gives an example of a girl who neither destroys nor saves, but creates however, it is the only example of its kind to my knowledge.)

The focus of Kham narratives was on characteristics such as bravery and independence, rather than on individual heroes. The woman in this story

is not referred to by her name, neither are any other mythological characters. It is only in the animal narratives that particular animals are attributed with particular characteristics, and known for these. These characteristics are not necessarily honor, however.

The story of the woman and the Rain is sensual and suggestive, with an emphasis on the olfactory senses, those of the Rain, the woman, the buchu and the burning horns. She uses buchu to make the Rain Bull sleep, that is, to dissipate his strength, and to disguise her scent once she has escaped. She then uses it to get rid of the smell of the Rain, and the older woman burn horns to appease the Rain Bull.<sup>3</sup> Her power lies in observing the rules and making use of the advice her mothers have given her.

The Rain and the woman are associated by their scent, and can easily smell each other. There is a distinct link here between Rain, or 'Khwa', and menstruating women. Both are powerful and have the ability to be creative or destructive. Water is central to the narrative, if the woman had not acted wisely her entire family would have been thrown into the spring and turned into frogs, which live in the water. Water is thus both a positive and a negative element: it could be both beneficial and used to punish, as it may have been if the woman had not used her intelligence.

Although the Rainbull is a common figure in the Bushmen mythology, it is particularly powerful as an image in the narratives concerning puberty rites. The bull in this narrative 'seduces' the young woman, she 'dominates' the bull, and she rubs its neck with pleasant-smelling buchu. These images are highly evocative of courtship rituals. Her reference to the Rain Bull as a man at the beginning of the narrative places the events firmly in the context of human interaction. Her status as a menstruating woman, with a child, distinguishes her as fertile. Sensuality, sexuality and fertility are intimately bound up in the ritual narratives about young women. Rain is central to the creation of new life in nature and to survival, as is generation and thus the continuation of human life.

The link between water and punishment or death is not only present in the stories, but also in Xam accounts of death. Best Wundhouse (1992:89) quotes the informant Hani/Kasso as saying:

<sup>3</sup> Between the time a girl emerges from her hut and her marriage, cooking for her parents is regarded as a dangerous activity. The fire used to be sprinkled with buchu so that it would have the scent of the plant. Not doing so allegedly incurred the wrath of 'Khwa'. When looking after children, the girl also rubbed them with buchu to avert the danger to the child if her menstruation rubbed off onto the child. Hewitt (1986:282) notices that these practices probably only applied when the girl was menstruating. The use of buchu was widespread during this time, for example, if a young woman played games with a young man during her menstrual period the first rubbed him with buchu to protect him from danger.

Dead people who come out of the ground are those of whom my parents used to say that they rode the rain, because the things with which they held it were like the horse's reins, they bound the rain. Thus they rode the rain because they owned it.

Other references are made linking death and the rain: a person's hair is said to look like clouds when they die. This is given as an explanation for the formation of clouds. The trance experience is described as a feeling of being underwater by some, while others refer to it as being 'dead'. The connection between death or punishment, and rain or water is thus firmly established in the mythology and ritual practices of the Xam. Girls with whom the rain is angry are taken to the water and turned into frogs, often with their entire family; or, according to another account, they are turned into flowers which grow in the water (Bleek & Lloyd 1911:195). A footnote says that young girls were told that they would become water flowers if they did not fear the Rain. Kwenten-ta-ken's grandmother told her daughter this, who then told Kwenten-ta-ken. The account also says that people who did not know that the flowers were once girls could not understand why they disappear under the water when one goes to pick them. Therefore, people should not go to pick them, as the Rain may take those people away.

Furthermore, unmarried young women, said Kwenten-ta-ken, are not encouraged to walk about in the Rain in case lightning kills them. The lightning smells the scent of the woman and strikes in that place. If a woman was walking through the Rain and she saw the lightning, she was supposed to quickly go to that place and look. Her shining eyes could turn back the 'thunderbolts', that is, lightning striking the ground'. It would then pass quickly because it respected the eyes shining on it, and would not kill people. Here again, the power of women is related to turn water and lightning is illustrated. Women can also turn a man into a star or a tree after transfixing him, as illustrated in the two narratives discussed earlier. Conversely, they can protect men from lightning, by painting them with fatamattas when they emerge from their hut. When it rained, young girls sat in their huts with one of the 'xoakengpu', waiting for the rain to pass. The xoakengpu probably told stories to the girls of the consequences of not observing menstrual rituals. The girl was referred to as 'Kwenakken', which means 'new maiden' in Bleek's translation. 'New rain' is that which has just fallen, and is deemed extremely potent (Lewis-Williams 1981:50). A girl approaching such water sprinkles buchu on it. The connection between

The snapping of a girl's fingers at someone during her menstruation was regarded as extremely dangerous; it was identified with the 'thunderbolts' spoken of here. These 'thunderbolts', according to Hewitt, (1986:284) 'were black pebbles found on the ground and believed to be thrown by 'Klwa in his anger'.

women and water is thus a strong one, and necessitates great care be taken.

Rain played a central role in the lives of the Xam; because the Xam were hunter-gatherers, their survival depended on it. Its recurrent appearance in their mythology is therefore hardly surprising. The Xam distinguished between male and female rain, male rain being a hard, destructive rain, and female rain being a gentle, soaping rain. In *The Rain and its Features*, Ben Woodhouse (1992: 19) explains that female rain is depicted in rock paintings being 'emitted from the nose of a multi-breasted 'she-rain' animal'. He also speaks of rain snakes:

The Bushmen recognized a close association between some snakes and water, e.g. the gubale, whose green and yellow colours were compared with those of the rainbow (Damard 1992: 17).

Snakes in mythology have long been associated with temptation, and persist as phallic symbols. Also apparent in the rock art of the Bushmen are rain animals, rain elephants, rain birds, rain lions, and the rain bulls which appear as 'Kwaa in disguise'.

### The Creative Woman

The following narrative is unusual in that it depicts a girl who does not fail to observe menstrual rites but is clearly dissatisfied with her confinement and food deprivation. Out of her anger comes creativity however, rather than the usual punishment. 'The Girl Who Made Stars' was related by #Kabbo, and he says in a footnote that:

This girl is said to have been one of the people of the Early Race and the 'first' girl, and to have acted ill. She was finally slain by her husband. These people are said to have been stupid, and not to have understood things well (Bleek & Lloyd 1911: 71-72).

In the first part of the narrative, the girl creates the Milky Way by throwing wood ashes up into the sky, but it is the second part of the story which is relevant here. The girl lay 'ill' in her hut. 'She was angry with her mother because her mother had not given her many thin roots, that she might eat abundantly, for she was in the hut', that is, she was secluded in accordance with menstrual observances. The narrative states specifically at this point that the girl did not go out to get food for herself, for this was the duty of the 'voisengu', and forbidden to the girl. In her anger, she threw up the 'thin' roots into the sky in order that they might become stars; the old roots became red stars, while the young roots became white stars.

The narrative goes on to explain that she did not eat young men's game because it would lead to their bows and arrows becoming 'cold', due to her saliva entering the meat and thus the bow. She only ate game killed by her father. She also treated her father's hands (with buchu) ... taking away her saava (from them) (Bleek & Lloyd 1911: 73-74).

These eating observances also extended to the 'voisengu': any animal killed by the girl's father for her to eat or was reserved for only the girl and the 'voisengu', rather than being shared out amongst the other hunters. Elsie (1986:280) says that some of the man's arrows 'were recognised as belonging to the girl'.

The narrative is an account aimed at instructing people, especially young girls, about puberty rites and the corresponding observances. It is concerned with the actual conditions of the girl's seclusion. A footnote to this narrative, related by #Kabbo, who heard it from his mother, explains these conditions in some detail. The narrative itself refers mostly to the seclusion in the hut and the rationing of food.

The footnote says that these people of the Early Race were very stupid, yet the girl performs a fantastical feat. Out of anger, a 'negative' state, comes tremendous power and creativity. The girl creates the Milky Way and then the stars, providing light for all, which is a highly positive action. The onset of menstruation signals the beginning of fertility and thus the ability to produce new life through procreation. The power a young girl had at this time could be creative or destructive. Thus the narrative is not merely a cautionary tale; rather, it indicates the belief in women's power during this time: their magical qualities and their courage. She is not punished in any way, as the young women in most of the other 'Kwaa' orientated narratives are, even though she is not passively accepting the puberty ritual. However, the footnote records that she was later killed by her husband. No further information or explanation is given and we are not informed of the reason for her death. Her defiance in this story could point to defiance of her husband, resulting in her death. The last section of the narrative operates on a particularly educative level. The information is conveniently contained within the framework of the story, although it may simply have been an aside by #Kabbo.

Whether it is in relation to themselves or others, the power of women in a ritual context is well-demonstrated through these narratives. But their power is generally restricted to destruction or the counteraction of destruction. Menstrual rites create restrictions for both the young women concerned and the rest of the community. The stories obviously served as educative tools which reinforced particular customs and beliefs. These traditions were gender-specific and were warnings against breaking with tradition. The female characters are severely punished, and this punishment

is not limited to themselves but extends to the entire community. Hence the stories emphasise the responsibilities of young women in this time and depict the rites and regulations as a duty to be performed, because the community's well-being is at stake. The supernatural being, *Khwa*, looms large over the events, or ominous figure acting as a catalyst for potential disaster, for which the young women are accountable.

The research carried out in connection with this paper is aimed at stimulating and facilitating discussion. It is thus not intended as a closed document which provides fixed answers and ends debate, but hopefully one which opens new areas for exchange, encouraging further research.

Department of English  
University of Natal (Durban)

## References

- Balandier, A. 1962. *Primitives and Barbarians of Southern Africa: A Comparative Ethnography of the Khoisan Peoples*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Black, W. & J.C. Lloyd 1911. *Speakers of Bushman Dialects*. London: George Allen & Co.
- Buckley, T. & A. Goulet (eds) 1985. *Blood Magic*. London: University of California Press.
- Heath, R. 1986. *Structure, Meaning and Ritual in the Narratives of the Southern San*. Hamburg: Helmut Buske Verlag.
- Lewis-Williams, D. 1981. *Believing and Seeing: Symbolic Messages in Southern San Rock Paintings*. London: Academic Press.
- Woodhouse, B. 1962. *The Kwa and its Creations as the Bushmen: Famed Them*. Cape Town: William Waterman.

# Censure and Social Comment in the *Izihasho* of Urban Zulu Women

Noleen S. Turner

## Introduction

Ong (1990:43) makes the point in his work *Orality & Literacy* that many if not most oral or residually oral cultures, strike literates as extremely agnostic in their verbal performances and even in their lifestyles. He goes on to say that oral narratives/traditions are often marked by the enthusiastic descriptions of physical violence which he explains as resulting from the common and persistent physical hardships of life. Furthermore, personal tensions can also arise due to ignorance of physical causes of disease and disaster, where these are seen to be caused by something or the malevolence of someone.

Vilipement moreover, is seen in oral art (and to be directly connected with the structure of orality itself. As all verbal communication by its very nature is directly transmitted by word of mouth, interpersonal relations are kept fair on both positive and negative levels.

In most polygamous societies, as in Zulu traditional rural societies, where women live together in close proximity in the homestead situation, tensions are bound to arise between co-wives as well as between a husband's mother and his wives. In line with this, Joffe (1978) and Mshinga (1993) state that tradition forbids a woman from talking openly about her marriage situation and its inherent problems.

These tensions can be evidenced in the cryptic naming of children or animals where

names reflecting censure, disapproval and discontent serve an important social function in that they tend to minimize friction in the communal environment, by enabling a person about whom defamatory allegations have been made, to redress



these accusations, and attempt to draw another name in a subtle yet collective manner. They may also function by either exposing, accusing, mocking, warning or challenging the wrongdoing reason or cause of the friction. This serves as a means of working out one's own frustration by affording the name the possibility of passing an indirect yet effective comment in an environment where direct confrontation and conflict is not only inadmissible, but also socially unacceptable (Turner 1993:45).

Kutshinga (1993) quotes numerous examples of Xhosa women's songs which are sung in specific settings, e.g. while working in the fields, at certain ceremonies or even at social gatherings. In these songs, those who deviate from the cultural norms are chided for their transgressions. These songs operate in exactly the same way as women's *isibongo* in exposing social ills, but have a broader frame of reference. In addition these songs are less personal in that they are not necessarily directed at any one specific person, although they may have originally have been conceived with a specific person in mind. When they are sung, the message embedded within the lyrics of these songs may be aimed at a more general audience.

Linnea Mvula, in his research conducted on the pounding songs of women in Ngoni society, states that these songs which are performed by women when pounding or grinding maize,

become a licensed means of communication employed strategically to play out social conflict and to define, maintain, or alter the position of women in the Ngoni community. The pounding lyrics provide the means to do this by creating a safe and licensed context and the pounding song acts as a poetic genre for expressing and defusing social tension (Mvula 1991:4).

In line with these types of songs which are often communal experiences and include music and movement, are Zulu *izigqo*. These are normally performed by women after feasting, when much food and traditional beer has been consumed. They are rhythmical chants or songs which are done with one woman acting as the leader and others responding as the chorus. Women often use these *izigqo* as a means of passing criticism or just commenting about the behaviour (often that which is deemed unacceptable) of others in the community. Usually these *izigqo* are performed in the presence of the culprit at whom they are aimed, so that she be made aware of any social undercurrent. Although no names are mentioned, the person targeted most often realises that the performance is for her 'benefit'. Apart from these indirect attacks which occur in the guise of these songs, there may also be retaliation either by the victim, or by her supporters if she or they become aware of the direction of the intended slur. Despite the fact that the message in the *izigqo* is often spiced with ridicule and reproach, it is normally done in a playful, teasing spirit without a malicious or vicious tone. These songs

are normally performed in rural settings as in the following example:

Leader:	'Khsa - khsa - khsa'
Chorus:	'Wagifhathephi, incedi yokufofa!'
Leader:	'Khsa - khsa - khsa'
Chorus:	'Ngayenikwa, le vcedi yokufofa!'

The sounds made by the leading woman are accompanied by exaggerated gestures depicting writing. The chorus joins in by posing the question 'Where did you get it, the license (letter) to indulge in unlawful, extramarital sexual relations?'. The writing is irritated again and the women join in the second time by replying 'I was given it'. The criticism in this instance was directed at a woman in the community who was suspected of committing adultery with the lead singer's husband. Instead of confronting her directly, the song is sung in her company, and the singer's supporters, who are party to the underlying message, then join in. The woman being accused in this instance was fully aware that the accusation was directed at her and failed to respond (presumably out of guilt).

### Personal Praises in Zulu Society

In many African societies, people are recognised not only by their personal names, but also by an extension of their names which form a sort of 'praises'.

As a child a person is given a praise name or 'great name' (Kopy 1980:74) by which he is known to his parents. Besides this name, he is given a name which is earned when he begins to *gqqa* (to impress) and dance (which is performed while praising, usually mimicking war movements). Thereafter, a new name is taken on reaching adulthood, and this is added to by other names which bear comment on certain deeds, characteristics and achievement. In some cases these names are expanded on and become incorporated into what is known as *isibongo* which are personal praises. Being known by his praises, provides a person with an identity, a sort of recognitions and respect, which is unique to his ego and *isibongo* (Turner 1993:50).

The term *isibongo* has many varied aspects to its nature, but the meaning that is most widely accepted, is that they are 'praise poems' which laud the feats, character and personality features of the person about whom the poem is composed.

Despite the fact that the content of *isibongo* is made up largely of praises, it may also contain aspects of criticism and censure of the subject

about whom they are concerned. (Gunnar 1979:13) in preference to the use of the definitive of 'praising' to describe the verb *ukubonga*, defines it more accurately as meaning 'to utter a poem about', as he regards the description of 'praising' as too limiting when one has also to deal with elements of censure and criticism. With regards the praises of ordinary people, it seems that the term most preferred when referring to this type of poetry that is not connected with important people and is not recited by a specialist band or *imbongo*, but can be recited by anyone, is *izibusho* which is a sub-category of the umbrella term *izibongo*.

The *izibusho* which contain satirical and critical references are not the exclusive property of ordinary women, but are also prevalent in the praises of women of Royal blood. If one looks at the praises of important women in history such as Mkhabayi, Nandi, Mfonase, Nontumbi and Ngqumbazi, there is abundant scatological and agonistic references contained therein on the same lines as the praises of the proverbial nurse, the local gossipmonger or the lazy daughter-in-law. In the *imbongo* of these Royal women, the contrast, despite their rank in society, is often not altogether complimentary or praiseworthy.

'Physical oddities such as ungainly height, wide spaced thighs, big chin, heaviness as well as extreme ugliness, meanness, ugliness, sexual forwardness and rudeness' are some of the disparaging references that are encountered (Gunnar 1979:51).

Unlike the praises of Zulu men which are common, and which may contain both positive and negative references, in researching Zulu women's praises in urban areas, the most striking feature, is the lack of praises generally accorded to women at all in urban environments. Why this should be, may be seen to be a direct result of their role in society and the very composition of the patrilineal and patriarchal Zulu social structure. Furthermore, the *izibusho* that have been researched and documented, are remarkable for the lack of praiseworthy material they contain.

The same principle as found in the naming of both people and animals, applies to women's praises, which are an extended collection of 'names', where a social comment, however critical or accusatory may be made in the allusive but acceptable poetic form of *imbongo*. This phenomenon it seems is not restricted to women in rural, polygamous communities only. There is clear evidence of an urban counterpart although the content, function and tone of these 'praises' has discernible differences.

The apparent lack of positive praises accorded to women seems to be the result of the prevailing attitude among various urban educated women whom I interviewed, who maintained that 'decent women do not have *izibusho*'. The field of praising was largely perceived to be a male prerogative,

and if a woman does acquire 'praises', they will invariably be of a non-complimentary type.

### The Function of Personal Poems/*izibusho*

In times gone by, Vlakazi (1915:46) regarded the *izibongo* of women as 'compositions dealing with something beautiful and praise-worthy'. Gunnar criticizes Vlakazi's claim that the praise poems of women deal with 'something beautiful and praiseworthy'. She maintains that Vlakazi's claim seems almost to ignore the contents and statements of these very praise poems, which for the most part

reflect the faces of life important to women, which display at the same time the sharp-eyed concern with individual identity that characterizes all Zulu praise poetry (Gunnar 1979:239).

Gunnar who has done extensive research on the *izibongo* of women in rural areas, cites the function of *izibongo* as 'a poetic statement of identity' (Gunnar 1979:241). A woman's acquaintances will acknowledge her indirectly or greet her directly by referring to one or more lines of her praise names. She goes on to say that

the women who possess and compose praise poems are usually traditionalists who do not belong to any of the mission churches, and many are married in polygamous households (Gunnar 1979:239).

Apart from the function of 'poetic identity' which Gunnar cites, she also lists complaint and accusation as important functions of these praise poems. Tension and rivalries that exist in the close knit structure of the Zulu polygamous unit find their legitimate outlet in praise poetry through allusive diction. Gunnar (1979:239) states that,

The statement of complaint or accusation in a praise poem is an effective and socially acceptable way of publicly announcing one's anger or grief.

### Contemporary Oral Poetry in Urban Settings

Women who live in rural areas have a far more prolific collection of praises than their urban counterparts. The reason for this is to be found in the very nature of their communal existence. By reciting or having one's praises recited, one's sense of belonging within a particular community or cultural

group is reinforced. As women's praises are normally performed in the presence of other women (e.g. within the homestead, in the fields while working or at any social occasion), the feeling of group solidarity and a shared identity is often very strong' (Gunter 1979:143). Praises can be self-composed or given by one's peers. They may comprise lines that arise from both these sources. The performance of these praises is a communal experience and as such, the balance between praise and dispraise or complaint most encountered in the majority of the oral poetry of rural women, is more marked. Although there may well be uncomplimentary references and accusations against others, these are often balanced with those that serve to compliment and flatter the subject.

The oral poetry encountered in contemporary urban settings differs markedly from its rural echo. Apart from the fact that very few women in urban areas have praises of their own, and this even includes certain famous women of the ilk of Dr. Nkosazana Zuma, the personal oral poems that I have come across which seem to be most prevalent, are those of a disparaging and deprecatory nature.

The acceptability of this form of criticism lies in the community structure within which these women live. Although not as close knit as the life of women in rural environments, nevertheless, all members of urban society hold a basic shared value-system and therefore feel at liberty to comment through the lines recited in the oral poems of their peers, on any form of behaviour that affects the stability and smooth running of their societal setting.

Another interesting fact is that lines from poems of this nature are not the sole composition domain of women. Obviously, where castigatory and carative references are predominant, it stands to reason that the lines are not self-composed, although this does happen. In certain of the poems recorded in urban settings however, men as well as other women have added lines.

## Composition

The language encountered in this type of reprimandatory oral poetry is of a highly allusive and formulaic nature. At the same time, however, it conveys a very clear and unmistakable message which is intended to act as a warning and admonishment against pursuing unacceptable forms of behaviour. Reflecting the very nature of the criticism contained therein, it is also common to encounter scolding references as well as crude and vulgar terms. These words are acceptable within the framework of *izibongo* but would be frowned upon as 'mhamba' or filth, if used loosely in everyday speech.

The types of irregular behaviour targeted in these oral poems focus primarily on misdemeanours such as promiscuity, laziness, gossiping and drinking.

## The Theme of Promiscuity

The most prevalent theme by far contained in the *izibongo* recited in urban areas, is promiscuity. Often more than one theme can occur at a time within a poem, so a woman can be reprimanded not only for promiscuity, but also for drunkenness and laziness as well. Certain formulas recur in the examples given, and it is clear that there is often an urban counterpart for a well established formula prevalent in rural areas e.g.

'akadibwa ibhukwe' vs 'akadibwa ibheba' 'akadibwa ibheba'

The following *izibongo* are those that have promiscuity as the dominant topic. Due to the allusive nature of this oral poetry, it is necessary with some examples, to fill in biographical detail as well as examining the texts themselves.

### IZIBONGO of KHI NGCIBO<sup>1</sup>

The One who picks up,  
She picks up here and discards there  
She has come, come, ride, come forward  
Social Worker, vehicle of the public!

### Literary Analysis

The deverbilised image in the first line of picking up is carried through to the next line and contrasted with the verb *qashaza* which means to drop, in order to highlight this woman's behaviour in having affairs with many men.

The images in the last two lines of being a vehicle (*taxi*), is a common one when alluding to promiscuous behaviour, the woman being likened to a mode of transport which is easily accessible, provided one has the money to pay, plus carrying the sexual undertone of being something that someone is able to ride on.

### IZIBONGO zikaKHI NGCIBO

Umaf'asha  
Siyamshi, siyacabaza lapha.  
Sirhi Wona, sibela, aya phambili  
Social Worker, moto yomphaka!a!

The metaphor expressed in English of the Social Winner alludes to someone who serves the community in a positive way – in this instance the male community, who make frequent use of her services.

#### IZIBONGO of S'DONGILE<sup>2</sup>

Enough you (karive) are!  
Enough you (old beer) put  
Which is fine and worn out  
For it has been in use a very long time

#### Literary Analysis

The reference in the first line to Mangqengqweni is a derivation from the verb *ugqengqweni*, a verb which denotes noise or the constant sound of a ringing bell.

The allusion to S'Dongile, a woman in her mid forties, as is an old worn out beer put, is a double edged sword. Not only does it carry the reference to drinking, but at the same time her promiscuity which is well known and shows no sign of abating, has rendered her a worn out utensil which is no longer desirable or useable.

#### IZIBONGO of MASITHOLE<sup>3</sup>

You who have no fixed place to live  
Because of your promiscuity  
Prostitute you appear me  
You do not sleep at home because of men  
For want of men,  
The changer of different men

#### IZIBONGO nika S'DONGILE

Yeka mangqengqweni  
Yeka khatho oludala  
UdakaLalale!  
Kade lwasa lufala

#### IZIBONGO nika MASITHOLE

UMzimbe! ghala  
Ngenxa yomaka  
U'Sifiso kuyamncola,  
Wangalali esinye ngenxa yomafola  
Umtandeni ngizayondoda  
Mshatshani ngimafola,  
Oshushu zimanda ayishumi

Who rejected Sipho  
By accepting S'iso  
When she had already admitted him  
Who rejected John  
By replacing him with Sabelo  
Sabelo ran away  
And was followed by Vusi.

The changer of different men  
Who rejected Mfo  
And changed him to Zakhile  
All men belong to me!  
The lover of men.

You have men in Durban  
You have men in Johannesburg  
You have men in Olusoni,  
You have men in Port Ngweni  
You have men in all spheres of the world.

#### Literary Analysis

Although these lines may not have much metaphorical imagery, the appeal lies in the structure of the poem, which is based very closely on the lines of traditional *izibongo zomakhosi*. Instead of conquests in battle, we are presented here with a number of 'love conquests' who are discarded and done away with in much the same fashion as the heroes of old dealt with adversaries in battle.

Ushushu uSipho,  
Wamshatshile ngoS'iso  
U'Sifiso wamshimisa ngoJohn  
UJohn wamshimisa ngoSabelo,  
USabelo wabala wamkela  
Wabamba ngoVusi.

Mshintshi wamanda: afakwe  
Oshushu eMfo  
UMfakazi ngoZakhile  
Mafod' onke ngawani  
Mihuzi wamanda

Orhanda eDurban  
Wamanda eJohannesburg  
Wamanda eOlusoni  
Wamanda ePort Ngweni  
Onganda ekuhlaleni.

# IZIBONGO of DELIWE<sup>1</sup>

You who goes everywhere  
You who does not choose  
Whether a person is old or young  
You also don't choose  
Whether a person is black or white  
Because you say you do not discriminate by race.

You want to eat by yourself  
Because you believe that what you have is inadequate.  
You spreader of venereal diseases  
To young and old alike

## Biographical Detail

This woman lives in Ngonyameni near Umlazi. She is illiterate and comes from a poor family. She turned to prostitution as a source of income. The lines would be recited when with her poor group and were not taken to be malicious, but spicy teasing.

## Literary Analysis

The first five lines refer to this woman's indiscriminate sexual behaviour, even across racial lines. The last two lines refer to her ongoing treatment at the local clinic for venereal diseases.

# IZIBONGO of NOBUHLE BUTHELEZI<sup>2</sup>

The mother of different frogs like the summer pool  
You are transporting and accompanying people, you heal

## IZIBONGO of DELELIWE

Mqedi wezwel  
Wena ongashel  
Ukuba emzantsi indaba noma emant  
Wena futhi ngokwethi  
Ukuba emzantsi emzantsi noma mthophe  
Ngokuthi azibandakanyi noma

Wena futhi noma ukuthi  
Ngokuthi ukuthi ukuthi ukuthi ukuthi  
Mkandla wemalunga  
Kwinkundla ngokuthi

## IZIBONGO of NOBUHLE BUTHELEZI

Mqedi wezwel  
Ukuthi ukuthi ukuthi ukuthi ukuthi  
Ukuthi ukuthi ukuthi ukuthi ukuthi

Yesterday you were at the fire,  
Today you are in the water in the morning,  
Both Blacks and Whites are known by you.  
I wonder what the capacity of your jump is.  
Happy are those who know it

## Literary Analysis

The first two lines of this poem are the only ones which have metaphors that require elucidation. The first line refers to her as the summer pool referring to the wide variety of lovers she has in the same way that the summer pool has such a wide variety of different vegetables which are cooked because of the favourable growing season. The second line refers to her in the commonly used image of a bus, a vehicle which transports many people provided they have the fare— a reference to her many lovers. The poem is concluded with crude references to her sexual capacity.

# IZIBONGO of BUSISIWE<sup>3</sup>

Go, go away child  
Weighed down by grief every day  
Books that have not been written for  
She goes up and down with the books

We are tired of young prostitutes  
Darkness is coming, it is now at the door  
All will be revealed!

## Biographical Detail

These praises belong to a schoolgirl in Standard nine at Umlazi. She was

Izibongo of Busisiwe  
Natala usenqobo  
Emdini emzantsi  
Abomazeni kubandakanyi ukuthi  
Kunengakawazi le nto yethu  
Bavalela abayizwe

## IZIBONGO of BUSISIWE

Natala usenqobo  
Nengakawazi le nto yethu  
Mitha ngakawazi le nto yethu  
Sitha ngakawazi le nto yethu

Sitha ngakawazi le nto yethu  
Kwethu ukuthi ukuthi ukuthi  
Zonke zonke

given these lines by different people who live in her community, and they are normally recited by various members of her peer group. On being questioned about the content of the lines, she showed indifference to any negative view that they expressed about her.

She said that her parents were not aware of her 'praises'.

#### Literary Analysis

The first verse refers to the fact that although this girl left home every day laden with books for school, her books were not used, as she would not attend school, but would go into town with potential suitors.

The second verse acts as a warning to the girl that people in the community are aware of the situation, and that if she is caught out, the evidence will be made known for all to hear.

#### IZIBONGO of LUNGILE<sup>5</sup>

Lungile, mother's baby!  
No mother, don't worry,  
She eats Induna (maize meal) and fills herself up (as usual)  
A child who brings joy.

#### Biographical Detail

Those praises which were recited at occasions by this young girl's peers and even sometimes by their mothers, were given to her in an attempt to censure the mother. The accusation levelled at her in these lines was to expose the fact that she indulged her daughter and spoiled her rotten. She would also not heed the warnings of others, with regards her daughter's bad behaviour and is thus, obliged with the results of her lack of discipline, i.e. her daughter's pregnancy.

#### Literary Analysis

The first two lines gently tease the girl, but in the third line, the mother is addressed in a sarcastic manner. The fourth line alludes to the fact that the girl is pregnant (i.e. her stomach is full having satisfied herself with Induna maize meal). The last line is a reference to the undesired situation of a young girl being pregnant.

#### IZIBONGO akaLUNGILE

Ulungile, umama's baby!  
Hayi Mama, ungashushanezi,  
Uyay Induna, euhhi! ikhanya ngokukhanya  
Ungakho mabanga!

#### IZIBONGO of ZOKUPHIWA MAKHATHINI<sup>6</sup>

Parties that loosen my stomach  
But which leave no-one behind,  
It is hidden my wealth, credit,  
Lovable one to men  
The real thing, however.

#### Literary Analysis

The first line here is a more modern urban equivalent to the original lines which appear in Nandi's praises.

Omabanga awahlanguzi  
Auhlanga ngokubona umabanga  
Ozokuphiwa

Again the concept of a woman as a form of public transport is used here—where Zokuphiwa is likened to someone who accepts anyone's advances. However, unlike a professional prostitute, she does not expect payment hence the reference to Isikweletu, but rather expects her lovers to court her and buy her things. Her appeal to men is quite obvious and the way in which she is referred to in the last line refers to her ability to gratify the sexual needs of her suitors.

#### IZIBONGO of MAMKHEZI<sup>7</sup>

Container without handles!  
Long rope of string,  
Much like water,  
When it sees one who was a treasure,  
One who loves till losing consciousness.

#### IZIBONGO akaZOKUPHIWA MAKHATHINI

Ukhezi linyanya umabanga adoda  
Ibhaxi engashiyi manta,  
Egibhezeni, ungashikweleti  
Uyigaga lamadoda!  
Isiqeda izoma ngokuba.

#### IZIBONGO akaMAMKHEZI

Umgagamo ungatankirshel  
Umabhi' ende kugama  
Umlomo ucansa umabhi  
Mawebona into efike ibhulukwe  
Uyagama aze upheke.

- 11 You don't care that the weapon has tuck  
That goes down the finger  
Stay Sarafina!

### Literary Analysis

The metaphor used in the first line of a container, or bin is commonly used to describe a person who is indiscriminate eater in drink or love matters. The second line is a metaphor that is associated with height. The last three lines criticize her for excessive drinking, and end the poem with a jibe at her for being condemned to the status of an old maid, the name Sarafina being in popular use before the film of that name, to indicate an old, undated person.

### IZIBONGO of NOMSA

The stranger who is looking!  
No news passes so fly,  
No man passes so fly  
She whose thigh do not meet  
They open voluntarily when seeing men

### Literary Analysis

This talkative woman who is also exposed for her immoral behaviour is well known amongst her associates in Kwa Masha by these formulaic lines. The first line contains a reference to the image of a stranger, a particularly striking metaphor, where her gossipmongering habits are likened to that of a stranger which is used to strain traditional beer. The formula which is used in the fourth line is taken from Nandi's *izibongo*.

### IZIBONGO of a NURSE at KING EDWARD HOSPITAL.<sup>1</sup>

- the one who stays at Point Road with red buttocks,  
12 Awutibeki nikhali amangwaba  
Okwela ngomshinhe kwelilela  
Sala Sarafina!

### 13 IZIBONGO of aNOMSA

Gwen' hwenze,  
sath' oza amabha,  
Kudl' oza bhalukwe,  
Ungahanga gwe/Vangari  
Ayazvulekela uma obona bhalukwel

### 14 IZIBONGO zikaNESI waseKING EDWARD

Ungawazi ePhoyint' esingqiboneni,

- You are as ugly as a pig!  
For taking a kiss and dipping it into the mud  
The child is innocent, the poison lies with the mat

The heart of Aids while she spreads it!  
The parties are too small when seeing a man  
This thing of God does not split!

### Literary Analysis

These lines would be recited by the peers of this nurse when clucking or teasing her. They would normally be treated with levels of laughter by those listening, and at worst would cause mild embarrassment to the recipient. On some occasions, depending who was in the company.

The first line alludes to her abode in Point Road in Durban, notorious as a place of prostitution. The second line refers to her facial appearance, as she is not an attractive woman and the fact that she is not choosy about the appearance or status of her lovers either. The third line seems to reflect the sentiment of debasing sexuality and sexual relations with its metaphor of mud. The fourth line is a jibe at her habit of never sleeping alone. The next line is true irony, although she is a nurse whose profession it is to render help in curing people, because of her loose morals, she actually is responsible for spreading disease. The penultimate line speaks for itself, but came into her 'praises' for her reported affair with a patient at the hospital. The last line is a line that the woman herself was fond of saying when questioned about her insatiable sexual appetite, implying that no matter how much she engages in intercourse, her sexual organs were indestructible.

### IZIBONGO of MAMSOMI<sup>21</sup>

Ugile that open easily,  
Never bearing children like a chicken does an egg  
No-one passes so fly

- 11 Umsh' wengqibela'  
Ngokuthazi' oza' wafak' ndakeni  
Umsh' ayinazela inzali' ozamsh'!

Umdaph' wengqibela' hazi' ngayifakela!  
Udilezi' liyavaga' mabazul' indoda  
Ina' ka' haxe' wiphel'!

### 12 IZIBONGO zikaMAMSOMI

Gog' hanga' ayazivulekela,  
Lamazela' ezeleni' njenge' nLulu  
Akadlulwa' bhebu', akadlulwa' bhalukwe.



Whether you are ugly or handsome, as long as you are a male  
 And you know what you're doing!

### Literary Analysis

The hearer of these izibongo, Mafumini, is not averse to these lines which criticise her promiscuous behaviour. They are normally recited by her peers seemingly not in a malicious way, but more in a type of 'barbed' teasing manner.

### IZIBONGO of MAGUMBE<sup>18</sup>

Magumbe, woman that fills road  
 Railway box of the Whites  
 Domination in the household

### Literary Analysis

These lines serve to hold this iron-willed lady up for ridicule. In a patriarchal society such as is found amongst the Zulu, it is extremely rare to encounter a woman who dominates the household or her husband. For this reason she is criticised, but to her, these praises are a delight and she has no problem with calling her own praises out gleefully. The praises would operate on a second level when recited by her peers, in so far as they would also be recited in order to rebuke the husband, who has allowed such a thing to happen in his household, and would be an invocation to him to address the situation.

### IZIBONGO of BELLA MSHIBE<sup>19</sup>

You long-stayed women of D-Section, what are they doing?  
 They wear rags  
 White! Can you see? Whiteman wearing a headdress!  
 Hloholo! Hloholo! No leaves are done!

Umbh! Umbh! ingqolo ematwintshu...  
 Uyabale nezweyo komdondolo!

### IZIBONGO of MAGUMBE

Magumbe, mfan' oshay' indoda  
 Nqongqona blas' yabekongo  
 Ngqashilelali ezuzini

### IZIBONGO of BELLA MSHIBE

Bafazana bakhe-D-Section?  
 Babhunc' izwevedwe  
 Wake wabonaphi ubhunc' oqili' ngqane?  
 Hloholo! Hloholo! Hlay, ngqash' wuzal!

### Biographical Detail

The lines in this woman's praises were self-composed and are used as a comment directed at a section of women who lived in D-section in the township of Umkazi. She came from a rural environment to town to join her husband who secured accommodation there. She encountered this group of women in the community who looked down on her and mocked her for her traditional form of dress.

### Literary Analysis

The use of the now offensive term *ngqash'* in its diminutive form which reflects derogation, makes Bella's feeling about her critics quite clear. The reference to *izwevedwe* which are equated to discarded clothing or rags, is an effective slight about these women's clothing, which although Western are described as being rags. The term *izwevedwe* carries a double entendre, as it may also refer to a morally bad person.

The third line carries the main implication of the intended message, in that while men are never seen wearing the traditional Zulu head-dress, *ingqane*, therefore those who show traditional ways as traditional dress and adopt other people's customs— their people's customs and culture—cannot be respected.

### Conclusion

Okpewho in his research on African Oral Literature explains that speaking about one's problems, whether in the form of song, poetry or story, provides the performer with an avenue for emotional and psychological release in day-to-day relations between members of society, helping to promote the bases for social harmony. He notes that this form of oral lampooning is widespread across Africa. The type of oral poetry encountered in the praises of women from both rural and urban environments, is used as an acceptable means of social commentary and deflection of ill-feeling that is commonly found in women's *izibongo*, as well as

discouraging sexual acts such as theft, adultery, truancy and general irresponsibility among young and old alike... they encourage the citizens of a society, to observe proper conduct, cultivate a sense of purpose and responsibility, and issue a warning whenever anyone or any group indulges in habits that are detrimental to the mental health and general survival of the society. (Okpewho 1993:119).

In considering the content of these praises, the most important point to take into consideration when analysing these oral texts, is context. The perform-

ance is not complete to itself – it exists within a recognised tradition. The impact that the recitation of these has, not only on the person at whom they are directed, but also on the people present, is totally reliant on the environment in which they are recited and also on whom is responsible for reciting them. This will often also determine the intention intended in the articulation of a person's praises. In the case of the praises of Langile, these praises may be recited by the mother or one of her friends, in an attempt to satirise the behaviour the mother has exercised over her child, as well as the moral laxness of the daughter. In the vast majority of examples cited here, where specific women who transgress socially acceptable norms in urban settings are exposed in these poems, one must bear in mind that they are typical examples of *imbongo* in *isibongo*, where the good and the bad are normally balanced and blended together to give an overall picture of the person.

Günner (1979:242) makes the point that:

Praise poems that are wholly recited in their content are considered to be a poor taste and to belong to low categories.

When one compares the paucity of metaphorical allusions and rich imagery in these examples as compared to those that are normally found in the 'balanced' praises of women, then, one might have to agree with Günner from an analytical, academic point of view. The people to whom these oral poems refer, may not however, regard them in quite the same way.

Generally, the lines of one's 'praises' are known by people close to the recipient in her community setting. In these examples, the oral poem seems to be used as a form of command but the severity of the chastisement depends largely on the context, and may vary from mild and playful teasing, to deprecation or derogation. The mercurial nature of these oral praises also renders them extremely difficult to capture in writing. If the person to whom they refer should be asked to recite their own praises, often a form of eating occurs which robs them of any risqué spice. Should one ask the subject's parent, the version they might give may vary considerably to that rendered by the subject's friends.

Most often, despite the content of these oral poems, they do not evoke hostility or animosity, because of the humor which is embedded in the images, and also because of the context in which they are recited. Where the humor may be lacking in the actual words, they may be very much part of the actual performance, where the reciter softens the message by absurd facial expressions and bodily gestures in order to incite laughter. This ultimately will reveal whether the person is being chastised or not, or whether the articulation of her praises, often in a shebeen setting as with

many of these examples, is meant to delight and excite the recipient. This results from the fact that attention and acknowledgement of her character, is being focused on her. Among her drinking peers, the recitation of her praises elevates her and is not necessarily taken as an amusement or insult, despite the seemingly censorious or insulting overtones in the poem. Being known by her 'praises' provides these women with a distinct identity, a sort of recognition and support which is important to her ego and psyche.

Department of Zulu  
University of Durban-Westville

## References

- Günner, T. 1979. Songs of Innocence & Experience: Zulu Women as Composers & Performers of *Isibongo*. Zulu Praise Poems. *Research in African Languages* 10, 2: 239-256.
- Jala, DN. 1978. *A Survey of African Drama*. M.A. Dissertation, University of Zululand, KwaDlangezwa.
- Krige, ET. 1960. *The Social System of the Zulus*. Pietermaritzburg: Shuter & Shuter.
- Mwale, EL. 1991. Strategy in Ngoni Women's Oral Poetry. *Oral Arts: The Journal for Cultural Studies* 15, 3: 1-17.
- Nxasanga, TN. 1993. *Zulu Women's Songs*. M.A. Dissertation, Unisa.
- Oxenden, J. 1993. *African Oral Literature*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Qaq, WJ. 1985. *Orality-Literacy Studies of the Unity of the Human Race*. Durban: Natal University Oral Documentation & Research Centre.
- Oppland, T. 1984. *Zulu Oral Poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Runo, NS. 1986. *A Detailed Analysis of the Imbongo of Zulu Urban Women*. Honours Dissertation, University of Durban-Westville.
- Runo, NS. 1990. *Elements of Satire in Zulu Oral Traditions*. M.A. Dissertation, University of Natal (Durban).
- Runo, NS. 1992. Zulu Names as Echoes of Censure, Discontent & Disapproval within the Domestic Environment. *Nomvula* 2: 242-50.
- Velazco, BW. 1945. *The Oral & Written Literature in Nyanja*. D.Lit. Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand.

# The Persistence of Tribe<sup>1</sup>

Alan Thorold

Most recent historians as well as the Banda regime have maintained that tribes and tribalism have never been significant factors in the history of Nyasaland and Malawi.<sup>2</sup> Banda's policy was to repudiate tribal differences while at the same time privileging the Chewa by designating its dialects as the central region and making Chewa the national language. As for the historians, it was simply unfashionable in the post-colonial era to acknowledge the significance of tribes except to dismiss them as creations of colonisers and missionaries which had been made redundant by independence. The result of the elections there this year may be taken as some kind of refutation of that view. The country seems to have voted fairly neatly along tribal lines, with the Tumbuka in the north voting for the Alliance for Democracy, the Chewa central region for Dr Banda's Malawi Congress Party and the Yao concentrated south for the United Democratic Front and a Yao Muslim president (although the UDF picked up votes from Lenawa as well as quite a few disaffected Chewa in the southern region).

In the course of my fieldwork I had an often-repeated experience which usually took the form of a response to my efforts to learn the Yao language. People would be surprised and delighted that I had chosen to learn Yao rather than Chewa (which with English is the national language and the one that expatriates usually try to learn), but they would inform me that they did not themselves speak the language correctly, and that they were not in fact the 'proper' Yao. This would sometimes be followed by a suggestion that if I really wanted to learn about the Yao I should go elsewhere, often naming some or other place in the general direction of northern Mozambique. Thus in Mangochi now I was told to go to Makangila's or Namwera, both near the Mozambique border. But when I eventually did

arrive in Makangila's I was told that I still had not found the real thing and that if I wanted to speak Yao properly – if I wanted to find the 'pure' Yao – I would have to go even further, across the border into Mozambique.

At the time I was more amused than disconcerted by these repeated attempts to persuade me to seek out the 'proper' Yao. The sort of ethnography that I intended to pursue did not depend on a notion of tribal or ethnic authenticity, and it was not my intention to track down representatives of an ideal version of the Yao, especially not at risk to my life in Mozambique. I suspect that even had I crossed the border and ventured towards that region which is generally regarded as the homeland of the Yao, my search would have been endless. The 'proper' Yao, like the eponymous hill from which they are supposed to have sprung, seem to be elusive by nature and I was content to leave them that way.

It was only after my return from Malawi that, on discovering in conversation with Clyde Mitchell that he had experienced the same sort of disclaimers while doing fieldwork among the Yao some forty years earlier, I began to consider the possible significance of all this. At first glance it seems a rather paradoxical situation, that the notion that a group of 'proper' Yao exist somewhere is quite widely held but that the people holding this belief identify themselves as Yao while at the same time disqualifying themselves from membership of the exemplary group. What seems important for those who identify themselves as Yao in Malawi is the idea that somewhere there is a sort of pristine core of the tribe which is a repository of an ideal language and culture of the Yao. To the extent that the Yao in Malawi can be said to have a tribal identity, this identity involves the notion of an ideal version of the tribe and a recognition of their own detachment from that ideal.

The question of the invention or creation of tribes and tribalism in central and southern Africa has received a good deal of attention in recent years, but much of the discussion has been about how tribes were invented by outsiders—missionaries, colonial agents and even anthropologists.<sup>3</sup> It may however be useful to explore the extent to which the Yao invented themselves, rather than assuming that any sense of tribal identity they may have is a sort of false consciousness imposed on them by outsiders. There is no doubt that an idea of what it is to be Yao has existed and continues to exist among people who in some way identify themselves as Yao, and it may be that a venture into the history of 'the Yao' as an ethnographic concept will cast some light on the paradoxical identity – Yao but not 'proper' Yao – of my informants.

<sup>1</sup> Paper presented at the AASA Conference, University of Natal (Durban), September 1990.

<sup>2</sup> I have deliberately used the term 'tribe' here, preferring it to other possible terms like 'ethnic group' or 'people' which, as Leach (1981: 1) pointed out, tend to be euphemistic or clumsy.

<sup>3</sup> A point of view taken by several of the contributors to the book edited by Eric Fyfe (1982). Smithall (1976) raised many of the same issues quite some time ago.

The story of the Yao begins with a hill. Somewhere in what is now Niassa Province of Mozambique. To the east of Lake Malawi in the mountainous region between the Lujenda and Luchelimo rivers there is said to be a hill named Yao. This hill is the home of the tribe, their place of origin, and it is the beginning of their history in more than one sense. Nothing is known of the people who came to be known as, and to refer to themselves as, the Yao before their dispersal from the hill. There are no records or traditions which describe a life before the hill. And the story of the hill, of a state of tribal integrity before the vicissitudes of history—of incorporation into regional trade networks and conflict with other tribes and the division of the Yao tribe itself into conflicting sections and chiefdoms—is itself an important component of the identity of the Yao as a tribe. That is to say, the history of the Yao as a tribe depends to some extent upon a sense of tribal unity, a centre and a root which overrides the differences of their actual experience.

The story of the hill is not an elaborate one, and my informants uniformly reproduced a version similar to the following one of Yehanna Abdallah (1919/7):

We ourselves say that the name of our race is 'the Yaos'. This means that we are they who spring from the hill 'Yao', we are 'of Yao', and thence are derived all who can claim to be Yaos. This hill Yao is situated in the area between Mwanje and the Luchilingo River (the gorges extending from Wisulo through Lumbe, where Malingale used to dwell, as far as Luchigowe, and up to Mtonya, that is Yao. Further the word 'Yao' refers to a hill, treeless and grassy over.

What is striking about Abdallah's account, and that of my informants, is that the hill Yao is referred to in a matter of fact way, as though there really is a hill named Yao, located in northern Mozambique. Writers such as Sanderson and Rangeley, who spent many years in the region and travelled widely in it, also appear to regard it as a real place, but neither claim to have visited it. So, is there really a hill Yao? None of my informants claimed to have been to Yao hill, and there is no record of any European traveller or missionary claiming to have positively identified the hill.

A clue perhaps to the resolution of this puzzle, of the hill which exists in a real space but which cannot be located, is in the name of the hill itself. The word *yao* is a plural form of *chao*, a treeless place, usually a hill.<sup>5</sup> But the word *chao* is not used to describe the hill which is the home of the tribe—it is the plural form which is used in this context.<sup>6</sup> One is drawn to the

<sup>5</sup> Rangeley (1963/8) in fact refers to the hill as 'Chao', but Sanderson (1994/30), like Abdallah and my own informants, explicitly gives the plural form 'Yao' as the name of the hill.

conclusion that the hill Yao is in fact more than one hill. This is given some support by a note on the Yao homeland in the *Nyasa News*:

Some months ago we were asked by the Commissioner: 'Where is the Yao home?' and I do not know that any of us felt inclined to dignify the question on the subject in answer to the query. Probably the Yaos were from the first, or at least as far back as it is possible to trace them, a people who lived, as they do now, not all on one mountain range, or set of hills, but on this and that great treeless-hill, under separate chiefs. If however we were asked to pick out one mountain of which we could say that Yaos have been known to inhabit it longer than we could say the same of any other Yao-land fastnesses, we should certainly fix on Mtonya. We remember asking Yao, at Novele at least 15 years ago, the same question the Commissioner asked us, and their answer was: 'for wherever it may be worth,— Mtonya'.

It may be that Mtonya is the hill Yao, but that seems unlikely. After all, the name of the hill is Yao. The hill from which the Yao take their name, in which indeed they owe their existence, has itself an elusive and ambiguous nature. The hill Yao is neither in any simple sense a real hill, in a real topographical space, nor on the other hand merely a mythical entity. The moment it is approached, it dissolves into the myriad of hills and mountains in the region. At this point where myth and history merge in the shape of a hill there is an essential obscurity, an ontological puzzle which is reflected in the nature of the identity of the tribe. From commentators of W.P. Johnson, who perhaps knew the Yao more extensively and intimately than any of his contemporary missionaries, it would seem likely that the term Yao, like Angulu, simply means 'hill people'—those who come from the hills, which accords well enough with the account of Yao origins given by Abdallah and others:

Thence to the Rovuma the country is cut by deep streams, and crossed by mountains 2000 to 5000 ft in height, used by Yao chiefs. Here is the cradle or *oyeo* of the Yao (Flynn) people, and their inaccessible refuge. It is the home of the east wind, and a name of contempt, Angulu, given them by the Lake people, is turned to mean the people swept down from the hills by this wind, as the leaves come in autumn. Certainly they often look as if they had come down quick enough, conspicuous with weather worn face, keen eye, long powerful limbs and longer hair, wrinkled round and round, and little else but muscles and grit.

The history of the Yao in the sense of some sort of narrative of events can only be reconstructed after their departure from the hill. Abdallah (1919/8)

<sup>5</sup> *The Nyasa News*, 6 November 1894:206.

<sup>6</sup> *The Nyasa News*, 2 November 1893:45f.

writes of the scattering of the Yao as follows:

What caused them to scatter in every direction from the hill called Yao is more than we can understand now. It may be that our ancestors quarrelled among themselves and separated, some going one way and others another, so that we now inhabit different countries.

He enumerates ten sub-tribes or sections of the Yao, each of which took its name from the place to which it moved after the dispersal from the hill Yao. Of these, three are significantly represented in Malawi:

The *Amamungwa* are those who went to live near the hill Lisungu, near the Luabwa River. Others went to live near the Mandimba hills—the *Amamungwa*, so named from the word *Amungwa* meaning a ridge with a serrated outline. . . The *Amungochi* at Mungochi Hill (Aldrich 1919:6)

These sections of the Yao dispersed further, and their movements and transformations can begin to be traced in the records of travellers and missionaries as well as in their own accounts. The picture now starts to come into a sharper historical focus. The chiefs and dynasties which came to prominence, the wars and migrations, the involvement in the slave trade and contacts with Europeans, all this can be pieced together to throw light on the subsequent history of the Yao. The question of whether the Yao really did exist as such in some golden age prior to their dispersal is one which it is impossible to answer but I suspect that, like the hill, the Yao were not one but many. Such identity that they may have had was, like the unity of the hill, a fabrication in the sense of being something that was worked out over time rather than being something given.

At the end of the 18th century the Yao emerge as the main conduit of goods between the interior of east central Africa and the coast. The traveller Lacerda who ventured to the interior in 1798, noted:

The dry goods L'Indo imported into this country have been brought by the Majao (Wahiao), indirectly or directly, from the Arabs of Zanzibar and its vicinity. Hence these people receive all the ivory exported from the possessions of the Carambe, whereas formerly it passed in great quantities through our port of Mozambique (Burton 1873:37).

Burton (1873:37) comments on this observation that the trade went through Kilwa, which seems indeed to have been the case, but that 'the Wahiao [Yao] tribe has been so favoured in the slave-market that it is now nearly

<sup>7</sup> There is a great deal of variation in the terms used by early writers for Yao: Majao, Wahiao and Ajawao are the most common.

extinct', which was certainly not the case but gives an indication of the extent to which the Yao had become victims as well as participants of the slave trade. Burton (1873:347), who visited Kilwa in the late 1850s, expands on these comments elsewhere:

The market is supplied chiefly by the tribes living about the Nyassa Lake, the Wahiao, as I have said, being preferred to all others, and some may march for a distance of 1000 miles.

Burton's visit to Kilwa also turned up a curious suggestion of a much earlier Yao presence there. On a trip to the island, Kilwa Kisiwani, which until it was replaced by Kilwa Kivinje on the nearby mainland at the end of the 18th century was the regional commercial centre, he found inhabitants of the island who claimed descent from the Yao:

In view of the ruins they recounted to us this partied legendary history. The island was originally inhabited by the Wahiao savages, from whence the present race partly descended, and Songo M'wana [the nearby island] was occupied by the Wahimuki, a Moslem clan (Burton 1872:361).

It is difficult to know quite what to make of this, but it does indicate at least a long presence of the Yao in the area, possibly pre-dating the shift of Kilwa from Kisiwani to Kivinje. This is reinforced by yet another observation made by Burton (1861:412):

The 'Bika' canoe formerly found its way to the Mozambique, but the barbarians have now learned to prefer Zanzibar, and the citizens welcome them, as they sell their stores more cheaply than the Wahiao, who have become adepts in coast trade.

What this indicates is not only that the Yao had been involved in trade for quite some time, but also the confidence and skill with which they dealt with the coast.

But how did the trade begin? How does one jump from Yao hill and the pristine tribe to the situation which begins to take historical definition in the mid-nineteenth century, of accomplished slave and ivory traders, travelling to the coast and selling off their less fortunate neighbours. The historian Edward Alpers (1969:406) follows Aldrich (1919:11) and accepts his rather convoluted tale of the Chesi blacksmiths, a Yao clan who are supposed to have set up an internal network of trade which gradually extended to the coast at Kilwa. There is little additional evidence on this point and, as another historian points out, the somewhat unorthodox stance which Alpers displays on this question may well have something to do with trends in African historiography at that time—an enthusiasm, in short, for 'African initiative' (Sheriff 1987:155).

It is simply impossible to reconstruct with any certainty exactly when and how the Yao became involved with trade at the coast. Alpers (1969:406) suggests that it was well established by 1516, when Gaspar Bocarro travelled from Iete to Kilwa, passing through the regions where the Yao are now settled, but in fact there is nothing in the record of Bocarro's journey to confirm this conjecture. It does seem that there was some trade with the coast from this area at the time, but there is no evidence that people who identified themselves as Yao were involved in it (Bocarro 1975:166f). It may be that the Yao simply did not exist as such at the time, or on the other hand that they were not yet active in long-distance trade and Bocarro's route passed them by. Rangerley (1963:7-9) claims that the Yao were trading between Kilwa and the Congo basin by 1768, a suggestion which is based more persuasively on Portuguese records that actually mention the Yao by name. This appears to be the earliest documented evidence of the existence of the Yao and their involvement in long-distance trading, though as Rangerley notes it seems likely that they must have been accustomed to travel and trade for some while before this. The means by which the Yao became incorporated into the trade have to remain a matter of conjecture.

What can be stated with some certainty is that by the early nineteenth century there was a very well established trade in ivory and slaves between the Yao and the coast at Kilwa. There is however little indication of the situation of the Yao in the interior until the arrival of Livingstone. He encountered the Yao first as slave-raiders on the upper Shire River in the course of the Zambezi expedition of 1859, but his most illuminating descriptions of the Yao come from the journals of his journey up the Rovuma in 1866. On that journey he passed through several Yao chiefdoms and with the assistance of the two Yao boys in his party was able to collect a great deal of information about the people on the way. 'Chimseia, Chimusaka, Mtanka, Mtendo, Makangela, Mataka, and all the chiefs and people in our route to the Lake, are Wanyau, or Wanau' (Waller 1874: 67). Coming towards Mwenbe, the town of one of the most powerful Yao slaving chiefs, Livingstone found to his cost that the trade with the coast was so well established by this time that it was difficult to tempt the people with his goods:

In the route along the Rovuma, we pass among people so well supplied with white cotton by the slave-trade from Kilwa, that it is quite a drag in the market we cannot get find for it (Waller 1874:61)

And further on:

...all are so well supplied with everything by slave-traders that we have difficulty in getting provisions at all. Mataka has plenty of all kinds of food (Waller 1874:68)

His description of Mataka and the town reveal further evidence of the extent of trade with the coast:

We found Mataka's town situated in an elevated valley, surrounded by mountains; the houses numbered at least 1000, and there were many villages around. Mataka kept us waiting some time on the verandah of his large square house, and then made his appearance... He is about sixty years of age, dressed as an Arab... He had never seen any but Arabs before. He gave me a square house to live in, indeed the most of the houses here are square. For the Arabs are isolated in everything... (Waller 1874:72f)

According to Abdallah, Mataka's town Mwenbe was designed to resemble the coastal towns. He attributes the following sentiments to Mataka:

All now I have despoiled Yao so that it resembles the coast, and the great fruits of the coast now I will eat in my own home, this place is no longer Mui but its name is now Mwenbe, where I have planted the mango (cashew) of the coast. (Abdallah 1919:51).

The Mwenbe which Livingstone visited in July of 1866 had however recently been relocated as a result of attacks by the 'Mazitu', and despite the prosperity which he found in some places, there was also plenty of evidence of war and upheaval. This seems partly to have been a result of the marauding parties of Mazitu (Ngoni) and Watoto, but mainly of competition among Yao chiefs for slaves. While Livingstone was at Mwenbe he found that one of the neighbouring Yao chiefs was kidnapping and selling Mataka's people, and farther towards the lake he found evidence of plundering for slaves by a woman chief of the Masananga Yao, Njolenje (Waller 1874:78ff).

In general, though, the Yao chiefdoms which were actively participating in the slave trade had turned their attention to the Mangochi to the south of the lake. The parties of Yao slavers which Livingstone had met in 1859 were only the vanguard of a general movement of the Yao south-west towards the Shire highlands. Sometimes in groups, sometimes in raiding parties, groups of Yao were moving into what is now southern Malawi in a region which has ghostly echoes in the recent past. Livingstone's analysis of the cause and manner of the migration is worth looking at in some detail. It is more charitable to the Yao than some of the other missionary accounts, but is probably quite accurate:

A migratory affliction seems to have come over the Agowa [Yao, tribes] Wars among themselves, for the supply of the Coast slave-trade, are said to have lost set their in motion. The usual way in which they have advanced among the Mangochi has been by slave-trading in a friendly way. Then, professing to wish to

live as subjects, they have been welcomed as guests, and the Manganja, being great agriculturists, have been able to support considerable bodies of these visitors for a time. When provisions became scarce, the guests began to steal from the fields, quarrels arose in consequence, and, the Ajawa having firearms, their hosts got the worst of it, and were expelled from village after village, and out of their own country. The Manganja were quite as bad in regard to slave-trading as the Ajawa, but had less enterprise, and were much more fond of the home pursuits of spinning, weaving, smelting iron, and cultivating the soil, than of foreign travel. The Ajawa had little of a mechanical turn, and not much love for agriculture, but were very keen traders and travellers (Livingstone 1865:487).

Dr John Kirk, a member of the Zambesi expedition, tersely described the havoc which the Yao had wrought on the Manganja in 1862:

Up the Shire there is famine and war. Hunger has killed whole villages, while war is on every hand. The Ajawa have occupied the hill country and have even crossed the Shire, perhaps on the way to Tetu (Foskett II 1965:483).

The easy pickings which Yao slaving parties had found in their forays up and across the Shire may have encouraged others to move and settle there. They certainly met with very little resistance, and the access of the Yao to firearms seems to have been decisive in their encounters with the Manganja. Some of the Yao seem to have been well supplied with weapons as Livingstone (1865:496) found when he met with a party in the village of a Manganja chief: '... and found there a large party of Agawa Wanyau, they called themselves—all armed with muskets'. Twenty years later Duff Macdonald (1882:19) was surprised at the wide-spread possession of firearms among the Yao on the Shire highlands:

The men go armed generally with guns. (The country is full of flint muskets, marked the 'Terror', and introduced by the slave trade.)

Procter, a member of the ill-fated LMCA mission at Magemero, was impressed by the fighting tactics of the Yao in 1861:

the Ajawa appear to be a very good set of fighting men, firing their guns and arrows and then hiding behind trees, with great dexterity. (Hassett & Ybiagier 1971:92)

It is clear that the dominance which the Yao came to have in the region was due to their contact with the coast, their involvement in the slave trade and their access to and skill in using firearms (Jibala 1982). It is also apparent that by the middle of the nineteenth century they were organised into autonomous chiefdoms, some of which were stronger in a military sense than others, but all of which seem to have been quite mobile. What is not at all clear is how

long this state of affairs had persisted. The suggestion of Alpers (1969:407), that it was their involvement in the slave trade which led to an enlargement of the significant political unit from village to chiefdom is plausible but difficult to verify. However, the fact that none of the chiefly dynasties which were prominent at the end of the nineteenth century extended back for more than a couple of generations does give some indication that these chiefdoms were a relatively new phenomenon.

Around the middle of the nineteenth century, the Yao began to come into a still sharper focus, thanks to the reports of Livingstone and other travellers, and in particular to the growing friction between the Yao and the missionary interests in the region. The picture which develops is that of several chiefdoms with well established trade links with the coast, increasingly involved in the slave trade and often in competition with one another. Situated in the upper basin of the Rovuma they had been well placed to take advantage of the trade between Kilwa and the interior, and their mountainous homeland had given them some protection from other marauding and predatory tribes. There was no central power, no 'paramount chief', but a series of more or less powerful chiefs, sometimes in alliance and sometimes in opposition, something like a group of warlords. The authority of the chiefs appears to have rested largely on their ability to conduct trade with the coast and to muster men and slaves in pursuit of this trade. As for the migrations into southern Malawi which Livingstone and the vanguard of the LMCA witnessed, it may in part be ascribed to attacks on the Yao by rival tribes and to squabbling between Yao chiefs, but it would seem that many of the slaving parties which they encountered were not so much fugitives but well-organised and disciplined marauders from the powerful chiefdoms come to take slaves for the coast. Those who settled in southern Malawi were on the one hand less-powerful Yao escaping from their more powerful competitors and, on the other hand, chiefs like Makanya who simply wanted to be nearer to the best pickings.

What is also clear from descriptions at the time is that, despite the competition between chiefdoms, the Yao had a well-defined identity. This was not some sort of spurious identity imposed upon them by outsiders. They regarded themselves as Yao and they were clearly distinguished in a political and economic sense from other people in the region despite the evident disunity within their own ranks. They were traders and slavers, the followers of powerful chiefs, and unmistakable as such whether settled or on the move. Where they had settled among the Manganja near to the lake, their villages were visibly different, as Livingstone found:

We passed one village of the latter [Manganja] near this, a sad, humble-looking place, where the Wanyau [Yao] villages are very neat, with handsome stone or reed fences all round their huts (Waller 1874:112).



Procter wrote of the pattern of settlement of the Yao in 1862, describing a situation which has persisted from then until the present:

It appears that the Ajawa run in a long line from Zomba between this and the Shire, with a branch out here and there among the Mangochi, who extend along on either side. It is easy to see hence that between the two quarrels should often arise, especially when the Ajawa occupy the land of a weak but jealous people like the Mangochi, though at other times a sort of toleration state of peace might exist between them. (Bermet & Ylvisaker 1971:150)

The Yao seem to have quickly established their dominance over their neighbours wherever they moved in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and the situation which was described south of the lake was also found to the north-east by the traveller Joseph Thomson.

There are many colonies of Waiyao all along the Rovuma, and wherever they have settled they have become the chief power of the district (Thomson 1882:78).

Virtually every description of the Yao from this time, including those of the missionaries who often found themselves in opposition to the Yao chiefs, emphasises their political dominance and evident superiority over the other people in the region. Thus Thomson (1882:77) praised them in the following extravagant terms:

The Waiyao are perhaps without exception the most industrious and energetic people to be found in East Africa, rivalling the Wanganyosi in these particulars and excelling them in intelligence and trading capabilities.

This seems also to have been the perception of the Yao themselves, at least in Abdallah's (1919:34) record of it:

That was the awakening of our tribes of old, and that was the time when the Yaus began to become civilized, to go ahead, in care of the person, in dress, and cleanliness, in knowledge and wisdom, and to consider that the Yaus were superior to all other races.

Their involvement in the slave trade and contacts with the coast appear to have given the Yao not only a political and economic advantage in the region, but also to have led to the development of a sort of tribal jingoism which manifested itself even in the case of those who had been enslaved by their fellow Yao, as the following anecdote about Livingstone's guide indicates:

Chuma, for instance, believes now that he was caught and sold by the Mangochi,

and not by his own Waiyao, though it was just in the opposite way that he became a slave – but this showed that he was determined to justify his countrymen at any cost (Walker 1874:125).

The Yao were distinct from their neighbours not only in political and economic terms. There were linguistic and cultural differences which tended to set them apart and which appeared to have unusual uniformity across the various sections and chiefdoms of the Yao. Their language was one with which the missionaries soon began to grapple, and found out only that it was dissimilar from many of the surrounding languages, but also that by comparison with some of the other languages in the region, there was very little variation in dialect. The Yao spoken on the Shire highlands differed very little from that spoken in Mwenje or near to the coast. The conclusion was that this resulted from the disposition of the Yao to travel, bringing all parts of the tribe into frequent contact:

Attention has often been drawn, and lately again by ourselves, to the fact that whereas in Chinyanja dialects changes are somewhat prominent, in Yao there are scarcely any, and the reason for this has often been attributed with probability to the well-known love of travel that seems to be in-born in every Yao, leading to constant contact between even remote offshoots of the tribe.<sup>8</sup>

The Church of Scotland missionary Alexander Hetherwick compiled an introductory text on the Yao language and had a similar view:

The Yao has a fondness for travel. Almost every young man has made one or more journeys to the coast, while some are described as *hazidewerokya*, wanderers. The different branches of the tribe have in this way been frequently brought in contact with each other, and we find but few instances of dialectic variety (Hetherwick 1932:xiv).

Sanderson (1954) maintains much the same opinion in the preface to his dictionary of the Yao language fifty years later, as does the linguist Wireley (1966) in his study of the language.

The lack of variation in the Yao language may certainly have been partly due to the 'fondness for travel' of its speakers, although it could also indicate that their dispersal from their hill (or hills) was relatively recent. As my experience of trying to learn Yao would suggest, there is now more perceived variation from an exemplary dialect among speakers of the language, which may have to do both with a further time lapse and the difficulty in travel across international borders. Whatever the reason, though, the integrity of the language at the time served to reinforce perceptions of

<sup>8</sup> *The Mwanza News* 2 November 1893:61.

the Yao as a unique social entity. The comments of a UMCA missionary on the question of language in education in Nyasaland are revealing.

Blantyre is some forty miles distant from Zomba, yet the Yaos of Blantyre and Zomba speak absolutely the same language—so do those of Manje—so those of Chikala, twenty miles further on,—so do those of the Upper River (Livingstone's). It is only when you go to Makangila's and Mankwa's that the differences in dialect are at all prominent. Even from as far distant a station as Newala we hear that the Yao of Zomba is very near to the Yao spoken at that place. Here then we have so called tribes of Yaos united by their common language into what we might term a nation.<sup>1</sup>

This theme of the Yao, dispersed and fragmented into sections and chiefdoms as they were, being nevertheless united by their language and culture into a 'nation' is one that was taken up by British colonial officials in their attempts to find suitable agents of indirect rule several decades later, as Vail and White (1989: 168–171) found. In that context it tended to become a spurious and even sinister notion, but the sense of identity which linguistic and cultural similarity maintained in quite distant branches of the Yao was not in any simple sense an external construct. It was certainly an advantage towards the end of the nineteenth century to be a Yao in southern Nyasaland, since the Yao chiefs and their followers had a virtual monopoly in the region on trade links with the coast, and even after the end of the slave trade the Yao still tended to be regarded and treated as the dominant African group in the region.

A common language and ideas of a shared origin along with a unique position in the developing political economy of the region might have contributed to the formation of a distinct Yao identity in the nineteenth century, but the means by which access to this identity was controlled were primarily those of ritual, and in particular initiation rituals. One of the distinctive elements of the Yao initiation for boys was noted by Livingstone at Mwenembe:

Yao men are large, strong boned fellows, and capable of enduring great fatigue, they undergo a rite which once distinguished the Jews about the age of puberty, and take a new name on the occasion; this was not introduced by the Arabs' whose advent is a recent event, and they speak of the time before they were inundated with European manufactures in exchange for slaves, as quite within their memory (Waller 1874: 31).

It is important to note that the Yao initiation ritual was distinctive in the region in that it involved a sort of circumcision as well as in other

<sup>1</sup> *The Nyasa News*, 8 May 1895: 245.

respects—and that then as now it was the prerequisite to becoming a Yao. The new Yao settlers on the Shire highlands were not long in getting initiations under way, as Procter found in 1861:

The ceremony of the Mwar among our Azyan people began today. It is the admission of young people to the state of Marigood and Womarihood, during which they are called 'Nawwah' (Bennet & Vissaker 1971: 50).

A couple of decades later Macdonald found that male slaves taken by the Yao were also being initiated according to their custom:

The Azyase do not make their males go through this ceremony but an Azyan slave taken by the Wyan is put through it even if he is an old man and married. (Macdonald 1882: 117)

It does not appear to have been very difficult to become a Yao—the main thing was to undergo the initiation ceremony—but this requirement was (and still is) taken very seriously. One of my informants from near Zomba who has a Yao mother and a Lomwe father said that only if he were to undergo the Yao initiation would he be considered—and would consider himself—to be a Yao.

The initiation ceremonies were firmly under the control of chiefs and headmen and they were thus the gatekeepers of Yao identity. There were of course various routes to becoming a Yao—for instance, the children of women who became slaves and concubines, who would in due course be initiated even if their mothers were not. But being conquered or enslaved was not the only way of becoming a Yao. The Makangila chiefly dynasty is said to have come from non-Yao stock, and this was also the case with several other of the trading chiefs of the nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup> It is clear that, having gathered together a substantial body of followers, the point of entry to becoming a Yao was reasonably flexible, at least where the powerful were concerned. It also seems that Arab and Swahili traders and their offspring had no difficulty in being accepted by the Yao, and in fact in becoming part of the Yao trading elite. So there does not seem to have been much in the way of 'primordial sentiment' in the formation of a Yao tribal boundary—the point of access was very clear, to be a Yao you had to undergo an initiation ritual. You didn't have to have a Yao ancestor, or belong to a Yao clan, or have a Yao name, or even have to be a fluent speaker of the Yao language.

<sup>11</sup> One of my informants at Mpilipah, a senior sheikh whose accounts of other aspects of the history of the chiefdom have proved very reliable, gave me a slightly different account of the first Makangila's origins than that of Abdallah, claiming that Makangila I came from near Monkey Bay and was a Mangani who married a Yao.

In fact, just about anybody could become a Yao as long as they underwent the initiation ritual. This is why the initiation rituals were pivotal in conversion to Islam and in the further elaboration of Yao tribal identity.

To the extent that it is possible to be sure about these things it would seem that Yao tribal identity was not something that sprang fully clad from the hill, like Athena from the forehead of Zeus. It was something that developed over time, in response to changing circumstances in the seventeenth century and onwards. More specifically in response to incorporation into what can be described as the Indian Ocean sector of the expanding world economic system. It certainly does not seem to have emerged from 'primordial' attachments, or even from any great confluence of interest or uniformity of social and political experience. It seems rather to have emerged from an apparent though flexible cultural and linguistic unity, along with a well-defined and carefully controlled point of access to the initiation rituals.

The circumstances leading to large-scale conversions of the Yao to Islam in the late nineteenth century have been explored elsewhere (Thorold 1987 & 1993), and although there was certainly a complex interplay of factors at work in these conversions, it seems to me that the two conditions which are at the foundation of why and how the Yao opted for Islam are those that have been outlined here. The one is the emergence of a sense of tribal identity with boundaries and membership criteria which were visible and fairly easy to control. The other is the transformation of the regional political economy and the growing conflict with the British over the slave trade. I have tried to show why it seems necessary to use some sort of concept of tribe as a tool of analysis in looking at Yao conversions to Islam, and to indicate what a tribe consists of in this context. In other words, although I have not taken it for granted that the Yao are a tribe, or that their conversion to Islam must be understood in terms of the mass conversion of a tribe or ethnic group, my examination of the relevant historical material has persuaded me that it would be disingenuous and even misleading to attempt to treat the people who became Muslims in this region as if they did not come from an identifiable and definable group which may best be described as a tribe.

Department of Anthropology  
University of Durham-Westville

## References

- Abdelali, YB 1919. *Chikoko aka Wiroo*. Sandusari, GM (ed & trans). Zomba, Government Printing Office.
- Alpers, EA 1969. Trade, State and Society among Yao in the Nineteenth Century. *Journal of African History* 10,3 405-420.
- Barnet, NR & M. Ylvisaker 1971. *The Central African Journal of Law, Politics and Practice, 1969-1968*. Boston: African Studies Centre.
- Boccardo, A 1973. Gaspar Boccardo's journey from Fata to Kibwa in 1616. In Freeman-Greenville, GSP (ed). *The East African Coast*. London: Collings.
- Burton, RF 1872. *Zanzibar, City, Island, and Coast*. Vol I & II. London: Stanley Brothers.
- Burton, RF 1873. *The Lands of Zanzibar, Lacerda's Journal, to Capetown in 1798*. London: John Murray.
- Burton, RF 1901. *The Lake Regions of Central Africa. A Picture of Exploration*. Vol I & II. New York: Hodge & Jackson.
- Ellis, JF 1879. *Travels and Discoveries among the Lakes and Mountains of Eastern and Central Africa*. Cotterill, MR (ed & completion). London: John Murray.
- Foster, R 1963. *The Zambesi Journals and Letters of Dr John Kirk 1852-63*. Vol I & II. Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd.
- Holbrooke, A 1902. *A Handbook of the Yao Language* (2nd ed). London: Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge.
- Ijala, VL 1982. The Yao in the Shere Highlands, 1851-1915: Political Domination and Reaction to Colonialism. *Journal of Social Sciences* 9,1 1-21.
- Johnson, WP 1884. Seven Years' Travels in the Region East of Lake Nyasa. *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society* 5,9 513-536.
- Johnson, WP 1922. *Spenser the Great White: Being a Description of the Lake and the Life of the People*. London: Humphrey Milford.
- Johnson, WP 1924. *My African Reminiscences*. London: UMCA.
- Leach, F 1987. Tribal Ethnography: Past, Present, Future. *Cambridge Anthropology* 11,2 1-24.
- Livingstone, D & C Livingston 1857. *Narrative of an Expedition to the Zambesi and its Tributaries*. London: John Murray.
- Macdonald, D 1882. *Africans on the Heart of Southern Africa*. Vol I & II. London: Simpkin & Marshall.
- Ringley, WH 1963. The Ayo. *The Nisaland Journal* 16,1 1-27.
- Sandusari, GM 1954. *Dictionary of the Yao Language*. Zomba: Government Printer.
- Sheriff, Abdel 1987. *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar: Integration of an East African Commercial Empire into the World Economy, 1770-1873*. London: James Currey.
- Scottall, AW 1970. The Illusion of Tribe. *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 5,1/2 28-50.
- Thomson, J 1883. Notes on the Basin of the River Ruvuma, East Africa. *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society* 4,2 65-78.
- Thorold, A 1987. Yao Conversion to Islam. *Cambridge Anthropology* 12,2 18-78.
- Thorold, A 1993. Metamorphoses of the Yao Muslims. In Freeman, J (ed). *African Identity and Social Change in Sub-Saharan Africa*. London: Hurst.
- Van der Linde, L & L White 1989. Tribalism in the Political History of Malawi. In Vail, L (ed). *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*. London: James Currey.
- Wallis, H 1874. *The Last Journals of David Livingstone, from 1865 to his Death*. Vol I & II. London: John Murray.
- White, L 1984. 'Tribes' and the Alternatives of the Chieftainship. *Aspects of African Affairs* 83 311-341.
- Whitley, WE 1956. *A Study of Yao Songwees*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Young, ED 1877. *Nyasaland, a Journal of Adventures whilst Exploring Lake Nyasa*. London: John Murray.

# The Gentleman's War: The Ideology of Imperialism in Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Great Boer War*

Jacqueline Jaffe

Ideology pre-exists the text but the ideology of the text defines, coerces and constitutes that ideology in ways unpremeditated, so to speak, by ideology itself (Baggott 1876: 50)

In what appears to be a parenthetical observation in *Sidwell and the American Experience in Cuba 1911-1943*, Barbara Tuchman comments, somewhat acerbically, on the British way of telling military history:

No nation has ever preferred a military history of such verbal nobility as the British. Retreat and advance, war or loss, blunder or bravery, murderous folly or unyielding resolution, all emerge often clothed in dignity and touched with glory.

Everyone is splendid: soldiers are saviours, commanders cool, the fighting magnificent. Whatever the facts, gloom is unbroken. Mistakes, failures, surprises, or other causes of disaster mysteriously vanish. Disasters are recorded with care and pride and become translated into things of beauty. Other nations attempt but never quite achieve the same self-esteem (Russell 1875: 125, referring to Tuchman 1970: 557).

While Tuchman's evaluation is a general one, relating to no specific time or stage, her insight is of particular interest to Paul Fussler who uses it to illustrate the link between the Romance form and the literature of the First World War. I am interested in this quote for the same reason as Fussler. However, I would argue that the link between Romance and military history is the explanation of Tuchman's observation and that this phenomenon is fundamental to the period of territorial expansion that took place in Britain in the nineteenth century. The British desire to glorify war may be a tendency

that goes back to Shakespeare's history plays, as Martin Green (1979) has suggested, but it seems clear that what was a 'tendency' has become an established form by the Victorian period. The linguistic elevation of warfare, Tuchman's 'verbal nobility', is therefore a significant part of the ideology of imperialism, especially as the use, or at any rate, the threat of the use of force, is one of the principal instruments of an expansionist foreign policy. The story of the way that force is employed, to use Said's (1994: 7) words, in 'actual contests over land and the land's people' is one of the more potent ways that the idea of empire can be disseminated to the culture. Thus the glorification of war is intrinsic to British imperialism for all kinds of reasons, not the least of which is that the ideology of imperialism demands that colonial wars be seen as part of the benevolent, chivalrous intent of imperialism. And the narrative of military history with its cloak of fact, thrown over the story of male derring-do is the way that military might is connected to the imperial ethos.

Martin Green (1979: 31) has conclusively shown how nineteenth century adventure stories acted as 'the energizing myth of English imperialism', and other critics have argued that the same dynamic exists in male juvenile literature, particularly in those boys papers and annuals which were so popular after the 1870s. The narrative of military history, although always imbued with the additional authority of fact is remarkably similar and nowhere is the similarity between the fiction of adventure and military history more clearly illustrated than in Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Great Boer War* (1900).

As Tuchman's comment makes clear, Doyle was not the first British historian to tell the story of war as heroic adventure. But Doyle is particularly interesting in this context for a number of reasons. First, he was a world famous writer of adventure stories before he turned to writing history. Second, he was an influential public commentator on the affairs of the day. Third, he was a notable amateur sportsman. As writer, commentator, explorer and inventor, Doyle was a substantial public figure who defined, for much of the British public, all that was best in the upper middle-class Victorian gentleman. Given his authorial and personal popularity it is no surprise that *The Great Boer War* was an immediate popular success selling 20,000 copies each year for the first two years and being reprinted sixteen times. Doyle's history was such a success that it outstripped what had been until then the best-selling history of the nineteenth century: Macaulay's *History of England*. In May 1902, as a result of this success, Doyle was knighted for 'service to the nation' showing that the government fully recognized Doyle's contribution to British interests abroad.

As a historian, Arthur Conan Doyle was wedded to the same narrative form that he had used so successfully as a novelist. He had long wanted to

emulate his favorite historian Macaulay. The favorite fiction writer was Scott and Doyle thought that his own historical romances were his most serious work to date. So he would naturally use the romance form in his history of the Boer war, just as he had used derivations of the romance—what Frye (1957) terms "the low mimetic"—in all his adventure stories. The formula of the Romance in which the protagonist moves forward sequentially from adventure to adventure, meeting and overcoming various adversities and adversaries until he faces the ultimate test or "crucial struggle" (Auerbach 1957:13) in which either the hero or the villain die, is, as Paul Fussell (1973) has noted, a form eminently suitable to the telling of the experience of war. But, there is another aspect of the romance form that is pertinent to wartime, to Doyle's text and to this paper, the aristocratic values that the form enforces. The romance celebrates the aristocracy, thus it contains very few non-aristocratic characters, and sees tests of strength as tests of virtue which can only be passed by the truly noble. Auerbach (1957:103) on the subject of the aristocracy in Romance, says:

There are only two social strata: one is privileged and noble while the other, more numerous, is colorful but more nearly comic and grotesque.

While Doyle's division cannot be quite characterized by those words—the men are not ever grotesque and only occasionally comic—the division of the social strata into two is fundamental to his narrative.

The Boer War began on October 11, 1889 and officially ended in May 1902. Hostilities began at the end of a century of what had been a spectacularly successful British effort to acquire territory overseas, an effort that, since the middle of the 1880s, had been accelerated and intensified by the ambitions of the other European powers. The war with the Boers, coming after such a long period of expansionism and after what was seen as flagrant Boer provocation provided the perfect opportunity for a resurgence of national pride and imperial spirit. As L.S. Amery (1900:1) said in his introduction to *The Times History of the War in South Africa*:

The South African war has been the greatest political event in the history of the British Empire since the conclusion of the Napoleonic wars.

The Boer war galvanized the nation because it was the first time the entire British army had been deployed in eighty-four years and because as Churchill (1932:229) notes, "nearly fifty years had passed since Great Britain had been at war with any white people".

It was also a war notable in terms of class participation since it was the colonial war where the largest number of volunteer units (as opposed to

the number of regular army units) were deployed. As the Boers were mounted guerrilla fighters (unlike the Zulus who had fought the British in South Africa from 1819-1887, on foot) the call for volunteers from the War Office was for mounted men only. The middle, upper middle and gentry class, those who could already ride and shoot, were therefore disproportionately represented in this engagement. Keegan (1985) points out that the cavalry officers in the regular Army were always from the land owning class, or "those who wished to buy their way into that class" (c. 1). He calls this set of class affiliations and values "the voice of the paladins" and asserts that,

it was the voice of valiant chivalry, as well as that of the serving aristocracy whose voice over conservative institutions, among which ranks stood foremost, remained unshaken by revolution and even by the rise of democracy (Keegan 1988:97).

The call to volunteers to serve in South Africa was therefore a call to the middle class to join the paladins—to associate themselves with aristocratic class affiliations and to participate as gentlemen in what was known as "the gentleman's war".

Young gentlemen who had graduated from the system of sports, games and physical fitness exercises which characterized British public schools in the nineteenth century saw war as a simple extension of that system; another one of the series of trials of strength which enabled them to become gentlemen. Certainly the officers on their way to South Africa treated the upcoming conflict as one in a series of sporting events. They were going "for the fun of it" and they expected "a fine fight" while at the same time, like the young Winston Churchill, they fully expected to be home "in good time for the Derby" (Pakenham 1979:60). Doyle, a member of the upper middle class, also believed that sports and war are similar activities and in *The Great Boer War* he employs sporting metaphors and the language of games to make this point. In Doyle's text the specific battle plan and the war itself is often called "the contest", or "the game", as in,

It was his [General Buller's] game therefore to keep his army intact, to abandon it was to give up the game altogether (Doyle 1903:130).

Boxing metaphors are applied to the soldiers, who are "full of fight" (1903:150) and to the Boers who are to be "hit squarely between the eyes" (1903:167). The British always show they have "spotted quail" (1903:199). For example, when a Boer gun is being moved the gun is likened to "a hare" spring from "cover" and its repositioning is greeted by the British with,

'tubers and shovels and laughter' and 'a 'gone to ground' whoop' (1903:208). Frequently the sporting spirit is emphasized in anecdotal form:

The first few days of the siege [of Ladysmith] were clouded by the death of Lieutenant Egerton of the 'Powell's', one of the most promising officers in the army. One leg and the other foot were riddled off as he lay upon the sandbag parapet watching the effect of our fire. 'There's an end of my cricket', said the gallant sportsman, and was carried to the rear with a cigar between his clenched teeth. (1903:152)

Doyle's use of sporting metaphors makes it clear that this war is an extension of the sports played by the aristocracy: war is a game for those who make up, as Aschbach (1957:211) calls the participants in the jests of medieval romances, 'the community of the elect'. The cultural codes implicit in the language invoke concepts of 'wealth', 'power' and 'prestige'. And they also, of course, invoke the concept of 'inaccessibility', for the soldiers, as well as the majority of Doyle's readers, do not shoot, fish, hunt or smoke cigars.

In the battle piece, which is the apogee of all military history, Doyle imitates the officers with more explicitly chivalric and heroic traits. As an illustrative, and rather lengthy, example of this I have picked one from the eight battles highlighted in Doyle's history: the battle of Spion Kop, fought on January 24, 1900; this battle was the scene of some of the fiercest fighting of the entire war: it was also a terrible defeat for the British. The battle began at dawn and by the early afternoon of what was a hot summer's day the situation for the British, trapped on the summit in shallow trenches and under heavy artillery bombardment, was tragic:

The army, little past its midwinter zenith, blazed down on a scene of fantastic carnage. The cries and groans of the wounded and dying and the exhortations of Boer and Briton to their comrades, and all the sounds of human voices were lost in the din made by gun and rifle, by shattering explosives and bullets ricocheting among the rocks. The main trench was being choked with dead and wounded. Many of the survivors were utterly demoralized and cowered down not daring to raise their heads, while others crawled about in groups through the smoking fumes and dust, helplessly seeking for shelter on the slopes behind the main line, the shells incessantly raked them. The agony and terror were added the despair of those who never had reached the firing line and now, of a sudden, screamed for it. (Krug 1960:185)

This account, by a South African historian in 1960 is almost identical to those given by Field Marshall Marcell (who wrote the 'official' British version of the Boer War in 1907) and by the modern historians Randolph (1969) and Darlow (1984). The first hand accounts quoted by Pakenham in *The Boer War* serve to flesh out the details of the more general description

The first, from Corporal Will McCarthy, who served with a Volunteer regiment:

I got into the Trenches ... and lay down at the side of Bodies with arms, legs, or Arms, it was terrible I can tell you and it was enough to completely [sic] nerve the braves, of men. But we had to stick in. I had been lying there I think about half an hour when Bang went a shell at my back wounding me ... I thought my back was broken ... (Pakenham 1975:294)

The second is from Lieutenant Wood who served directly under Colonel Thameycroft in the Mounted Infantry:

The most awful scene of suffering ... We had no guns, and the enemy's Long Toms swept the hill. Shells rained in among us. The most hideous sights were exhibited. Men blown to atoms, joints torn asunder. Headless bodies, trunks of bodies. Awful, Awful. You dared not lift your head above the rocks or you were sure dead at once. Everything was confusion: officers were killed or mixed up in other regiments, the men had no one to rally them and became demoralized. (Pakenham 1979)

In contrast to these accounts Doyle (1901:213) says:

Hour after hour of the unmitigated crash of the shells above the rocks and in the gullies and screams of men torn and beat by the most terrible of all weapons had shaken the troops badly. Spectators near below saw the shells arching at the rate of seven a minute on to the crowded plateau (covered as the landscape which held the devoted men to their post. Men were wounded and wounded out again and still went on fighting. Never since Inkermann had we had so grim a soldier's battle. The company officers were superb. Captain Michel of the Middlesex was shot through the cheek while giving a cigarette to a wounded man, continued to tend his company and was shot again through the breast. Scott, Moncreff of the same regiment was only disabled by his fourth bullet which hit him. Young Murky of the Scottish Rifles, dropping four live wounds, still staggered about among his men. And the men were worthy of such officers. No retreat. No retreat! they yelled when some of the front line were driven in. In all regiments there were weaklings and hard backs, and many a man was worn down the reverse slopes when he should have been facing death upon the crest, but as a body British troops have never stood firm through a more fiery ordeal than so that fatal day.

Doyle's version is clearly more different from the others than they are from each other. The first hand accounts describe the horror in terms of the pieces of bodies that were strewn about, 'the sides of bodies with heads, legs or arms' and the 'headless bodies, trunks of bodies'. Both combatants emphasize, by the passivity of their positions as well as their words, the impossibility of movement in the middle of an artillery barrage. McCarthy

'I had been laying there I think about half an hour' and Wood, 'You dared not lift your head above the Rock or you were shot dead at once'. On the nature of the courage displayed, McCarthy says, 'it was enough to completely unnerve the bravest of men' while in Wood's words: 'Everything was confusion . . . officers were killed or maimed in other regiments, the men had no one to rally them and became demoralized.'

Although Doyle begins with the same issue, dismemberment, 'the groans and screams of men torn and burst', he immediately alters the emphasis in the following sentence by connecting this slaughter to a sight which made the spectators marvel, i.e. 'the endurance which held the devoted men to their post'. The position of 'spectators'—indeed, their very narrative presence as watchers, makes the 'spectacle' a performance which frames and emphasizes the heroic. Further, in a textual sleight-of-hand, Doyle actually reconstitutes, recreates the dismembered corpses by the end of the passage: 'as a body British troops have never stood firm through a more fiery ordeal'. By putting the men on their feet, Doyle denies the reality of men waiting or hiding in the trenches. Doyle's men are actively and bravely in fighting position at their post.

Just as Doyle transforms pieces into a whole body he also transforms a wound from something to be avoided at all costs, (see McCarthy's description of his back being blown in) to a test of strength and courage. 'Men were wounded and wounded and wounded yet again and still went on fighting'. And in a further development, which follows Auerbach's formula perfectly, Doyle suggests that for the officers to be wounded was not just a test of strength but one of virtue also: Captain Muriel was shot through the cheek while giving a cigarette to a wounded man, Mimerieff was 'only disabled' by the fourth bullet which hit him, and Minnie 'dripping from wounds, still staggered about among his men'. In the face of the universal confusion and demoralization that Wood and McCarthy report, Doyle tells us that *the men*, being worthy of the example set by their 'superior' officers, yelled 'no retreat' 'no retreat', while only some 'weaklings and hang-backs' left the battle when they should have been fighting.

In the quoted passage, as throughout the entire book, the reader is asked to identify with the aristocratic officers. First of all only the officers are named, given an identity and second only the officers attain heroic stature through their individual acts of bravery. The men, known variously as 'soldiers', 'regiments', 'troops' or 'the ranks' are accorded the possibility of heroism only 'in a body' under their companies' name or number, such as, 'the Sussex and the City Imperial Volunteers were charging to the enemy's left flank while the 11th Division was holding them in front' (Doyle 1903: 389). As well as rising above the anonymity of numbers by being named, the officers are charged with being the social and moral arbiters of the cam-

paigns. At Diamond Hill, Doyle reports that:

. . . and the gallant Lord Arthur, as modest and brave a soldier as ever drew sword, was struck through the heart. 'Pray moderate your language' was his last characteristic remark made to a half-brother-in-law sergeant (Doyle 1903: 388).

When 'Flanner's men start grumbling about a long march, Flanner 'set an admirable example sending away his own horse and walking with his rear most soldiers' (1903:359). In a crucial battle, of course, the moral responsibility is all consuming. The officers must lead the way, rally, inspire and at all times be worthy of the trust reposed in them. Should the battle go badly then the officers have to do more than inspire, they have to act as spiritual guides:

Clashula, Dick O'neighlan, Downman, Welford, Gurning, Sharston, Thackeray, Sitwell, Aubrey—they have led their men to and through the gates of death (Doyle 1903: 261).

As in medieval romance so in Doyle's narrative a victory means that the victor is morally superior. Conversely, a defeat or surrender means a moral failure: one that is primarily felt by and must be atoned for by the officers. After what appears to be an unavoidable capture of a small post, 'laggard officers cracked their swordblades and cursed the day that they had been born' (1903: 107). In a more domestic example, when Colonel Scott had to abandon the defence of a small town called Vryburg '... in his humiliation and grief at his inability to preserve his post he blew out his brains upon the journey' (1903: 110). Using this same reasoning, Doyle argues that when the Boers abandoned their capital at Bloemfontein this proved, 'that they were not in the better cause' (1903: 352).

Doyle's officer heroes are a late nineteenth century version of the chivalric ideal. They are sportsmen and warriors, full of fun and full of courage, they combine a love of adventure for its own sake with Christian piety. Lord Arthur whose last request that a sergeant come down what was, presumably, violent or blasphemous language is but one indication of the unimpeachable Christian present in Doyle's warriors. The sportsmaning of the playing fields of Eton must be set within the framework provided by the Church of England in order for officers and gentlemen to become heroes. Doyle insists. The officers of *The Great Boer War* thus, join the nineteenth century debate on the nature of masculinity, 'Manliness' (which Doyle uses as the opposite not of femininity but effeminacy), here shown to include courage, stoicism, good sportsmanship, selflessness and Christian rectitude, is best illustrated in the gentlemen, the 'men' can only aspire to manliness by



aspiring to the class which produces it; class affiliation/divisions are maintained while the desire to transcend them is simultaneously produced.

In spite of the gentle-knight demeanor of the officers *The Great Boer War* affirms that the heroism and the martiness of the officers can never be accessible to the men, or the majority of Doyle's many readers, just as the aristocratic sports used by the text are also inaccessible. The articulation of this in *The Great Boer War*, where wealth, power, privilege and inaccessibility are always linked together, both suggest that leadership can never be anything more than a dream to those of his readers who are not gentlemen while, at least for the duration of the reading, it gives them access to that dream and simultaneously promotes a desire for it. In another context I have argued that Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories were so successful precisely because they followed the established adventure story format. In retrospect I now believe that the appeal of those detective stories lies more in Holmes' aristocratic class affiliations and less in the adventures per se. The appeal to Holmes' many readers is similar to the appeal of *The Great Boer War*, that is, an identification with a superior aristocratic sportsman hero who is ready to expend all his skill and energy for love of 'the game' itself. Soldiers, officers and readers ultimately collaborate in his affirmation of aristocratic values: in an affirmation of a time and place where class divisions, rigidly enforced, actually fertilized social unity.

Doyle's recreation of feudalism, (a benevolent version of noblemanly oblige) enforces class separation in the name of racial unity. Speaking of the formation of the Imperial Yeomanry:

This ancient and formidable force was drawn from every part of England and Scotland, with a contingent of hardy Irish freehunters. Noblemen and gentlemen rode side by side in the ranks and the officers included many well known country gentlemen and leaders of opinion. Well horsed and well armed, a better force for the work in hand could not be imagined (Doyle 1903, 155).

And, in a more pointed example, writing of the soldiers at the Battle of Colenso:

Northern, Irishling and southern men in German, Irish, orange and green, Protestant and Catholic, Old and Saxon, their only unity was war who had shed his blood most freely for the common cause (Doyle 1903, 140).

The common cause, to beat the Boers, can only be achieved if class positions are maintained and class responsibilities met.

Doyle's purpose however is not merely to tell the heroic militarist story of how Britain won the war. He intends to do something greater: to use the story to inform and energize the British into accepting their role as

imperial leader of Europe. Doyle begins with the premise that the Anglo-Celtic race (as an Anglo-Irishman Doyle rarely uses 'Anglo-Saxon') is inherently superior. And empire is the way that this superiority is exported to the rest of the world. In the case of the Boers who

were as near akin to us as any race which is not our own, they were of the same Christian stock which peopled our own shores (1903, 67).

Doyle argues that while the stock is the same the Boers stand for the older order of Dutch Protestantism and separatism while the British are the enlightened Protestants whose task is to govern all the races under imperial unification. To defeat the Boers is to emerge as the most powerful Protestant nation in the world and, in the terms defined by the text, such a victory means that Britain is also the most virtuous, the best nation in the world. The Anglo-Celtic, Protestant British virtues privileged by the text are shown best in direct comparison to the different order of Protestantism embodied in the Boers. 'The children of the veldt' as Doyle frequently calls them are first depicted as out of place in the modern world: strong but inflexible, religious but limited by zealotry, they belong in the seventeenth rather than the nineteenth century. Speaking of a break down in early negotiations between the two sides, Doyle (1903, 13) explains

So, its primitive men do not understand the way of our civilization, and they ascribe to stupidity what is really but ignorance and simplicity.

'Inflexible', 'rigged', 'unprogressive' and 'most conservative' are some of the qualities that Doyle (1903, 1) assigns in the first few, introductory pages to 'the hard-bitten farmers with their ancient theology'.

As an enemy in battle, the Boers are the equal of the British for the adversary must be, as Holmes says to Watson in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, a 'foeman worthy of our steel'. The demands of the fictive form mean that Holmes is seen to be the extraordinary man that he is, only when faced with Moriarty. Likewise, usually the Boers must equal or exceed the British in military skill. The Boers are therefore, 'one of the most rugged, virile, unconquerable races ever seen upon earth', well trained by 'a country which is eminently suited to the tactics of the hunter, the marksman and the rider', these farmer-soldiers are 'the most formidable antagonist who ever crossed the path of Imperial Britain' (1903, 11). Off the battle field, however, the struggle is between old-fashioned and modern and here the British are the decided victors. Given this structure, Doyle suggests that it is sad but necessary that the Boers be defeated, for just as the seventeenth century must give way to the twentieth, as the agrarian past must give way to the

machine age, so the Boer foundation must give way to a more modern imperialism. This enlightened version of imperialism, indeed the modern world in its totality, is personified, by the British.

The struggle between the kinds of Protestantism that is the most important part of the struggle between the old and the new is a familiar one to Doyle's readers. An almost identical struggle forms a major part of Doyle's novel *Micah Clarke* (1889). In that novel, Micah's grim father 'Ironside Joe', believes, like the Boers, in 'a dour, fatalistic Old Testament religion' (1903:11), while his son, 'Micah', exemplifies, like the British, the more moderate, flexible Protestant who is willing to compromise religious dogma for the good of the civil state. *The Great Boer War* assigns Britain the role of Micah, the one willing to compromise, while the Ironside Boers cling to their rigid moral positions. Young Micah will surely triumph to carry Protestantism into the future the novel concludes and Doyle's history concludes in the same way.

The British flag under our best administrators will mean clean government, honest laws, liberty and equality to all men. So long as it continues to do so, we shall hold South Africa (Doyle 1903:81).

Once the Boer War is posed in the same terms as *Micah Clarke* a British victory is inevitable because, as it is a generational conflict that is being reserved, the son will, must, succeed. The comforting end of all this is that the Anglo-Boer conflict can be portrayed as largely free of the bitterness that is usual between enemies who have gone to war, the Anglo-Boer relationship can survive in the same way that the relationship between fathers and sons survive.

... There is nothing more wonderful than the way in which these two sturdy Anglo-Afrikaner races clasped hands the instant the fight was done (Doyle 1903:549).

Further, the movement from old to young, from father to son from Old Testament to New is shown to be part of a natural order of change and progress. In this sense, the British victory is first assured and then sanctified as nature's way.

Doyle's carefully structured epilogue which claims that both parties, perhaps sadder but wiser, will survive with honor, helps explain the general Hebraic acclaim for *The Great Boer War*. His account is ultimately ideologically satisfying to both victor and vanquished. The Boers are portrayed as the true keepers of the faith: those who battle to maintain religious duty in a corrupt, weak world, while the British can see themselves as the new Empire builders who fight for liberation and modernity.

Brandinger (1988:135) has pointed out that all Empire builders think,

or pay lip service to the thought, that they are 'liberating its peoples supposedly from the darkness of bondage and superstition'. Doyle's discourse is interesting in this regard as it invokes a double liberation. As this was a 'white man's war', Doyle makes almost no reference to the black South Africans over whose land the armies marched and fought. Used only as defenseless victims of Boer intolerance, the black South African who was specifically excluded from combat in the war (although not from its results by virtue of his, supposed, unreliability), is rendered nearly invisible in *The Great Boer War*. Chapter IV, titled 'The Eve of War' poses the question of the government of South Africa:

Should Dutch ideas or English ideas of government prevail throughout that huge country? The one means freedom for a single race the other means equal rights to all white men beneath one common law. What it means for the colored races we must let history decide (Doyle 1903:87).

However, the abolition of slavery by the British in 1834 at the Cape had been one of the chief arguments to the Boers, leading, in part, to the Boer trek northwards, in 1836. So, *The Great Boer War* is able to claim that the Africans are to be liberated from the strict yoke of Boer domination, while the Boers are to be liberated from the yoke of their own zealotry.

British Imperialist goals in South Africa are thus linked to a re-education and absorption of a fellow Protestant nation. As Doyle (1903:513) says, rather hopefully, of the Boers in defeat:

But time and self-government, with the settled order and varied interests which will spring up under British rule, will all combine to make a unity which will beaverse from any violent separation from the Empire.

British nationalism, including the division between Scot, Celt and Anglo-Saxon, is to be subsumed within a larger imperialist unity which has the higher purpose of promoting good government and the rule of law overseas. Doyle's story concludes therefore by suggesting that the imperial ethics that raises Britain above petty national racial and class concerns is the same force that will enable Britain, in the name of modern, liberal Protestantism, to govern the world.

And of all gifts that God has given to Britain there is none to compare with those days of sorrow, for it was in them that the nation was assured of its unity and learned for all time that blood is stronger to bind than salt water is to part. The only difference in the point of view of the Briton from Britain and the Briton from the ends of the earth, was that the latter with the energy of youth was more whole-souled in the Imperial cause. On the plains of South Africa, in common danger and in common peril, the blood brotherhood of the Empire was sealed (Doyle 1903:511).

When an extremely popular writer of Doyle's stature writes a unitary history, the work is assured a huge national and international audience and the ideology of the text is widely disseminated. Doyle wrote on behalf of the landed-gentry but he wrote for the middle class. He thoroughly understood middle-class aspirations and he wrote for that section of it which, like himself, was literate, materially acquisitive, socially mobile and eager for acceptance into the gentry class. *The Great Boer War* acts as a channel for that eagerness which is then defused, satisfied, through an identification with the most heroic as well as the most conservative members of society. To return to Fuchman's comment, probably most British military history works as a similar negotiation between the middle, upper-middle and aristocratic classes; class confrontation is defused by a narrative which employs a fictive form and the kind of language which, going back for several centuries, was used to perpetuate the ideals of gentility, heroism, social and moral responsibility, best exemplified by the aristocracy.

Doyle's narrative provides us with but one example of the mediation that such texts engage in when readers accept the values of the story and find satisfaction in the narrative outcome. The fictive form of the romance is itself a powerful piece of propaganda (see Green's 1979 *Dreams of Adventure, Dreams of Empire*) but when taken in conjunction with the pith of fact that 'history' authorizes, the officially quoted numbers, tables of armaments, maps of terrain and troop movements, and, in Doyle's text, his even-handed, 'fair' approach to his subject, military history becomes one of the more powerful social mediators. Antonio Gramsci (1971) calls this process 'cultural consent', or perhaps more explicitly, an atmosphere where consent is likely to occur, which leads to social hegemony. Although 'consent' is too complex a process to reduce to a few sentences, the aspect which is pertinent to this essay involves an inhibition, a negotiation, between state institutions, like the army, whose domination is 'direct' and other segments of the society whose domination is 'voluntary'. Military history such as Doyle's, functions as an explanation of what the army has done and why, to the society that has to give its 'voluntary' consent not only to that particular instance of direct 'force' but also to the existence of a 'veiled' domination that functions, presumably, in their interests.

The Army emerges from *The Great Boer War* sanctified as the locus of the new world order: the place where men can prove themselves manly, where leadership not soldiering is the prerequisite for victory and where the superiority of the Anglo-Celtic race is made manifest. His numerous readers who responded to this idealistic portrait of the Army in action must have an increased respect and admiration for the 'direct domination' of their soldiers. After four lives are lost trying to save a gun, Doyle says, addressing the reader directly:

A useless sacrifice you may say, but while the men who saw them die can tell you, a story round the campfire the example of such deaths as these does more than clang of bugle or roll of drum to stir the warrior spirit of our race (1903:141).

This increased admiration is applied to the conduct of the troops in South Africa to any other further acts of imperial force and to longer range issues such as increasing military size and expenditures.

On one level, *The Great Boer War* helped to structure the public debate about the Army. On another level it was part of the larger cultural movement where 'gentlemanly and chivalric values came to suffuse the middle class' (MacKenzie 1992:20). And Rich (1987:29) has pointed out in his article, 'The Quest for Englishness', the level of this suffusion:

By the late 1890s, though, a number of liberal critics of imperialism such as J.A. Hobson and L.T. Hobhouse did become increasingly worried by the power in which imperialism and progress had found a base in the 'middle town' of the suburban middle and lower middle class.

It seems to me that Doyle's text, surely one of the books most likely to be found in suburban villas, is an important channel for the displacement onto the middle-class of those values.

Initially, I had ended this paper with a short discussion about how Doyle's history, coming at the end of a period of aggressive Victorian imperialism served to reinvigorate and reaffirm, if only for a short time, the traditional relationships of power and authority on which the ideology of imperialism rests. However, I have had to reassess this in light of a study, quoted by John MacKenzie in his book *Propaganda and Empire: the Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960*. Speaking of The Board of Education's Handbook on the teaching of history in British elementary schools MacKenzie (1992:193) says:

A generation of imperial thinkers at the end of the century influenced ... manuals of teaching methods, Board of Education handbooks for teachers, and school texts which ... survived at least until the 1930s and 1960s.

Arthur Conan Doyle's real legacy may be found not in the ideology of 1903 but much later in the twentieth century for on the select list of suggested works of value for teaching history was *The Great Boer War* (see Archer 1916:127).

In colonial and post-colonial studies a great deal of critical attention has been paid to narrative fiction, but very little has been paid to the narratives of warfare. Yet as Sand (1994:xiii) points out: 'The main battle in imperialism is over land, of course ...'. The telling of the story of that battle is to sustain and shape the idea of what it means to have an empire. As I

hope I have made clear this kind of narrative is a powerful tool for both culture and imperialism.

Department of General Studies  
New York University

## References

- Achebe, Chinua 1978. *An Image of Africa: Research in African Literature* 9, Spring 22-30.
- Archer, R.I. 1915. *The Teaching of History in Elementary Schools*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Avery, J.S. (ed.) 1900. *The Times History of the War in South Africa 1899-1900*. Vol 1-7. London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co.
- Auerbach, Erich 1957. *Mimesis*. Garden City: Doubleday.
- Barnes, Corradi 1970. *Britain and Her Army 1500-1970*. London: Allen Lane.
- Bathory, Michael 1984. *The Anglo-Boer War*. Poole, Dorset: Blandford Press.
- Brading, Patrick 1988. *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Chambliss, Winston 1972. *Thoughts and Adventures*. London: Butterworths.
- Cooper, Terry 1976. *Criticism and Ideology*. London: NLB.
- Cur, John Dickson 1975. *The Life of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*. New York: Vintage.
- Doyle, Arthur Conan 1900. *The Great Boer War*. London: Thomas Nelson & Sons.
- Doyle, Arthur Conan 1902. *The War in South Africa: Its Cause and Conduct*. New York: McClure, Phillips.
- Frye, Northrop 1957. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Hassel, Paul 1975. *The Great War and Modern Memory*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gracian, Antonio 1977. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. New York: International Publishers.
- Green, Mark 1979. *Dreams of Adventure, Dreams of Empire*. New York: Basic Books.
- Keegan, John 1982. *Soldiers: A History of Men in Battle*. London: Harvill/Harcollar.
- Keegan, John 1983. *The Mask of Command*. London: Penguin Books.
- Kupper, Kaye 1980. *Goodbye Dolly Gray*. New York: Lipincott & Co.
- Mansel, Thomas Babington 1868. *The Complete Works of Lord Mansel*. New York: Tappan, Green & Co.
- Mackenzie, John M 1984. *Imperialism and Empire: The Imperialization of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Mackenzie, John M (ed.) 1992. *Popular Imperialism and the Military 1855-1950*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Pakenham, Thomas 1990. *The Boer War*. New York: Random House.
- Pemberton, William 1954. *History of the Boer War*. Great Britain: Dutton Children's.
- Piers, Richard 1972. *An Imperial War and the British Working Class*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Rensford, Oliver 1990. *The Battle of Spion Kop*. London: John Murray.
- Richards, Jeffrey 1992. *Popular Imperialism and the Image of the Army in Juvenile Literature*. In Mackenzie 1992 M (ed.) *Popular Imperialism and the Military 1855-1950*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

- Robinson, Gallagher & Alice Dancy 1961. *Africa and the Victorians*. New York: St Martin's Press.
- Said, Edward 1994. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Yiddick, Kathryn 1990. *Empire and the English Character*. London: IB Tauris.
- Zushman, Rebecca W 1970. *Stowell and the American Experience in China, 1911-1945*. New York: Macmillan.

# Re-viewing the Past: Notes on the Rereading of Canonized Literary Texts

Godfrey Meintjes

I began with a desire to speak with the dead (Grootenlat, 1988: 1)

## 1 Introduction

Canonized, traditional Afrikaans literary texts are not only a product of the socio-political power emanating from a colonial hegemony, but the very canonization of the literature itself is a product of a particular ideological network. The aim of this investigation is to *review* examples of texts written prior to the so-called *Revolusie of State* and which traditionally were *reversed* and more recently have been *revised* by critics.

## 2 Reading and Rereading

The traditionally acceptable and therefore institutionalized readings of canonized Afrikaans literary texts can inhibit the process whereby meanings are generated in texts. Roland Barthes (1974:10) stresses the co-authorship of the reader in the following way: 'The more plural the text, the less it is written before I read it, ...'. However, the canonized and canonizing readings of texts tend to lock the text into a specific system. Andre Lefevere (1986:3) formulated the problem regarding the institutionalized interpretation of texts as follows:

What further contributes to the increasing irrelevance of literary studies in our time is the unopposed persistence with which corporate critics bind their to a certain set of values, epitomized by a certain canon tend to insist on ... the right, or acceptable, interpretation of that text.<sup>1</sup>

The history of literary theory in the Western world reflects the gradual but consistent decentring of the author and the foregrounding of the reader. Ieffersohn (1988:97-98) describes reader-centred criticism as follows:

For Hauries criticism consists in actively constructing a meaning for a text and not in passively deciphering the meaning. For in the structuralist view there is no single meaning in literary works.

Van Zyl (1982:77) describes the reader involvement in the generating of meanings in texts in the following way:

... the reader is not viewed as passive and will because of her capacity to model reality, project into the work not only the structures of his artistic experience, but the structures of his life experience as well.

Keenode (1983:44) explains the textual openness to new interpretations as follows:

It seems that on a just view of the matter, the books we call classics possess intrinsic qualities that ensure, not possess also openness to accommodation which keeps them alive under endlessly varying dispositions.

Roland Barthes (1974:16) proposed the following reading strategy in order to escape the tyranny of institutionalized readings: '... rereading is here suggested at the outset for it alone saves the text from repulsion, ...'.

Rereading might assist the text in relating historical events to contemporary discourses. With regard to a semantic interpretation of texts, Robert Scholes (1982:30) has the following to say:

... we do not bring just any meanings to the texts, but we can bring all the meanings we can link to the text by means of an interpretive code. And, above all, we can generate meaning by situating the text among the actual and possible texts to which it can be related.

The act of rereading by definition confronts the reader with what Montrose (1989:20) calls the 'historicity of texts and the textuality of history'. This paper will confine itself to the historical implication of texts, but the literary theoretician finds it interesting that modern historiography finds itself confronted by the action that history, in the words of Collingwood (1946:242) is viewed as a 'web of imaginative construction' rather than, in the words of Von Ranke (Ricoeur, 1988:154) a presentation of the past 'as it actually happened' (*Wie es eigentlich gewesen*).

While 'the uninterrupted sequence of raw empirical realities' as de-

scribed by Krieger (1974:339) may appear to be knowable, historiography involves '... critically examining and analysing the records and survivals of the past' (Krieger 1974:339) and it has to take cognisance of the possibility of what Foucault (1977:143) calls the 'ancient proliferation of errors'. Degenaur (1986:69-73) reminds his readers that historical facts are presented in terms of metaphors, icons and images. Hinchey (1989:63) believes that historiography itself 'is influenced by phenomena such as interpretation involving subordination. It can therefore not be assumed that history necessarily would be free from forgetfulness, concealment and misunderstanding as listed by Derrida (Derrida in Bennett 1989:144)

As a 'vehicle for historical truth' (McCallie 1987:90) historiographic metafiction in the words of Marshall (1992:150) 'refuses the possibility of looking to and writing about the past 'as it really was''. Rather she takes on an active role and 'does the past', participates, questions, and interrogates.

In opposition to this fragmented view of history, marxists like Jameson (1983:19) prefer to view history as 'a single great collective story' containing a 'single fundamental theme: ... the collective struggle to wrest a realm of Freedom from a realm of Necessity'.

The advent of the practice of *the new historicism* as outlined by Stephen Greenblatt (1989:1) in the early 1980s goes some way towards incorporating some of the important features of both postmodernism and marxism. While reading the text from a historical perspective as would a marxist, the new historicist also remains aware of the open endedness of texts and of *différance* (Derrida 1973:136). In line with poststructural thinking, new historicism as indicated by Abrams (1993:249) also takes cognisance of Foucault's view that

power relations at any given era in society contribute the concepts, oppositions and hierarchies of its discourse and in this way determine what will be counted knowledge and truth.

New historicism further accepts Bakhtin's (1981:273) view that literary texts tend to be dialogic and this feature of conflicting and contradictory elements merge in new historicist practice with the post-modernist notion that texts tend to deconstruct themselves.

Abrams (1993:249) succinctly describes the approach of the new historicism:

This historical mode is grounded on the concepts that history itself is not a set of fixed, objective facts, but like the literature with which it interacts, a text which needs to be interpreted, that a text whether literary or historical is a discourse which although it may seem to present or reflect an external reality, in fact

consists of what are called representations – that is verbal formations which are the ideological products or constructs of a particular era.

In this way the new historicism, in the words of Ruthven (1964:221) writing about feminist criticism, becomes a 'searching device' in the sense that 'it operates in the service of new knowledge which is contributed by rendering visible the hitherto invisible'.

Greenblatt (1989: 1-14) favours the term *cultural poetics* for his new historicist textual practice while marxists like Dilligore and Sheffield (1985:foreword) prefer the term *cultural materialism* for their brand of new historicism. In essence a new historicist reading is political in nature. Abrams (1993:252) describes a political reading of texts as follows:

The primary aim of a political reader of a literary text is to undo the ideological disguises and suppressions in order to uncover the historical and political conflicts and oppressions which are the text's true, although covert or unintentional, subject matter.

We shall use three traditional texts from Afrikaans literature in order to demonstrate how a political reading of a text can uncover 'covert or unintentional, subject matter' (Abrams 1993:252).

### 3 *Hans die Skipper* (1928) by D.F. Malherbe.

The publication of D.F. Malherbe's novel *Hans die Skipper* coincided with the PACT coalition government between the Nationalist party and the Labour party which governed the Union of South Africa from 1924 to 1929. The fact that the author received the coveted Hertzog prize for the novel in 1930 is proof of the literary (and political) status of a text which over thirty years was revered as a classic in the Afrikaans canon. Kannemeyer (1978:164) in his monumental Afrikaans literary history calls this text Malherbe's 'suurwete' (poised) work and refers to the conflict between father and son in the text. Traditional institutionalized readings of the text tended to emphasize this very generation conflict as well as the notion that the text was a novel in praise of labour. Fifty five years after it's first date of publication the text was – for the very first time ever – read from a historical perspective by Gerwel (1983). In 1991 however, Bontelmann subjected the text to an invasive rereading from a historical perspective.

In stead of decoding a hymn to labour *per se* or a mere generation conflict between father and son, Bontelmann traces the ideological project of a text which, according to him, sets out to encourage the likely reader

(poor platelands Afrikaners, locked into a rural economy) to enter into a 'Folkskapitalisme' in the cities in line with the so-called 'civilized labour policy' of the PACT government. This ideological project, according to Bertelsmann, was disguised by the fact that Johan, the son of Hans die Skapper in the text, does not leave the family farm, but the small scale fishing life style for the industrializing town where, incidentally, he becomes involved in wagon building with its obviously acceptable symbolic connotations. While Johan becomes very successful in town, the text, Bertelsmann (1991:12) points out, describes his father Hans' dependence on the seasons and nature in general.

With reference to Matherley (Coetzee 1984:25-27) Bertelsmann (1992:12) indicates that certain *silences* reveal the ideological project of the text. One such *silence* is in connection with the history of Johan's so-called 'coloured' counterpart Willem Willem and his wife display the very characteristics which the text propagates: they were of sober habits, hard-working, decent living etc. However, Bertelsmann points out that because the portrayal of a successful 'coloured' man in town or in a city would undermine the ideological project of the text, this figure had to be dropped from the narration altogether.

Gerwel (1983:141) is of the opinion that this novel reflects attitudes in the social environment from which the texts emanate. Bertelsmann (1992:12) takes issue with Gerwel and states that the very ideological project of this text is not to portray the extra-textual *status quo* but to attempt to change the very socio-political situation by encouraging a new economic dispensation. Similarly, when Gerwel (1983:143-144) sees the portrayal of 'coloureds' in the text as a group of people with inherent defects, Bertelsmann (1992:13) is of the opinion that the very opposite is true in this novel. The very economic system propagated by the text would inevitably lead to the demise of the feudal social order and for this very reason the text envelops the future of the so-called 'coloured' in textual silence.

The following general description by Abrams (1993:250) is directly applicable to the very process at work in Matherley's *Hans die Skapper*:

Furthermore, what may seem to be the artistic resolution of a literary plot yielding pleasure to the reader, is in fact deceptive, for it is an effect which serves to cover over the unresolvable conflicts of power, class, gender and social groups that underlie the resolutions that underlie the surface meanings of a literary text.

#### 4 *Somer* (1935) by C.M. van den Heever

*Somer* (1935) is a typical Afrikaans farm novel which, in the words of J.M. Coetzee (1984:83), 'celebrated the memory of the old rural values or pro-

claimed their desirability and elaborated schemes for their preservation'. The setting for the novel is a Free State farm at the time of the harvest.

Traditionally the text was read as a story dealing with problems affecting farmers such as natural disasters, and problems related to ownership rights. At a different level it was read as a love story involving Linda and Wyand negotiating notions regarding the family of love against the background of the eternal movement of the seasons.

This is another text central to the traditional Afrikaans canon and originally revered by establishment critics. Kannemeyer (1978:304) in the seventies still described this text as one of van den Heever's best: 'een van van den Heever se swaarste werke'.

Gerwel (1978:97) in sharp contrast to Kannemeyer's reverential attitude towards the novel, representing a revisionist reading, decodes a different text. Gerwel (1978:97) states that this novel is one of the 'most reactionary' texts as it is the portrayal of so-called 'coloured' people in the texts under discussion in his essay. He says that the 'coloured' figures are described in the most brutal of terms and they remain mere aspects of the background and are portrayed as obedient servants of their white masters.

Mackenzie (1994:1) rereads *Somer* from what she calls a 'sexist political' perspective and decodes patterns of patriarchal domination represented in the text. Mackenzie's reading of a text which, according to a traditionalist reading like that by Kannemeyer (1978:304) was regarded as a romantic and idyllic treatment of abstract, so-called, universal problems, have much in common with Dollimore and Sinfield's (1985:foreword) 'commitment to the transformation of a social order which exploits people on the grounds of race, gender and class'.

This kind of reading relieves the very opposite of the traditional Kannemeyer (1978:304) kind of reading which tends to

naturalise the text – that is interpret its culture-specific and time-bound representations as though they were features of universal and permanent human experience (Abrams 1993:251).

#### 5 *Boplaas* (1938) by Bortmeester

The short prose texts in Bortmeester's *Boplaas* (1938) provide typical examples of Afrikaans prose from the pre 1948 period. The texts in this volume in which a white narrator relates experiences on a Bokkeveld farm from his childhood, deal with the day-to-day activities on a Kanna farm and encode blatant racism as part and parcel of a specific view of life. While some critics revere these texts as respectable first class literature belonging



in the canon, the texts also fall into the very category which are reviled by revisionists.

The canonical readings of these texts traditionally established and entrenched certain meanings comfortable to the hegemony. In the late sixties F.L.J. Van Rensburg (1968:11) described what in effect represents a description of a feudal order in the *Boplas* texts as a 'natural hierarchy' and Mawie Scholtz (1979:4) in the late seventies still regarded the *Boplas* texts as images of a kind of farm idyll.

Mphahlele's (1974:50) reading of Afrikaans literature as a whole, epitomises a reading strategy which reviles Afrikaans literature on the grounds of its surface structure.

Were it not that it glorifies white supremacy, and were it not for the notorious evil this literature breathes, one would simply dismiss it as mere, a crushing bore.

Gerwel (1987:92) in a report of a revisionist reading of the older Afrikaans prose, says that many of these texts (the *Boplas* texts by Boemseel, although not specifically mentioned in his essay, fit into this essay) tend to affirm attitudes which might contribute to colour and race discrimination.

Here we have typical examples of a dilemma. Gerwel and Mphahlele decried devastating racism in these (kind of) texts and Scholtz and Van Rensburg report the reading of an idyll.

In addition to the two approaches outlined above, Aucamp (1988) suggests that some of the older Afrikaans texts represent the Afrikaans writer's own demythologization of a feudal and presumed paradisiacal world.

It is however, not merely a matter of decoding blatant racism on the one hand, or assuming an idyll on the other hand. The primary aim, in the words of Abrams (1993:252), of a political reader of a literary text is

to undo these ideological origins and suppressors in order to uncover the historical and political conditions and expressions which are the text's true, although covert or unmentioned subject matter.

Read in this way the *Boplas* texts become discursive signs representing historical power structures.

A historical rereading of this text indeed portrays a feudal racist social order. The paradox in these texts is that the very uncensored portrayal of the social order to which Mphahlele refers, unmasks a system which could, as indicated by Scholtz's reading be mistaken for a peaceful farm idyll. The text radiates a narrative process within which the narrator employs the narrative elements, figures, events, space and time in order to generate a *Boplas* code. This code indicates paternalism, racism and feudalism as major aspects of an idyll and read in this way the text demythologizes the notion of a farm

idyll. The text also, as the result of its capacity to represent aspects of history, does not only question Mphahlele's (1974:50) negative view of Afrikaans literature in general, but it can even meet Mphahlele's own social criteria for literature which demands that 'it should order our experiences and responses and help resolve conflicts inside ourselves ...' (Gerwel 1987:92).

This kind of reading strategy enables the decoder of the text to trace the representations of the past and in the process, to use the words of Abrams (1993:252), the 'voices of the oppressed, the marginalised and the dispossessed' can be decoded.

## Conclusion

The rereading of texts traditionally revered and currently reviled, might assist the reader, in the words of Kumar d'Souza (1989:26) taken from a different context 'to move into another space, another time, reclaiming submerged knowledge, generating new spaces'. Fiction is indeed a kind of history as Doehnow (1977:217) asserted. Whether history is a kind of fiction as he also postulated, is the subject of another investigation.

Department of Afrikaans and Nederlands  
Rhodes University

## References

- Ayres, M.N. 1963. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Fort Worth: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich College Publishers.
- Adorno, T.W. 1972. *Zur Dialektik des Aufgebauens*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.
- Aucamp, H. 1987. 'Skepsis: maar plaas was?' *Die Burger* 13 September 1987.
- Bakhtin, M.M. 1981. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Burkes, Rosalind 1974. 3-7. New York: Hall and Wang.
- Burke, Rudolf. 1981. On Derrida's Introduction to Russell's *Origin of Geometry*. In Silverman, Hugh (ed). *Derrida and Deconstruction*. New York: Routledge.
- Botelmar, R. 1991. Our Yarn, Yarn on Citizenship. *Esprit* 2 Winter, 11-17.
- Boemseel 1948. In Boemseel 1976. *Boemseel's Farmhouse Press*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.
- Cherns, M. 1988. *White Writing*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Collingwood, R.G. 1956. *The Idea of History*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Derrida, J. 1986. Historical Discourse as Postcolonial Fiction. In Derrida, M.C. & J.N. Kray (eds). *Acts and Voices: Philosophical Reflections from Western and Non-Western Perspectives*. Dordrecht: Martinus Wykoff Publishers.
- Derrida, J. 1973. *Speech and Phenomena: and other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Sign*. Allanson, D.B. (trans). Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

- Dusterrow, El. 1977. 'False Document', *American Review* 26 November 27-30.
- McElmore, Jonathan and Alan Sinfield. 1985. *Political Shakespeare: New Essays on Cultural Materialism*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Pinault, Michel. 1977. Nietzsche, Genealogy, History. In *Language, Culture - Memory, Poetics: Selected Essays and Interviews*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Gerowa, J. 1984. *Literature en Apartheid: Concepts van 'gekolourde' in die Afrikaanse Roman tot 1948*. Kaselgeloof Kaapen.
- Gerwel, J. 1987. Apartheid as the Vorstellung van Gekolourde in die Vroeg Afrikaanse Literatuur. In Mula, C. (ed.) *Race and Literature*. Pinetown: Uwea Burgess.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. 1989. Towards a Poetics of Culture. In Veeen, H. Aron (ed.) *The New Historicism*. London: Routledge.
- Hutcheon, Linda. 1988. *The Poetics of Postmodernism*. London: Routledge.
- Jefferson, Fredric. 1985. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. London: Methuen.
- Jefferson, A. 1988. Structuralism and Poststructuralism. In Jefferson, A. and D. Robey (eds.) *Modern Literary Theory*. London: BT Blandford Ltd.
- Kamunoye, J. 1978. *The Gekolourde van die Afrikaanse Literatuur - Band 1*. Cape Town: Academica.
- Kermode, F. 1981. *The Classic*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Kuper, Murray. 1974. Fiction, History and Empirical Reality. *Critical Inquiry* 1, 2: 157-181.
- Kumar D'Souza, Corinne. 1983. A New Movement, A New Hope. East Wind, West Wind, and the Wind from the South. In Pharr, Judith (ed.) *Healing the Wounds: The Poetics of Exile*. Santa Fe: New Society Publishers.
- Lefevere, Andre. 1986. Power and the Canon. *Tekst en Literatuurwetenskap* 1, 1: 1-14.
- Mackenzie, L. 1994. *A Journey Unending of CM: van den Heever's 'Die Kameer'*. Unpublished essay. Grahamstown: Department of Afrikaans and Netherlands. Rhodes University.
- Malherbe, DE. 1978. *Race and the Novel*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.
- Marshall, Brenda K. 1991. *Reading the Postmodern: Fiction and Theory*. New York: Routledge.
- McElrath, Brian. 1981. *Postmodernist Fictions*. London: Routledge.
- Montana, Louis A. 1989. Prefacing the Renaissance: The Poetics and Politics of Culture. In Veeen, H. Aron (ed.) *The New Historicism*. London: Routledge.
- Mphahlele, Ezekiel. 1974. The Function of Literature at the Present Time: The Isizwe Imperative. *Transafrica* 15, 3: 49-53.
- Strozier, Paul. 1984. *Time and the Novelist*. Vol. 5. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- Robyn, KK. 1981. *Feminist Literary Studies: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Serre, Jean-Yves. 1970. *What is Literature?*. Ithaca, N. Y. (trans.) Northampton: Methuen and Co.
- Scholar, Robert. 1982. *Semiotics and Interpretation*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Scholar, M. 1978. Slammurpans as Spoils. In Scholar, M. (ed.) *Beacons of Verminicide*. Pinetown: Cape Town: Tafelberg.
- Van Rensburg, PJ. 1988. *Beacons of Verminicide*. M. 1-9.
- Van Zyl, S. 1982. Semiotics: The Sign in our Times. In Ryan, Rory and Susan van Zyl (eds.) *An Introduction to Contemporary Literary Theory*. Johannesburg: Ad Books.
- Van der Veen, CM. 1935. *Novel*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

## African Evidence for Three Proto-World Lexical Roots

Richard Bailey

This paper shows that a refinement in the method of historical semantics, the most neglected of areas in linguistics, offers a means of extending the application of the comparative method of linguistic reconstruction to at least as far back as 14000 B.P. This may coincide with the onset of the Neolithic Revolution in agriculture which dramatically changed the distribution of peoples and languages on the planet.

Evidence is provided for three possible roots, KAM, PAK and TAK\* which certainly date back to this period but which might have been present in the Proto-World of about 40000 B.P.

There is a large amount of published lexical data representative of the language families of the world. For several major language families there exist sizeable corpora of lexical reconstructions which recover thousands of lexical items in use 5000-6000 years B.P., e.g. Indo-Iranian, Proto-Dardic, Proto-Austronesian, etc.

The Bantu subequatorial African family of between 400-600 languages is in effect a subfamily of Niger-Congo, the major sub-Saharan language family.

From studying semantic development patterns applying in the case of TAK\* it was found that the same patterns occurred with other unrelated roots such as PAK and KAM, often in the same languages.

From studying semantic development patterns present in the data, it becomes apparent that a generally predictable direction of semantic change is discernible. Diachronically, the same patterns of change occur in the same way in unrelated roots with the same or similar meanings in the same and/or different languages. In other words, from available evidence, it seems as if similar semantic patterns of change have occurred in unrelated roots such as KAM, PAK and TAK\*. The regularity and direction of these semantic

patterns of change in available evidence in most of the world's languages suggests a universal tendency of semantic development.

These findings afford historical linguists a certain predictive power. Knowing that a root is found in some related languages with certain meanings, other reflexes of the same roots can be predicted within a wide semantic development area in these languages. The same semantic changes have been observed in three distinct Proto-World roots.

Some linguists because of various factors will not be able to accept the following data as sufficient evidence of genetic relationship of the languages involved. Nevertheless most social scientists will, it is hoped, agree that this is clearly a case of data in want of a conclusion and a method.

In keeping with the practice of structural-functional and structural-mentalistic linguistics of the twentieth century, the study of meaning change has been almost completely neglected in historical linguistics. Meaning has been used as a criterion for affirming the relatedness of words. Words could be judged to be genetically related if their meanings were identical or fell within narrow limits of variation. Semantics was used as a control on the study of sound change but did not become an object of study in its own right.

The postulation of language families such as Nostratic, Eurasiatic, Proto-World is controversial. In order to postulate these language families, the comparative method would have to be used. It is accepted by most historical linguists as being the only acceptable validation of linguistic genetic relationship.

The comparative method depends on the demonstration of regular sound correspondences between languages. It is believed by most historical linguists that the cumulative effects of sound change and lexical replacement make the method inapplicable beyond 8000 B.P.

The data presented in this paper suggests that a careful analysis of historical semantic areas will make available many more roots for the application of the comparative method.

One historical semantic area is investigated in this article as it has differentiated over ten or twenty or more thousand years in three roots TAK, KAM, PAK. The representation of these roots is not intended to constitute reconstructions. It is too early for that. All that is intended, is to demonstrate that historical reconstruction according to the comparative method will become feasible at remote time depths, i.e. earlier than 8000 B.P. The identification of more roots and the evidence of their semantic changes will add legitimacy to both the theory and the method.

If the cognates listed under each of the three roots are accepted then some interesting etymologies may be revised. E.g. the Latin *homo* for 'man' can now be seen not to be derived directly from *humus*, 'earth', as is conventionally believed. Rather, the true etymology is with *amare* 'love' and

*ameto* 'wrap'. The Latin *h* and the zero reflex standard PIE *\*gh* as in Latin *homo* 'man', *hortus* 'garden', *anser* 'goose' with English cognates 'person, garden, goose'. The Latin *h* was a weak consonant and on its way to loss. It is not surprising to find both *h* and zero reflecting *\*gh* (= *\*g* in the glottalic revision).

A recent development in Indo-European studies has been the widely accepted suggestion that glottalic conventional Proto-Indo-European *\*h*, *\*d*, *\*g* were in fact glottalic ejectives stops *\*p'*, *\*t'*, *\*k'*. It is therefore interesting to note that a number of reflexes of the TAK root from Africa and the Americas contain ejectives. This unusual phonetic feature is more likely to be a retention from ancient times than an independent innovation. As a retention it supports the glottalic theory.

The following English verbs and associated nouns illustrate the semantic area of the three roots with reflexes in languages representative of nearly all the language families of the world.

walk	> go in front, jump, hurry, stride	[leg, foot, side, thigh, hip, outback, back]
straddle	> stride, strut, be haughty, step, step on	[pace, step, step-ladder, wing]
go in front	> precede, do first, do before, begin	
grasp	> clutch, seize, bite, (into and hold on with teeth) hold, scoop, handle, comb, span, reach, be adjacent	[claw, teeth, talon, fing, hand, finger, toe]
bite	> chew, eat, chomp, nibble, corrode, erode	
hold	> take, receive, seize, take hold of, press, squeeze, milk, be tight, stiff, firm, wrap around, clothe	[tooth, jaw, chest, etc.]
take hold of	> grapple, wrestle	
span	> crack, split, fork, bifurcate, grasp	[crack, split, fork, crotch, (mountain) pass, interval, hand, eye, ear]
press on	> embrace, hug, squeeze, love, deliever, pride, grab, shear, grind	[arm, tail, belly, pear, penis, sting]
cover	> put roof on, build, shield, protect, muzzle	[skin, muzzle, hide, roof, garment, earth]
love	> want, desire, be joyful	

The list comprises the following data. It was the intention to provide a representative selection and not a complete listing of cognates. Gaps in the list do not necessarily mean an absence of reflexes.

KAM			
<b>KHOISAN</b>			
!Xara	Axam	urine	Barnard 1985:69
Nama	Akha	urine	Barnard 1985:69
!u-Axama	Axam	give a handoff	Sayman 1975:126
!u-Axama	Axam	cling to, carry on the back	Sayman 1975:126
!u-Axama	Axam	let (with list)	Sayman 1975:126
!u-Axama	Axam	stand on toes to reach	Sayman 1975:126
!u-Axama	Axam	call	Sayman 1975:126
!u-Axama	Axam	tighten, a bowstring, wing out (a doll)	Sayman 1975:126
!u-Axama	Axam	tighten, close	Sayman 1975:126
!u-Axama	Axam	jump up	Sayman 1975:126
!u-Axama	Axam	to hurry	Sayman 1975:126
!u-Axama	Axam	pinch, sting	Sayman 1975:126
!u-Axama	Axam	eat (e.g. porridge)	Sayman 1975:126
!u-Axama	Axam	give birth	Sayman 1975:126
!u-Axama	Axam	pinch	Sayman 1975:126
!u-Axama	Axam	grip (between the toes)	Sayman 1975:126
Nama	gama	fold (liquor) in mouth	Rust 1969:28
Nama	gama	knock, trip	Rust 1969:28
Nama	gama	two	Rust 1969:28
Nama	gama	kill, murder	Rust 1969:28
Nama	gama	mutter	Rust 1969:28
Nama	gama	drift	Rust 1969:28
Nama	gama	run away	Rust 1969:28
Nama	gama	jump over	Rust 1969:28
Nama	gama	honest, show off	Rust 1969:28
Nama	gama	on over	Rust 1969:28
Nama	gama	was, damp	Rust 1969:28
Nama	gama	clap (hands)	Rust 1969:28
Nama	gama	to urinate	Rust 1969:28
Nama	gama	single, separate, fasten, put	Rust 1969:28
Nama	gama	to struggle, fight	Rust 1969:28
Nama	gama	have stillborn (lamb, calf)	Rust 1969:28
Nama	gama	to pour	Rust 1969:28
Nama	gama	grind, line	Rust 1969:28

Where possible, roots are supplied with their source cited. Minor transcriptional changes have been necessitated by typographical requirements.

Nama	Nama	wrap up, envelop	Law 1969:24
Nama	Nama	rather, guiding, scene	Rust 1969:28
<b>NIGER-CONGO</b>			
Nama	ngina	fresh (the body)	Law 1969:24
Nama	ngina	skin	Law 1969:24
Nama	ngina	eat the inside, pick out, eat and eat	Law 1969:24
Proto-Bantu	*kama	to, to, wing, tick	Guthrie 1971:142
Proto-Bantu	*kama	soot	Guthrie 1971:142
Proto-Bantu	*kama	rough	Guthrie 1971:142
Proto-Bantu	*kama	ten	Guthrie 1971:142
Proto-Bantu	*kama	ten	Guthrie 1971:142
Proto-Bantu	*kama	ten	Guthrie 1971:142
Proto-Bantu	*kama	head in arm, hold in hand	Guthrie 1971:142
Proto-Bantu	*kama	bread, dough	Guthrie 1971:142
Proto-Bantu	*kama	but with hammer	Guthrie 1971:142
Proto-Bantu	*kama	thumb	Guthrie 1971:142
Mama	kama	weak	Law 1969:24
Mama	kama	hot with fat	own, own
Mama	kama	rough (as clothes)	own, own
Zulu	kama	easy, find	Dent 1969:24
Zulu	kama	ten	Dent 1969:24
Zulu	kama	interval of time or distance	Dent 1969:24
Zulu	kama	to come out, strain, drain off (as whey), thistle, light rain (when it clears)	Dent 1969:24
<b>NILO-SAHARAN</b>			
<b>NILOTIC SUDANESE</b>			
Akan	kama	to, to, to, hold, some	Hillier 1969:24
Lukana	kama	eat by throwing food into mouth	Barnard 1985:22
Lukana	kama	catch, seize	Barnard 1985:22
Lukana	kama	grip	Lucas 1969:24
<b>AFRASIAN</b>			
Arabic	kama	to, to, to, hold, some	Hillier 1969:24
Arabic	kama	eat by throwing food into mouth	Barnard 1985:22
Arabic	kama	catch, seize	Barnard 1985:22
Arabic	kama	grip	Lucas 1969:24
Arabic	kama	to, to, to, hold, some	Hillier 1969:24
Arabic	kama	eat by throwing food into mouth	Barnard 1985:22
Arabic	kama	catch, seize	Barnard 1985:22
Arabic	kama	grip	Lucas 1969:24













Uralic	lak	de-in-a	Booy 1998: 171
Uralic	lakking	devel	Booy 1998: 169
<b>AUSTRONESIAN</b>			
Proto-Polynesian	taka	lean	Rafter 1980: 223
Proto-Polynesian	taka	overstuffed	Rafter 1980: 223
Russell	taka	rusty	Rafter 1980: 223
Namoun	taka	lower, sinker, unstable, contentious, party to whom proposal of marriage is taken	Rafter 1980: 223
Polynesian-Polynesian	tago	touch, hold, grasp	Rafter 1980: 223
Tongan	tago	visit someone in night for sex	Rafter 1980: 223
Proto-Polynesian	takavaka	to have broad legs	Rafter 1980: 220
Tokelau	takake	sit on chair, ride horse	Rafter 1980: 223
Proto-Austroasiatic	*takak	angle, quick	Blust 1989: 95
Proto-Austroasiatic	*takap	finger, toe	Blust 1986: 95
Proto-Austroasiatic	*takel	arm, leg	Blust 1986: 98
Proto-Austroasiatic	*takelkay	spread, scatter	Blust 1986: 102
Proto-Austroasiatic	*takel	heel, foot, leg	Blust 1989: 100
Malay	takpa	leaves ladder, stairs, steps	Yusop 1975: 264
Malay	takpa	rebell	Yusop 1975: 264
Malay	takpai	staff, stem, handle of cup, dagger	Yusop 1975: 264
Malay	takpa	crack, press, grasp	Yusop 1975: 264
Malay	takpa	swell, swell (of breasts), swell	Yusop 1975: 264
Malay	takpa	hard, and forearm	Yusop 1975: 264
<b>AUSTRALIAN</b>			
PAMA NYUNGAN			
Diyari	taka-	rock	Austin 1981: 229
Diyari	taka-	carry on the back	Austin 1981: 258
<b>SINO-TIBETAN</b>			
Chinese	tan, ty.	iron (clothes)	Wang 1967: 457
Chinese	tan, ty.	drag, pull up	Wang 1967: 461
Chinese	tan, ty.	draw out, pull out	Wang 1967: 461
Chinese	tan	egg	Wang 1967: 470
Chinese	tan	and (for farming)	Wang 1967: 471
Chinese	tan	to get, to pull (to get, to pull)	Wang 1967: 472
<b>JAPANESE</b>			
Japanese	tan, ty.	to step over, stride	Wang 1967: 472
Japanese	tan, ty.	stride, stride, step	Wang 1967: 472
<b>AUSTRIAN</b>			
Nixthar	tan	five	Wang 1967: 472

**AMERIND**

Miwok	takaw, etc.	1) to jump 2) to jump out of the way 3) to jump over something 4) to leap 5) to skip	Callaghan 1984: 144
Chadliin	takha	box	Matheson 1972: 155
Totomaw	dikaku	arm	Matheson 1972: 158
Bura	osaga	finger	Matheson 1972: 157
Calutan	tipira	finger	Matheson 1972: 157
Washo	ik'sig	finger	Matheson 1972: 157
Kami	dik	finger	Matheson 1972: 157
Totomaw/Mayan	tek'w	step on, step (Ritual speech, prayer)	Laughlin 1975: 334
Totomaw/Mayan	tek'w	stamp, pace	Laughlin 1975: 334
Totomaw/Mayan	tek'w	stamp, pace	Laughlin 1975: 334
Totomaw/Mayan	tek'w	step on (ph.)	Laughlin 1975: 334
Totomaw/Mayan	tek'w	about to head cut (quarter on hen)	Laughlin 1975: 334
Totomaw/Mayan	tek'w	near, step	Laughlin 1975: 334
Totomaw/Mayan	tek'w	stand firm (Ritual speech, during prayer)	Laughlin 1975: 334
Totomaw/Mayan	tek'w	ladder	Laughlin 1975: 334
Totomaw/Mayan	tek'w	stair (runking), dancing, action	Laughlin 1975: 334

**NA-DENE**

Atlatlak	ts	tail	Greenberg 1987: 324
Atlatlak	ts	back, up, y	Greenberg 1987: 324
Atlatlak	ts	jeopard	Greenberg 1987: 324

**PAK****NIGER-CONGO**

Proto-Bantu	*takat	hold especially child	Guthrie 1971: 136
Proto-Bantu	*takat	go, catch	Guthrie 1971: 136
Proto-Bantu	*takat	take, move	Guthrie 1971: 136
Proto-Bantu	*takat	blue poison	Guthrie 1971: 136
Proto-Bantu	*takat	tree, fork	Guthrie 1971: 136
Proto-Bantu	*takat	wild cat, domestic cat	Guthrie 1971: 136
Proto-Bantu	*takat	take out food (from pot), take out (from container)	Guthrie 1971: 136
Nganda	gaga	thigh	Greenberg 1987: 324
Seruli	kwa	one of a ladder, step	Greenberg 1987: 324
Venda	-chak	take flour or similar substance out of pot by hand	Greenberg 1987: 324
Venda	-chak	scrap, scrape out of floor	Greenberg 1987: 324
Venda	-chak	take greedily, help oneself liberally without consideration for others	Greenberg 1987: 324

Venda	phanga-phanga	to lumber, to bang and splashing in foam	v. Warmels 1985:193
Venda	phala	wildness	v. Warmels 1985:193
Venda	phango	narrow cliff, cliffs, narrow narrowness of the neck (of a child or ill)	v. Warmels 1985:193
Venda	-phasha	dignifying, serve or dish up	v. Warmels 1985:193
Venda	phakho	cease, below etc.	v. Warmels 1985:193
Venda	basa	space, space as between the sticks of a fence or roof or between the spokes of a wheel	v. Warmels 1989:7

# NILO-SAHARAN

Turkana	pa'	indicate, speculate, cross, whistle, cut	Barnett 1960:55
Turkana	pa:ci	female cat, rabbit	Barnett 1960:62
Turkana	paka	cat, kitten	Barnett 1960:63
Turkana	pakakaj	to quarrel, split	Barnett 1960:64
Turkana	pakar	separate, separate rebel	Barnett 1960:65
Turkana	pakar	gap, fissure, rent, crack	Barnett 1960:65
Turkana	paka:va	selected, chosen	Barnett 1960:64

# AFRASIAN

Arabic	la:ja	to stride over, to walk wide, to have the legs wide apart	Cowan 1976:697
Arabic	la:ja	elaborate break up	Cowan 1976:697
Arabic	la:ja	elaborate break up	Cowan 1976:699
Alor	la:ja	to	Parker 1985:99
Alor	la:ja	to	Parker 1985:99
Alor	la:ja	to	Parker 1985:99

# INDO-EUROPEAN

Proto-Indo-European	pek-	strike, war, fight	Manni 1985:313
Proto-Indo-European	pek-	to strike, to hit, fit	Manni 1985:319
Proto-Indo-European	pek-	to strike, to hit, fit	Manni 1985:319
Proto-Indo-European	pek-	to strike, to hit, fit	Manni 1985:319
Proto-Indo-European	pek-	to strike, to hit, fit	Manni 1985:319
Proto-Indo-European	pek-	to strike, to hit, fit	Manni 1985:319
Proto-Indo-European	pek-	to strike, to hit, fit	Manni 1985:319
Proto-Indo-European	pek-	to strike, to hit, fit	Manni 1985:319
Proto-Indo-European	pek-	to strike, to hit, fit	Manni 1985:319
Proto-Indo-European	pek-	to strike, to hit, fit	Manni 1985:319

Greek	pega-	to	Manni 1985:311
Greek	pega-	to	Manni 1985:311
Greek	pega-	to	Manni 1985:311
Greek	pega-	to	Manni 1985:311
Greek	pega-	to	Manni 1985:311
Greek	pega-	to	Manni 1985:311
Greek	pega-	to	Manni 1985:311
Greek	pega-	to	Manni 1985:311
Greek	pega-	to	Manni 1985:311
Greek	pega-	to	Manni 1985:311

Old Icelandic	la:ja	to	Ziegen 1970:124
Old Icelandic	la:ja	to	Ziegen 1970:125
Old Icelandic	la:ja	to	Ziegen 1970:125
Old Icelandic	la:ja	to	Ziegen 1970:125
Old Icelandic	la:ja	to	Ziegen 1970:125
Old Icelandic	la:ja	to	Ziegen 1970:125
Old Icelandic	la:ja	to	Ziegen 1970:125
Old Icelandic	la:ja	to	Ziegen 1970:125
Old Icelandic	la:ja	to	Ziegen 1970:125
Old Icelandic	la:ja	to	Ziegen 1970:125

# BASQUE

Basque	la:ja	to	Campbell 1990:150
--------	-------	----	-------------------

# ALTAIC

Turkish	la:ja	to	Manni 1985:319
Turkish	la:ja	to	Manni 1985:319
Turkish	la:ja	to	Manni 1985:319
Turkish	la:ja	to	Manni 1985:319
Turkish	la:ja	to	Manni 1985:319
Turkish	la:ja	to	Manni 1985:319
Turkish	la:ja	to	Manni 1985:319
Turkish	la:ja	to	Manni 1985:319
Turkish	la:ja	to	Manni 1985:319
Turkish	la:ja	to	Manni 1985:319

Turkish	pey	backward, offshoot, stick outside of the nail	Hogoy 1947:274
Turkic	lapir	leg, shank	Hogoy 1947:274
U. K. Ch.	peh	the space behind	Kennanupf 1989:131
Turkish	peşpeş	pace, strength, violence	Kennanupf 1989:131
Turkic	paşpaş	pliers, tweezers	Hogoy 1947:272
Turkish	paş, laza	arm, muscle, strength	Kennanupf 1989:131
Turkish	paşa	pig/sashay's master	

## URALIC

Finnish	vira	axe	Reilly 1981:305
Finnish	pukka	carve	Africa 1974:52
Hungarian	fog	cold, three, seize, grain, catch	Magy 1991:317

## INDO-PACIFIC

Dea	pep	claw	Greenberg 1977:858
Esale	pepa	claw	Greenberg 1977:858
Sulka	paapa	finger nail	Greenberg 1977:858
Shaba	pat	finger nail	Greenberg 1977:858
Tamimivira	pek	finger nail	Greenberg 1977:858
Nai	fasa	finger	Greenberg 1977:858
Arara	foka	finger	Greenberg 1977:858
Ewe	fika	claw	Greenberg 1977:858
Marwari	laga	chin	Greenberg 1977:858
Khasi	laga	chin, jaw	Greenberg 1977:858
Mina	lag	cheek	Greenberg 1977:858

## AUSTRONESIAN

Proto-Austronesian	*pekpek	tear, bit	Blust 1986:68
Proto-Austronesian	*pepa	fork of a broom	Blust 1986:68
Proto-Austronesian	*papa	forked, peevish	Blust 1986:68
Proto-Austronesian	*pe(p)kan	stretch, open, apart	Blust 1986:68
Proto-Austronesian	*pusa	crack, thigh, foot	Blust 1986:68
Proto-Austronesian	*paka	separate, part to	Blust 1986:68
Taiwanese	paqi	hatchets	Benedict 1960:216
Malay	paha	dingy	Yunus 1975:191

## AUSTRALIAN

Proto-Australian			
Djangu	paqa	to separate	Austin 1981:311
Djangu	nuka	to separate	Austin 1981:309

## JAPANESE

Japanese	hikkake	to scratch, to claw	Vance 1991:139
Old Japanese	hiki	claw (flower leg)	Buckwalter 1991:278

USSA<sup>2</sup>

University of Durban-Westville

## References and Bibliography

- Abbie, A. 1969. *The Original Australians*. London: Frederick Muller.
- Adderson, A.D. & Fahir (Zahid) 1957. *The Concise Oxford Turkish Dictionary*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Anttila, Raimo 1973. Internal Reconstruction and *Pieni-Lijne* (Finnish). In Sebeok, Thomas (ed). *Current Trends in Linguistics 11*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Anttila, Raimo 1965. *Diachronic Analysis: A Lexicon*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.
- Austin, P. 1981. Proto-Kanyawa and Proto-Mandhara. *Historical Phonology, Tongue*, 54: 295-333.
- Balga, George Percy 1967. *An English-Arabic Lexicon, in which the Equivalents for English Words and Islamic Sentences are Rendered into Literary and Colloquial Arabic*. Beirut: Librairie du Liban.
- Barr, L. 1965. *A Course in Egyptian*. Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau.
- Barnard, A. 1985. *A Nǀso Wordlist*. Occasional Publication No. 2. Department of African Studies, University of Natal, Durban.
- Barnard, A. 1990. *Tswana English Dictionary*. London: Macmillan.
- Bellwood, P. 1978. *The Polynesian*. London: Thomas & Hudson Ltd.
- Benedict, P.K. 1960. *Japanese-Austro-Thai*. Ann Arbor: Karoma Publishers.
- Reilly, 1981. *English-Tswana Names-English Dictionary*. Lusitane: Felious Hertz.
- Blust, R. 1980. Austronesian Etymologies. *Oceanic Linguistics* 19, 1&2: 181.
- Blust, R. 1983/4. Austronesian Etymologies II. *Oceanic Linguistics* 22-23: 182-190.
- Blust, R. 1986. Austronesian Etymologies III. *Oceanic Linguistics* 25, 1&2: 1-123.
- Boss, F. 1911/1969. *Handbook of American Indian Languages, Part 1*. Oosterhout N.B.: The Netherlands. Anthropological Publications (Reprinted from Smithsonian Institution Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 40, 1911).
- Bray, Denis [1983/1985]. *Brabant Language: Phonetics and Grammar*. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services.
- Brown, Thomas & MB Freeman 1960. *A Dravidian Etymological Dictionary*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Callaghan, Catherine 1984. *Plains Algonquian Dictionary*. London: University of California.
- Campbell, George L. 1959. *Compendium of the World's Languages, 2 Vols*. London: Routledge.
- Church, W. 1911. *The Polynesian Wanderings*. Washington: The Carnegie Institution of Washington.
- Collinge, N.E. 1969. Languages as it Evolves: Tracing as Verbs and Families. In Collinge, N.E. (ed). *An Encyclopedia of Language*. London: Routledge.
- Corrie, Bernard 1980. Languages of the World: Who Speaks What. In Collinge, N.E. (ed). *An Encyclopedia of Language*. London: Routledge.
- Cowan, M. (ed) 1976. *The Hausa-Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic-Arabic-English Dictionary*. Ibadan: Spoken Language Services.
- Cooper, R. 1992. *Tswana English Dictionary*. Johannesburg: Walter Mordant & Sons Africa.
- Dahl, O.C. 1976. *Proto-Austronesian*. London: Curzon Press.
- Dau, G.R. & C.S. Nyembesi 1969. *Shona's Zulu Dictionary*. Pietermaritzburg: Shuter & Shooter.
- Dixon, R.M. 1972. *The Dyak Language of North Queensland*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dolgopolsky, A.R. 1975. Contributions to the Afroasiatic Comparative Word List. *Proceedings of the Sixth Conference on African Linguistics*. Orléans: 27-52-13.

- Threl, C. 1983. *The Historical Reconstruction of Southern Ojibwa Phonology and Morphology*. Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag.
- Et, Avaria, Rosine Santos & Jean L. Dosses. 1995. *Encyclopedia Polyglotte-Française*. Paris: Bulmer's Karthala.
- Fasli-ah, J. 1985 [1979]. *A Dictionary of the Persian and English Languages*. New Delhi: Cosmo Publications.
- Garskoldes, IV. 1970. *Archaic Languages and the Problem of Indo-European Migration to Asia Minor*. *Izvestiya Sibirsk. VII. Congress Internationale de Sciences Anthropologiques et Ethnologiques*. Moscow 3-10. 300-304.
- Graded, J. & V. V. Ivanov. 1992. The Early History of Indo-European Languages. *Scientific American* March 1992: 82-89.
- Gries, A. & L. White. 1992. *Basque-English-English-Basque Dictionary*. London: University of Nevada Press.
- Greenberg, JH. 1973. The Indo-Pacific Hypothesis. *Current Trends in Linguistics* 10: 827-871.
- Greenberg, Joseph H. 1987. *Languages in the Americas*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Greenberg, JH & M. Ruhlén. 1982. Linguistic Origins of Native Americans. *Scientific American* November: 67-69.
- Griegesen, H. 1972. *Language-Formal Journal of African Languages* 11: 1-77-89.
- Guth, J. R. 1967 [1971]. *Comparative Grammar of Bantu*. Cambridge: Cambridge Press Ltd.
- Haus, M. 1981. *Standard Hausa Dictionary*. Harare: College Press.
- Haus, B. 1988. *Die Verheirathung und Gleichung der Toponymen*. Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag.
- Heders, M. & J. C. Low. 1988. *An English-Afro & Afro-English Vocabulary*. Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau.
- Holladay, W. L. 1988. *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Leiden: Brill.
- Hury, H. 1981. *The History of English*. 1947. *A Turkish-English Dictionary*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Howells, W. 1973. *The Pacific Islands*. London: Wadsworth & Nicholson.
- Jones, G. 1980. *A Hindi-English Dictionary*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Johnson, L. 1939. *A Standard Hindi-English Dictionary*. London: Oxford University.
- Jones, A. M. 1989. The Influence of Malagasy: The Malagasy Evidence Reconsidered. *Asianica* 1: 111-145.
- Kornatoff, H. 1987. *Langensprache's Universal Dictionary*. Turkish-English-English-Turkish. Istanbul: Alfa Kiyafet.
- Kong, R. 1973. *The Great Travel Dictionary of San Lorenzo Zambian*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Lewis, Charles Y. & Charles Stuart. 1982. *A Latin Dictionary*. *Phonetic and Archaic Edition of Lewis's Latin Dictionary*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Lidd, Henry George & Robert Scott. 1940. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Luh, Virginia. 1987. *Somali-English Dictionary*. Weyron: Dardwode Press.
- Magee, Thomas. 1992. *A Chinese-Thai-English Dictionary*. Bangkok: Academic Books.
- McClure, D. 1988. *The Search for the Indo-European*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- Mel, E. 1988 [1975]. *A Dictionary of the Central Nicobaric Language*. Delhi: Sarvagran Prakashan.
- Mura, Sam. B. 1985. *An Indo-European Comparative Dictionary*. Hamburg: Helmut Buske.
- Mukeson, E. & 1972. *Comparative Studies in American Languages*. Paris: Mouton.
- Newman, Paul & Rosina Ma Newman (eds). 1973. *Papers in Classic Linguistics: Papers from the Leiden Colloquium on the Classic Language Family*. Leiden: Afrika-Studiecentrum.
- Newman, Paul & Rosina Ma Newman. 1979. *Modern Basic-English Dictionary*. Leiden: University Press Leiden.
- Newman, Rosina Ma. 1990. *An English-Bantu Dictionary*. London: Yale University.
- Nichols, J. 1960. Linguistic Diversity and the First Settlement of the New World. *Language* 36: 3-475-521.
- Parker, EM & R. H. Hayward. 1981. *An Afro-English-Portuguese Dictionary*. London: SOAS.
- Prager, F. W. 1970. Is Hausa Really a Chadic Language? Some problems of Comparative Phonology. *African Language Studies* 1: 275-283.
- Pokorny, Julius. 1959. *Indogermanisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*. Bern: Francke Verlag.
- Polomé, Edgar C. 1969. Language and Civilization: Anthropological Comments. In Colin G. NE (ed). *The Encyclopedia of Language*. London: Routledge.
- Polomé, Edgar C. 1990. Linguistic Palaeontology. In Polomé, Edgar C. (ed). *Issues in Linguistic Studies and Monographs*. 10. Research on Language Change. The Hague: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Pope, N. 1980. *Vergleichende Grammatik der Afrikanischen Sprachen*. Teil 1. *Vergleichende Lautlehre*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz.
- Rahy, Peter. 1980. *A Monomer-Lexicon Approach: Proto-Polynesian Reconstructions*. The Australian National University Department of Linguistics Research Series of Pacific Studies (Pacific Linguistics Series C No. 53).
- Randall, C. 1989. The Origins of Indo-European Languages. *Scientific American* October 1989: 81-90.
- Ruhlén, M. 1976 [1991]. *A Guide to the World's Languages*. Vol. 1. *Introduction with a Preface on Recent Developments*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Rust, F. 1969. *Hausa-Wörterbuch*. Wiesbaden: University of Siegen Press.
- Sains, H. J. 1982. *An Etymological Dictionary of Hausa*. Hamburg: Helmut Buske Verlag.
- Schulz, Russel G. 1977. West Chadic Verb Classes. In Newman, Paul & Rosina Ma Newman (eds). *Papers in Classic Linguistics: Papers from the Leiden Colloquium on the Classic Language Family*. Leiden: Afrika-Studiecentrum.
- Schick, T. (ed). 1973. *Current Trends in Linguistics*. Vol. 14. *Linguistics in America*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Seymour, J. W. 1973. *Zimbabwe Knowledge & Words*. Harare, AA Balkans (Communication no. 11 of the University of Cape Town School of African Studies).
- Stanislawski, Jan & M. Szlachetka. 1981. *A Practical Polish-English Dictionary*. Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Powszechna.
- Sweetenham, Sir V. A. 1973. *Vocabulary of the English and African Languages*. Vol. II. *African-English*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd.
- Threl-Grey, I. 1955. *Tamil-English-English-Tamil Dictionary*. Oxford: Clarendon University of Miami Press.
- Third Thru Book. Woodbridge: Hugo's Language Books Group. 1990.
- Uhl, J. & J. C. C. 1984. *Indo-European Toponymy*. SP Brazil: Trapa Editora.
- Tucker, AN. 1957. Phonology and Africa. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 20: 241-244.

- Enckert, AN & J Tump Ole Mprayer 1955 *A Gikuyu Grammar*. London: Longmans.
- Green, RL 1973 *A Comparative Dictionary of the Indo-African Languages*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Yasuni, Otsu 1980 *Yasuni's Standard English-Japanese Dictionary*. Tokyo: Yasuni's Language Institute.
- Van Wieringen, HJ 1989 *Tswana Dictionary: Tswana-English*. Pretoria: Van Schaas.
- Yano, Taroichi J 1973 *Kokumoku's Romanized Japanese-English Dictionary*. London: Kodansha International.
- Wang, Juec-Fangyi 1967 *Mandarin Chinese Dictionary: Chinese-English*. South Orange: Seton Hall University Press.
- Wang, Fred Fungen 1971 *Mandarin Chinese Dictionary: English-Chinese*. South Orange: Seton Hall University Press.
- Wendemann, D 1957 *The Hottentot-Speaking Peoples and their Languages in South Africa*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co.
- Wells, GSA 1988 *Yokosuka-Hall's Japanese-English Dictionary*. Canberra: Department of Linguistics, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University. Pacific Linguistics Series C No 22.
- Yusop, HAR 1975 *Malay-Malaysian - English: Urban-Gam Dictionary*. Chicago: Harper Collins.
- Zaliznjak, Andrej 1975 *Materials for a Comparative Dictionary of Celtic Languages: Some Celtic Comparisons*. In Benon, James & Pierdina Hyman (eds), *Language Science in The Hague*. Mouton.
- Zucchi, P 1970 The Role of Songany in New Trends in Diachronic Linguistics. *Journal of African Languages and Linguistics* 1: 87-92.
- Zeigler, GE 1977 *A Concise Dictionary of Old Testament*. Olathe, KS: Logos.

# Wietie: The Emergence and Development of Tsotsitaal in South Africa

Louis Molamu

## Introduction

Tsotsitaal is essentially a language made up of elements of Afrikaans and other languages spoken in South Africa. As a pidgin, it developed rapidly as a means of verbal communication between people of different ethnic and racial backgrounds in the urban milieu. Many people have always understood the term 'wietie' to mean to be able to communicate in Tsotsitaal. Variants of Tsotsitaal have been spoken widely in townships along the Reef from Randfontein to Springs.

Modern scholarship has accumulated a vast body of knowledge on the subject of pidgins internationally (DeCamp & Hancock 1974; Todd 1990). However, very little or no scholarly discourse on the sociology of language with respect to Tsotsitaal has been undertaken. A brief historical account of languages in southern Africa by Lambson (1978) includes a discussion on Tsotsitaal. Gwaila (1968) in his study makes passing reference to 'languages ... confined mainly to the gangster element' in urban South Africa. Similarly, in a survey on lingua francas in southern Africa, the existence and use of Tsotsitaal receives scant attention (Heine 1970). In their extensive surveys of languages in Africa, for instance, Greenberg (1970) and Alexander (1972) make no reference to both Afrikaans and Tsotsitaal. In other studies, head lists of languages and dialects of languages throughout the world exclude Tsotsitaal (Voegelin & Voegelin 1978; Katzner 1986).

What is missing from this literature is a comprehensive dictionary of the words and expressions used by those who spoke this distinct language. An exception, to a limited extent, is Brautford's (1987) seminal study which has included a variety of terms 'from the street language of the gangster's underworld'. The general contention amongst many scholars has been that

Tsotsitaal constitutes an unsystematic and vastly complex form of Afrikaans which was used mainly by thugs and other social misfits.

### Purpose of the Study

The present paper forms part of a larger study. The overall project seeks to break relatively new ground by presenting specifically a historical and descriptive dictionary of Tsotsitaal. The dictionary constitutes a modest repository of the linguistic experience of sections of the black population in urban South Africa. It sets out to provide a comprehensive catalogue of words and phrases used in Tsotsitaal. As part of southern Africa's heritage, it is not something which is concerned solely and exclusively with the past. Rather, since many people continue to communicate in Tsotsitaal, it is an essential part of the culturally and politically exciting present.

The present paper sets the scene for the overall study and is essentially an exploratory investigation of the relationship between language and society. Its aim is to briefly trace the history of Tsotsitaal and the philosophy behind its use. It concentrates itself with identifying the social functions of Tsotsitaal and the manner in which it has been used to convey social meaning. However, it cannot possibly explore in detail all the dimensions of the historical evolution of this language. It has, of necessity, to be selective and will obviously reflect the author's subjective impressions of the spoken language of Tsotsitaal.

### Methodology

The main method adopted for the study was that of participant observation. The success of this technique of data gathering heavily depends on the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the research subjects. To the extent that one grew up and participated actively in the street culture of black urban South Africa, the data presented therefore also reflects an insider's view.

Although participant observation was the primary method employed in this study, other data gathering techniques were used to supplement and reinforce it. For instance, face-to-face interviews with selected key informants in Meadowlands, Rockville and other parts of Johannesburg were conducted in July and August 1994. Important information which was gathered from these respondents included ethnic background, socio-economic status, education, the type of environment in which they grew up and language experiences. As proficient speakers of the language, the

respondents were also requested to suggest a core of terms and phrases which they believed should form part of a Tsotsitaal dictionary.

In addition, some use was made of data published in books, newspapers, journals and magazines such as *Drum* and *Zonk*. Their value is that they provide accounts of events and places associated with the development of the language.

### The Setting: Kofifi

Sophiatown ('Kofifi'), Western Native Township ('Die Kas') and Newclare ('Muglars') were three townships which were located to the west of Johannesburg. Since the 1920s they were amongst the most important centres of the black population on the Witwatersrand. The three communities came to represent a physical manifestation of the differential access to residential space. One of the dominant criteria used for designating these townships as residential areas was race.

For purposes of this study, these three townships constitute the speech community from which the stock of words and expressions have been drawn. Although the study is restricted to this area, many of the terms, phrases and expressions which have emerged from the research were undoubtedly employed in other black communities on the Witwatersrand.

In no sense were the communities in these townships entirely self-contained. They were intertwined with the life of the rest of the Reef and beyond in many respects (Hannerz 1994:184). Western Native Township was established after World War I to provide housing for Africans who were employed in Johannesburg. It covered an area of approximately 74.5 hectares and was situated over eight kilometres to the west of the city centre. Sophiatown and Newclare were located on both sides of Western Native Township. In both these townships, land could be held freehold (Horrell 1957:109, Beavan 1982:11, Gready 1990:140 and Parnell & Puz 1991:131). The housing and living conditions of the majority of families could at best be described as 'basic' (Heflin 1935; Heflin 1948; Boetic 1967; Lodge 1983; Mashile & Pirie 1984; Mattern 1987 and Nicol 1991).

### Aspects of Urbanization

This section of the study seeks to provide a brief account of the early history of the black communities in Johannesburg. It is expected that such a descriptive account will enhance our understanding of the dynamics of community life in Sophiatown, Western Native Township and Newclare. It



will also help us to appreciate the extent to which all aspects of life have had a bearing on the development of Tsotsitaal.

The social structure of urban life in South Africa, as in other parts of the world, is a product of powerful and diverse forces (Gold 1982; Spales & Macdonald 1987). The imperial revolution of the late 19th century was accompanied by a massive movement of contract workers from the largely subsistence-farming areas of the African peasantry. They came to form a dependable supply of cheap African labour. In addition, increasing numbers of Europeans also arrived in the mining areas and the new towns. The white community included settlers who came from Holland, the mines, cities and countryside of Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Belgium, Eastern Europe and the United States of America.

A distinct presence of Indian families developed over the years. They came mainly from India via Natal where they first settled as indentured labourers in the sugar plantations. Subsequently, many of these wage-earners migrated to Johannesburg and other towns on the Witwatersrand (Mesthrie 1991:37). Out of this group emerged a significant number of petty entrepreneurs who undertook their activities and lived in Sophiatown and Newclare. A large proportion of semi-skilled and unskilled Indian workers in Johannesburg settled in 'Fietas' (Vrededorp), Donmfontein and other parts of the city (Carmichael 1990).

Chinese immigrant contract labourers, originally recruited on the mines, also swelled the total population of towns on the Reef. A part of Newclare where a concentration of Chinese-owned neighbourhood shops emerged, was popularly known as 'Chinatown'. Also settled amongst the blacks were many Coloureds from the Cape.

The Second World War brought along immense changes to the lives of black people on the Witwatersrand. The tremendous growth in the number of industries and factories associated with the war effort led to increasing demands for cheap black labour. Formal sector employment became an important source of livelihood for a significant proportion of black families as the manufacturing sector expanded. The local communities which emerged, especially on the Witwatersrand—consisted largely of working class Africans and Coloureds (Lodge 1983). In the 1920s and 1930s racial mixing increased with the arrival of 'poor whites' in Johannesburg (Parvelli and Pirie 1991:131). Some of the white families bought stands in Sophiatown.

The majority of the wage earners were employed as unskilled or semi-skilled labourers in the city centre or industrial centres near Johannesburg. The policy of colour bar determined the position of blacks in society. It was essentially a policy of job reservation under which the most poorly paid and unskilled positions were reserved for black employees. White workers in

contrast, received preferential treatment in that they were offered the semi-skilled and skilled and, invariably, better-paying forms of employment.

A number of activities in the informal sector developed in these communities. These activities were spearheaded by petty-traders and hawkers who included sellers of fat-cakes, sweet-corn, sweet-reed and shoe laces. Tailors, hairdressers and laundry services formed a significant part of the informal sector (Bozzelli 1991:140).

A significant proportion of the youth were caddies at nearby exclusively white golf courses such as Consolidated Main Reef (CMR), Parkview and Windsor Park (presently Rand Park). Yet others sold local newspapers such as the *Rand Daily Mail*, *Rambo World*, *The Star* and the *Golden City Post* (Hollman 1940:47). Significantly, as Koch (1983:62) notes perceptively, these casual income-generating activities 'formed the bedrock of popular class responses to the conditions of alienated life'.

Many other individuals who were unemployed were engaged in criminal activities and other forms of deviant behaviour. The wide range of illegal activities included the sale of dagga (cannabis), brewing and selling of illicit alcoholic beverages such as *mbambisa* and *skokiaan*, and the receipt and sale of stolen property. Pickpocketing and stealing were important ways of obtaining money. As Buzzell (1991: 140) notes, some women 'earned money in the semi-legal sphere of Chinese gambling, or *fah lee*'. Prostitution, involving black and white women, began to thrive as urban South Africa expanded.

An important aspect of social differentiation in these communities was the emergence of a black middle class (Lodge 1983). It consisted mainly of teachers, nurses, clerks, journalists, lawyers, medical doctors, craftsmen and traders (Greedy 1990). A striking feature of these communities was the existence of close ties, very often at a personal level, of many members of the nascent middle class with individuals and families of the working class (Hollman 1940:22). The shared conditions of life in the congested townships engendered solidarity.

The social bonding between the two classes was often likened to a product of considerable social contract in these communities.

The drama and distinctiveness of black urban living has been captured in the studies of a number of writers who lived in these communities (Modisane 1963; Beatie 1967; Dikobe 1973 and Matlana 1987). For instance, Sepanda (1976:46), in his poem, 'Mutha Kazibani-bani' describes the social life of streetwise youth in Tsotsitaal. Using a combination of English and Tsotsitaal, Motjwadi (1990) also wrote about the pain caused by apartheid. The linguistic skills of some of these writers, mainly in English, and to a lesser extent in Tsotsitaal, constitute an invaluable insight into the black urban experience.

Myerowitz (1986:XIII) referred to Sophiatown as primarily one of the 'great centres of literary, artistic, musical and other artistic activity'. And for Trevor Huddleston, Sophiatown was 'a remarkable and vividly vigorous community' (Nesol 1991:25). In similar vein, Coplan (1979) and Ballantine (1991) focus on related aspects of the cultural vibrancy of Johannesburg.

### Social and Cultural Origins of Tsotsitaal

The term 'Tsotsitaal' is derived from two words 'tsotsi' and 'taal'. According to Glaser (1992:47), the term 'tsotsi' described a style of narrow-bottomed trousers which became particularly popular amongst the black urban youth during the 1940s. In time, the word came to refer to young, black, urbanised and mainly working-class males (Simpson 1983:78) and was also increasingly associated with young black thugs and members of gangs. A number of studies have examined the youthgang subculture amongst the permanently urbanised black population of the Witwatersrand (Glaser 1992, James 1992). In his book, *House of Bondage*, Cole (1968:123) observed that

Tsotsis take their name from the U.S. Zoot-suiters of a generation ago, and they do, in part. They are street corner rascals, lounging in the doorways of vacant stores, idling in the train stations and bus terminals, giving poverty the hard eye.

It is clear that a full understanding of the development of Tsotsitaal requires sensitivity to the place of the tsotsi's 'gangsters' in the various communities.

The word 'taal' is an Afrikaans term meaning 'language'. Thus 'Tsotsitaal' came to refer to the language spoken mainly by young black males in the urban areas—especially since the 1940s. According to Gready (1990:146), Tsotsitaal was essentially a 'Sophiatown paroxysm'.

Historically, Tsotsitaal is a product of the ethnolinguistically diverse groups which converged in the urban areas on the Witwatersrand. The multi-ethnic composition and multicultural character of the communities in Sophiatown and Newclare more specifically, have been described vividly in various studies (Beaumont 1982; Popoff & Pirie 1991). As a language, it blossomed in the streets—the favourite meeting places for groups of young men. Many of these often had nothing else to do but to *blow* or 'hangout', passing hours amidst conversation in Tsotsitaal. This language came to be known widely, also, as 'Fly-Taal', the language spoken by those who were 'fly' or 'streetwise'.

The evolution of Tsotsitaal was shaped by the dynamics of the inter-

play between the political-economic arena and socio-cultural forces. This interplay was an essential element in the spontaneous evolution of a distinct youth subculture which took root in post-Second World War South Africa (Glaser 1992:49). As an instrument of survival in a particularly hostile environment, the origins of Tsotsitaal lie deep in the slums of the Reef. Like other pidgins it evolved in situations of social pressure and inequality (Coulmas 1992:158). Other distinguishing features of the urban subculture of the time were distinct clothing, music, dance, sport, sexual mores and crime (Sepemla 1976; Motjwadi 1980).

Tsotsitaal had Afrikaans as its base. Ecker, Straus (1970:5) noted that Afrikaans had originated from Dutch and German dialects of the 19th century and developed into a language. It is perhaps for this reason that some writers view Afrikaans as a good example of a creoloid language (Trudgill 1992:22). According to Mattera (1987:14), Tsotsitaal derived principally from a home of Afrikaans which was spoken mainly by black domestic workers. It was pejoratively termed *kamhuistaal* or kitchen language. Tsotsitaal is distinctly different from another lingua franca, Fanagalo. The birth of the latter can be traced to the work context. As a lingua franca based mainly in the Nguni group of languages, it was meant to facilitate employer-employee relations especially at the coal-face of the mining industry. It became a medium of communication among workers from different ethnic and racial backgrounds (Cole 1964, [Heine 1970; Mesthrie 1989]).

By the 1940's Tsotsitaal had stabilised on the Reef. It had acquired a measure of prestige as a vehicle for social interaction amongst youth. Many young people sought social acceptance and status on the streets partly through an emphasis on the correct use of the language. The ability to speak Tsotsitaal also tended to encourage a greater social arrogance which totally excluded other young persons from the ranks of *clevers*—'streetwise youth'. It was also meant to reveal and reinforce perceptions of social differences between *clevers* and others.

### Bilingualism

It is important to point out at the outset that, in general, most people on the Reef, as in many African societies, spoke two or more languages (Whitley 1971:2, Brindley 1976:7). For the black youth, bilingualism was a fact of social life which invariably involved the use of one or more African language as the mother tongue. As primary institutions of cultural transmission, the family and the schools played a seminal role in ensuring that young people learnt and spoke their respective mother tongues. In addition, the young

people were also competent in one or more of the other languages spoken in southern Africa. In many instances, the second language spoken by the youth specifically, was Tsotsitaal. As Katzner (1986:37) observes 'A pidgin language has no native speakers ... it is always spoken in addition to one's mother tongue'.

As a vehicle of relatively easy communication, Tsotsitaal cut across racial and ethnic boundaries. It is, however, significant to note that historically speaking, very few whites spoke Tsotsitaal. As stated earlier, Tsotsitaal had Afrikaans as its base. There is however no linguistic evidence to suggest that many Afrikaner youth spoke nor understood this lingua franca. A comparatively greater proportion of Indian and Coloured youths were fluent in Tsotsitaal. For the African youth and young adults, this language became an established common medium of communication which was passed on through legitimate processes of socialization.

### Power Relations and Language

In the political, economic and cultural arenas, the relative position of one distinct social group against another clearly influences, *inter alia*, language use (Romaine 1993). In this context, given that material conditions prevail specifically in the urban areas—political, cultural and economic relations shape power relations in time. The nature of these relationships in turn come to play a crucial role in determining the content and form of language use. The influence of power relations on and in the urban youth subcultures was a key element in determining Tsotsitaal and vice versa.

It is clear, for instance, that the influence of the politically and economically dominant Afrikaners in this setting was most significant. Some essentially Afrikaans terms such as *baas* (boss) or *oubaas* (old boss) and *mevrou* (madam) for white males and females respectively are a reflection of unequal power relations in local communities and society in general.

Perceptions of superiority and inferiority based on the rural - urban divide were reflected in the use of terms such as *wenkies* or *devo* for rural folk and *myke* and *slane* for urbanite males who spoke Tsotsitaal. These words provide clues to the antagonism which still deeply mark the relations between urban-dwellers and rural folk. The ability to converse in Tsotsitaal often encouraged a greater social arrogance which totally excluded non-Tsotsitaal speakers from the ranks of 'clevers'—streetwise youth. It was also intended to reveal and reinforce perceptions of social difference between 'clevers' and others. Makora (*Newsweek* 23 September 1994) wrote:

Often the street vocabulary was so densely encoded and colloquialised that some

township inhabitants, 'hoochies or harrers', could not even keep pace with the innovative but rapidly changing Tingo.

Those who did not acclimatise readily to the urban environment, or did not demonstrate that they were streetwise, were labelled *spoor* or *spyt*. They often ended up being outwitted or outmanoeuvred by the 'clever'. Quite often they were considered to be relatively easy prey for *bul vang* (snugging), *tuip* (pickpocketing) and *gewas* (trickery). As in many other urban centres in other parts of the African continent, considerable pressure was brought to bear on immigrants from the rural areas to 'adapt to the sociocultural patterns of the city' (Bronckhorst, Heine & Sommer 1991:32).

### Vocabulary

The source of languages of Tsotsitaal was varied and accounts for the hybrid linguistic outcome. As a lingua franca one of the primary distinguishing features of Tsotsitaal is the incorporation and use of words, phrases and expressions from different languages. These invariably have subtle connotations which derive from the situational context. Moreover, what appears to be a potpourri of many familiar and some strange words and expressions represents an attempt to resolve problems of interethnic communication by youth in the urban setting. The phenomenon of 'borrowing' may be defined as follows:

The process whereby bilingual speakers introduce words from one language into another language, and these loan words eventually become accepted as an integral part of the second language (Traugott 1992:14).

The bulk of the vocabulary is drawn from Afrikaans and the Nguni (especially isiZulu and isiXhosa) languages. isiZulu and isiXhosa are members of the Nguni sub-family of Southeastern Bantu languages. Tsotsitaal also drew from the Sotho group of languages (i.e. Sesotho and Setswana) and from xiTsonga. Many of the loanwords from the African languages were adopted with minimal or no phonological change. Some of these words included the following in isiXhosa: *gwazeka* (to object) and *hangulula* (cervic guard). Derivatives from Setswana included *tyanya* (news) and *gato* (policeman) and from xiTsonga *tshanta* (sit).

Another significant feature of Tsotsitaal is the retention of some of the click sounds derived from many African languages (Heathen 1990; Janson & Thonope 1991). Terms such as *aza* (umpress), *hwa* (fine), *gova* (observe) and *ago* (sorghum beer) were used extensively.

There is also evidence of borrowing from European languages. This category of derivatives is mainly English and to a limited extent Latin, French and German. Many of the words and expressions drawn from the various languages assumed different meanings. In French the word *cherie* means 'darling' (Manson 1989:42). It was incorporated into Tsotsitaal to mean 'gullible' or 'young woman'. In its daily use it conveyed strong proprietary overtones. In Latin, *pains* refers to 'bread' but in Tsotsitaal it means 'water'. Another loanword which has a peculiar semantic history is the term 'moring'. It seems to be derived from the German word *schmieren* which means 'to lubricate or to grease' (Schulze-Stubenrecht & Sykes 1990:636). In Tsotsitaal 'moring' referred to money.

Hannerz (1994:191) refers to Tsotsitaal 'as a variety of Afrikaans with an unusually large proportion of American slang'. The main channels for the transmission of such words and phrases were American films, books and magazines. Some of the words taken from American slang included 'baby' (girl or sweetheart), 'broke' (very short of money), 'fuzzy' (sidekick), 'hooch' (alcohol), 'movie' (cinema), *poloko* (a large, clumsy and/or slow-witted male) (Jhorne 1990:381), 'blind' (dull).

Despite the significant Asian presence on the Reef, there seems to have been no obvious loanwords from languages such as Gujarati, Telugu, Bhupuri, Hindi and Urdu. Nor was there any significant borrowing from languages spoken by the Chinese, Portuguese and Greeks. The presence of these visible minority groups who were differentiated from the Africans in terms of culture and physical appearance did not necessarily lead to a significant lexical contribution of their various languages to Tsotsitaal.

## Phonology

Another significant feature of Tsotsitaal and common in other African languages, is the practice of using natural sounds of objects in the environment to enhance one's vocabulary (Pastor & Toldson 1997). For instance, in relating a violent altercation, one may say: 'Mqetani! *Akhonyani! Hahaa! Zithu!*' In essence, the speaker would be saying 'Guys! (Mqetani), I slapped him or her (*akhonyani*)'. The word *zithu* is meant to simulate the sound and feeling of physical attack. The term *zithu* conveys the crashing sound as the victim lands on the ground. Such a linguistic mosaic of terms and expressions constitutes one of the peculiarities of Tsotsitaal.

## Grammar

Although there seems to be a coherent underlying structure, Tsotsitaal often

defies the formal constraints of grammar. Grammatical creativity and spontaneity were sometimes accompanied by peculiar violations of structured syntax. Speakers of Tsotsitaal used some words and phrases in special ways which excluded from the group any persons who did not share their meanings. For instance, the simple word *ga* meant 'give'. And the strange expression *ma ga* which meant 'let us share'—especially food—was part of the esoteric repertoire of Tsotsitaal.

The individuality about the language is reflected in quaint expressions such as *haba wiete* or *ha wiede*, literally meaning 'I have nothing to say'. Such expressions were perfectly understandable as responses to the form of greeting, *Heita*. Other forms of response to such a greeting included *grand*, *umbala*, *singali*, *sharp* and *sweet*. A more flamboyant expression indicating that one was in good health is, *sweet job no mikanaka*. The linguistic and grammatical monstrosity, *Ita sal haw*, meaning 'I am fine' was considered to be a stylish and appropriate response to 'Hezit!'. All these words and turns of phrase marked the speakers as 'clevers'. The mastery of intonation, inflections and speech rhythm invariably reinforced the expression of the speaker's emotions. The gestures and facial expressions that accompanied the words and phrases provided a fitting context for the meaning of the communication.

## Racial and Ethnic Prejudice: Linguistic Expressions

Where several ethnically diverse groups reside in close proximity with each other, various forms of conflict and prejudice tend to emerge. As noted earlier, groups of people with distinctive physical features and cultures lived side by side in and around Sophiatown, Western Native Township and Newclare. In this setting, negative images and stereotypes of the different racial and ethnic groups was a pervasive phenomenon in the social consciousness.

A number of the most enduring and commonly held stereotypes found expression in Tsotsitaal. In a sense, the terms used by the 'clevers' were part of the broader collective action by the various oppressed groups, responding to the exigencies of socio-political conflict. The increasing intolerance, specifically of young blacks, was expressed in part by the use of terms of denigration such as *jaque* and *naboerke* when referring to working class Afrikaners from the neighbouring residential areas of Albertswood, Newlands and Westdene.

The antipathy towards Greeks and Portuguese was expressed through the use of the pejorative term, *stopara*. Young blacks also tended to use derogatory forms of address such as *chara*, *janamiz* and *mmeme* for the

descendants of Indian indentured labourers. The Chinese were widely known as *chango* or *gong*.

A number of terms were also used by 'clevers' to express hostility towards some members of the different African ethnic groups. For instance, the epithets *droneer* and *prosapie* were terms which contained denigrating and condescending overtones, and were reserved for the so-called tradition-bound Zulu migrant worker. Similarly, negative images are contained in the word *shaka-anku* when reference is made to Shangaan individuals. Chikwisi, Basotho were known as *fishers*, presumably, a reference to their legendary association with horses.

The fidelity of many of these individuals to *wines* was one of the overt sources of the prejudice against them. Quite often they stoically became accustomed to the aspersions which were cast on their identities. Accepting these provocative epithets with little or no complaint was one way of ensuring that no physical violence ensued. On occasion, the use of these derogatory words triggered off trouble – *shandies* – in which ferocious fist-fights or violence was unleashed.

### Alcohol Abuse

Distressed neighbourhoods are often characterised by a variety of deviant behavioural patterns. Two of the most visible and negative features of black urban life are alcohol and drug abuse. Drinking alcoholic beverages of different types seems to have always played a significant role in black township life. A great deal of the drinking was done in unlicensed premises where alcoholic beverages were sometimes brewed. The norms of custom were flexible and the patrons were invariably involved in group drinking. In Tsotsitaal, these premises were known as *noek-shanka*, *shebeen* and *spot*.

The centrality of these drinking outlets in black urban culture has been captured graphically in the writings of some of the leading black writers and journalists of the 1950s and 1960s (Patel 1975:57-58). These literary figures have come to be described rather extravagantly as a 'small cluster of bohemians'. Like the Bohemians of nineteenth century Europe, it is argued, their appetite for alcohol was prodigious. They shared drinks with fags and held conversations in Tsotsitaal (Greedy 1980:155). Quite often, the personal lives of these writers of unmistakable originality were undimmed, or ended up tragically precisely because of alcohol abuse. The *shandies* they patronised included *Black & the Moon*, *Cool House*, *House on Telegraph Hill* and *Thirty Nine Steps*.

Terms such as *haja* (halfjack), *looper* (alcohol), *soaking* (drunk), *pongo* (drink) and *nek* (drunk) for instance, are also a manifestation of the

place of alcoholic beverages as desired commodities in many black communities (Dudson 1974; Rogerson & Hart 1986). A number of these words were coined by the literary figures and found their way into the stock of words used by the youth to refer to alcoholic beverages.

Drug use amongst youth centred mainly on cannabis or dagga, and to a lesser extent, benzene. Words such as *tori* and *pubas* for cannabis and *azawa* for benzene converge to suggest the significance of substance abuse especially by young males. The use of dagga specifically, was meant to enhance one's appreciation and enjoyment of music, food and sex. The overall effect produced by smoking the relatively easily available cannabis was one of euphoria. The inhalant, benzene, led to hallucinations or confused states which were described as being *gevoek*.

### Violence

Many observers have argued that one of the most debilitating psychological effects of years of racism on blacks is violent and anti-social behaviour. The lives of the blacks in the townships have always been plagued by violence and crime (Bumlet-Syner 1971; Marks & Audenberg 1990; Greenaw 1993). The vast bulk of some of the criminal violence was perpetrated by the hardcore of the criminal world. The most notorious of the gangs of the time included, *inter alia*, the 'Berliners', 'Co-operatives', 'Gestapo', 'Head-quarters', 'Russians', 'Vultures' and the 'Young Americans' (Guy & Thabane 1987; Mattera 1987; Van Tonder 1990). Other gangs with equally bizarre names were the 'Black Norwans', 'Deer-ant Kads' and the 'Hinkas'. These were groups of young males, usually teenagers or young adults in their twenties, with clear organizational structures.

The *sterk man* or 'strong man' image of some of the gangsters earned considerable honour and prestige in the criminal underworld. The young males often felt the need to assert themselves through violence. The medium of communication which was used for expressing themselves was largely Tsotsitaal. Jimmy Boyle (1992:34) refers to a 'squezo-go' as a fight where the fists, head and feet were used. The use of weapons, in this instance, was not allowed. In the dusty streets of the slums of Johannesburg, the equivalent of the Scottish 'squezo go' was 'sea go'.

Winar James (1992:3) describes as 'the ritualization of male violence and aggression' has always been a disturbing feature of the Tsotsitaal culture. Individual acts of violence such as assault, mugging and rape were widespread phenomena. Kgositse (1971:60) refers to the 'bloodstained streets of Sophiatown'. Hellman (1940:49) in her study concluded that

In all locations, and especially in Sophiatown, many robberies and assaults are

connected to males. It appears that the older the gang members, the more dangerously and secret their activities.

Some of the words and phrases associated with such violent personal crimes included *hush* (wecece), *rotta* (mug), *stake* (assault), *ibet* (stab), *bul wang* (murder) and *ganda* (kidn). In this context, the use, for instance, of the term *ibet* (to shoot) – apparently through onomatopoeic imitation – also comes to mind.

The movie cinemas – ‘Balansk’ and ‘Olin’ in Sophiatown and ‘Reno’ in Newclare – often showed American films which were showcases for fashionable life-styles and deviant behaviour. Quite often, the youth were furnished with popular images of rebellion and deviance. Richard ‘Styles’ Widmark in *Street with Two Names*, Humphrey Bogart and James Cagney in *Angels with Dirty Faces* and Frederick Crawford in *The Fastest Gun Alive* were popular film stars with a reputation as tough guys (Sampson 1983:81; Nicol 1991:39; Goolan 1979:147).

## Sexuality and Sexist Language

What appears to be a preoccupation with sexuality is linked to various terms and phrases which denote sexual attitudes and mores and intimate physical experiences. In the main, the men controlled the language – a clear index of the relationship between power and language. The language is replete with terms and expressions of sex-stereotyped roles and character elements of females. Beauty and the number of girlfriends one had, represented success and often generated envy. Some of the words were extremely patronising terms of praise for certain types of females. Examples of such words include: *sheta*, *delahama* and *mba*. Some of these terms may, arguably, have well been neutral. They may eventually have acquired negative connotations as they increasingly referred exclusively to women and as their meanings focused on women as sexual objects.

In a study of the pejoration of terms designating women in the English language, Schab (1975) notes the role of comparable linguistic experience. In Tsotsitaal terms such as *robber-maid*, *skin* and *rocky-bone* are severe swear words which portrayed derogatory images of women. The word *buck* falls in the same category as a term of individual affront. It is interesting to note that there seems, arguably to be parallel between the use of the term *buck* in Tsotsitaal and its use by some African Americans. Burns (1990:1) observed that in the case of African Americans the term was ‘used with proprietorial or condescending meanings rather than with personalized malice’. Many among the older generation of ‘clevers’ in Soweto maintain that it was essentially in this context that the term was used.

One of the features of Tsotsitaal is the prevalence of rather unaffectionate terms associated with the feminine anatomy. Secular words referring to the vagina, for instance, include *gong*, *shwet* and *over*. These are indeed a reflection of the fixation on female genitalia. As McAlister (1992:177) notes, ‘the female genitals ... are couched in derogatory and negative definitions’. For the women, these words always represented the height of insult and affront. Many of these terms and associated expressions were used almost exclusively by men. The overall sexist character of the language is a reflection of the stereotyped attitudes to women.

## Swearing

Forms of swearing in Tsotsitaal were many. Such use of foul or obscene language was a distinctive feature of this lingua franca. In a recent study, Hughes (1991:5) observed that

in many contexts swearing is fascinating in its precise history and creative creativity while being simultaneously shocking in its offensiveness and crudity.

Swearing was used mainly to be offensive and insulting. It was also used to demonstrate strong emotions. Terms and phrases such as *gor*, *naar* and *meskon* were vivid swear words used as personal insults. In addition, terms for human excrement are typical swear-words used in Tsotsitaal. Two such synonyms, *kok* and *ping*, were used in fixed expressions for swearing. The figurative meaning of the expressions *ty is not kok* and *ty-pranc ping* are ‘You are irritating me’ and ‘You are talking rubbish’ respectively.

‘Ek sal jou jou ma wys’ meaning, literally ‘I will show you your mother’, evoked gross vulgarity and extreme provocation. The hidden meaning of this sentence refers to one’s mother’s genitalia. Even a seemingly innocuous *hou an* (Your mother) has always been considered to be extremely obscene. The rather copious use of such harshly aggressive terms and expressions – invariably carrying with them implications of obscenity – often led to fist-fights and stabbings.

## Language Contraction

The year 1955 signalled the beginning of a new phase in the development of Tsotsitaal. For many people it marked the beginning of the contraction of the language. As the decades and the golden age of Sophiatown recede in the distance, so too, the use of Tsotsitaal seemed to diminish. There are a

number of social factors which accompany language contraction and language death (Trombino 1989, Brenzinger, Heine & Sommer 1991). These may include, *inter alia*, resettlement, dispersion and inter-marriage.

As part of a broader policy of systematic social separation between the various racial groups, working-class shanty-towns in various urban areas were demolished (Gorelli 1987, Plautky & Walker 1988). In Johannesburg, specifically, a government-appointed 'Natives Resettlement Board' implemented the Western Areas Removal Scheme. The first notices were issued to residents of Sophiatown and Maitland to vacate the premises they had occupied for years. Families and communities were moved to ethnically segregated townships in Soweto (Masilela & Pirie 1977, Lodge 1983; Maruma 1989, Paruch & Pirie 1991). Soweto had derived its name from an abbreviation of what until April 1963 was known officially as the South Western Bantu Townships (Lewis 1966: 15).

The brutal implementation of the Group Areas Act of 1950 led to a partial disintegration of the Tsotsitaal speech community. It may well be viewed as one of the major external factors which led to the apparent contraction in the use of Tsotsitaal. The fact, however, that most of the families were moved *en bloc* and accommodated largely in Meadowlands and Rockville in Soweto means that a number of essential elements of Tsotsitaal were retained. Thus, language maintenance has occurred precisely because a significant number of speakers continued to 'swathe'. But the retention of the use of Tsotsitaal seem to have declined in the urban settings of the Reef.

In more recent years this decline may be attributed to increasing negative attitudes towards this language. In some circles, the rejection of this lingua franca was part of ideological and political debates about the historical and current place and role of Afrikaans in South Africa. The tendency to view Tsotsitaal in negative terms stemmed in part from the rejection of Afrikaans as the language of the oppressors (Van den Berghe 1970:252).

In the course of this process of contraction, all that seems to be left over is a language which, arguably, is spoken mainly by grey-haired and middle-aged 'clevers' who are caught in a cruel time warp. This, of course, represents the cynical view. A more positive scenario draws from evidence which seems to suggest that significant numbers of young men, especially in Meadowlands and Rockville, still speak the language. Despite the apparently continuing decline, Tsotsitaal still seems to supply a considerable stock of terms and phrases. Perhaps one should add that even during the heady days of the transition to a democratic South Africa, political activities are known to have used Tsotsitaal expressions directly. It was thus not uncommon to hear: 'Hona, Comrade Madiba, Hona!'. All in all, it still seems to serve important functions in many black communities.

## Conclusion

The above study of language use in its context is essentially preliminary in nature. In this exploratory effort it has been shown that the geographic, socio-economic and cultural conditions under which the speakers of Tsotsitaal lived, gave form and content to this language. Undoubtedly, it fulfilled the communication needs of those young people who had no common language and had chosen a life-style associated with being street-wise. It flourished for a while, albeit as a relatively marginal language. As a language of the streets, it was capable of tremendous flexibility, including innovation of grammar, idiom, pronunciation and vocabulary. As in other languages, change was inherent in the nature of Tsotsitaal.

Tsotsitaal remains, arguably, a sufficiently important symbol of identity to ensure its continued use among black people on the Reef. It is however possible that other lingua francas, such as *isicoma*, which is spoken in many parts of Soweto, may come to replace Tsotsitaal.

Department of Sociology  
University of Botswana

## References

- Alexandre, Pierre 1972. *An Introduction to Languages and Language in Africa*. London: Heinemann.
- Ballantine, Christopher 1991. Music and Emancipation: The Social Role of Black Jazz and Vaudeville in South Africa Between the 1920s and early 1940s. *Journal of Southern African Studies* 17, 1, 129-152.
- Bevan, Keith 1982. Black Townships of South Africa. *Terra Incognita for Urban Geographers, The South African Geographical Journal* 54, 1, 3-25.
- Dacis, Dorothea 1967. Familiarity is the Kingdom of the Reef. In Gordonner, Nadine & L. Abraham (eds) *South African Writing Today*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Boyle, Jimmy 1992. How Glasgow Gange Fight is out. In Kerr, Phillip (ed) *The Penguin Book of Rights, Poets and Poetries: Poems and Poetries: An Anthology of Antipathy*. London: Viking.
- Bozzoli, Belinda 1991. *Women of Phokeng: Consciousness, Life-Strategy and Movement in South Africa, 1962-1983*. London: James Currey.
- Brindley-Syrie, Mia 1977. *Beeftown Blues: A Study of Social Mobility in a Modern African Community on the Reef*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Bradford, Jean 1987. *A Dictionary of South African English*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- Brenzinger, Mathias, Bernd Heine & Gabriele Sommer (eds) 1991. *Language Death in Africa*. In Robins, Robert J. & Papias M. Ullrich (eds) *Endangered Languages*. Oxford: Berg.
- Brindley, Marianne 1976. *Beers and Coloured Townships: Problems of an Urban Shop*. Johannesburg: Raven Press.



- Carnegie, Diana 1981. *The Road to War 1890-1902: The Boerstraland and the Anglo-Boer War Context*. Johannesburg.
- Cole, D. 1994. Fringe and Sub-Bantu Languages in South Africa. In James Deane (ed), *Language in Culture and Society: A Reader in Linguistics and Anthropology*. London: Harper and Row Publishers.
- Cole, James. 1968. *Home of Bondage*. London: Penguin Press.
- Coplan, David 1979. The African Museum and the Development of the Johannesburg Botanical Institute, 1930-1960. *Journal of Southern African Studies* 5: 135-160.
- Coumans, Florian 1992. *Language and meaning*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- De Camp, David & IF Hancock. 1974. *Pidgins and Creoles: Current Trends and Prospects*. Washington: Georgetown University Press.
- Dikoko, Mankwe 1977. *The Shona: A Reader*. London: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Dobson, Don 1974. The Race Modes of Urban Popular Fiction and Social Control in South Africa. *African Studies Review* 17.2: 119-41.
- Ellen, Chris 1992. The State of Zulu: Sexuality and Gender Relations in the 'Terror' Suburbane on the Witwatersrand. *African Studies* 31.2: 147-67.
- Gold, Harry. 1952. *The Sociology of Urban Life*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.
- Goodness, David. 1961. The People's Police Force: Community Policing Initiatives in the Western Areas of Johannesburg 1930-52. *Journal of Southern African Studies* 193: 467-83.
- Grossel, D. 1968. Some Sotho Languages at the Cape of South Africa. *African Studies* 7.1: 115-27.
- Gready, Paul. 1990. The Soweto Town Writers of the Fifties: The Urban Keatsy of their World. *Journal of Southern African Studies* 16: 1: 129-164.
- Grossel, David H 1977. *The Languages of Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University.
- Guy, Jeff & Mervyn Thabane 1987. The Ma-Busha: A Participant's Perspective. In Bozzoli Belinfante (ed), *Classroom, Class and Country: South African Perspectives*. Johannesburg: Raven Press.
- Hammars, JIF 1991. Soweto Town: The View from Afar. *Journal of Southern African Studies* 20.2: 181-91.
- Haus, Bernd 1970. *Shona and Use of African Languages*. Munich: Westdeutcher Verlag.
- Kellman, Susan 1975. Native Life in a Johannesburg Shum. *South African* 8: 14-67.
- Hellman, Ellen 1949. *Harvard*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- Herbert, Robert K. 1990. The Sociolinguistic of Clicks in Sotho Bantu. *Anthropological Linguistics* 32.1-4: 295-315.
- Herbert, Robert K. 1991. Patterns in Language Change: Acquisition and Disolution. *Neurolinguistics and Cognition: A Bantu Anthropological Linguistics* 9.2: 103-164.
- Horne, Muriel (Conrad) 1957. *A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa*. Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations.
- Hudson, Richard A 1981. *Sociolinguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hupps, Geoffrey. 1991. *Language: A Social History of Food Language, Class and Profanity in English*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- James, Deborah 1992. Urban Life and the Struggle for Autonomous Culture in Some Township Communities. *African Studies* 31.1: 1-7.
- Jansen, Pieter & Joseph Jansen 1951. *Birth of a National Language: The History of Kewena*. Gaborone: Heinemann Botswana.
- Katzner, Kenneth 1985. *The Languages of the World*. London: Routledge.
- Koosile, Kuzajane 1971. *My home is Africa*. New York: Doubleday.

- Keck, Eddie 1984. Without Visible Means of Subversion: Margaret Calver in Johannesburg, 1918-1970. In Bozzoli Belinfante (ed), *Town and Countryside in the Township: Capitalist Penetration and Popular Response*. Johannesburg: Raven Press.
- Lanham, LW 1978. An outline History of the Languages of Southern Africa. In Lanham, LW & KP Huchee (eds), *Language and Communication Studies in South Africa*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- Lewis, RLB 1986. A 'City' within a City: The Creation of Soweto. *The South African Geographical Journal* XLVIII: 45-85.
- Loche, Tim 1983. The Desecration of Sophiatown. In Bozzoli Belinfante (ed), *Town and Countryside in the Township: Capitalist Penetration and Popular Response*. Johannesburg: Raven Press.
- Manson, J. 1989. HARRY'S Standard French and English Dictionary. London: Harrap.
- Miles, Shula & Nor Anwar 1990. The Epidemiology and Culture of Violence in Mangoch, Natal. In Shula & Andre de Toit (eds), *Violence and the Struggle in South Africa*. London: Macmillan Academic and Professional Ltd.
- Moshale, GG & Gordon H Price 1977. Aspects of Dialectal Education in Soweto. *South African Geographical Journal* 59: 36-49.
- Motema, Don 1987. *Memory in the House*. Johannesburg: Raven Press.
- Motema, Don 1989. The Day They Came for Our House - Sophiatown, 1960. In Gray, Stephen (ed), *The Prospect Book of South African Verse*. London: Penguin Books.
- Motema, Don 1994. Personal life and war. *Sowetan* 21 September 1994.
- McFadden, Patricia 1992. Sex, Sensitivity and the Problems of AIDS in Africa. In Motema, R (ed), *Gender in Southern Africa: Conceptual and Theoretical Issues*. Harare: SAPES Books.
- Moshrie, Rajend 1991. Language in Idleness: A Sociolinguistic History of Shojari Hindi in South Africa. London: Routledge.
- Moshrie, Rajend 1989. The Origins of Language. *Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages* 4.2: 211-240.
- Moshrie, Rajend 1991. Blame Me on History. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Motswagole, Stan 1989. What is not White is Black. In Moshrie, Rajend (ed), *Black and Lard: Africa South - Contemporary Writings*. Johannesburg: Raven Press.
- Motswagole, Stan 1991. 1986. Hungry Flames and Other Black Stories. African Short Stories. Harlow: Longman.
- Nice, Mike 1991. *A Good-Looking Woman*. London: Secker and Warburg.
- Patel, Susan M & Gordon H Price 1991. Johannesburg. In Lerner, Anthony (ed), *Home Apart: South Africa's Segregated Cities*. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Parmer, Alfred B & Ivory T. Toldson 1982. *Roots of Soul: The Psychology of Black Expressiveness*. New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday.
- Patel, Pooja (ed) 1975. *The World of Nat Nakasa: Selected Writings of the Late Nat Nakasa*. Johannesburg: Itan Press/Indoor Press.
- Platky, Lavonne & Cherry Walker 1985. *The Soweto People: From Home to the South Africa*. Johannesburg: Raven Press.
- Rogerson, Christian M & DM Hart 1986. The Survival of the Informal Sector: The Shepherds of Black Johannesburg. *Geographical* 12.2: 54-160.
- Remane, Suzanne 1992. *Language in Society: An Introduction to Linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Romaine, Suzanne 1989. Pidgins, Creoles, Immigrant and Dying Languages. In Romaine, Suzanne (ed), *Investigating Obsolescence: Studies in Language Construction and Change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



- Sapir, Anthony 1961 *From An African Adventure and elsewhere*. London: Tavistock and Stockton.
- Schuler-Staatsrecht, Werner & Ty Soken (eds) 1970 *The Oxford Book of German Proverbs: German-English/English-German*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Schulz, Marcel R. 1975 The Semantic Organization of Words. In Thomas Daine & Nancy Suzanne (eds) *Language and Sex: Difference and Dominance*. Newbury House Publishers.
- Sejima, Spho 1976 *The Blues is Joy is Me*. Johannesburg: A. S. Honker.
- Smith, J. 1970 Africans—*Us*. Origins and Development. In R. Schickel, Ed. (ed.) *Images of Southern Africa*. London: Frederick Warne and Co.
- Spicer, James E. & John J. Mearns (eds) 1967 *The Sociology of Cities*. Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Thorne, Tony 1976 *Grammatical Disputes of Contemporary Usage*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd.
- Trudgill, Peter 1972 *Introducing Language and Society*. London: Penguin Group.
- Van der Horst, Pieter L. 1970 *Race and Education: Essays in Comparative Sociology*. New York: Basic Books.
- Van Londen, D. 1990. Griques, Councillors and the Apartheid State: The Soweto Squatters' Movement of 1982. *South African Historical Journal* 22, 82-101.
- Vogelbein, C. C. & C. M. Vogelbein 1978 *Classification and Index of the World's Languages*. New York: Elsevier.
- Webb, J. N. 1981. *Us, La Nosi, To Be*. The Socio-Cultural Significance of Bantu Language. In Samovar, Larry A. & Richard E. Porter (eds) *Intercultural Communications: A Reader*. Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Whitely, Wilfred H. 1971 Introduction. In Whitely Wilfred H. (ed.) *Language, Use and African Culture: Problems of Linguistics in the Special Reference to Eastern Africa*. London: Oxford University Press.

# Language Maintenance in South Africa: Hoarding Dreams, Hiding the Springs of Identity?

Jeanne Maartens

## Introduction\*

The questions surrounding the complex and often emotionally charged relationship between language and identity, can be approached from a number of different perspectives. Such questions can be treated in philosophical investigation, to sociological investigation, to education's or psychological investigation, as well as to linguistic (or to be more precise, sociolinguistic) investigation. It is the latter perspective I wish to adopt in this paper, taking the views of Edwards (1985) on the language-identity relation as a point of departure and expiring, albeit tentatively, the implications of these views for the debate on the continued co-existence of the languages of South Africa.

It will be argued that the economic and social realities of the South African situation make it likely that the indigenous languages such as Afrikaans and Zulu will eventually be supplanted by English. Although these languages may vanish as markers of group identity, the identity itself can be maintained should the group so wish.

## Ethnic and National Identity

It is necessary to delimitate the field somewhat. Reference to identity is specifically to *group identity*, comprising the two powerful elements of *ethnicity* and *nationality*. Edwards (1985: 16) defines ethnic identity as '... allegiance to a group ... with which one has ancestral links'. It points out

that some sense of a group boundary must exist which can be sustained by shared objective markers such as geography, religion, race, gender or language. Group boundaries can also be marked by more subjective attachments of a symbolic nature, usually from a shared past, such as eating habits. Steyn (1980:96) makes the same point when he states that a person is a member of a particular ethnic group partly through birth and partly through inheritance.

Edwards (1985:2) refers to the work of Smith (1971) for the conceptual link that enables him to regard nationalism or national identity as an extension of ethnicity. Added to the belief in shared characteristics (the inheritance), that characterizes ethnicity, nationalism also incorporates a desire for political autonomy. Nationalism therefore, is seen as '... ethnicity with a desire for self-government ...'. As a doctrine, nationalism makes the assumption that the linguistic criterion is the most important one in delineating the nation that desires political autonomy. In this context language is raised from a marker to the marker of 'groupness'.

Criticism of both ethnicity and nationalism abounds in the literature. However, whatever arguments can be brought in against ethnicity (such as that it is repressive in nature and promotes particularism—Porter (1977) and Vallee (1981)) and against nationalism (such as that it constitutes a threat to individual rights and interests—Orwell (1961)), they remain vital forces in most societies, including our own.

### The Language/Identity Link and Language Maintenance

It is widely accepted that the central function of language is to facilitate communication. Edwards (1977, 1984) points out that such communication is an in-group phenomenon. It is only within a group sharing the same language that the specific language serves a communicative function. He identifies a second, exclusive, function of language, viz. that of concealment. In this function language serves to protect group distinctiveness by excluding any non-member of the group from participation. According to Steiner ('1975:233) this represents a group effort to prevent '... hoarded dreams, patents of life ... (being) taken across the frontier'. Separate languages enable the group to hide its 'spring of identity' (Steiner 1975:232). Language therefore not only marks group identity, but also protects it.

It comes as no surprise that language is commonly held to be inseparable from group identity; a threat to the one constitutes a threat to the other. However, Edwards (1985:18,47-85) argues convincingly on the basis of 47 language centres around the world, that history provides ample

evidence to the contrary. Language is not essential to group identity. There is no intrinsic link between language and identity and group identity can and does survive the demise of a definitive language. Edwards (1985:67) refers to Irish as a case in point. Only about 3% of the population now use the language in any regular way, yet the Irish as a group seem not to have lost their national identity, but to have enshrined it in English.

Conversely, Steyn (1980:98) argues that the silent revival of the past two decades could lead to the growth of declining minority languages. But in this regard Edwards (1985:115) sounds a note of caution: 'greater ethnic visibility because of increased societal tolerance of diversity and increased social mobility of ethnic groups should not be mistaken for a new ethnicity'. He finds it highly unlikely that minority (used in the sense of being of 'minor status') languages will show a sustained growth. The economic necessities that govern modern societies require '... a need and a willingness to make alterations in those visible markers of groupness which might compromise chances of success ...'. Language, per excellence, is a visible marker that can severely affect the individual's economic mobility in modern society. Speakers of Zulu or Afrikaans, for example, need English to make any headway in the South African job market. The more private and symbolic markers such as eating habits, can be retained without the danger of community censure, for the group identity to survive.

### The South African Situation

In South Africa today the language/identity link is of special relevance. In this rapidly changing socio-political environment, visible markers of identity such as language will be highly susceptible to change. The most prominent sociolinguistic debate at present concerns the future of Afrikaans. Sociolinguistically speaking, there is every reason to be concerned about the long term prospects of Afrikaans. But there is also every reason to be concerned about the future of Zulu, Xhosa and the rest of our eleven official languages, except English, and a number of others besides, such as the Indian languages. These are all languages in close contact with an economically strongly dominant world language, which is a dangerous situation for any language to find itself in, according to the data presented by Edwards (1985).

A number of interrelated social phenomena have led to the continued existence of these languages up to now. Steyn (1980:180-130) discusses, for example, the influence of favourable demographic processes on the survival of Afrikaans after the second Anglo-Boer War. Prabhakaran (1992:184ff.) argues that the Group Areas Act of the apartheid political dispensation

contributed in no small measure to the unusually slow tempo of language shift from the Indian languages to English. One of the most significant factors in the continued existence of Afrikaans, and also some of the other African languages such as Zulu, has been the link between these languages and the identity of their speakers. Steyn (1980:182) formulates it as follows for Afrikaans:

It was fortunate for Afrikaans that the Afrikaner nationalism was language directed ever since the First Language Movement. In times in which nationalism flourished, Afrikaans was advantaged by this.<sup>1</sup>

(It can be argued of course that this link between Afrikaans and Afrikaner nationalism held but a short term advantage for the language. In the long term, the negative attitudes generated towards the language as a result of this link have severely damaged its chances of survival.)

In the evolution of a new South African society, however, the multitude of languages spoken here may in the long run have no basis for continued existence. On a pragmatic level there is certainly no justification for the retention of so many languages. Communication could probably be greatly enhanced if the number of distinct languages in circulation were reduced, not to mention the economic advantages of such a development. Modernization worldwide promotes a language shift in the direction of the international languages. The reason for nonetheless maintaining the number of languages that we have in South Africa, is closely linked to the language-identity relationship.

In this regard the 'survival of Afrikaans' debate is of particular interest:

- (i) The view that Afrikaans is an essential component of Afrikaner identity and that survival of the one is inextricably linked to survival of the other, underlies much of the debate. This is reflected in media slogans such as 'Ben dog is seker raak aan sy taal en jy raak aan die Afrikaner' (*Hofmeester* 4 Aug. 1994).
- (ii) The arguments put forth by those wishing to 'save' Afrikaans reflect an interesting paradox. On the one hand prominent academics have been arguing recently that for Afrikaans to survive, it will have to become less exclusive, less the property of the white Afrikaner. The language must be 'democratized'. In loosening the link between the Afrikaans language and Afrikaner identity, both can be maintained. Rightwing Afrikaners, on the other hand, in arguing for a 'volksstaat', maintain that the only chance of

saving Afrikaans in the long term lies in strengthening the link between the language and the Afrikaner identity in a delimited geographical area.

For all this talk of identity, discussions of the future South African language scene have taken little cognisance of research into the language-identity link. The focus has been on a short term scenario reflecting a rather myopic vision of the future of the languages of South Africa.

## A Historical Perspective

A historical approach to exploring the role of identity in language maintenance, language shift and language death in the South Africa of tomorrow, offers a new perspective. Drake (1984), in investigating these phenomena in the USA, observed that '... the best predictor of future social behaviour is past social behaviour ...'. His sentiments are echoed by those of Edwards (1985:47):

what people have done are likely to be useful not only in determining what they will probably continue to do, but also in ascertaining what their desires and values are in linguistic (non-linguistic) matters.

It is my assumption that an assessment of the local linguistic scene has much to benefit from an historical awareness of the situation elsewhere in the world.

The first lesson to be learnt from Edwards' analyses of the survival history of languages around the globe is that group continuity or identity can survive the most radical social changes if its maintenance is desired by group members themselves. This does not mean that such an identity will not alter under social pressures like urbanisation, modernisation and social access. Edwards (1985:96f) points out that if pressures are persistent enough, changes in identity occur as a rule. The fluidity of identity, he says, allows group continuity in the midst of such change. It could be argued that the Afrikaner is in fact moving in the direction of such an altered identity with many young urban South Africans adamant that they are Afrikaners without subscribing to the traditional values associated with this identity. Although changed, the identity itself will persist.

The visible markers of the group identity like language, however, are highly susceptible to altered environments. In response to social pressures, these markers tend to disappear. They disappear faster and more completely than those markers that are intangible. The second lesson that history teaches then, is that language shift from one language to another and the resultant loss of the original language under social, political and especially economic

<sup>1</sup> Dit was 'n geluk vir Afrikaans dat die Afrikanernasionalisme sedert die Eerste Uniebeweging taalgeus was. In tye waarin die nasionalisme opgebloeit het, het Afrikaans die voordeel daarvan ondervind.

pressure is the rule, not the exception. Pinker (1994:259) refers to estimates by the linguist Michael Krauss that between 3,600 and 5,400 languages, as many as 90% of the world's total, are threatened with extinction in the next century. Only about 600 languages worldwide are reasonably safe by dint of the sheer number of their speakers. Taking a long enough perspective, virtually all groups have language shift somewhere in their past. In South African history the shift from Dutch to Afrikaans is but one case in point. Edwards (1985:62) presents evidence to suggest that the communicative and symbolic aspects of language are separable during periods of change. The latter can continue to exercise a role in group identity in the absence of the former. To this day many Afrikaans families who do not know a word of Dutch are grace at table in Dutch. Most English mother tongue speakers of Indian origin retain an accent from their language of descent, although two generations removed from that language.

What are the implications of this for the present South African situation? With English dominating the higher functions such as those of the state, the law, the media and education, the economic and social empowerment for the greater part of the population lie with English. Coupled to the climate of radical social change triggered by radical political change, the scene is set for language shift and consequent language death in the long term. The thousands of two to three generations must be stressed. Groups can be expected to resist change and may do so for some time, without great disadvantage. The stronger the language-identity link, the stronger this resistance will be. But with social pressures persistent and strong enough, it would be truly a remarkable phenomenon for shifts not to occur. In South Africa they are already in progress. For the Indian languages the shift in the direction of English is so far advanced that there are no longer mother tongue speakers of the original languages around. For Afrikaans, Zulu and the other indigenous languages this shift has only just begun. To see this, it is only necessary to list the signals of language shift in progress. Siegen (1990:310) provides such a list, discussing its implications for Afrikaans. I wish to highlight only three of these signs for the South African linguistic situation.

### The Signs of Language Shift

Bilingualism is more often than not a precursor to dominant language monolingualism. Bilingualism can be a stable condition for a longer or shorter period of time, as it has been with respect to Afrikaans/English for close on fifty years. However, as Edwards (1985:72) points out

The rule of the day here is ... pragmatic: people do not maintain two languages for even, why, one is sufficient in all contexts.

When a language has no more monoglots, language shift is in progress. One would be hard-pressed to find an Afrikaans monoglot and, especially in the cities, indigenous language/English bilingualism is widespread and ever spreading mainly because finding a job without English is almost impossible.

A lack of transmission of the original language to the younger generation is another sign of language shift in progress. This usually represents a pragmatic decision in which another variety is seen as more important for the future. It is a spreading phenomenon for Afrikaans speaking parents to send their children to English medium schools. Many children of prominent speakers of the Cape Coloured dialect like the poet Adam Small, no longer use Afrikaans and in any case their children in English. As regards Zulu children, many urban schools that cater mainly for these children report a growing number of pupils who no longer speak sufficient Zulu to pass it as a first language school subject. This seems to be a source of shame and is often vigorously denied by school principals, possibly because the language is so closely linked to Zulu identity. As one school principal put it succinctly and fairly in personal communication: 'A Zulu speaks Zulu'.

A third sign of language shift is a lack of an active concentration of speakers. This differs from region to region in South Africa, but in Natal for example the large cities are English. To this any person will attest who has tried to find a grocery card, a calendar or a paperback in any South African language other than English in a newstand in Durban or Pietermaritzburg.

That the shift for South African languages would be in the direction of English, was predictable. Throughout the world most people are committed to maximising material wellbeing through upward mobility. The economic basis of group dynamics has been stressed in much of the literature critical of ethnic and cultural pluralism (Patterson 1977, Stein & Hill 1977, Steinberg 1981). In South Africa English opens the doors to education, to jobs, to social advancement and to the wider world. It is the prestige language. Such pragmatic considerations require choices from ethnic group members. Edwards (1985:50-52) points out that his research as well as a number of other studies indicate that most members of such groups are willing to 'compromise' by voluntarily giving up the visible markers of ethnic identity. This has led to the view that languages are not murdered by other languages (as often claimed by Afrikaans speakers with reference to English), rather they commit suicide. In linguistic suicide, however, there is always a significant other language which creates the pressures, without any intent being implied, leading to language shift and decline. In South Africa, this language is English.

So language shift in South Africa is under way. The good news for many groups here is the finding of Edwards (1985), referred to earlier, that

should any of the groups involved wish to maintain group solidarity, the group identity will survive. Afrikaans, for example, although perhaps not eventually retained for communicative purposes, may retain a strong symbolic value in an evolutionary group identity. This has happened in the Indian community. The language in the direction of which the shift has occurred may in turn carry features that serve as marker of group identity, Indian English being a case in point.

### The Language/Identity Link in Inhibiting Language Shift

There are factors that retard language shift. Holmes (1992:70) points out that the stronger a language is valued as a marker of identity, the more resistant that language is to shift. This would be a factor in any shift from Afrikaans or Zulu to English. Also, where a group is large enough to form a large speech community and is reasonably isolated from other speech groups, e.g. where the community in question is a rural one, there is more chance of short term language maintenance. Factors such as these will inhibit language shift in South Africa in the short term, but nowhere in the world have such factors prevented shift in the long term. As indicated, the language/identity link is already loosening for many Afrikaans speakers who believe that the language should be demystified. Ironically, the end of apartheid is leading to a breakdown of the group concentration and isolation needed for language maintenance.

What about active efforts to protect and promote a language? The efforts of *Die Stichting vir Afrikaans* fall into this category. In pointing out that Afrikaans is at least fighting for its continued existence (note for example the outcry surrounding decisions of companies such as Toyota and Coca Cola to abandon the use of Afrikaans in packaging and promotion as well as the controversy concerning television time allocated to Afrikaans), Du Plessis (quoted in OSA 48: March/April 1994) laments the lack of such action from the side of the ethnic languages. This may be a rather paternalistic attitude. If a people chooses to switch to a mainstream language that promises economic and social advancement what gives an outside group the right to prescribe that they should not do so? The voluntary element in language shift further entails that the chances of success for active intervention on behalf of a language, are in any case negligible. It has proved difficult to interest ordinary group members themselves in language maintenance efforts. They may be supportive of the ideals, but experience has taught that in practice they simply continue to follow the upwardly mobile course. Language revival efforts have often led to a growth in the number of people knowing the language. Such 'secondary bilinguals' have,

however, proved to be less vital elements for the continued life of a language than are native speakers (Edwards 1985:72). So much for the very popular sentiment in educational circles that the future of Afrikaans lies with its black speakers. Language decline is only one variable in an interrelated combination of other important social phenomena. Attempts to intervene on behalf of one feature alone is not likely to succeed.

### Education in Identity and Language Maintenance

Bilingual education in the USA is a particularly fascinating arena when considering the role of the school in group and language maintenance. From the rhetoric surrounding bilingual education in this context, (Wolfsen 1989:231ff), it is clear that, as in our own context, education has been seized upon as the main support system for groups and languages perceived to be at risk. But the historical record, according to Edwards (1985:136), especially in the USA, shows a gradual decline in the desire for programmes in and on ethnic languages on the part of the beneficiaries themselves. It has been reported at various recent conferences that parents in South Africa themselves are strongly resisting schooling through medium of the indigenous languages, seeing it as a continued effort to disempower their children. It appears that, although schools should respect and eliminate diversity, it is not their task to preserve and transmit specific cultures. The American experience has further taught that maintenance bilingual programmes are most unlikely to significantly affect group identity. In fact, Edwards (1985:118-138) argues that such programmes may actually damage children's sense of identity. South African educationalists should learn from this experience.

### Conclusion

The historical evidence seems to indicate that ordinary group members adapt to changing circumstances in a non-arbitrary manner. Realising that change is required for pragmatic reasons, they retain what is possible to retain without active and essentially artificial policies of support. As Edwards (1985:165) puts it:

If in fact, given markers of group identity are seen to require support, the probably indicates that they cannot be retained anyway.

Few areas have the emotional impact of language decline and death, but

change and transition are usual realities for most people. The alternative is a static situation which very few have been prepared to accept. Those arguing for maintenance and preservation must ask themselves whether they really want to foster the exclusive role of languages in a society in transition. Linguistically speaking, the cost of the transition in South Africa will only be determined in two to three generations. Hale (1992: 6) points out that the price paid for the loss of a language is high.

The loss of a language is part of the more general loss being suffered by the world, the loss of diversity in all things.

But in the situation under discussion it will probably turn out that, to quote Edwards (1985: 97) out of context, '... the cost is less than that which would ensue if changes were not made.'

I would like to express my indebtedness to two anonymous referees of *Didaktika* for a number of relevant comments.

Department of Afrikaans and Nederlands  
University of Natal, Durban

## References

- Brake, G. 1986. Problems of Language Planning in the United States. In Edwards, J. (ed.), *Linguistic Minorities, Politics and Pluralism*. London: Academic Press.
- Edwards, J. 1977. Ethnic Identity and Bilingual Education. In Giles, R. (ed.), *Language, Ethnicity and Intergroup Relations*. London: Academic Press.
- Edwards, J. 1984. Language, Diversity and Identity. In Edwards, J. (ed.), *Linguistic Minorities, Politics and Pluralism*. London: Academic Press.
- Edwards, J. 1985. *Language, Society and Identity*. New York: Basil Blackwell.
- Hale, K. M. Krauss (ed.) 1992. Endangered Languages. *Language* 68: 1-62.
- Holmes, J. 1992. *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. London & New York: Longman.
- Grwell, G. 1961. *Collected Essays*. London: Secker & Warburg.
- Potter, G. 1977. *Ethnic Change and the KwaZulu Region*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Pinker, S. 1984. *The Language Instinct: The New Science of Language and Mind*. London: The Penguin Press.
- Pratt, L. 1990. Canada: Dilemmas and Contradictions of a Multi-ethnic Society. In Goldstein, J. & R. Brecken (eds.), *Ethnicity and Ethnic Relations in Canada*. Toronto: Scarborough.
- VanLacort, V. 1992. The Political Situation as a Factor in Shift and Maintenance of the Tswana Language in South Africa. *SPAL* 19 (1): 21-48, 489.
- Smith, A. 1971. *Phonology of Nguni*. Leiden: Mouton.
- Steen, B. & A. Hill 1979. *The Zulu Language*. University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press.

- Steinberg, S. 1961. *The African Myth*. New York: Atheneum.
- Steiner, G. 1975. *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Steyn, J. 1980. *Phonics to Lee-Yard Kaapstad Tafelberg*.
- Vallee, P. 1981. The Sociology of John Peet: Ethnicity as Anachronism. *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 18: 639-656.
- Wolman, N. 1985. *Perspectives: Sociolinguistics and TESOL*. New York: Newbury House.

# Learning Myself Anew

Betty Govinden

## Introduction

We are living in a period of momentous happenings in South Africa. One of the most difficult and challenging areas in our communal life is related to changing an educational system that has been entrenched on the basis of inequality and prejudice. In this paper I begin by reflecting, in an impressionistic way on the legacy of reading literature under apartheid in my own educational journey. To situate the discussion in a South African context, I have woven particular personal experiences with institutional and historical realities, reading my way into theory from the bedrock of my experience and vice versa. In the second half of the paper I shall extrapolate from such experience some of the challenges that we face in the sphere of cultural and educational politics for the present and coming years.

## Telling our Stories

Madelaine Grunert (1978) has drawn attention to the use of the autobiographical method in education, particularly teaching practice, to explore ways of transforming objective situations through subjective, personal reflection. Naomi Norquay (1993:241ff), drawing on Briggs Haug and others, speaks eloquently of 'memory-work' as a political necessity in our transformative agenda. She shows the value of interrogating personal experience and personal history in the process of envisioning the future.

Telling our stories, using the 'self as subject', shows the intersection between the individual and the larger forces of our history. In telling our stories we attempt to understand both intellectually and emotionally. We each have a story to tell, in its uniqueness and commonality, but also in its constructedness. In remembering in the present, we begin to realise that parts of our past are waiting to be reclaimed, 're-visioned' and told as we view the past through the lens of the present, weaving an inter-textual narrative.

We need to be able to engage in 'remembering', to use Toni Morrison's (1987) phrase. Remembering provides the opportunity to recall the horror as well as the joy (of intimations) of creative life that was suppressed and lost almost irrevocably. Writing in the United States, Ronald Takaki (1993:14) states: 'In the telling and retelling of their stories, they create communities of memory'. Memory is indeed the weapon not just to reconstruct the past, but to interpret it (Roy Pascal 1960:19).

Telling our stories is particularly necessary at this historical juncture in South Africa, a time when we engage in the building of a nation. This does not mean that we shall be able to set the past in clean and meaningful terms. We are constantly creating and recreating the past, arranging and rearranging it, drawing on individual and collective experience. V.S. Naipaul (1995:9) has noted the inscriptions we bear of an expansive shared memory:

But we go back and back. For ever, we go back all of us to the very beginning, in our blood and bone and brain we carry the memories of thousands of beings. . . . We cannot understand all the traits we have inherited. Sometimes we can be strangers to ourselves.

Inscribed in our memory is also the anecdotal, ordinary and everyday, as we signpost our lives in the context of our history and reinterpret that very history.

## Looking Back

I was in high school in the late 1950's and early 1960's, inheriting a legacy of reading under apartheid without realising it. It was the time of separate education, of growing up in an all-Indian school, walking on winding footpaths past rows of Indian homes, past the gates of the school for 'Coloureds', vaguely aware that beyond those gates was a whole world quite separate from mine. (Yet my neighbours were 'Coloureds', who shared 'vellocks', family gossip and a common Christian faith with my mother and father, my brother and myself.) The school for White children was at the other end of town, we never met them, even for debates or peace rallies. African children went to school in the distant 'location' but they could have been on another planet. In my 'NED' (i.e. Natal Education Department) white-controlled provincial system of education (before the Unilateral Parliament in 1983, when Indian Education came under a separate Indian chamber) classroom of those years, I was safely sandwiched from the realities of sharing life with my fellow South African citizens who lived in the same 'home' town. It is a sad indictment on apartheid schooling that I was not

attended the opportunity to encounter and interact with students of other race groups throughout my entire formal education, from primary through secondary to tertiary level. My teachers in school were all Indians and mainly males. Generations of South African students have endured the cultural impoverishment and the processes to redress this situation has only recently begun.

In 1955 the Bantu Education Act was passed and in 1956 we saw a transfer of the control of black education from the provincial administration to the central government Department of Native Affairs. The Department of Bantu Education was created in 1958. L.I. Verwoerd, Minister of Native Affairs had set the South African agenda uncompromisingly in his now-famous statement:

When I have control over native education, I will refrain, so that natives will no longer trace childhood that equality with Europeans is not for them.

Occasionally there were glimpses of the wider world of resistance, alternative thinking. Some of our more daring teachers had visited Chief Albert Lutuli who lived in Grahamville, Natal, to speak to us at one of our annual speech days. Chief Lutuli, the first Nobel Peace Prize winner from South Africa, epitomised the unwavering struggle of the ANC in those days. He was later to be placed under house arrest and the ANC itself was banned in 1960 culminating in the Rivonia Trial of 1964. Lutuli's autobiography, *Let My People Go* (1962), was a cry of anguish against apartheid. But for years that voice was suppressed. Hopes were raised in 1966 when Harold Macmillan made his famous 'winds of change' speech in the House of Parliament in Cape Town. But those winds of change did not blow over our schools. Newsworthy items we were exposed to focused on the space race between the United States and Russia. Our classroom talk centred on these international examples of the progress of 'mankind'. But we hardly heard of what was happening in the other end of town, or the rest of the country.

The South African government was growing aware that winds of change blowing over the rest of Africa would mean that it could not expect further support from Britain. We were poised to leave the Commonwealth. I remember the day that the vice-principal came to our class and offered us souvenir-mugs to commemorate the inauguration of South Africa as a republic. Nobody seemed to receive them. Our allegiance to 'The Crown' and 'The Queen' was unmistakable and there was general unease when Verwoerd finally walked out of the Commonwealth. The move, of course, was that blacks, like the rest of the black population, were omitted from the referendum to decide whether South Africa should become a republic or not. My classmates were loyal royalists, vying with one another about how much

they knew about royal family life, enjoying the royal pomp and pageantry vicariously and developing naturally a 'nostalgia for empire', to use Edward Said's (1994) phrase. Yet, under the British Crown, the history of indentured labourers was hardly a happy one.

As I look back now, I realise that there was a curious collusion between apartheid and colonialism and that this came to bear especially on the literature that we studied at school. Literature was immediately synonymous with Literature with a capital L. Raymond Williams' critique was in some years later, ironically only after my formal university education, when I began reading for myself (see Williams 1977). Literature was confined to English Literature or that which was written 'a long time ago'. Oral and popular literatures as well as local and contemporary writing of black South African peoples were not even considered as being marginal or secondary. It simply did not exist.

With its stress on 'standards' and aesthetics, the Great Tradition was accepted unproblematically as canon. Developing in the 1950s in Britain, the chief figures of the great tradition were F.R. Leavis and the Scrutiny School. As Matthew Arnold had tried to do in the late nineteenth century, they wished to bolster a declining society and its hegemony by promoting a literary education. They hoped that this canon would provide the 'civilising', cultural and moral values that religion was failing to offer. John Higgs draws our attention to the precarious position that English Literature occupied historically and the strategies that were devised to prop it up. He argues that

a part of the success of English literature was to invent a sense of Englishness at just the moment that England entered a long period of imperial decline (Higgs 1994).

In recent years I have learned that English literary study actually developed in the colonial context of India and have begun to appreciate how the study of English and the growth of the Empire were inextricably bound together.

Now, when I look back on those classes in my old school, in another time and place, I see the extent to which I was 'insidiously colonised'—into 'the institutional system of English literature as an academic subject' (Bhagwati 1990:5). Peculiar totalising discourses were infecting my thinking silently, unplaceably. I think of the many silences and details of those learning days, those 'articulated silences' to use Henry Giroux's (1992) phrase. There was, of course, no television in those days—due to the Calvinist need to protect the people from moral decay. So the 'hyperreality' came not from a media culture, but from the insidious hidden curriculum of dominant discourse telling me who I was and shaping my identity. This was the time of entrenchment of apartheid, and the growing power of the Nationalist



Government. In another part of the world, Frantz Fanon (1961) was writing about the 'wretched of the earth' and his writings were going to contribute decisively to resistance of apartheid in the decades to come.

I realise now that those were the days of *Drum* and Chin Fleming. I recall seeing *Drum Magazine* lying about the house, together with *The Harpers' Weekly* and *Outpost*. I don't know where my father obtained old copies. It would be years later that I would grow to appreciate that the *Drum* writers were trying to

spread and create the voices, images and values of a black African culture which, in the aftermath of war time 'advertisements', were struggling to retain its poise and identity. At the same time, the newly-elected National Party government was setting out to smother any potential African presence in the so-called white cities and to embark on the apartheid dream of Bantu retribalisation (Chapman 1989).

I now realise why *Drum* never appeared in our official reading in our classrooms. It was not even mentioned in passing.

Can it be true that black women were writing since the turn of the century? Yet they never made their way into my classrooms in this town on the north coast of KwaZulu-Natal. Even Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), though presented to me as an exemplary model of 'indigenous' writing, was not depicted for its singular South African perspective, nor for its place in feminist thinking at a time when the world was moving into the second wave of feminist thinking and writing.

I was living out my romance with English literature, moving in and out of grand old English country houses and splendid estates, learning about the way all real people lived while formulating a distinct impression of how all good poetry and good novels should be written. My consciousness and sensibility—my 'televisual' self—was being produced and 'saturated' by another culture of ideas, a 'politics of signification', telling me who I was and what I should become. The books of the Great Tradition, naturalising canonical values, held unquestioned status. This became my centre from which I viewed the world. And all I cultivated was the grand desire to be like the Catherine Hammetts waiting to be eternally quoted to the Headquarters of the world, somewhere beyond the provincial boundary of my dismal and ordinary neighbourhood. Perhaps I dreamed too of covering the 'blest eye', like Toni Morrison's Pecola. I was made for divine discontent and 'immortal longings', far beyond the sordid reality of life in this corner of the world.

In this context, I have something to expiate—a pettiness. Why did I believe that true literature was meant to take me away from the reality of my life and place me on some transcendent plane of existence? Why did I experience it as a legitimate aspiration above my lowly class, giving me visions of a better life, a better world?

I read of no stories of local labourers, of life on the sugar plantations on the hills and valleys of Kearsney, the village of my growing-up days. There was no way of reflecting then on the feudal-type existence my parents accepted as privilege—barrack-based accommodation with weekly rations as remuneration. This day to day living, woven with stories of families and feuds, of living and loving and struggle and small joys was relegated to the margins of real life. The crude personal and private was only to be lived and endured. This daily history was slighted by a politics of selection working invisibly on behalf of my colonised self.

There were stories of Pandita Ramabhai, of Sarojini Naidu, of Gandhi and Nehru. Told around large homely coal fires, they assumed the breadth of legend and irony, portraying life experiences in broad brush-strokes. In colonised India, fragments of the pre-colonial past had already been merged with colonial patterns of life and culture. The process of dispossession which began in India continued for the Indian workers who were brought to work in a strange land with its own myths and legends. They did not resist it, nor did they create counter myths. These were left for the real 'frontiersmen'—those of the European races.

What thoughts filled the early Indian migrant workers in their physical and emotional encounter and confrontation with the colonial masters and the new land? What metaphors were deployed to depict their severing of links with ancestral traditions on the one hand and their migration and translation across the Indian Ocean on the other? What 'counter-memories', as Paul Gilroy (1987) and others ask, came into being but are now lost to the wind? Why are these questions relevant only to the white settler's dilemma and not to the black races of the world? One of the sad indictments of our apartheid schooling, sufficiently well-organised to promote formal, functional education, was its insidious stranglehold on the creative imagination. The stifling and even absence of a literary tradition among Indians prevented us from reflecting on our psychic displacement. We were subjected to colonial discourse and simultaneously prevented from criticising empire 'textuality' (see Bhebe 1995: 15). We were also kept apart from the wider world community of history, literature and intellectual thinking. Our post-1960 isolation from the rest of the Commonwealth did not enhance a sense of shared historical conditions globally.

Moreover, Indian experiences were not woven into the fabric of the emerging literary expression of other race groups in South Africa for the better part of the century. The tendency to imagine oneself to be part of discrete and homogeneous cultures was both cause and effect of our separated living.

From the 1960s onwards, there has been a growing number of writers of Indian origin, both male and female and both 'at home' and in exile, who

are writing with a distinctively South African voice. Examples of these writers are Ahmed Essop, Ismail Chookor, Achnat Dangor, Essop Patel, Farook Asvat, Ronnie Govender, Gani Pillay, Kessie Govender, Kibera Pillay, Deema Padayachee, Shabbir Barokohai, Jayapunga Reddy, Shabaana Poonna, Farida Kamulila and Agnes Sami. Many have resisted narrow ethnic categories of the apartheid state and have claimed a wider, black identity to 'harmonise our blackness all over Azania' (Patel 1980). While this writing, mainly of a younger generation, has not directly engaged in a critique of indenture and assimilation, of the discursive violence of colonialism and racism as found in other parts of the Indian diaspora such as Trinidad, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines and Australia, the context from which their ventures spring is unmistakably related to this history.

There is also Arabic, Urdu, Tamil and Hindi poetry that needs to be integrated into South African literary writings. Surendra Bhana and Joy Brand (1996) observe that pamphlet literature written by Indians in South Africa is a considerable but still hidden and not adequately explored resource. Their own research also shows the value of oral records, passed from generation to generation, for the uncovering of lost experiences, thoughts, memories, expectations and criticisms. Much work also remains to be done in extant little-known, published or archival material to uncover discourses and literature common to Indians in South Africa's past. Much has yet to be added to the three poems by BD Lalla, published in Van Wyk et al. (1988), to ensure the popularising of this literary expressions.

Foucault (1973) has drawn attention to the process whereby exploitation and domination is inhibited, whereby people subjugate themselves in a process of 'subjectivity'. In the past, we were not only manipulated politically and economically but also excluded by being 'exoticised'. And we participated in the commodification of ourselves and our 'culture'. These processes assured that we collude in our own cultural oppression. In this context, Edward Said (1978) notes that, "the modern Orient ... [still] participates in its own Orientalising". It was this tendency that also prompted Ndolebe (1971:3) to protest against the general expression of all colonised peoples, when he wrote:

do not crowd my mind  
with staid images of my past.  
For me first, at least,  
do not display my curved rituals  
at the British Museum,  
for little do they say,  
let me first learn first.

At present, there is a particular yearning to discover these 'subjugated know-

knowledge'. As we attempt to 'look back', 'think back', 'feel back' in order to uncover the almost, extinct but silenced literary expressions of the past, these as well as our present literary expression may, provide the aesthetic context for participation, education and reflection in the *simple* South African literary measure.

Change has been taking a long time to reach our educational systems. Our schools and universities were isolated from the mainstream of global change for a long time and have only recently become places of real curriculum and structural change. The discourse of decolonisation was already beginning in the 1960s in Kenya for instance – in South Africa, however, we were still officially entrenching 'grand apartheid' at the time. It took years before I heard about the Black Power movement, of the concept of Negritude and the Harlem Renaissance on the recorded at the very time I was at school. This critical engagement in the multifarious and complex discourse of decolonisation and resistance to apartheid undergirded the events of Soweto 1976.

Sumeto 1976

Soweto 1976 was precisely a revolt against apartheid and cultural imperialism in our educational system. It re-introduced the practices of struggle into the South African arena like no other event since the banning of the African National Congress in the early 1960s. The media's depiction of these events as 'senseless violence against the hallowed halls of learning' and the official instruments of apartheid society and the government's stifling of the real effects of this turning point in southern African history and education did not succeed in stemming the tide. In real terms, the legacy of that struggle is only being claimed now as we try to implement those dreams of a liberatory pedagogy. Soweto 1976 signifies that time in our education history when we started to sever and extricate ourselves from the shackles of all that is related to our oppressive lives. Sepanda (1977:6f) captures this vividly in his poem, *At the Dawn of Another Day*.

of the height of the due  
vacu: rage applied all over the page  
unless, as its own copy  
confounding the moment  
period the the

take away  
your teachings

take away  
your promises

take away  
your hope  
take away  
your language  
live  
me  
live  
day  
myself  
I shall learn myself a new  
I shall learn myself from the trees  
I shall learn myself from the others  
I shall learn myself of you

Soweto 1976 claimed for all of us the right to foreground our particular historical experiences. It was the affirmation of our need to name and describe our oppression. This naming of our experiences was crucial in the awakening of the consciousness of the oppressed.

Students were protesting against the artificial boundaries that had been ideologically set up and which would in time collapse – boundaries between context and education, teacher and student, student and political reality, curriculum and need. Our 'street culture and street knowledge', our singular and corporate experiences of apartheid divisions and practices felt in our names and in our bodies, were rendered inert in the formal abstract knowledge of classroom instruction (see Peter McLaren 1993). This is also why the advent of 'Peoples' Education' was inevitable in our history. The growing resistance of students to the state's attempts to inculcate, preserve and further an alienating education, initially only had one source on which to draw: personal experience. A tyranny of place, an inescapable and necessary 'politics of location', was prompting us into new spaces of liberation. All this as we moved into the eye of the storm, with the state of emergency beginning in the mid 1980s, and the inevitable apocalyptic literature of this decade.

After Soweto 1976 and Steve Biko's death, our education history was set on an irreversible course of reconstruction.

## Challenges for the Present and the Future

My 'lifelong education' is taking a new turn nowadays. It is really a re-education, sensitive to new impulses of thought, new critical voices and old silences. Apart from asking questions about what constitutes the literary canon, I am going back to those old familiar texts and reading them for their omissions, evasions and erasures. In this process, I am claiming a reflexivity

that had hitherto been suppressed. I am seeing them in all the trappings of their 'locatedness'. Edward Said (1994), together with writers such as Homi Bhabha (1990), points out that a fundamental aspect of 'locature and imperialism' is that nations themselves are narrations, that those who had power, had the power to block out other narratives from forming and emerging, of screening the way representations of the colonised took place. In order to rectify this distortion, the advent of *Staffrider* serves as the point of orientation impressing on us that this heterogeneity also serves as the stimulus which prompts us to produce (and publish) our own books and writing.

In recent years I have been growing attentive to South African voices demanding the right to define, imagine and theorise our own understanding of human skin, black and white history and to develop a sensitivity to voices from the Third World speaking in the interstices of gender and race. I am discovering the

need to find new symbols, to retain the familiar which has suddenly become strange, to rediscover the ordinary, to reinvent the sea. (Ntshole (1971))

There will always be that longing to know what you have been denied of, to strip yourself of those false identities that have been trafficked for you and to search for your 'real' identity beneath the colonial layers. The recent craze for 'roots' is perfectly understandable. The 'West' had given us, in James Nkomo's (1968) words, a 'heap of broken images' of ourselves and we have assumed the mission to recreate ourselves from the disparate elements of our cultures as well as from the debris of our shattered pre-colonial past. Of course, we will realise that there is no authentic identity somewhere waiting to be found. We have to be circumspect when we prop ourselves up by our apparent 'authenticity'. Stuart Hall and Peter McLaren (1993:286) urge the 'construction of identity grounded in memory, narrative, and history but not contained by them'.

We should be circumspect too of the influence of well-meaning critics or 'cultural brokers'. Richard Kroe's (1977:61) earlier evaluation of those involved in the literary scramble for Africa is certainly apt especially today.

This time, to explore as we must with a raft of phobias in that literature, passed through Africa's doors, and taught his blacks to understand Soyinka and Achebe, and discuss negritude, if not meaningfully then at least soulfully, the professional Africanist created the professional African. The former was a white learned when he saw his protégé don his beads, fix his hair, beat his *aseko* drum, and tell whites what they in any case already knew.

Indeed a new battle has to be waged. While we have grown critical of how

Literature was defined for us in the past, there is a need now for further vigilance. Literature reflected the criteria by which we determined whether something qualified as 'literature' or not, the standards by which we distinguished 'good' writing from bad and the means and aspirations of a particular class (Barman 1991: 240). Now, literature must include the literary expressions and experiences of all. While we academics were once opposed to the commercialised and mass-marketed popular culture consumed by common people, the politically-correct view now may prompt us to become self-appointed surveyors and custodians of a new Culture with a capital C or even of popular culture. We have started to speak of township culture, music and art. In this activity, we might find that we 'still legitimate and validate our positions at educational institutions by using strategies similar to those harnessed by colonialist and apartheid regimes. Deciding that the old distinctions are now spurious and proclaiming to the world our enlightenment from imperialism, elitism and bigotry we might find ourselves still being implicated in the same from a different vantage point.' Roger Deacon and Ben Parker (1994) state:

The struggle against all forms of domination, both Western and indigenous and inside as well as outside the zone of emancipation, requires not the identification of a higher body or a future paradise but simply the persistent critique of what is and is inherent (ibid).

## To Counteract the Legacy of Apartheid

To counteract the legacy of apartheid which manifested itself at state, institutional, cultural and individual levels of South African society and to reconstruct a new society, schools and universities, we must consider radical change of the curricula. This requires a major paradigm shift, a politically-engaged perspective instead of a neutral one. Such a perspective has to rigorously critique the 'epistemology of apartheid' and adequately address questions related to the production of knowledge and the assumptions of truth and objectivity. An informed and dynamic strategy for organisational change at school level in particular is essential and analyses and action-proposals on curriculum issues inescapable.

Given this background, curriculum change cannot be short-term, technical, ameliorative, additive and piecemeal. We have to pursue developing a critique of exclusivist, privileged, monopolistic 'regimes of

Some of these views are articulated by Barman (1991: 246) in relation to feminist curricula and I have extended them here to include thinking about literature and teaching.

truth'. The practices of cultural violation, epistemic violence and imperialism that colonised the social imagination and perpetuated processes of othering 'others' in this case, those who were not Western, not middle class or black or female—must be radically excised from education and pedagogy.

Because of our experiences of the past, we need an analysis of the deliberate exclusion of the experience of living in Africa. Such 'regimes of closure' were designed to keep people passive, silent, and dispossessed, both intellectually and materially. These analyses may also open the space for accounts of the liberation of the stifled 'political unconscious' breaking through the layers of suppression. Since curriculum change cannot be isolated from wider institutional transformation research and university education will have to play the leading role here.

Our schools and universities could not always be locations of oppression. They have been transforming themselves radically into sites of struggle and of resistance and have become sites of hope and possibility. I believe that literature study, in all its critical diversity, can be pivotal in continuing this developing critical tradition in the 'new' South Africa.

Furthermore, we have still to engage in a proper study of the implications of 'Africanising' our schools and universities. Amongst other changes, it should include the changing of the composition of students, academics and administrators, the changing of the syllabus and curriculum, the establishing of criteria to determine relevant research programmes and the criteria for the judgement of excellence in our particular contexts of need and challenge. This will also have to include the development of ideologically-engaged academic support programmes and a major review of all prevailing assumptions that black students are inferior, that it is the students who must change and that perceived 'loss' can be made up by bridging programmes.

We will need to develop mechanisms for the on-going development and transformation of the curriculum by both teachers and students, to constantly problematise even our critical pedagogy and to reinvigorate our emancipatory work in the light of emerging and changing experiences and interpretations. This will also involve a study of the feasibility for disciplinary deterritorialisation and dynamic interaction in the light of existing expedients of disciplinary divisions, intractability and impermeability.

## Conclusion

I began this paper by noting the importance of 'telling our stories'. I have presented these reflections at a particular moment in my own history. I

expect to go back to the past again and again, to engage in new interrogations and new reconstructions and to be attentive to the contradictions, gaps and silences in my story and in my telling of it. Part of reconstructing ourselves as a post-apartheid society is to consciously dismantle and rebuild as we try to understand the part that social structures have played in shaping our identities as well as our own complicity in them. Telling our stories entails a risk and pain, but in the reclaiming and re-naming is new freedom.

Department of Curriculum Studies  
University of Durban-Westville

#### Note

I am particularly grateful to Johannes A. Sent, Jonathan D. Jansen and referees for their invaluable comments and criticism on an earlier draft of this paper.

#### References

- Barnett, A. (ed.) 1991. *Massey*. In Harrison, Joan B. & Ellen Messer-Davies (eds) *Enriching Knowledge: Feminists in Academia*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press.
- Bogard, Bernard 1990. *Exploring English: Grammar, Theory, Culture*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Bhabha, Homi K. (ed.) 1990. *Nation and Narration*. London: Routledge.
- Bhamb, Arundhati & Joy Bhan 1991. *Nothing Down Roots: Indian Migrants in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.
- Brennan, E. (ed.) 1991. *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chapman, Michael 1989. Can Thucydides, Storyteller and Journalist of the 1950s: The Lex in Context. *Logos in Africa* 16.1, May 18-28.
- Deacon, Roger & Ben Parker 1994. *Teaching the Language of Theory*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association.
- Edson, Frank 1991. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Foucault, Michel 1973. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. London: Routledge.
- Gilroy, Paul 1987. *There ain't no Black in the Union Jack*. London: Hutchinson.
- Ginnat, Madeline 1978. *Songs and Situations*. In Willis, George (ed) *Questioning Legitimacy*. Berkeley: McCutchan.
- Hall, Stuart 1991. Stochastic Identity and Difference. *Cultural Studies* 23.4, 9-20.
- Herz, Gloria 1992. *Border Crossings*. London: Routledge.
- Higgins, John 1991. *The End of English*. Paper presented at the HSRC Conference, Knowledge, Memory and the Public Good, Pretoria, July.
- Leahy, Albert 1962. *Let My People Go*. London: Four Paperbacks.
- McLaren, Peter 1997. *Schooling as a Ritual Performance—towards a Political Economy of Educational Symbols and Gestures*. London: Routledge.
- Morrison, Toni 1987. *Beloved*. New York: Knopf.
- Nupur, V.S. 1995. *A Ship in the World*. London: Mantra.
- Ntshole, Njabu N. 1971. No Gentle. *Comment* VII, 27.2.
- Nkomo, Lewis 1965. *Home and Leisure*. London: Longmans.
- Norquay, Nancy 1993. The Other Side of Difference: Memory-work in the Mainstream. *Qualitative Studies in Education* 6.3, 241-251.
- Patel, Esop 1980. *They Came at Dawn*. Arisbee: Black Publishing House.
- Potter, Roy 1960. *Design and Trick in Anthropology*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Rice, Richard 1977. The Black Man and White Literature. *New African* 19.1, 17.
- Said, Edward W. 1978. *Orientalism*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Said, Edward 1994. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Sepassa, Sipho 1977. *The Soweto I Love*. London: Joss Collins.
- Truku, Ronald 1993. *A Different Woman—A History of Multicultural America*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Van Wyk, Joann, Peter Conrad & Nik Constantinou 1988. *SA in Process: 31 in Poetry*. Plunkett: Owen Burgess.
- Williams, Raymond 1977. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

# The Antinomies of Black Rage

David Hesmon

## Review Article

*I Write What I Feel*

by Steve Biko

Oxford: Heinemann, 1981, 153 pp

ISBN 0 433 90968 8

At last, it is true that something of us does survive even in the Hall of Mirrors, but with no one out of all only the ghost and semblance of a man (*Turner Book XXIII 1971*).

The sharp controversies around claims to the heritage of black consciousness and legacy of Steve Biko which have followed the first post-election commemoration of his death in detention, remind us that there are certain unsettled matters in our national history and consciousness in relation to both. The fusion of the personal and the political appears uncomfortable and the links to current practice is contested. The boundaries between the personal and the public are blown apart, subject to public debate, and then carefully re-erected. As Mamphele Ramphele has remarked about the 'unfinished business' following her eight year passionate involvement with Steve Biko in launching her autobiography:

I have a peace with it, it is incorporated into my life. But it has been talked about so much and given so many different associations that it is important my own interpretation had to be given. The next few years will be very rich in this. There is a real urgency to talk about experiences (*SADSA*, 19 October 1985).

Personal incentives and the products of black imagination are being fought over by black intellectuals. No white person in opposition to apartheid in the late 1960s and early 1970s could avoid passing through the fire of criticism

of self, motives, and practice mounted by the student advocates of black consciousness. As one of that generation I can testify to the fire fury and interrogations characteristic of passage through its political heat. A certain humility was learnt. Many of the whites who entered later into political activity—at the time of an established Congress non-racial practice—appear to have a bland self-assurance which is surprising in the activists of the earlier period.

Biko provided a frontal criticism of the role of whites in political activity at that time: either as part of the System or as its critics. In his verbal exchanges, he was a passionate advocate of black liberation but also an accomplished debater, a master of the Socratic question and (in a lighter vein) a political tease.

But it is to the black people that he addresses his well-crafted arguments and pleadings. His writings stand as the historical documents of his time, a curious period between the crushing of the liberation movement in the early 1960s and the flowering of mass protest in the mid 1970s. It was a period devoid of political malice, a time in which the intellectual vacuum invited innovation and the recasting of black politics. Black consciousness at that time attempted to retrieve the morale of the black intelligentsia by instilling black pride while stabbing at the balloon of white racism. At its apogee its practice was daring, innovative and heroic. It set itself an extremely ambitious goal: that of uniting the oppressed—African, Coloured, and Indian—around a common black self-identity and in common organisation. At the time, this approach was held almost beyond measure. Today in the post-election period—which has generated both a Rainbow nation and currents of ethnonationalism separating African, Coloured, and Indian people—it appears to be a palpably impossible goal. Hybrid political formations clustered around demands for or in opposition to ethnic entitlements (e.g. in its current form of affirmative action) are fragmenting the broad identity of the oppressed as 'black'.

Today, black consciousness (whether from strategic choice or innate ideological orientation) stands somewhat aside from the historic compromise between the official black (and white) parties. The prognosis of South African resistance becoming divided along sharply defined racial lines in the struggle for liberation was firstly elbowed aside by the Congress non-racialism in the 1980s and then sidelined by the overwhelming and extraordinary mood of reconciliation after the election. This is a mood which can be exploited and misused by those whites who effortlessly shoulder the mantle of non-racialism while resting on established privilege.

The black-consciousness and Africanist traditions, however, remain deep within the psychology of African politics as an oppositional current to the non-racialism (or as the Africanist terminology would insist 'multi-

movement) of the past and present. In the movement supported by the African people, the dominant tradition of moderate nationalism contains within itself its unofficial opposite, watching and waiting for its time and place. It is this phenomenon which justifies a retrospective review of *When I Wake*, the most comprehensive edition of Biko's writings.

Nowhere else are the ideas of black consciousness given fuller expression than in the writings and speeches of Steve Biko. Here is possibly a unique collection of writings, statements in the dock, essays and interviews, illuminating the nature of politics and the struggle to define black identity at a time when it was being denied and repressed. Biko's formulation of black consciousness is presented as it appeared in the political struggles of the time: a period roughly between the foundation period of SASO (South African Students' Organisation) in 1969 and his murder in 1977.

Biko is a fluent writer. His writings remind us of his forceful and dialogical speech. Often, his assertiveness is keenly argumentative and at times dissolves the meaning of the question rather than answering it. Throughout, however, he would take up genuine points of debate from the opposing camp and provide a reasoned response. The title of the book expresses the fierce individualism of the man as well as his insistence on his own ability to see, judge, and speak. While a close reading of these texts reveals all these sentiments, it also reveals the ambiguities of black consciousness together with fresh questions of identity, ideology and strategy, which in judicious measure will be explored below.

All his writings were aimed towards the creation of (in his words) a 'solid identity' among blacks, a resilience in the face of the utter ruthlessness of triumphant white power. These writings give evidence of this courage and its moral and intellectual qualities: there is the extraordinary exchange in court with Judge Boshooff during the trial of the SASO leaders when Biko provided calm and determined responses to hostile questioning and rarely conceded ground. Throughout the book, the broad strokes of a portrait of a political man who is neither servile nor blindly belligerent, takes shape.

The themes of culture, black dispossession, white cruelty and the critique of the disparate and somewhat forceless opposition to apartheid are covered. These are complemented by savage attacks on black collaboration, an exemplary opposition to Bantustans, analysis of the colonial character of South Africa and an examination of the psychological forms of domination. There are, however, also silences which can be noted without arrogance and with the benefit of hindsight: the cheap labour system, the strategic strength of the African working class, the struggle of black women and the tactics of moving from black 'consciousness' to strategic engagement with the enemy — in short the outlines of a strategy for power. The texts can also be

dated in terms of our political culture: the term 'comrade' has yet to appear. We are here in a certain pre-history of mass resistance.

## Two Faces of Courage

Revisiting these texts as a participant in the student movement of the time, I am struck by the freshness and originality of Steve Biko's thought and the fruitful contradictions which run through his arguments. Biko's extraordinary courage was both physical and intellectual. In the nadir of black subjugation during the 1960s triumph of apartheid, he engaged in a project of restoring African cultural capital in preparation for the task of resistance. The first step towards consciousness was the recognition of what had been lost and the resultant desolate world bereft of comfort, that the black people inhabited.

Biko was able to confront platitudes of the time (e.g. the notion that the liberal opposition and a flimsy form of non-racial unity cobbled together under white leadership, would bring about change) and asserted a fierce opposing logic which drove in the direction of a separate black sphere of politics and radical nationalism. He showed great daring in being able to pull away any weak scaffolding in the construction of opposition, in particular in illusions in white liberals. It meant facing up to white people who were often sincerely involved in oppositional politics and pointing out (often without alienating their friendship) the limits and contradictions of their practice.

It is difficult to convey just what bravery it took them to *think* coherently and logically about the need for revolution — to posit an utterly different future — and to speak your mind when the act of speech itself could summon imprisonment or a death sentence. There were two constraints: firstly the mental inertia and fondnessness of resistance in the student field and secondly a signal confusion about a strategy to move beyond formal criticism of apartheid in the practice of an *internal* resistance which could shake the regime to its foundations.

His most remarkable bravery was in breaking from the manacles conventions of the politics of defeat of the 1960s: by creating a political space for new ideas, showing a sceptical attitude towards the movement in exile (an attitude which even then was greatly controversial); and being prepared to confront the phenomenon of black collaboration with the regime. He also expressed with considerable and striking honesty his perceptions of the problems of black society.

But it was his physical courage which helped galvanise a black generation and inspire implacable hostility to the system of racism and exploitation — a tradition of intemperance which has lived on in the defiant songs in court and prison to the present. Most graphically this is shown in an



interview in 1977 about his determination to resist to the death. In a sense, he was making a living response to the rhetorical question he himself had posed about the black man:

Does he live in his people's make up that rare quality that makes a man willing to die for the realisation of his aspirations? (1987:287)

Tragically, his interview entitled 'To death', presages the most likely circumstances of his death. 'I'm afraid you may have to kill me in the process even if it's not your intention'. He sees that the police would be infuriated by his defiance but that they were in a vulnerable position even in torturing him. This audacity is a mark of his character. He was a revolutionary consciously prepared to give up his life and keenly aware of the public significance of the death of a black fighter.

Before his death, Biko gave recognition to the indomitable courage of the township youth and he saw in the growing polarisation of the post-1976 period that the method of death itself could be a galvanising event for black people. Most probably his torturers went beyond whatever limits they might have been set, undoubtedly also, he breathed defiance to the end.

## Vision and Revision

This, in brief, is the man. The ideas published in *I Write What I Like* were enormously important and continue to have political relevance. They impinged on the agenda of the joint commissions of SPROCAS (Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid Society) to which Biko addresses critical remarks. They permeated into the discourse of South African Christianity, crystallised a perspective for the white democratic left which set about investigating white oppression in response to his argument to turn their attention to changing white society and stimulated radical intellectuals (such as Rick Turner) who in turn responded with counter-challenges. They polarised student politics and brought a generation of black intellectuals into political activity. For all, they constituted a grounding for debate.

One way or another, resistance politics were forged in response to these ideas. *Sechaba*, the journal of the ANC (then in exile) had editorials in sympathetic response to these ideas. In a little known item of history, Ben Turok, then one of its editors, was dismissed and later expelled from the Communist Party for advocating ideas to some extent influenced by Biko and the dynamics of internal resistance. Shortly before this expulsion he published a pamphlet in which one section is headed: 'Black Consciousness is not False Consciousness'. For all these reasons, Biko's writings deserve a

careful reading they do not appear to have had to date. Historically, they provide the evidence of black intellectuals struggling for theoretical and strategic clarity to see with 'unmatured eyes the hateful characters of decay that fill the gods themselves with horror' (Homer *Iliad* XX 62).

Much of the early writings are taken up with his repudiation of white liberals and conventions of internal resistance – in particular the idea that forms of inter-racial unity in themselves would be sufficient to undermine and finally break-up apartheid. The argument was fairly straightforward: while white liberals were confident in their ideas and abilities and dominated common organisations, blacks, considered as a whole, suffered from an inferiority complex which made it impossible to take control of their own lives and assemble their own outlook. Underlying this psychological approach to the assertion of black identity is the perception of the extreme, blatant or disguised, of white hegemony through the ideology of liberalism. The ringing declarations of the liberal faith from the mouths of white people seemed nothing less than a sophisticated defence of the System and the pleading of liberals for non-racial unity, nothing less than the arrogance of the dominant in dictating the appropriate methods of opposition to their System. Biko expresses an irritation with a perceived sophisticated domination by arguing for clearing the ground of an 'extraneous' element. 'Their presence amongst us is irksome and of no service value'.

For blacks to be able to take hold of their destiny and plan a different future, there was in Biko's view the historic necessity to make a radical rupture with the past and not to remain trapped in the 'two-faced' nature of African politics. A historian sensitive to the subtleties of African political leadership recognises the metaphor of mask as central and argues that the concept of ambiguity is essential to any understanding of domination (Marks 1986:2). However, out of a particular sense of conviction of his generation's vocation, it is precisely the 'two-faced' nature of African politics that Biko is determined to end: 'ultimately the leadership of the non-white peoples in this country rests with us'. The politics of ambiguity is replaced with unambiguous declarations of intent. Fuzzy conceptions are substituted with an unambiguous statement of principle.

Although black consciousness encouraged thinking and writing along racial lines (similar to that of United States blacks on 'race pride') Biko argues that it is not racist:

racism is discrimination by a group against another for the purposes of subjugation or maintaining subjugation. In other words one cannot be a racist unless he has the power to subjugate (1987:35).

He compares black mobilisation to that of the trade union form in which workers organise separately from employers and yet are not called separatist.



As in the feminist conception, Biko draws a line between progressive and reactionary forms of nationalism along the divide between oppressor and oppressed nations.

But if whites were barred from black organisations what were they to do? Liberals, he argues, should loop back to white society. 'The place for their fight for justice', the fight for their *own freedom* and they should not attempt to fight on behalf of the 'nebulous "they" with whom they can barely claim identification'. They must educate their white brothers. When they ask 'What can I do?' Biko answers: 'stop using segregated facilities, take menial jobs, defy privilage'. But he accepts that it is unrealistic since skin privilege 'will always put him miles ahead of the black man'. 'Thus in the ultimate analysis, no white person can escape being part of the oppressor camp' (1987:23). The cycle of argument closes in on itself. Within the compartments of race, Biko cannot see any prospect for individual self-determination.

This repudiation of white liberals is simultaneously an assertion of radical black leadership. Biko shows a more complex strategy than one of simply breaking up the small intellectual groupings of inter-racial consensus. Although Biko initially seems to have dismissed the liberals for good, he later shows a duality in attitude: white liberals

must serve as a lubricating material to help separate gears in trying to find a better direction in South Africa (1987:26).

They are rejected within the fold of black strategy but Biko sees them as part of the potential super-structure of managed political change.

These are by and large the ideas for which black consciousness is well known. But in many ways, it is Biko's responses to *change in black society* which provide the most interesting reading of his writings in the present context.

In a more gender-sensitive age, the preoccupation with masculinity is stark: the theme of the regeneration of the black man is vivid and at times so pervasive that black consciousness appears a self-consciously masculine movement. Here are echoes of current black nationalist practice in the United States, in one of the most remarkable quotations of the book Biko writes:

Black people under the Smith government were oppressed but they were still men. But the type of black man we have today has lost his manhood. Reduced to an old, grey shell, he looks with awe at the white power structure and accepts what he regards as the 'inevitable position'. . . . All in all the black man has become a shell, a shadow of man, completely defeated, drowning in his own misery, a slave, an on-beating the yoke of oppression with sheepish mildness (1987:25).

This quote is often repeated but deserves deeper analysis. Steve is arguing that under the period generally termed 'segregation', the African psyche was not fully colonised and retained aspects of independence. However, with the coming of apartheid society, there was a sense of psychological devastation. Nowhere else is there a sharper expression of the loss of identity and a self-critical reflection by a black writer. I read the references to masculinity as deliberate rather than as slights of the generic 'human' as 'man'. The link between politics and male sexuality is explicit.

The political direction of black consciousness then emerges as a current of black male redemption:

The first step therefore is to make the black man come to himself, to pump back life into his empty shell, to infuse him with pride and dignity, to remind him of his complicity in the crime of allowing himself to be abused and the crime of letting evil reign supreme in the society of his birth (1987:28).

Black consciousness is then an expression of manhood and through its medium the black man would no longer 'tolerate attempts by anybody to dwarf the significance of his manhood' (1987:68).

There is an insistence on masculinity and resistance, a feature which has recur in studies of struggle and counter-violence (see Campbell 1989). An explanation for this combination has to be sought in the living conditions of the black intelligentsia of the time. It was men, by and large, who were granted the privilege of education and yet paradoxically it was men who suffered the grossest of humiliations at the hands of white authority. Again it was also men who were failing to provide the leadership for the black community and who were caught in an impasse between resistance or collaboration.

While Campbell focuses on the *demobilising* effects of the politicised male on black women, this self-conscious masculinity confronts the political incapacity of the black community and emerges as a force to regenerate the politics of the oppressed. To what extent is this frank assertion of masculinity justified? A feminist critique of the ideas and practices of black consciousness would have no difficulty establishing the silences on the question of the black woman or even of the socio-political attitude black men should have towards women. But is all assertion of masculinity sexist? How is the masculinity of black consciousness essentially combined with resistance? Is this not simply another form of men engaging in sexual politics as Campbell implies? Marcuse (1969a:23) has remarked, 'all liberation depends on the consciousness of servitude'. The question remains which identity is being strengthened and what oppositional force is being prepared.

Part of the answer to this question has to be located in the contradiction

tions within the patriarchal nature of African movements. As a new political formation, Black consciousness, like other redemptive political movements, had to start with a new group of activists. In accounting for the structural weaknesses of black politics, it had (like others such as the ANC Youth League of the 1940s) to build a critique of the older generation too and project its own values and strategies.

Biko found this confrontation both necessary and difficult. He notes at one point that the lack of respect for the elders is, in the African tradition, an unforgivable and cardinal sin.<sup>1</sup> Yet, while working within what he accepts as the African tradition, he formulates a sharp critique of the politics of the traditional political organisations.

The question which has constantly been asked is 'Was Biko for or against the ANC and its policies?' A close reading of his writing shows that Biko was in many ways in opposition to the ANC's politics, black assertiveness, while never absent, was not the ANC's dominant tradition and Biko argued for the unity of all movements which was then the position of the PAC.

To pursue the discussion at one point he argues that the Charter (most evidently its opening phrase declaring that South Africa belongs to all who live in it) was evidence of the 'ease with which the leadership accepted coalitions with organisations other than those run by blacks' and that the opposition to the Charter showed the 'first real signs that the blacks in South Africa were beginning to realise the need to go it alone' (1987: 67). He traced the antecedents of black consciousness to this opposition of the ANC leadership. In confirmation of this line of argument he states that the revival of the Natal Indian Congress, a key component of the Congress Alliance, was evidence of 'dangerous retrogressive thinking which should be given no breathing space'.<sup>2</sup>

This thinking was certainly regarded as a problem by the ANC leadership of the time (although the ANC-supporting Defence and Aid Fund produced a commemorative book after his death). But Biko saw the mutual friction in its internal context. The younger generation was seen to be 'moving too fast' by an older generation passively linked to old allegiances involved in Bantustan politics or simply trapped in fear. The youth had to challenge the traditional leadership to break out of this paralysis.

Shortly before his death, Biko argued that the black consciousness movement was uniquely placed to be able to bring together the different strands of resistance to apartheid. But this diplomacy was never exercised—not only because of his murder, but also because of the fiercely competitive nature of nationalist politics which never allowed the matter to be seriously ventilated. The imperatives of resistance, moreover, could not wait for this coming together and as a matter of historical record nothing was achieved

along these lines, movements fell or stood on the basis of their ability to unite the largest forces against a formidable enemy and to conquer their opponents.

For a time, however, it appeared that the savage repression of the 1960s had created a desolate landscape which allowed a new movement (the term then used was the 'third force') to flower in the vacuum of the interior. In short, during the 1970s, the politics of exile and of the interior moved in different directions before coming together in the 1980s as a movement built around the broad traditions of African unity in the ANC and its members' ethos. The Congress movement then became the majority expression of the movement and the Africanist wing (roughly speaking the PAC) its minority partner, with black consciousness its lesser theme.

### The Politics of Culture: The New African Emerges

Lying at the centre of Biko's perception of difference and continuity is the analysis of culture. Yet it is possibly in this area that his contribution has been least appreciated despite having an original perspective which makes a number of forward linkages to our present. Although Biko argues it is 'not necessary to talk with Africans about African culture', it is precisely this debate among Africans that he helped initiate and develop. The antinomies revealed here still remain in contention in contemporary African culture and politics.

At various points he distinguishes and uses diverse notions of culture: universal, communicative/African, political/resistance, and Western-colonial, among others. Said (1992:xxix) links such variety of interpretive perspectives on culture to the colonial condition:

Partly because of empire, all cultures are involved in one another none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinary differentiated and unresolvable.

It is among these various concepts of culture that Biko seeks the values by which to build a new political tradition and to exercise judgement from an African perspective.

Biko defines culture as 'essentially the society's composite answer to the varied problems of life' (1987:96). If this is the universal nature of culture, what answers are there to the problems of life in apartheid South Africa? He enters into the debate about cultural tradition and change, and argues that culture has a nationally or racially defined problem-solving capacity.

Biko re-establishes Africanism as a resilient and powerful force which has not been crushed by the power of colonial cultural capital. To establish its vitality he insists on continuity in African culture. In phrases which evoke many of the contemporary debates, Biko declared himself

against the belief that African culture is time-bound, the notion that with the conquest of the African all his culture was obliterated (1967: 11).

Two points appear to be crucial: firstly, that African culture is evolving and secondly, that traditional culture remains extant. This connection, although containing a certain contradiction or suspension, is sustained throughout Biko's writings on the subject. Biko switches between asserting traditional values and recognising the new cultural forms evolving in African life. Since both aspects make up a certain whole, they should not be treated in exclusion of one another. The African people had suffered 'severe blows' but

even today one can easily find the fundamental aspects of the pure African culture in the present-day African (1967: 12).

In another publication, Barney Pityana remembers how Steve Biko was greatly impressed with the insistence of a fellow passenger in the railway coach on sharing his food. Here appeared the living evidence of cultural continuity he was seeking.

In a memorable phrase, Biko rejects the 'arrested image' of African culture presented by certain forms of Western social sciences: he both recognises traditional African culture and attempts to present the evolution and confrontation of black culture with 'white' culture.

Our culture must be defined in concrete terms. We must relate the past to the present and demonstrate an historical evolution of the modern African. We must reject the attempts by the powers that be to project an arrested image of our culture. This is not the caricature of our culture. They have deliberately arrested our culture in the ritual stage to perpetuate the myth that African people were near-cannibals, had no real ambitions in life, and were preoccupied with any one drink. In fact, the wide-spread vice often found in the African townships is a result of the interference of the White man in the natural evolution of the true African culture (1967: 11).

From the black consciousness viewpoint there is an attempt to bring together the fragments of African experience. The elements of tradition and change, language and the sacred are to be combined in an inclusive African culture. Once the ideological constraints of the dominant over the African were stripped away, African culture—African dignity, community and communication—would emerge as a whole.

This notion of black totality could not be perceived nor appreciated by whites. In an important challenge to white social scientists and other intellectuals, Biko declares:

Whites can only see us from the outside and as such can never extract and analyze the ethos in the black community (1987: 53).

He develops an integral and organic perspective of black life and culture—an integrated, oppositional system to the established white techno-political system of power.

African culture, he argues, is built around a Man-centred universe which sustains itself through a 'capacity ... for talking to each other'. Africans are characterised by an easy communication which is 'inherent in the make-up of African people'. Such intimacy and communication exists in the conversation groups he sees so emphatically constructed around age and gender groups, that there could traditionally be no such thing as two friends, he asserts.

He weaves a positive perspective of African society and race. Africans are 'not a suspicious race', they believe in the 'inherent goodness of man' and always place Man first. Africans, he argues, are a 'deeply religious race' but the missionaries confused religion with the 'theology of the existence of hell' and projected a 'cold cruel religion', alienating the black man from his cultural values.

Furthermore, in African community and culture the 'interests of the community rather than that of the individual, predominate: 'action is usually joint community oriented action rather than individualism which is the hallmark of the capitalist approach'. The eagerness of black people to communicate is evident in Africans:

love for song and rhythm. Music in the African culture features in all occasions, stories. When we go to work, we share the burden and pleasures of the work we are doing through music (1987: 42).

In African society, all songs are group songs, and 'girls and boys never played any games without using music and rhythm as its basis'.

The African attitude to property had the village community as its basis: neighbours were invited to work on plots and this 'service was returned in kind and no remuneration was ever given'. In traditional African society, because of community, 'poverty was a foreign concept'.

This ontology to African culture has a certain romanticism and nostalgia, but equally, having started from this standpoint and developing the points of continuity in culture, he feels able to develop a critique of black society which runs in many ways counter to this depiction.

The dynamism of black culture is its counter-assertion of values against the domination of whites. Biko argues that African culture had been reduced to barbarism by a white history which 'distorted, disfigured and destroyed' the African past. The new and modern African culture is

a culture of defiance, self-reliance and group pride and solidarity. It is a culture that emerges from a situation of common experience of oppression (1987: 46)

Throughout his discourse, Biko develops the idea of an 'African personality' which relies on a concept of *umuntu*, rather than power to solve the problems of life. In Biko's writings culture is seen as a way of life, and the cultural politics of assertion and defiance a way of defending and extending the African way of life.

The development of an authentic African history is seen as a central task of the black consciousness grouping. The problem for an independent authentic history and culture, as Biko recognises, is that culture evolves in circumstances of domination and subjection. Biko sees that the culture of the majority group 'must ultimately determine the broad direction taken by the joint culture of that society'. However, it only prevails in the long term as 'cultures affect each other ... like lions and you cannot escape rubbing against someone else's culture'. Despite the essentialism of his analysis of black culture, Biko is highly conscious of the forms of exchange possible between different cultures. Though not with the clarity consistent with his later (1990:164) implies, identity in the colonial setting retains its complexity.

There is a tension in Biko's discussion about culture between the assertion of the traditional strength and value of African culture and the recognition of the hegemonic force of 'white culture'. Biko feels that the experience of acculturation has been 'extremely one-sided' and that 'African (black) culture' was of such power as to cause the African to 'lose a grip on [himself and his surroundings] and to slump into inferiority'. So, tied in with his view of the consumed integrity of African culture, is the annihilating possibilities of white culture.

### The Heart of 'white' Technology?

Contrary to being a mere assertion of the racial inferiority of the African, the affirmation of white hegemony is more than a concentration on racism. It is achieved in the conditions of modernity which in South Africa took the form of racial capitalism. In a complex but critical point which explores the establishment of white hegemony over blacks, Biko foregrounds technology

In his view, there is a complete dichotomy between the black world and the world of high technology:

We come from a background which is essentially peasant and worker, we do not have any form of *deeper* contact with a highly technological society, we are foreigners in that field

'Black technology', he argues, is 'completely inadequate' to the modern world. White culture, he argues, solves many problems in medicine:

you tend to look at it as a superior culture than yours ... and this incites in the black man a sense of self hatred (1987: 32)

Here the bifurcation of race and a race-essentialist view of society leads into hilly terrain.

I found Biko's complex integration of technology, race and culture unexpected and in need of explanation. Did Biko really understand technology as permeated by race and as the product of 'white civilisation'? Was he backward looking and hostile to modern technique? It appears that he—like radical thinkers in the United States and Europe of the time—saw a close connection between technology and domination. The matter went beyond a more limited conception of surveillance and control. Hahmias (1971: 81) links scientific and technical development to the concept of a progressive nationalisation of society. This led to social institutions being permeated by science and technology and being transformed in a manner which would often be judged as perverse and dehumanising. Marcuse, for instance, saw in rationality a 'specific form of unacknowledged political domination' which displaces the 'total social framework of interests'. Elsewhere he argues:

Not only the application of technology but technology itself is domination for nature and man—mechanical, scientific, calculated, colonizing, control. Technology is always a historical-social process; it is projected what a society and its ruling interests intend to do with man and things (Marcuse 1969: 273-5)

It is in this sense that Biko sees that technological advances are deepening the oppression and helplessness of black people.

Although not comprehensively developed, Biko presents a complex expression of the hegemony of 'white culture' through which domination is established both through a conscious and highly visible state repression (there are many firing attacks on the Security Branch) and the much more elastic and uncontrollable development of technology which leaves the black person vulnerable to a canopy of invisible controls. He uses this concept of

technology to explain changes taking place in society which are beyond (African) human control and direction.

While Africans stress the 'value of human relationships' and have a high regard for people, it is in the field of technology and economy that these values are most effectively challenged. The closest links are made between technology, domination and the modern material world, 'in a fervently idealist statement. Biko argues that African values must 'reduce the hold of technology over man . . . reduce the materialistic element that is slowly creeping into the African character' and restore to blacks the importance of 'human relations, the high regard for people and their property and for life in general' (1987:71).

Running parallel and yet counter to his eulogy of traditional African values and their continuity into modern Africa, are the bitter truths about black spiritual impoverishment of the African man who is questionably (in Biko's words) 'a defeated person'. Even black unity is precarious: at one point he recognises the 'mountainous inter-group suspicions amongst the Blacks'. Biko frankly points to the feelings of terror in the townships 'rape and murder are very very common aspects of our life'. The old are assaulted by youngsters and 'thieving, housebreaking, stabbing, murdering, adultery, etc.' are a daily experience, all of which 'is a bitter reminder of the kind of violence that is there in our society' (1987:107). And again he returns to technology: African values are not understood by those 'black slaves to technology and the machine'. African culture and technology stand dramatically opposed.

Even while he makes these frank recognitions he argues that these phenomena are linked ultimately to poverty and migratory labour.

No one wants to completely condone abhorrent behaviour, but it frequently is necessary for us to analyse situations a little bit deeper than the surface suggests (1987:74).

This pointer to a deeper analysis of the real conditions of mass poverty and the potential for collective resistance are unfortunately not taken further by Biko. Indeed, he judges it as unimportant. These atrocities will be taken up in discussion of the black working class.

### Black Man Seduced?

If nothing else is remembered of Black consciousness' political strategy, possibly its opposition to collaboration with apartheid institutions remains integral to its whole approach to politics was the resolute rejection of the

'toy telephone' institutions of apartheid. Its goal of a common organisation for African, Coloured and Indian (an achievement which in the experience of the ANC came very late) was only possible on the basis of an absolute rejection of the institutions encouraging the collaboration of the black intellectual with the various ethnic enterprises of apartheid.

In South Africa politics the sophisticated strategy of the Russian Marxists in the period 1905-1917 was never followed: of revolutionaries participating in elections and taking seats in ostensibly democratic bodies for the purpose of destroying illusions in progress from above, under the Chief Whip of the underground party. Neither have we had sufficiently strong revolutionary organisations with the theoretical strength to avoid all the pitfalls of the strategy. The justified suspicion of the common people of the institutions of divide and rule has challenged the very idea. Nevertheless, the life of Msizi Dube who returned from Robben Island and became a councillor and leader of mass resistance in Lamontville shows in our history the potential potency and complexity of such a strategy.

The general experience of the oppressed has been the farcical nature of these institutions and the venal cruddiness and corruption of those claiming to be their representatives. A strategy of boycott towards collaborative institutions has been the instinctive and traditional attitude of the common people, although not so certainly among their leaders.

Steve Biko and black consciousness came of age when the apartheid state was setting about consciously drawing the black middle class into the institutions of separate development. The black students of his time were faced by the challenge of being part of these institutions at one level or other or struggling for an independent existence. This was not a time of increased resistance. In Biko's view, the opposite was happening: 'the black world is beginning to be completely fragmented' as people 'are beginning to lack sectional politics' (1987:36). Of the various Bantustan leaders 'none of them see himself as fighting the battle for all black people' and, of course, none could genuinely claim to speak for the whole on the foundation of a crude compromise.

Biko put the question of collaboration at the core of a black strategy of resistance because the prospects for participating in the system were being exercised with 'cold relentlessness and also with selective bribery'. At times he feels enveloped by the power of the System on these around turn:

all of us who want to fight within the system are completely underestimating the influence the system has on us (1987:37).

The problem of collaboration ran deeply into the life decisions of black intel-

lectuals. It threatened to make a mockery of all pretensions to national resistance which had to turn on those participating in the politics of ambiguity in order to engage the enemy. In national struggles, the most available targets for armed resistance are the collaborators— in the war of Algerian independence, for instance, by far most deaths were those of vulnerable appendages of the regime like those trying to straddle the divide in those living among the colonial people. Since the black intellectual was recruited into remunerative collaboration with the colonial system, Black consciousness can be understood as setting the scene for the battle of the mind. Steve Biko's writings and black consciousness itself were marked by a fierce opposition to all forms of participation in apartheid institutions and the leaders who advocated such a strategy— in particular Chief Gatsha Buthelezi (the name Buthelezi then used).

Biko notes that separate development had divided Africans in 'several tribal cocoons' and increased 'inter-tribal ill-feeling'. Yet, the oppressed had to rally around the cause of their suffering—then 'black skin'—and ignore the 'bureaucracy of the promise' of Bantustans. Biko contends that there was 'a lot of confusion' about strategy towards the Bantustans, which, he argues, were the 'greatest single fraud ever invented by white politicians'.

His denunciation of the role of Bantustan leaders is fierce: they 'are subconsciously aiding and abetting in the total subjugation of the black people of this country'. He describes Buthelezi as the 'finest ambassador' of apartheid. Yet, these leaders were gaining esteem among the common people since any points of criticism of apartheid they made were being transmitted and amplified by the white press.

Such stinging denunciation may appear to remove all ambiguity and contradiction from the assessment of black collaboration. But this is not the case. Biko withdraws the dignity of 'blackness' from certain black collaborators:

I must state categorically that there is no such thing as a black politician. There are colourless white lackeys who live in a marginal world of unhappiness. They are extensions of the enemy into our ranks. (1987, 781)

These men are without humanity, without the redemption of colour, and exist outside the black world.

Yet, accompanying these denunciations, there is another strand of men who are black, recognised leaders, but involved in acts of collaboration:

We have such men in these bantustans who would make extremely fine leaders if they had not decided to throw in lot of their with the oppressors. (1987, 841)

And again:

These apartheid institutions are swallowing too many good people who would be useful in a meaningful programme of emancipation of the black people. (1987, 87)

It appears that the confident assertion of black unity is a facade. With the growth of the Bantustans, blacks were 'fast approaching an impasse'. Like at times appears to be offering an olive branch to certain Bantustan leaders on the basis of an unstated and undefined alternative.

But the hammer blows of collaboration continued to strike against the resistance especially after Soweto. The most brutal dilemma for the black consciousness leader arose in the person of Chief Gatsha Buthelezi:

For me as a black person it is extremely painful to see a man who could easily have been my leader being so misused by the cruel and exploitative white world. (1987, 86)

In these phrases, Biko expresses many of the contradictions in his analysis. Buthelezi is sharply attacked for his collaboration but is presented as not possessing individual will or ability to resist misuse by whites. The white is active, the black passive, and somehow not responsible for his actions.

The final danger for the national struggle is that 'we cannot have our struggle being tribalised'. Simultaneously, however, the question arose as to what to do about those black leaders fighting for higher salaries and more land for themselves: those leaders who were taking a political direction inevitably undermining, if not destroying, the possibility of an organic black unity. Somewhat surprisingly rather than proposing an all-out resistance, Biko argues for *pressure* on 'bantustan leaders to pull out of their political cul-de-sac'.

In an open-ended but somewhat cloudy conception Biko predicts

that a time will come when these struggle bodies will agree not only in terms of money but also in terms of the credibility of the struggle that Nationalists are trying to sell. (1987, 82)

Is he meaning that the Bantustans could become a platform for change despite the intentions of the regime or that they would be such catastrophic failures that the whole enterprise would be exposed? Biko is suggestive but unprecise.

### Agency and Ideology: Black Intellectuals and the Masses

The interrogation of collaboration sharply raises the question of the measure of social force which has the capacity and which is needed to end the crime

of apartheid against black people. The problem is that Biko recognises that the collaborators have certain support (which he argues is the result of press exposure) while the black intellectual remains isolated. The question is not fully addressed in the book even though the threads of answers can be pulled together from the text. Black consciousness is defined as a form of spiritual and psychological liberation implicitly involving the regeneration of the black intellectual and the political organisation of black people to end political domination. Yet, paradoxically, social welfare and black economic projects seem to be the most immediate priorities.

At various points Biko identifies the black intellectual as plainly the 'leader of the nation'. While never explicitly discussing the question, he seems to see the self-conscious black intellectual as the main agency for change. Not unexpectedly, most of his writings deal with the strategies for the student movement. With the formation of SASO, 'students appear to be a power to be reckoned with in this country' and students could become central in the emancipation of their community as

the isolation of the black intellectuals from the rest of the black society is a disadvantage to the black people as a whole (1987: 18).

Later he talks unproblematically about 'the vanguard political movement'.

Nevertheless, the question is not fully explored. Biko was well aware of the interest of white intellectuals in the organisation of black workers as the fulcrum for resistance to apartheid and capitalism. But he shows an astonishingly casual attitude towards material questions: 'one should not waste time here dealing with manifestations of material want of the black people' (1987: 18). As he sees it, a vast literature already exists and he is concerned rather with spiritual poverty. Such insouciance leads to an *ex cathedra* *cul de sac*.

In a discussion of black impoverishment, Biko argues that cheap labour has helped to make South Africa what it is today and that it is 'very expensive to be poor' — i.e. that blacks had to pay more for paraffin, private doctors and for school books. Workers are reduced to labour crises. Biko quotes a worker saying: 'I do more work in order to live, I live in order to work'. But the answer he immediately proposes is 'the need for blacks to 'establish our own banks' a project also championed by Buthezi and many others. The institutions which were then being established curiously remain unmentioned.

Throughout his writing, there is the expression of opposition at a psychological level, the pleasure of youthful resistance and the sheer joy of defiance. Yet, even though the *volupté* of production is absent, this is tied up with a common understanding that 'blacks relate their poverty to their

blackness' and 'the poor people shall always be black people'. Clearly he sees one side of the equation: that wealth and race are linked.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the blacks should wish to tie themselves in a system that locks up the wealth of the country into the hands of a few (1987: 63).

But the problem of black social emancipation is a matter for the distant future. He approvingly quotes a statement by Rick Turner, the white radical, that 'any black government is likely to be socialist'.

Surprisingly, these conclusions do not lead to a positive understanding of the productive role of the black worker and the strategic power of the black producers. At times, Biko declares himself hostile to class theory — that black and white workers share common material interests and should unite. Undoubtedly, this is an important aspect of Marxist understanding. Moreover, even though labour history has retrieved the points of class unity between black and white, the main emphasis of class theory has been to develop the productive and political role of the black worker. This, however, Biko presents as just another argument for racial integration at another level of society: class, he argues, is a 'red herring'. The white liberals (who he incorrectly states share the same view as the Marxists) 'tell us that the situation is a class struggle rather than a racial one'. The liberals of the Institute of Race Relations of upper Houghton, of big business and the universities would certainly be surprised at this equation. To the contrary. Liberalism as the liberal Charles Simkins (1986: 4) acknowledges, 'is a first-line defence of a capitalist system marked by great inequality'. In building an ideal-type of racial polarisation, Biko does not see the distinction between liberalism and Marxism — which also means that he cannot anticipate the fruitful, if not entirely equal, relationship which sprung up at the time of his writings between white intellectuals influenced by Marxism and black workers. Instead of turning back to the white community as Biko had advised them, those influenced by Marxism ambitiously looked for the motive force of the South African revolution in the latent powerful black working class. This, of course, carried its own contradictions, but it did finally lead to powerful and permanent mass organisations now led by black people while black banks have had a somewhat different future.

Biko's analysis of class relations under apartheid is based on a realistic perception of power relations. He states that blacks are 'the only new workers', but instead of exploring this productive relation, he asserts that no class solidarity is possible because white workers have an 'exaggerated reactionary attitude'.

Hence the greatest and black feeling is to be found amongst the very poor — whites



when the Class Theory calls upon to be with black workers in the struggle for emancipation (1987: 50).

There is, of course, a truth in this perception: the white worker has been first in line to lose privilege in a changing political order. He rejects class theory as the 'twisted logic' of liberal thinking because of such concern and black feeling among poor whites. But the other side of the question is that the white capitalist class, while at times liberal in sentiment, is galled on the exploitation of the black worker. There is a blindness to this side of the question. The white worker may not be an ally but she also does not determine the contours of the cheap labour system. It is the capitalist class which has been its beneficiary.

Is this misunderstanding of class integral to a nationalist understanding of social relations or is this an unfortunate misunderstanding? It is certainly a curious side of historical development, calling for some sociological explanation. The fact that black intellectuals have by and large ignored exploring the history, working conditions and political perspective of the black working class is certainly true. In superficial assessments, the middle-class black Rantustan leader may still have a saving grace, but the working class black policeman is pure loss!

There is a curious disjuncture between the flowering of class analysis—a peculiarly creative intellectual epoch among white intellectuals building common cause with African workers—and the theoretical explorations of black consciousness. Black consciousness never attempted to appropriate this line of theory and the proletarian resistance it espoused. The lines of departure were absolute, and the theoretical gulf very broad.

This misunderstanding had, of course, tragic consequences for the practice of radical black nationalism. This emerged not so much because of the social gulf between the rising black middle class and working class, but because of the overall dynamics of resistance in which for a historic period (from 1973 and beyond), the black workers have constituted the primary social force against apartheid. The militant school youth of the black working class families became an advanced detachment largely on their own.

It is also curious that despite the call to action in relation to history, few adherents to black consciousness have taken up a serious attitude towards the discipline in comparison with the writings of the Unity Movement, which at times have been very influential. See Dora Taylor's *The Role of the Missionary in Colonialism* (Maple: 1986). Beyond a demand to recognise black leaders as heroes and a certain necessary revision of racist historiography, not much more is said. Moreover, nationalist historiography often has an ambiguous attitude towards Christianity and missionaries. An intellectual or vocational void still exists between the protagonists of a radical history and the African historian.

Are we trapped in the continuum of the sociology of knowledge?

These questions remain after putting down the book. We have to recollect that Steve Biko was murdered at the age of 31 when the deeper outlines of the meaning of class politics were not yet clear. Biko tested out his ideas against the common understanding of the people and at times honestly reflects self-doubt: 'I thought for a moment I do not understand black society'. Biko was a master of political debate, often responding to the cut and thrust of argument with new formulations. He had a deep insight into the nature of the Rantustan politics of the Transkei, for example, which unfortunately never seems to have been written up—and other diverse interests. In 1973, just after he was banned, he asked me to gather clippings and other information on the conditions of farm and rural workers. His interests were diverse although directed more to potential rural areas.

In the end, the reader gains the outline of a whole argument, a holistic approach to white oppression rather than a single desperate cry of rage. Biko's massive intellectual radicalism and political vision is shown in understanding that South Africa was ripe for revolution but he stood firmly against white hatred which 'leads to precipitate and shot-gun methods which may be disastrous for black and white alike'. Yet, the outlines of a strategy for power are not drawn beyond an apparent strategy of the slow accumulation of black institutions created around a common black identity.

A final audit of the achievements of black consciousness still has to be undertaken. For the better part, the black university student movement gave ground to the steeled working class township youth which carried the initiative as comrades from 1976 and beyond. While at times very influential in its ideas and in setting the language of black politics, black consciousness has also to be judged by its permanence in organisational form and its 'graduates'. Among the latter there are Cyril Ramaphosa and Zwelakhe Sisulu but also Ben Ntshane, one of the founders of SASO and someone who fairly quickly moved from the SASO policy of non-participation in Rantustan politics to being leader of Inkatha. Although only a small minority of its past adherents still espouse its basic tenets, its latent opposition to present compromises endures. Even though Biko's criticism of Aimé Césaire for expressing a desire to show magnanimity in victory may be a yardstick, his attitude towards the current dispensation can only be guessed at.

Biko and his tradition are not the inheritors of the present, nor the architects of the present dispensation. Yet, they were integral to the resistance which precipitated the settlement. Identities were constructed in the 1960s and 1970s, mainly in terms of difference. Yet, paradoxically, this discourse marked the beginning of a long period of erasing antagonisms in South Africa, a point developed in Landa (1990: 140). Today the language of politics is very different and identities are being reconstructed in discourses



of reconciliation and the appropriation of white symbols (such as the Springbok) in frank distinction from the sharp edge of difference. It appears that those attending the liberal seaparties, the white progressive taking to the podium and functions of those 'collaborators' who deplored the excesses of youth politics, are among the beneficiaries of the present.

The black consciousness playwright Maisha Maponya has stated (in the *Idiot and Gossip* from 26 July-2 August 1995):

Once I feared that 'revolution' was the only way to solve our problems, now a negotiated settlement is a reality. I am still asking, though, to whose expense that settlement was reached.

That question will return in the future and prompt a variety of answers, although I fear none to the satisfaction of the questioner.

## References

- Campbell, Catherine 1989. *Township Families and Social Change: Towards a Working Conceptualisation of the Family for Township Research*. Unpublished Masters thesis, University of Natal, Durban.
- Fischer, Jürgen 1971. Technology and Science as 'Ideology'. In: *Towards a Rational Society*. London: Heinemann.
- Ignatiev, Ernest 1993. *New Regime: on the Revolution of our Time*. London: Verso.
- Mason, Nodjho (Dora Taylor) 1986. The Role of the Missions in Colonial (Camdenwood) APDINA.
- Marcuse, Herbert 1968a. *One Dimensional Man*. London: Sphere.
- Marcuse, Herbert 1968b. *Negative Dialectics in Critical Theory*. London: Allen Lane, Penguin Press.
- Makhe, Shula 1986. *The Ambiguities of Dependence in South African Class Nationalism, and the State in Twentieth Century Natal*. Johannesburg: Raven Press.
- Said, Edward 1993. *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Chatto & Windus.
- Skuku, Charles 1986. *Reconstructing South African Ethnicism*. Johannesburg: SAKR.
- Turok, Ben 1974. *Strategic Problems in South Africa's Liberation Struggle*. Canada: LSSE.

# Book Reviews

## The Tin Shack Bushmen of Kaggga Kamma

*In the Tradition of the Forefathers: Bushman Traditions at Kaggga Kamma. The Politics and History of a Performative Identity*, by Hylton White. Cape Town: UCT Press, 1995. 60 pp. ISBN 0 79521 5139

Reviewed by Helma van Vuuren  
Department of Afrikaans and Nederlands  
University of Port Elizabeth

I went hunting today and I brought back a can of pickled fish.  
This is the white man's world now. There's no more place for  
Bushman (White 1995:43).

At the privately owned Kaggga Kamma Nature Reserve near Citrusdal in the Cedar Berg live twenty-three Bushmen, originally from the Kalahari. These people are all patrilineal kin of the leader David Kruper. When tourists are brought there, the group dresses in traditional garb and get involved in traditional activities such as bow- and head-making. Sometimes they pose for adverts or movie-cameras. If they are lucky, they are paid. Close-by there is even a cave with Bushmen paintings. When the tourists have taken their photographs and departed, Kruper's people return to the other side of the hill, to their plastic and canvas huts and don their clothes. The 'play-acting' has been going on since January 1991. In this manner they earn their keep, the right to stay on the reserve and to sell their beads and beaded-articles at the tourist shop.

Hylton White is a post-graduate American anthropology student who spent February 1992 with the group and then produced this monograph based on his fieldwork. *In the Tradition of the Forefathers* addresses issues

important to all South Africans concerned with identity and representation in our multicultural society.

White poses the question of 'what it is that makes Bushmen such a concept of representation?' He sees the answer in Western modernity's view of these people as 'the ultimate cultural and evolutionary "Others"' (1995: 2). The myth of what White terms the 'Great Bushman Debate' holds that these hunter-gatherers lived a harmonious and isolated life based on collective values, untouched by conflict or 'the materialist individualism of the late modern world' (1995: 3). This myth of authenticity of the 'pure Bushman' has long been debunked by historians (Whitely 1971) and anthropologists such as Wilmsen (1989) who pointed out that Les was a utopian vision which did not hold true for the conflict-ridden reality and the inevitable evolution of most human communities. One of White's aims in his study has been to relocate the 'increasingly introspective and reflexive discussion of Western representation' (1995: 5) in the reality of the flesh-and-blood people living at Kagga Kamma (and by implication one of the other remaining groups – the inhabitants of the tented at Schmidtsdrift).

The Kagga Kamma venture is seen within the framework of ethnic-tourist enterprises and the author claims rather glibly that:

commodifying essentialist images of 'authentic' indigenous African cultures to attract an international market to South Africa have long been a vital and profitable part of the local tourist industry (1995: 12, quoting Spiegel 1989 & 1994: e 11).

This statement is debatable – apart from the recent venture at Shokaland in KwaZulu-Natal and this Kagga Kamma 'tourist attraction' which started in 1991, there is little evidence of ethnic tourist enterprises and if there are, they are far from 'profitable' – with the exception perhaps of Shokaland. The contrary rather holds – the lamentable state in which the Bushmen rock art sites all over South Africa are in, was one of the central topics at the first conference on representation of the 'Bushman People of Southern Africa' (Wits university 4–7 August 1994). Very little money is spent on the upkeep of these sites and as soon as a site is marked or signposted, it opens up to vandalism, with the result that the discovery of new sites is not disclosed anymore.

White's recording of these #Kagga Kamma Bushmen's definition of their own identity (in juxtaposition to other groups) is valuable in spite of the occasional blind spot. In one instance David Krupar defines a Bushman thus:

A Bushman's knowledge is in the wild, to make Les living out of the wild. To live like a Bushman, from oldfashions and plants. I want to live like that, from Kamma

males, from genetics – numbers – and from roots that I use to grow maize. And with medicines from the wild – they work with me, because I believe in them. ... A Bushman is a man but an animal of nature and a Bushman has the status of a predator. A Bushman is Les same – just like a lion and the whole of nature (White 1995: 18: e 4).

The expression of the heartfelt wish of the speaker ('To live like a Bushman ... I want to live like that') to become like his object of admiration (the Bushman) suggests an irreconcilable rift between the self and the desired identity. One the one side stands David Krupar, a hybrid product of South African society, long divorced from a traditional lifestyle and on the other a well-defined identity – a desired 'Bushman-ness'. And although he and his group 'play-act' this identity, don a like evercosts for the tourist spectacle, the rift between hybrid self and 'Bushman-ness' is clearly illustrated in Krupar's words. The two artists they migrate between, Bushman cave and squatter shack, illustrate something of the alternative identities which the group adopts. To a certain extent they have also internalised the myth of the 'authentic' Bushman.

White points out how this group shows a sense of 'cultural empowerment' and insists that they are superior to 'Basters'.

The assertion of distinctiveness from Basters in this respect is based principally on documenting a 'legitimising' subtext of Bushmanising their heritage and thereby becoming Basher-Bushmanes (1995: 20).

White consciousness resorts to chauvinism and even aggression in the group against Sanna Drazien, Sanna wife of David Krupar, who has desired Bushman status'. But normally, these 'ethnic chauvinists' cannot speak the #Khomani language which 'they claim as their heritage' – they all speak a colloquial mixture of Afrikaans and Nani' (1995: 25). Their names also point to the strong linguistic link with Afrikaans: *Begorataam, Koppie-Oale, Sanna Batsheen, Fanie Koper, Sanna Drazien*. The only name reminiscent of Bushman origin is *Kamma*, the grandfather of David Kamma, 'who occupies a key symbolic position as the ancestor who passed the Bushman heritage on to present generations' (1995: 21). But even his name is given an Afrikaans ring by the addition of 'ou' (old) as he is always referred to as 'ou Makai'.

White suggests that there is a fictive identity with invented traditions and an 'imagined community' (for this last concept he quotes Anderson 1983). The reason why this fictive identity of 'Bushman-ness' is so coveted, lies in the group's history. After the Kabaleli (transvaal Peka) was demarcated in the 1930s, a professional hunter David Duan had a 'Bushman' designation in a march on parliament in Cape Town' (1995: 32). As a result of this

agitation some families were granted residence in the Kalahari Gensetok Park. Most adult people in Krüper's group were born here. But in the early 1970's they were all evicted by a new park administration and had to do casual labour as farmworkers. From 1987 to 1989 they gained 'white passports' when a Kuruana tour operator put on tourist shows at the known showgrounds with the Bushmen as main attraction (1997:32). After dispersing again, they reconnected once more in 1991 to resettle at Kaggga Kamma and to get another passport arrangement (1997:33).

While the interesting experience of hardship and loss, the Bushmen's re-assertion of themselves as distinct native peoples—and their reaction that they are 'the distinct from Dinka's (sic)'—makes a salutary attempt, on their own position, to make them as undistorted subjects of the global Bushman image that has generated pitiful sympathy and its benefits (1997:37).

Their determined cultivation of the 'authentic' Bushman identity is thus a result of economic pressure: play-acting the roles designated by white patrons has become associated with survival and survival an easier livelihood.

In the final chapter entitled 'Kaggga Kamma: A Situation of identity', White identifies two possible ways of looking at the Kaggga Kamma situation: either as 'a fake that is generated by pure material interests' or 'as the site at which longer-term processes of construction and boundary formation currently operate' (1997:38), but he rejects the first perspective in favour of the second, 'especially considering the group's own psychological connections to fit the traditional identity of "Bushman-ness"'.

Then follows the most shocking part of this monograph: the details of the 'contract' between Krüper's people and the owners of this ethnotourism project. White describes the squalid camp conditions they live in: no shade but without any protection against the elements, the lack of medical care (with alcoholism present), the lack of education or recreational facilities, a herd of monkeys provided as food (and) and their reliance on the farm store where

cash is generally withheld by the manager, but even when there is no cash ... [they] have to barter goods ... [and] tend to ... [the] Bushmen only wish to live according to their traditional way [and] they should have no desire for either cash or consumer goods' (1997:40).

There is no specified talk of a trust fund for the group, but nothing definite in his writing seems White concludes that these Bushmen find 'occupy a vulnerable and neglected position within the century', even though it is a cultural survival initiative (1997:50).

This study of hardship life at Kaggga Kamma is thought provoking. It

comes as a timely reminder especially to literary critics and researchers focusing increasingly on the oral traditions of these earliest inhabitants of southern Africa, of the question of advocacy. We use cliché phrases—for example, such as 'recovering our lost heritage' or talk of 'reconstructing voices from the past' with reference to the extinct Xam group's oral tradition (which Beck and Lloyd, 1971 and later G.K. von Wiedtgh focused on). It is all too easy to romanticise these 'little people' or 'harmless people' as symbolising the original South African presence. But are we perhaps merely recolonising exotic material into our defined white canon with the aim of revitalising it? The politically powerless people of Kaggga Kamma, Nyae-Nyae and the community living in tents at Schmidtsdrift act as shocking reminders of other pressures and issues than the merely aesthetic and literary.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Fiction, History and Nation

*Fiction, History and Nation in South Africa*

by Annalisa Oboe

Venezia: Supernova, 1994, 217 pp.

Supernova Edizioni, C.P. 58, Bialto, 40100 Venezia, Italia.

Reviewed by Jean-Philippe Wade

CSSAFL

University of Durban Westville

After recently re-reading a disastorously inaccurate critical study of the novels of J.M. Coetzee by an American scholar, Susan VanZanten Gallagher, *The Story of South Africa: J.M. Coetzee's Fiction in Context* (Harvard 1991), I have become wary of foreign scholars writing desultorily into South African literature. However, Annalisa Oboe, a researcher in the Department of English and German Languages and Literatures at the University of Padova in Italy, has written a fascinating and scholarly book which is sensitive both to the specificity of our national space and to the research produced by South African literary critics.

*Fiction, History and Nation in South Africa* focuses on the South African historical novel in English, from its first appearance in 1990. While

using a great many novels to illustrate her arguments, these are considered to be 'representative' in order to offer a comprehensive panorama of the *fictions* which centres on the problem of historical myth-making and nation-building.<sup>1</sup>

In her examination of these discourses of national 'foundational fictions' in the South African historical novel, Obbe has scrupulously engaged with recent revisionist analyses both of historiography (Hayden White, Bartlett, Foucault, etc.) and nationalism (Hobsbawm, Benedict Anderson, Gellner, Homi Bhabha, etc.) The contentious nineteenth century opposition between history and fiction is crumbling before semantic and discursive crises, while nationalist discourse is now seen not as some truthful representation of a given essence, but as a political-ideological 'invention' given to consolidating myth-making. Obbe is thus convincingly able to reveal the inverted logic of much of this writing (here of Sarah Gerda Millar):

The present, when it wants to find its 'origin' in the ancient border experience, in fact 'inverts' that origin by writing its own contemporary racism into it, so that the cause can be made to carry the blame for the effect (1991: 178).

Thus recent scholarship enables Obbe to perceive historical novels (the prototype here is the novels of Sir Walter Scott) as nation-building fictions which turn to history to 'supply a basis for communal identification and cohesion'. Given her awareness of the limits and silences of nationalist discourses, Obbe's analyses—indebted to post-colonial theory—favour those literary voices which speak of intercultural hybridity rather than exclusive and ethnic solidarities.

Recognising along with Hayden White that literary and historical meaning is 'dependent upon 'implication'', Obbe devotes most of her study to a nomenclatured 'typology of the recurrent plots of South African historical fiction', which she divides into 'Border', 'Settlement', 'War', and 'Crossroads' stories.

The 'Border' novels are those which, in that individual confrontation with the fluid ambiguity of the frontier, either reinforce white colonial identity (Stuart Cloete, Haggard's *Moola*, Millar's *King of the Basterds*), progressively deconstruct it (J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*), or turn it into an occasion for cross-cultural hybridity (Anthony Delius' *Border*, Stephen Gray's *John Ross*). The 'Settlement' novels deal with the 1820 Settlers and the Great Trek, redefining Boer, British or white 'South African' national identities by locating 'in the communal past the birth of the future nation'. The 'War' novel defines the collective inside against the outside, instills internal solidarity, and determines the supremacy of the community over the

individual', and, in a country so remarkably prone to civil conflict, these foundational narratives tend to encourage ethnic separatism. Obbe's chapter on 'Crossroads' historical novels is particularly valuable, dealing intelligently with Bessie Head's *A Bechamled Crossroad* and Sol Plaatje's *Mithab* (her lengthy analysis of *Mithab* is the deserved centre-piece of her book)—both deliberately anti-colonial re-writings of South African history. Against the grain of so much white writing, both these books—themselves hybrid in form—emphasise syncretic moments of convergence and exchange between tribe and tribe, race and race.<sup>2</sup>

Obbe then identifies three important *genres* which interact with or subvert these various novel-types and which are central to the fabrication of national discourses: those of the farm, romantic couples, and of adoption. The pastoral narratives of the 1900s-1940s, 'posit[ing] the birth of the idea of the nation in the disclosures of farm life', for example rooting Afrikaners in possessed soil to construct an ethnic and divisive identity. Obbe interestingly argues that romance love in historical fiction 'make[s] the motivation for literary/historical/national projects' which is 'essential to the wish-fulfillment dimension of foundational fictions'. This 'political erotica' can be used to unite the white cultures of Boer and Briton, the family becoming a microcosm of the larger nation. She further points out that the notion of monogamous love 'with its anti-traditional "civilised" claims' becomes, in the dissident writings of Peter Abraham, Bessie Head and Sol Plaatje, the very model for a progressive nationalism, a new kind of man and woman endowed with all the qualities necessary to give birth to a solid black nation'. Finally, Obbe draws helpful attention to the motif of 'adoption' as a way of forging inter-ethnic national links on the grounds of choice rather than biology. If in novels by Haggard and Francis Brett Young it is used to unite Boer and Briton, it is also used 'subversively', most famously in Stephen Gray's *John Ross*, to enact intercultural communication with the erstwhile Black other.

In a study of the *historical* novel, Obbe could perhaps have devoted more intellectual energy precisely to those shifting 'historical' contexts in which these narratives were both produced and received. While not strikingly original in her detailed analyses, Obbe is nevertheless an accomplished synthesizer of the primary research of others, and has made a significant contribution to the study of the South African historical novel. Her comprehensive bibliography will be of value to students. We must also acknowledge yet another success from the Supersova publishing house in Venice, Italy.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Popularising History

*The Sun Turned Black: Isandlwana and  
Rorke's Drift 1879*

by Ian Knight

Penguin, William Ware and Publications, 1992, 236pp

ISBN 0 7459 062 7

Reviewed by Stephen Lush

Department of History

University of Durham, UK

One hundred and sixteen years later, the Anglo-Zulu War continues to attract enormous attention. Recent press reports have suggested that its tourist potential is set to expand<sup>1</sup> and plans were being prepared to celebrate its centenary.<sup>2</sup>

It is this which provides a ready 'popular' market for publications about the War and since the later 1980s, Ian Knight has contributed a considerable number of books to this particular market.<sup>3</sup> His most recent publication *The Sun Turned Black: Isandlwana and Rorke's Drift—1879* is a reworking of his *Zulu: Isandlwana and Rorke's Drift—22-23 January 1879*, which appeared in 1992. This edition was in a folio format with numerous illustrations, an aspect which characterizes Knight's books. *The Sun Turned Black* does not have these features, and is presumably an attempt to make the book more affordable.

As is clear from the title, the book concerns the battles of Isandlwana and Rorke's Drift, which occurred between 22 and 23 January 1879. In this sense *The Sun Turned Black* is firmly placed within the 'popular' framework of understanding the War.

'Popular' literature about the War, has its origins in the 1960s when the War of 1879 was once more brought to the fore by the film *Zulu* (1964) and Donald Morris' *The Washing of the Spears* (1965). Ian Knight readily

admits that *Zulu* ignited his fascination in Zulu history<sup>4</sup>, while Morris' book spawned a series of clones<sup>5</sup> and is still being published. These clones were mainly written during the 1970s and early 1980s and represent little more than market-orientated descriptions of the heroics of British units. The Zulus, if they were fortunate enough to be included in the discussions of the various battles, appeared as 'primitive' and frighteningly 'savage'. Zulu Warfare was simply a series of bloody encounters.<sup>6</sup>

In addition this paradigm's main focus on the War was not the entire campaign but more specifically it emphasised the battles of Isandlwana and Rorke's Drift. Morris for example was so obsessed with the Isandlwana battlefield that he insisted on being sent there as an election monitor during the national elections in April 1994.<sup>7</sup>

The two battles have achieved almost a ritual status, Isandlwana was a 'great and glorious tragedy' where several hundred British troops were eliminated, while at Rorke's Drift 'a handful of men' defended themselves in a primeval struggle with hundreds of Zulu 'warriors'. It is this 'popular' literature of the 1970s and 1980s which delved deeply into this mythology discourse and created a series of images about the War which were sensationalized, if not fictionalized.

Features of this discourse can be found in *The Sun Turned Black*. Knight uses the testimony of British officers and men, who for various reasons looked upon Isandlwana with superstition (e.g. p. 2 and p. 45), to create a sense of the supernatural. The battle field therefore receives a pejorative connotation. The author seems to overlook the possibility that the benefit of hindsight has given these comments a more sinister interpretation, than that which might originally have been intended.

Furthermore the title of this book is a reference to the eclipse of the sun which occurred during the battle. Mentioned by Knight on several occasions (e.g. p. 72 and p. 76), this aspect is also seen to suggest an unusual quality about the 22 January 1879.

*The Sun Turned Black* would also be attractive to those interested in British heroics as well as regimental histories and the careers of individual officers and men, for the book has much on all three topics.

<sup>1</sup> See the Preface.

<sup>2</sup> Examples are *The Zulu War* by D Clarimer (1973), *The Zulu War* by A Lloyd and *Rorke's Drift: A Victorian Epic* by M Green (1975).

<sup>3</sup> See *The Zulu War - A Pictorial History* by M Bantony (1984-88) and published by Bok Bokas International and Dunsford Press, Dorset.

<sup>4</sup> 'At Isandlwana for the "most important day"', see *The Sunday Mirror* 15 May 1994.

<sup>1</sup> See for example 'On the threshold of a dream' in *The Sunday Express* 31 July 1994.

<sup>2</sup> See for example 'Strategic plan for Zululand battle has big potential' in *The Sunday Express* 24 July 1994.

<sup>3</sup> These include *Burns Men's Blood* (1981), *Nothing Remains but to Fight* (1993) and *The Zulu War Then and Now* (1993).

Nevertheless, this does not mean that the book is the same as the Morris clones mentioned above. On the contrary, Knight's books are well-researched with attention to detail and accuracy. Most significantly, he has taken heed of the academic research on the War which has been produced in the last two decades, as well as Zulu oral testimony.<sup>8</sup> One of the leading contributors to the former is John Laband of the University of Natal, who has produced a number of works aimed at investigating the Zulu perspective of the War.<sup>9</sup> It was such research which indicated the differences between 'academic' and 'popular' views of the War, going beyond the mere adventures of British soldiers to more substantial analyses of the War as a whole.

Drawing upon his research and Zulu testimony, Knight has produced a sound discussion of the two battles. The eleven chapters provide much information about the individual's and mass, both British and Zulu, involved in them and the physical terrain of the two battlefields. The Colonial and irregular wars for example have often been ignored but Knight discusses them at some length (see Ch. 1). *The Sun Turned Black* also addresses areas of controversy, such as the role of Sanford in the Battle of Isandlwana (see Ch. 5) and makes it clear that the recreation of the events of a battle is distorted by fragmentary evidence and faulty testimony (p. 197). The book's maps are clear and concise and are helpful in following the events of the battle, while the text is uncomplicated. Accordingly the publication should be accessible to both the enthusiast and the general reader.

On the one hand, the book's strength is the contribution it makes in explaining British activities during the two battles. It is aimed at a 'popular' market, a point emphasised by its focus on Isandlwana and Rorke's Drift. On the other, *The Sun Turned Black* does not contain a comprehensive understanding of the Zulu in the War, something which, at this time, seems to be the sole realm of the academic historian.

\*\*\*\*\*

<sup>8</sup> These are *inter alia* extracts from *A Zulu King Speaks* by C. de B. Webb and J. Wright (eds.) (1978) and *Through the Zulu Country, to Butterfields and the People* by B. Mfema (1982).

<sup>9</sup> See for example *Fight On in the Open* by J. Laband (1985) and *Kingdom in Crisis* also by J. Laband (1992).

## A Passing Miracle?

*Miracle in Natal: Revolution by Rifle-Box,*

by Alan Tharold

Cambridge, Puckly Pea Press,<sup>10</sup> 1996, 50 pp.

Puckly Pea Pamphlet No 2

ISSN 1461-2961

Reviewed by David Herman

Department of Sociology

University of Durban Westville

For most South Africans participating in the first democratic election, was sufficient to itself, but for some the line drawn in political power, in psychology and indeed was the time for recording the subtle moods, fervent hopes and confusions of the occasion. This pamphlet, a collection of interviews and personal reflections, is the product of a novel intervention by anthropologists and students participating in the events and recording their own feelings and the views of others in Natal.

The title attempts to capture the possibilities of the conjuncture of a province in a stage of civil war attempting at the last moment's way out of inescapable violence as part of a watershed national election. Certainly the lack of violence on the election days was a surprise but unfortunately the miracle was a post-modern one; a very temporary respite from violence and the engineering of an outcome which had little to do with the actual counting of votes. Unfortunately also there was no revolution, social, political, economic, or of the spirit in Natal but rather the further consolidation of an uncontrolled and destructive political leadership incapable of taking the region back from the abyss.

But let us leave the quibbles about the title and turn to the content of the exercise.

<sup>10</sup> The Puckly Pea Press is a non-profit making organization that was set up in Cambridge to publish anthropological material that moves beyond the confines of the discipline. The series of Puckly Pea Pamphlets aim to be provocative, entertaining, pocket-sized and cheap. They include contributions from leading figures in anthropology such as Marilyn Strathern and Marshall Sahlins. *Miracle in Natal* is available in South Africa from Ashraf (JND) and the Department of Anthropology at UDW at the price of R 15.00 each.

Elections are the measurement of opinions: of certain attitudes based on the bedrock of historical experience, or of whims and fancies of the moment. This pamphlet marvellously presents the many nuances of mood by the capture of the precise statement. The landmark quality of the election is marked by African participants:

... deep down I *know* that one would be the end of our misery, but I know it will never take away the hate that has deep down in me ...

When I heard that the black man has won I thought there will be a war like Blood River ...

To me the election day was just like a judgment day because only an individual knew the truth. I also felt that it was up to each individual to liberate or betray the nation.

Those more used to the cynicism and boredom of elections in established democratic countries would find it hard to understand the psychology of this moment:

My heart just started to shiver and as if I had done something wrong and my head were throbbing ... I felt the collapsing ... and I was perspiring a lot ...

In a pre-election atmosphere of rising tension there are testimonies of chiefs instructing their subjects to vote for the IFP. Elsewhere there is a record of the apprehensions of the simple act of voting: some thought there would be a process of voting for three days, others feared:

We were told of us putting a cross next to the party of your choice but it was not clear to us.

Participation expresses great care in describing the party voted for: 'I thought of an old man who once came to our area ...'

In a race vignette the complex attitude of an African servant towards an Indian employer supporting the ANC is captured; going together to the voting station 'made me feel very happy because we are going together and united for one party which we support'. There is the moment of play and the African woman singing 'Nkosi Sikelel' i-Afrika'.

The authenticity of testimony and the complicated relationship of political opinion to voting is shown in the case of a woman whose son was hacked and left for dead by IFP supporters, wanting to contribute her vote to 'be a hanger-on's nose for apartheid' and voting nationally for the ANC, but also concerned it would be 'unfair to totally ignore Buthelesi and whatever he had done' and voting regionally for IFP. Another participant expresses

strong fear and distrust of police but also the same feelings towards Indian children who could necklace somebody they don't like.

On the one hand, there is the simple experience of voters who could say 'I had survived', at another there is the absurdities of enumeration which counts for nothing. Eric Plaine records the election results being announced while at the massive Expo 'we were barely a third of the way through our count'.

There were the multiple confusions of procedures and spoils votes, the starting and stopping of counting, nervous breakdowns among leading officials and mix-ups of all kinds. The whole process was governed by snoopies conducting the election like a business transaction while the chaos multiplied: young men disconnecting the essential fax machines, the impossibility of reconciling ballot and statements of ballots used, scrutineers dismissed and then officials asked to keep counting stations open. All then part of the reflection of fact and feeling by anthropologists trying to be the dispassionate enumerators of the marks of hundreds of thousands. There is nothing to convince the sceptic that there was not massive fraud and that there was a juggling of numbers to arrive at a convenient result.

At the end there is a simple statement:

I still do not understand why in this province of Natal we experienced so many problems that other regions did not have.

This is precisely the question which is still occupying those concerned for peace hemmed by a miracle unfortunately temporary and fit the past.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Constructing New Objects of Reading

*Stone no More*

by Jean Metelzerkamp

Durban: Gecko Books, 1995, 71 pp.

ISBN 1-875011-67-2

Rory Cooverden

Department of Communication Studies  
University of Durban-Westville

Jean Metelzerkamp's new collection of poems, *Stone no More*, evocatively criss-crosses and connects time and space, history and myth and experiences both personal and communal through its sprawling, weaving words and images. I particularly loved the epic sweep of people and places – from Aphrodite to John, from Princess Margaret to Adrienne Rich, from Sisyphus to Mandela, from The World Bank to Cato Manor to Taiwan – as she maps and remaps the world in telling configurations.

The image of weaving—threaded through Metelzerkamp's poetry and so appropriate to her purposes – is an important one in women's writing. Nancy Miller (1988:116)<sup>1</sup> distinguishes between post-structural appropriation of mythic stories about women weaving and the feminist reappropriation of the act: 'If we are to recover women's writing, Miller argues, we need to "reappropriate" the story of Arachne – to read it not in terms of a "web of indifference" but as the construction of a new object of reading: women's writing.'

Like Ingrid de Kok, Metelzerkamp speaks within the context of her class, her colour and her gender. Writing in this post-apartheid time in South Africa, her concern is not that of 'legitimacy', of 'voices' against the inequalities that persist, but that of the weaver with words and meanings, with 'structures of feeling' that cannot contrainvent adequately reflect that very struggle. Through her poetry, Metelzerkamp explores the interplay of power, writing and gender, and the challenges of 'weaving the feminine', when

inscribed in the very discourse she is questioning. In this she resonates with a kindred contemporary, who ruminates:

Finding a voice, searching for words / of sentences, say some thing, one thing, or  
no thing: fish like cometezooz, discard their forms, scribble the year out all  
habits of your writing and decide for yourself when you're free to express. Again,  
order(s). Shake syntax, smash the myth, and if you lose, shed on, search some  
new linguistic paths.<sup>2</sup>

Metelzerkamp's poetry, '... like painting – gaps between the words' is a challenge to readers looking for meaning and relevance and I have written the following response to her collection rather than 'tinkering with the patriarchal poem's traditional, linear "review"':

### Reading Jean Metelzerkamp's *Stone no More*

turning the words  
furrowed in spaces  
between grandmother and  
mother defying Athena  
as you weave yourself anew  
in the warp and weft of words  
I see you refracted in elusive images

music of blood and stone  
against the gram academia filling  
telling all nightfall  
dreams of heaven and sky are one  
you stretch a web with meaning  
you struggle to sever the web  
in subtextual bond swimming in streams  
totem poles surreal shards  
stopping you to silence

words dancing circling  
blood in the womb  
still the decadence of commodity  
in love and shopping malls  
stretching striving for air

<sup>1</sup> See her contribution to Ruth Salvaggio's *Enlightened Absence: Poststructuralist Configurations of the Feminine* and published by University of Illinois Press, Chicago.

<sup>2</sup> See Toshi T. Muthuk's *Woman, Nation, Voice: Writing Postcoloniality and Remembrance* and published by Indiana University Press, Bloomington, p. 3.



warrior's voice breathing dying freedom  
 above the voice of reason  
 to be more than the nitro-rails of tea  
 gestures but no heavy-rubbing thank you

self-reverent as I intrude the sating of words  
 stone no mine  
 but bread on the water  
 you, in me and I, in you  
 with the phantom child's lost calling  
 and the dark near from your bones  
 [let the dead lie  
 in between the lines]  
 in the soul of your words  
 rain and tempests break and you write the  
 goddess weaving the ancient song  
 in the valley of the hills

\*\*\*\*\*

## Academic Writing

*A course in academic writing*

by C.B. Peter

Edmont, Kansas: Zeph Chancery, 1994, pp. 279.

Zeph Chancery, P.O. Box 4385, Edmont, Kansas.

Johannes A. Smith

Department of Biblical Literature

University of Durham, Newcastle

Where the improvement of research and academic writing as well as the development of distinct stylistic skills are of the utmost importance in academia, the Rev. C.B. Peter has provided an excellent resource. Not only does this book contain a wealth of information, progressively covering areas such as a discussion on what academic writing is, how to plan one's research, how to formulate and use research theory and methodology, the forms of discourse (exposition and argumentation) in terms of which one

may cast one's writing, the actual writing and formulating of research and finally to publish one's material. Central is also a discussion on the developing of a distinct academic style. Here, important elements such as consciousness about readership, context, originality, credibility, value and clarity are discussed. One of the strengths of the book is its thorough discussion of the older notebibliography system and the more recent, and less cumbersome parenthetical reference/cited-in-text system which may be used for academic writing. Even though the exposition of these two systems are cast in a right/wrong conventional form, the author does emphasise that the most important element of academic writing is to be consistent in the format used.

Since the book thoroughly covers all areas important to most Hays students and prospective researchers in the know-how of all the facets of academic writing, it is highly recommended. It is a must for Haysians and will be extremely helpful to students preparing research papers and theses. The readability of the publication adds to its value.

Contributors must submit *one computer-generated and three double-spaced printed copies* of the manuscript. The computer-generated copy may be on double density floppy or stifle in Word Perfect 5.0, Word for Windows 6.0 or ASCII. If accepted for publication, the disk or stifle will be returned together with original off-print copies of the article. (Prospective contributors working in Word for Windows 6 may send an empty floppy or stifle to the editor who will supply an Alteration template with full instructions.)

Manuscripts should *only* be over 5000 words. However, longer articles may be considered for publication.

Attach a cover page to our manuscript containing the following information:  
 Author's full name, address + mail address, position, department, university,  
 institution, telephone/fax number, as well as a list of present publications.

Maps, diagrams and pictures must be presented in print ready form. Clear black and white photos (postcard size) may also be submitted.

Use language sparingly. In order to enhance the value of the interaction between words and text, we use annotations and not endnotes.

Authors may use their own membership numbers in the manuscript.

Except for bibliographical references, abbreviations must stand without explanation. Abbreviations (e.g., *in vitro*, *et al.*) – insertion of the full name is not necessary.

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 conventions. Plots (1994) signifies a journal article, and a reference to a particular page (1994: 134) signifies a page reference.

The full name or initials of authors as it appears on the source cited in item 4 of the reference section.

Review articles and book reviews must include the following information concerning the book reviewed: title, author, place of publication, publisher, and date of publication, number of pages and the ISBN number.

The format for the references section is as follows:

**Fanon, Frantz** 1986. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Markmann, Charles. Translated. London: Pluto Press.

