

SOUTH AFRICA: LITERATURE AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS DALL-LINEAL/THO-LINEAL-LON CROSS CLIETURAL POETICS



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# MARINE TERMINE THE MONEMENTS

in memoriam,

**Dennis Brutus** (1924-2009)

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# "ALL HAVE JOINED IN THE STRUGGLE": THE LITERATURE OF THE UNITED DEMOCRATIC FRONT IN SOUTH AFRICA!

Priya Narismulu

### Introduction

A literature is being born in the process of social crisis and political change. We should be able to say: we were here; and this is how we were (Gwala 71).

From 1652 the Southern-most portion of the African continent, eventually known as South Africa, was under various Dutch, British and settler colonial regimes. Racism was institutionalised by the National Party government through the policy of apartheid in 1948 to consolidate the long political and economic hijack of resources and power by the whites. Various resistance movements of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s were smashed and outlawed by the ruling minority.

In the early 1980s, despite decades of intensive structural repression, censorship, bannings, forced exiles and unremitting threats and harassment, hundreds of national, regional and community-based organizations mobilized to create the United Democratic Front. By working together these organisations attempted to overcome long and deeply entrenched historical and material divisions of class, race, gender, ethnicity, ideology, culture, language and location. Driven by the escalating levels of political repression they converged on the point that a mass opposition movement was necessary to challenge the ruling minority's narrow and brutal agenda, to generate an effective and focused struggle for state power, and to secure a democratic state. The literature produced by people involved in the broad movement offers insights into the values, character and energy of this remarkable instance of social mobilisation.

## Introduction to the United Democratic Front and the literature of the movement

How... can [oppressed] classes, groups and individuals... create and imagine another form of uniting amongst themselves, and relating to others? (Mattelart 17)

The United Democratic Front (UDF) was launched in Cape Town in August 1983. The organisation consisted of a loose alliance of about 600 community

organisations, trade unions, youth structures, students' societies, residents' associations, religious groups, political organisations, professional associations and groups that considered themselves part of organisations that had been banned. The rallying principle against apartheid was democracy, with Nelson Mandela as an icon of the popular struggle. The songs, drama, symbols, legends and alternative histories strengthened the spirits of people across the country as they participated in day-to-day and broader struggles that fuelled the insurrection.

The anthem that was heard at then end of virtually every UDF gathering was the well established and very popular "Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika" (God Bless Africa). Written in 1897 by Enoch Sontonga, and later extended by SEK Mqhayi who added seven more stanzas, this anthem has long been used by a broad spectrum of community and resistance organisations, including the ANC at the inaugural meeting in 1912 (Mutloatse 155). In the 1980s the anthem was heard across South Africa in a variety of contexts: meetings, rallies, marches, funerals, commemorations, the launch of trade unions, and the resolve of strikers and rent boycotters facing the security forces. Within and among UDF and other organisations the role of the anthem as a unifying force during clashes of strategy, perspective or ideology was also striking, soothing ruffled egos and feelings in a reminder of the larger context and vision that they shared. As the struggle intensified in the 1980s the performance of the song in UDF circles changed from the plagal, low-toned, melancholy hymn of suffering to a quick-paced, sonorous, and confident paean to the anticipated victory.

The patriarchal, middle class history of the song, and the similarity of part of the tune to the colonial anthem ("God save the Queen") did not seem to do much to undermine its acceptance among African nationalists, socialists, communists, feminists or secessionists. That the song also formed the basis of other liberation struggles (such as the struggle of Namibians against the colonizing apartheid state) as well as the national anthems of the independent neighbouring countries of Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Tanzania, served to strengthen its resonance for South Africans longing for freedom in the 1980s (Mutloatse 153-160).

The effectiveness of the UDF as a resistance movement may be gauged from its phenomenal growth. Despite the various states of emergency that were imposed by the PW Botha government to crack down on dissent, the UDF grew from about 600 affiliates at its launch to about 1000 affiliates in 1989. The effect of the mobilisation of ordinary people was captured in a half-serious, half-comic chant that was heard among the barricades of Athlone township, Cape Town, in 1985:

All the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, the grandmothers and the grandfathers, the dogs and the cats - they all have joined in the struggle (Hill and Harris 32).

Recognising that their strength lay in their numerical superiority, people from across the country defied the ruling logic of association to explore the possibilities of alliances across ideology, class, race and language. The impetus for fresh initiatives to deal with the inequitable power relations and for new forms of organising and organisational structures is addressed in James Matthews' poem "am i a fly entwined" (17), which construes unity as a source of oppositional power:

i am a tiger, a panther who has broken oppressive cages i shall stalk the streets find the friendship of my kind together we shall be a band of each and every colour gaining strength...

The words "my kind" echo and mock the chauvinism fostered by the ruling elites while repudiating these logics of association for more transformative values. By the 1980s there was a fair amount of agreement that to contest the power of the apartheid state with any chance of success required the broadest alliance of forces across political ideologies, provinces, classes, races, ethnic groups and languages.

Campbell has pointed out that struggles over issues such as wages, rent increases and fare hikes "pushed the masses beyond the differences which had dogged the PAC and the ANC for two decades" (Nyong'o 154). However, it needs to be recognised that before the UDF was proposed, a network of smaller Black Consciousness organisations had set up a National Forum to challenge the apartheid state. These organisations, along with other black and African nationalist organisations such as the Pan Africanist Congress, did not join the UDF when it was formed, largely on the grounds that important questions about race were being sidelined in the search for unity. While the organisations supporting the Freedom Charter (such as the ANC) conceptualised the issue through the liberal compromise of multi-racialism, these organisations had the more engaged response of non-racialism, from which the important construct of anti-racism is derived. First activists and later the liberation movement as

a whole came to adopt non-racialism as the preferred concept although the legacy of confusion still lingers (notably among minorities, including intellectuals, reluctant to surrender the scale of their privileges), and the challenge of equitable racial representation remains an intractable problem in spite of the efforts of activists in this period. Finally, this standoff between the liberation organisations is also interesting for it illustrates the fraternal and long-term sacrifices on which the UDF was built.

However, while the struggle increasingly took on a non-racial form, South Africans were not just fighting for non-racialism; the struggle was over the control of state power. This was what drove millions of South Africans to agree to work together despite long histories of segregation and differences in material conditions. The strength of the UDF's evolving principle of non-racialism lay in the way it deconstructed the basis of white power. This principle helped the UDF gain the support of some individuals and organisations from the more privileged minorities who contributed their skills and resources towards achieving a democratic state. An alliance with organised workers, through the largest trade union federation, came later.

In a society that inherited a strong indigenous oral tradition as well as the consequences of a raft of racist legislation and policy making aimed at underdeveloping the majority of people and excluding them from contention, the art form of poetry has had a significant role. Some of the most powerful expressions of the popular-democratic struggle are to be found in the medium of poetry, oral and written: "In the last decade... poetry has been marching in the front ranks of the mass struggles that have rolled through our land" (Cronin "Poetry" 19). The close links between community activism and creative expression in this period has been captured in a number of poems. The poem "To learn how to speak" was written by the activist and academic just quoted, Jeremy Cronin (58). The poem uses an extended metaphor of the South African landscape to articulate the need for a more engaged and integrated and effective lexicon. A philosopher by training, Cronin uses the infinitive forms of the verbs 'speak' and 'learn' to help South Africans recognise that this part of speech cannot achieve its full identity in its abstract (theoretical) form. A pronoun or proper noun (the subject, the reader/audience) is critical to the action of the verb, particularly if learning and open communication are to occur. Cronin invites the reader to select the conjugation appropriate to her/his reality.

To learn how to speak
With the voices of the land,
To parse the speech in its rivers,
To catch in the inarticulate grunt,
Stammer call, cry, babble, tongue's knot

A sense of the stoneness of these stones
From which all words are cut....
To write a poem with words like:
I'm telling you,
Stompie, stickfast, golovan,
Songololo, just boombang, just
To understand the least inflections,
To voice without swallowing
Syllables born in tin shacks, or catch
the 5.15 ikwata bust fife
Chwannisberg train, to reach
The low chant of the mine gang's
Mineral glow of our people's unbreakable resolve.

To learn how to speak With the voices of this land.

Celebrating the value and development of a South African lexicon the speaker is at pains to illustrate the intimate connections between culture, development and language. "To learn how to speak" in all our voices is posited both as a personal and a social project, as rendered in the conjugations I learn, we learn. The reader who responds to the cues to supply the pronouns participates in a process that aims at developing an active social and linguistic subject. Cronin, like other resistance writers, seized the space that literary discourse offered and challenged its boundaries and assumptions, recognising that while language is a medium of art, it has a more widespread function as a medium of communication.

Cronin's tactic for engaging the reader is similar to the approach used earlier by the poet-activist Wally Serote in, for example, his collection *Behold Mama*, *Flowers* (1978). As with these poems "To learn how to speak" straddles the chasm between high and popular forms, drawing syncretically from the lexicons of indigenous languages, urban patois and the white languages privileged by the apartheid state. In these ways both Matthews and Cronin, like Mafika Gwala and Wally Serote in the 1970s, engaged the discursive dimension of the resistance struggle, that is,

the point at which discourse becomes material power, and at which writers provide the cultural context, the language, the self-confidence, the condition of readiness for action in which the liberation struggle can take place (Watts 253).

Articulating a "criticism and transcendence of literary individualism"

(Vaughan 213), many poets and playwrights chose to forego the safety of literary distance and began to use voices that were recognisably their own as they worked to help develop the cultural and political agency of the popular resistance forces. That poets like Cronin, Matthews and Dikobe wa Mogale (like Serote in earlier times, and Brutus in still earlier times) wrote a number of poems while imprisoned for their political activities (including such ironic charges as terrorism) suggests the efficacy of the form in such an unlikely setting or the determination of the activists not to be silenced and to treat all eventualities as opportunities.

The need for the development of a powerful internal movement was related to the need to strengthen the resistance within the country and for a united national opposition to the constitutional amendments that were proposed as "reforms" by the PW Botha regime in 1984. The resistance galvanised around protests against the proposed tricameral system, which offered token political representation to Coloureds and Indians while excluding indigenous African people, who of course comprise the vast majority of the South African population despite the concerted attempts of the colonialism-apartheid regimes to undermine or diminish their claims on their rights.

The UDF-led boycotts of the 1984 constitutional reforms and "community" council elections were aimed at mobilising support and forcing the state and private sector to negotiate on a more progressive agenda for transformation. Resistance groups attempted to "isolate the state from all constituencies" and to "reject participation and co-operation with state-created institutions at all levels" (Zulu in Meer 17). The boycott action subverted the state's attempts to implement superficial and piecemeal reforms. As Campbell argued, the UDF's broad programme of opposition to apartheid led to a phase of militant, sustained and organised opposition to the Botha government (Nyong'o 154). Alongside its nationally co-ordinated campaign against the tricameral system, the UDF's strategies varied from petitions and peaceful defiance to open confrontation. This is captured in the poem "Semiotic Events" by Keith Gottschalk (Oliphant 463-4), an activist and academic. As in Cronin's metalingual poem there is an extended metaphor, this time of the populardemocratic struggle, in Gottschalk's allusions to the discursive challenges of organising against the apartheid bloc:

We mobilise the alphabet into strong syllables, crowded, chanting, fisted. We deploy iambics, always rising—we tense: transformative.

Such poems offer an indication of the extent to which the resistance strug-

gle was accompanied by a literature that invoked and anticipated a liberated society.

The apartheid state attempted to suppress extra-parliamentary opposition by declaring a state of emergency at the end of 1985, but the structure and organisations of the UDF proved to be very organised and creative. It was through the UDF that the influence of the banned African National Congress (ANC) grew dramatically (Baskin 88). Other banned organisations like the South African Communist Party also made a showing.

Central to the culture of the UDF was a commitment to grassroots, participatory democracy, and "[d]emocratic structures, mass participation and greater accountability were principles formulated in the day-to-day struggles" (Campbell in Nyong'o 153). The goals of the UDF are indicative of the popular-democratic ethos of the movement:

the right to decent housing, to fair rents, to decent services, to fair wages, to equality before the law, the right to equal education, to work, to decent working conditions, to strike, to freedom of movement, the right to democratic representation, freedom of association, freedom of expression and ultimately the right to life (Campbell in Nyong'o 154).

Social, political and economic justice was integral to this notion of democracy, together with the assumption of an inseparable link between national liberation and social emancipation. Given the level of participation of the popular masses "the question of whether the democracy of the UDF was ideologically sound from the formalist point of view paled as the concrete issues in the communities took precedence in the campaigns" (Campbell in Nyong'o 154).

### The popular-democratic

Democracy proved to be one of the most threatening ideas to the security of the regime, rather than the Communism or Marxism that the government had long vilified. Part of the political imaginary of the resistance movements, the term democracy refers to both an ideal state and an informing process, as in Amilcar Cabral's argument that the struggle for liberation "requires the exercise of democracy, criticism and self-criticism, growing participation by the people in running their own lives" (in Mattelart and Siegelaub 211).

Contrary to government propaganda that raved about the black peril, various activists affirmed indigenous values and conceptions of a free and equal soci-

ety. Jeremy Cronin wrote the English language poem "Motho ke motho ka batho babang (A person is a person because of other people)" (18), which challenges the state's history of criminalising and marginalising persons and organisations that opposed it. The title draws on a seSotho proverb that celebrates ubuntu (humanity) through the assertion that a person is a person because of other people. There are equivalents in several other South African languages, the isiZulu Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu, the isiXhosa Umtu nguntu nga banye, the northern Sotho Motho ke motho ka motho e mong, and the Setswana Motho ke motho ka motho yoy mogwe. These resonating expressions of communal wisdom predate and act as a counterpoint to the divisive culture of the apartheid state, which had constructed and entrenched inequality and its fictions of white supremacy through a battery of policies and laws.

Literary activists developed tactics to deal with the silencing that had been imposed. Intervening in various discourses of power they demonstrated that despite the claims of the ruling elites, there was in practice little separation between the "literary" and "imaginative" on one side and the political and institutional world... on the other' (Merod 9-10). As awareness of the constructive and constitutive potentials of culture developed many resistance writers acted reflexively, to challenge and transform the social meanings of literature and cultural practice (Narismulu *Theorising* 1). Literature was seen not just as the expression of individuals or small groups but of an entire social movement to end oppression.

The popular-democratic in South Africa is therefore a conjunctural construct that arose out of the nexus of art (ie., literature) and a social movement in South Africa in the 1980s (and 1970s, although that period is not the subject of this essay). Constituted through the process of struggle the popular-democratic construes the resistance literature of the 1980s as being expressive of an entire social movement to end oppression and transform society. Through the construct of the popular-democratic voices that have been marginalised, fragmented, dislocated, excluded or otherwise silenced can be seen in relation to each other and to the sources of oppression.

Popular-democratic literature focuses on the social meaning of experience. Literary artists construct literary texts out of or reinsert them into cultural practices, at the same time addressing questions of how literature, theory and criticism can become socially productive. In this they draw upon the work of progressive theorists such as Bakhtin, Brecht, Williams, and Bourdieu who have pointed out that culture is the lived experience of all people, and Bakhtin, Bourdieu, and later Fiske and Brett who maintained that there are no categorical boundaries between art and life.

The significance of popular-democratic literature in the political struggle in South Africa was enormous, the more so as other spaces were either marked off or closed off by racial-intellectual elites (Narismulu *Here be dragons* 1998). As is evident from the poems that have been cited (and the literature still to be addressed), popular-democratic literature tends to accompany and track the political and cultural development of people who rejected having to be the object of a bankrupt politics and insisted on assuming agency. The links with the political project of liberation are most evident where literary works create new speaking voices and places, so enabling those othered by apartheid to speak in community to, for and of each other.

As Cronin, Matthews, Gottschalk and the poem of the Athlone barricades indicate, everyday activities offered the most effective sites for political engagement, for "[t]he real is always a site of contestation" (Ashcroft in Tiffin and Lawson 34). Hence, the popular-democratic is a "part of the everyday, not distanced from it" (Fiske 154), for it "poses everyday life as a political problem" (Fiske in Mattelart 26). The focus on the everyday tends to counter the layers of social abstraction (ie., alienation) produced by colonialism, settler colonialism (apartheid) and industrialization. Functioning as part of a politics of knowledge in which social justice for all citizens was the objective, the consistent goal of this form of literature was to make critical opposition part of the general opposition.

Recognising the significance of power as the basis of all social practice, the popular-democratic represents a counter-hegemonic project. Collective forms of organisation were used to challenge and change established structures. Just as literature and art had functioned on behalf of the various elites to establish and sustain their cultural and political hegemony, many resistance writers/composers conscripted it into the service of the oppressed. They used their texts strategically to intervene in various discourses of power and to exert pressure that was otherwise difficult given the conditions of repression. They also used their literary practice to constitute, enunciate and insert oppressed voices and democratic values in fiercely patrolled cultural and political institutions.

Recognising that the relationship of literature to politics is highly mediated, these writers used their hard-won public voices to challenge the entrenched political and cultural discourses, opening up new alternatives in literary form and language. In this way they reconceptualised the relationships between power, communication and art. The trade unionist and cultural activist Frank Meintjies articulated the recognition that while language is a medium of artistic expression, it has a more widespread function as a communication matrix:

the centrality of language—of shared systems of communica-

tion—to human society underpins the centrality of language to culture, self-definition, consciousness and to the definition of reality itself (16).

As activists and cultural workers the resistance writers had a shared faith in the instrumentality of the word, and this extended to the English language. Refusing to be intimidated by the prestige it had acquired as a colonial and neo-colonial language in South Africa, they drew simultaneously upon the artistic and the expressive functions of the language to redress the imbalances and isolationism that had occurred in South Africa (and elsewhere). They worked past the depredations of apartheid and colonialism and affirmed South African languages that had been systematically underdeveloped in pursuance of the national liberation and democratization project. Retrieving South African languages from the colonial and apartheid ideologies, they recognised that each language offers a basis for social interaction and a medium in which exchange and struggle occurs.

These poems show that as the struggle evolved the writers recognised that they had to offer more than a language of analysis and resistance. At the same time as they committed skills and other resources to the political resistance they were exploring the constructive and liberatory capacities of their artistic medium. From their work it is clear that the anti-apartheid struggle also rescued English South African literature from its colonial dependencies, and from being fragmented and marginalized, while giving content and materiality to that which had been inchoate:

South African writers have begun to forge a genuine literature of the people: a literature in which the spectator and the reader have acquired an importance that is perhaps unprecedented in the history of literature: a literature which reflects back to its readers their struggle for emancipation, and at the same time reinvigorates them for that very struggle (Watts 37).

### The media

Through censorship the government exerted control over all sections of the media. More than 100 laws restricted information about most aspects of South African life. The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) was an integral part of the government's apparatus of domination. Controlled by the secret Afrikaner intellectual organisation, the Broederbond, the SABC was used to secure 'consensus' through propaganda, misrepresentation and disinformation. The most obvious instance involved naturalising and legitimating the illegitimate government's euphemisms. There is irony

in the Dikobe wa Mogale's reference to the dominant lexicon in "waking up: 09-12-1982" (56-8):

my countrymen teach me how to play with words like: "national security" "terrorist build-up" "pre-emptive cross-border strike"

The trade unionist Frank Meintjies clarified what was going on:

In our struggle, the battle over language intrudes into every struggle, campaign and event. Daily we encounter the state's use of its powerful institutions and vast resources to define crucial aspects of reality in such a way as to deny the experience and perspective of the masses. Examples of this are the creation of official terms such as "unrest", "bantustan", "terrorist", "enemy", "law and order" etc. (25-26).

The most effective modes of expression under such conditions of repression and disinformation were music and poetry. Given the prevalence of the oral tradition poetry proved to be a most empowering resource. Peter Horn argued that the role of poetry in such a repressive political climate was very important: "Poetry is a means of survival in the trauma of this society, and a means of survival in the flood of media propaganda: so "we mount the words till we can swim" (Writing 57, quoting Serote in A Tough Tale 24).

In 1985 the struggle in South Africa was reported very prominently in the international media. International pressure mounted on the government, which proved unable to deliver significant reforms, the currency plummeted and multinational companies started to withdraw. Refusing to take responsibility, the illegitimate apartheid president P.W. Botha maintained that there was a "total onslaught on South Africa" by internal and external enemies, and that to maintain the status quo a "total strategy" was required. Total strategy required, among other measures, a press that conformed, and did not side with "the enemy." The state of emergency imposed on 20 July 1985 was aimed at controlling freedom of expression. The Public Safety Act (sic) was used to declare the first State of Emergency in this decade. Under the State of Emergency the minority government appeared, through its Emergency Media Regulations, to be arming itself with powers it already had.

It was left to the small "alternative" media to struggle for the fundamental right to free expression, on meagre resources and under increasingly precarious conditions. Most of the small, independent news agencies, such as ELNews, were attacked by mysterious so-called "third force" elements, which were invariably linked directly to the state (as emerged later in even in the cases of the death squad leaders Dirk Coetzee and Eugene de Kock). Pamphlets and posters were confiscated. The state tried to impose a writers' register to control the work produced by freelance journalists.

Alternative newspapers such as South, Weekly Mail, New African and Grassroots were regularly harassed and seized. Through the Publications Act Grassroots, South and New Nation were temporarily banned; and Vrye Weekblad, Weekly Mail and South were prosecuted. Many journalists, whom the state labelled "media terrorists," were imprisoned. In 1986, some 89 media workers were detained, some for lengthy periods (Webster 159). Many journalists were detained for lengthy periods during the states of emergency, including the leader of the Media Workers' Association of South Africa, Zwelakhe Sisulu. Veliswa Mhlawuli, a journalist with the Grassroots community newspaper in Cape Town was shot and left for dead. While covering the battle between comrades and the Witdoeke vigilantes (who had the support of the army) at Crossroads, George De'Ath was been beaten and hacked by vigilantes in the presence of the government's security forces (sic), and later died. Kaiser Mabhilidi Nyatsumba who later became a journalist, wrote an ironic poem, "The Written Word" (96), which addresses the state's problems with freedom of expression in the mid-1980s:

> the written word in this in this country has become public enemy number one

the written word must be silenced jailed expunged

Though short of resources, the small alternative press made heroic efforts to survive and keep South Africans who supported the struggle informed and with a forum for self-expression. New Nation and New African newspapers published poetry every week. The Pietermaritzburg newspaper editor Khaba Mkhize gave readers a forum to express themselves through the columns of the Echo Newspaper, the supplement to The Natal Witness. Mkhize explains

why the newspaper column was especially popular while there were severe restrictions on the freedom of expression: "Because in poetry you can get away with who, where and why, messages directed against dangerous politics could be said without repercussions.... It gives the man in the street a platform" (1990:3). In the context of prohibitive, restraining discourse (interdiction), poetry afforded a rare space for expression. As the repression intensified the role of the cultural workers increased.

### Drama in and out of the townships

How does one use English as a site of struggle (Gwala 72).

The townships were a key arena for the organisation and consolidation of resistance in the 1980s. The UDF demanded the removal of troops from the townships, and the depoliticisation of the functions of the police in the townships (Zulu in Meer 14-15) and rents. Given the refusal of the state to concede any of these demands, battles for control over the townships occurred between the army and residents. The townships represented the locus of tactical alliances between residents, youth, workers and ad hoc structures to address specific issues. Student organisations, unions, unemployed youth, commuters and taxi operators united in bus boycotts against the unilateral fare hikes that the transport monopoly Putco tried to institute.

Most townships rejected the community councils and local affairs' councils that had been set up by the apartheid state because the state structures exacerbated the suffering they were supposed to alleviate (Zulu in Meer 17-18). Community organisations mobilised to make the townships "ungovernable" by the repressive apartheid structures, and alternative structures such as civic organisations, student councils and professional organizations were created. Some of the initiatives of UDF affiliates were even more threatening to the state than the resistance itself. The Cradock Residents' Association (CRADORA), which was led by Matthew Goniwe mounted a programme of broad political mobilization. One of the outcomes was that local councillors resigned their posts and CRADORA facilitated their reintegration into the community (Saul and Gelb 222).

A number of dramatists sought to synthesise 'creativity and social responsibility' (Gordimer 243), such as the community arts project, Soyikwa, under the directorship of Matsemela Manaka. The plays *Woza Albert!* (Mtwa, Ngema and Simon) and *Asinamali* (Ngema) were based on the conviction that the transformation of society depended upon the integral involvement of ordinary people. Both plays drew upon song, dance, mime, narrative, history, and didactic tracts to entertain, record and educate. Their treatment of oppressed subjectivity

is witty and optimistic as they affirm the agency of oppressed people. The singular and totalising values and narratives of the dominant are challenged in the polemical, episodic structure and rapid pace of *Woza Albert!* 

Though well entertained, the audiences of both plays were not allowed to treat theatre as a vehicle for escapism, but continually exhorted to take responsibility for the destruction of oppression.<sup>2</sup> The play *Asinamali* (We have no money) deals with the rent and transport boycotts that began in Lamontville in 1983 under the leadership of the community activist Msizi Dube and spread across the country. The play focuses on the actions of the community, celebrating the responses of ordinary, even apolitical, township residents as they struggled to come to terms with their challenges, refusing to be defeated by various setbacks, including Dube's assassination.

Across the country there were powerful expressions of community solidarity in response to the censorship and repression. When organised activities were banned or otherwise silenced, the forms of resistance used included dancing the *toyi toyi*, marching, singing political songs, displaying militant posters, using challenging slogans and graffiti, with poetry "marching in the front ranks of mass struggles" (Slovo in Corrigall 60). While the state prohibited the use of props such as wooden AK47 guns, it was unable to do much about the graffiti that appeared across the country, and "towards the end of 1986 more than half of the township graffiti was political in nature" (60).

The vibrant street theatre of the 1980s also registered the refusal of people to be crushed. When the SADF moved into the townships and began to raid houses and harass residents, people fought to regain control. Street theatre quickly captured the struggles in a synthesis of music, dance, mime, narrative and an "open" style of street utterance. Reflecting an insistence on the right to be heard, street theatre emerged across the country, generally performed by groups of youths. Most plays were not recorded, but a characteristic determination is apparent in the words of one (unnamed) group of performers in the streets of Durban:

The soldiers are taking away my brother, my mother babe-in-arms is crying, my father who dared ask "Why?" is lying in the dust nursing the head gash from the butt of a rifle, my protesting sister is sworn at in dirty Afrikaans but I will not be intimidated (*New African* 13).

The struggle for a democratic society played out in very interesting ways in the dichotomised urban-township contexts as a result of the state's manoeuvres. In the mid-1980s some theatre practitioners wondered if the state

was trying to create an impression of reform:

Perhaps the state has begun to realise that in the heightened tensions of South African society, the safety valve provided by cultural expression is becoming extremely important. In the context of the governmental gesture of "reform", the theatre has been less exposed to the formal machinery of the Publications Act. Instead, more insidious forms of control are being invoked. In a crisis-ridden society, state censorship provokes embarrassing media attention (Steadman 28).

At the same time, however, practitioners of resistance drama were encountering great problems with township performances. Scripts had to be submitted to township authorities before performances, and few were permitted to go on. Those that were allowed were often subject to expurgation.

Maishe Maponya wrote and directed the play *Umongikazi/The Nurse* (1995), which ran for three weeks in 1983. However, when his Bahumutsi Drama Group performed the play at Baragwanath Hospital, "the security branch called at my home and left a note telling me to report to Protea police station the next morning at eight o' clock with the script of the play and my passport (Maponya ix).

Maponya's experience with the censors over his double-bill, *Dirty Work* and *Gangsters* (1995), clarifies the logic of the apartheid state. In the play *Gangsters* a woman poet who is being held in detention is tortured to death by the security police. The double-bill had a successful season at the Market Theatre in downtown Johannesburg. When Maponya announced that he wanted to produce the plays in Soweto, the censors notified him that while the plays could continue running at The Market Theatre, he was forbidden to present the more militant play, *Gangsters*, in the townships:

When *Gangsters* was restricted by the Publications Control Board to "small, intimate avant-garde" theatres, it automatically meant that the play could not be seen by the majority of black audiences in the townships [because] there were no such theatres (Maponya xi).

Ian Steadman, who had worked with Maponya, raised questions about the anomaly:

Why, with its reputation for repressive state and ideological apparatus, has the South African government apparently

ignored the recent spate of politically-inspired theatre played in established theatres and on the international stage? Why, on the other hand, have pressures been brought to bear on the home front—in the townships and in alternative theatre venues—against plays embracing even mild political content? (26).<sup>3</sup>

Matsemela Manaka, whose play *Egoli* had been banned earlier, suggested that while the government was not too concerned with urban performances of the plays it was clear that it was worried about the impact of the resistance plays in townships: "Critical plays in town are okay because the audience in town is not a revolutionary mass. The township audience is, and they can be influenced by your ideas because it affects them directly" (Hollyer and Luther 30).

This raises questions of audience, agency and commitment to change.<sup>4</sup> The location of the venues suggests the substantive differences between the ideology, material interests and responses of middle class, white minority audiences and the black township audiences, who then comprised mainly working class people.

This seems to be borne out by the view that the P.W. Botha regime had relaxed censorship because they saw intellectuals as an "ineffectual class who could be allowed their liberal catharsis" (Bunn and Taylor 21). Indeed, not long afterwards the censors under Kobus van Rooyen began to operate in a more "reformist" mode, the state became alarmed by the growing popular response to drama:

Over the past few years, however, the audience for political writing has broadened considerably and government censors have reacted.... Failing to stem the revolutionary fervor or activism [the state] has fallen back on an attempt to control the means of representation, which is enforced through the catch-all definition of "subversive statements" in the emergency regulations (21).

The operation of different layers and modes of censorship in response to perceived differences in white and black audiences is borne out by the attack by the Minister of Home Affairs, Stoffel Botha, on resistance art. Unlike Van Rooyen, Stoffel Botha had decided views about the political effects of art and culture in South Africa, as he indicated in a statement to the house of Representatives:

After certain theatrical performances the audience is so

emotionally charged that they will not calm down before everything in the vicinity, from buildings to cars and even other people have been attacked (Hadland 21).

The arts journalist, Adrian Hadland, responded to Stoffel Botha's argument with the following criticisms:

The claim is extreme. Although the vision of marauding bands of Market Theatre patrons may be cause for mirth, the minister's pronouncement is indicative of a new and ominous level of government concern about the subversive power of the arts (21).

Clearly the government's concerns were linked to the remarkable growth of organised cultural initiatives within extra-parliamentary groups. Challenged to defend his statement, Stoffel Botha offered the following response (which confirms Hadland's conclusions):

What I expressed concern about were plays... staged in theatres in the main cities of the Republic focusing on themes of alleged oppression and police brutality, consciption, alleged social and political injustices and the like. Can the aims and purposes of such plays be anything else than creating a spirit of discontent, unrest, civil disobedience, insurrection and in the final instance, revolution? (21).

Stoffel Botha conceded that it was difficult for the performers of plays, recitals or popular music to control the responses of the audience, although he warned that "censorship remained an under-utilised weapon in the state's armoury" (21). Chris Pretorius, director of the (initially banned, then restricted) play *Sunrise City* countered that

challenging accepted norms is exactly what theatre is all about. A government that can't stand up to criticism shouldn't be there in the first place (21).

In a move that compounded the pressure on the arts, the segregationist Minister of Education, F.W. de Klerk (who would share the Nobel Prize for Peace with Nelson Mandela in 1993) warned the audience at a state sponsored arts conference in Stellenbosch in 1988 against "the threat of 'people's art' and the role of groups that propagated it in the 'total onslaught'" (21). While the white state seemed determined to crush all manifestations of resistance, it was clear that this would not happen without a struggle. A person only identified

### as a United Democratic Front member retorted:

You can't ban culture. You can suppress it or at least try to replace it... but it will always be there. And if it's always there, then it can be used (21).

What is also curious about this debate is that Stoffel Botha's remarks (in 1988) about audiences running amok after certain productions were quite unfounded: Gillian Slovo has pointed out that "[t]here were no reports of this in fact happening during three years of emergency rule" (Corrigall 56). Slovo's research also contradicts the Directorate of Publications' reason for banning the Nyanga Theatre Players' production *Kwanele* (Enough) in 1987, for allegedly "giving rise to new violence, rioting and terrorism" (Anon "Nyanga..." 10). It is apparent that what was actually happening was the ongoing repression of drama. The emergency regulations were used in combination with prior legislation to restrict cultural activity. The regulations enabled the state to react quickly to stop performances. So it was rather the state that was engaging in political and cultural terrorism. In a section of "Baphomet's dance on my eardrum" (*Poems* 20-1) Peter Horn, the academic and activist, challenges the state's representatives, whom he portrays as cowardly bullies behaving like the fascists in Bertolt Brecht's accusation:

Why are you so frightened? You are the same who courageously babble against the liberals, atheists and communists You are the same still who courageously shot down unarmed women and children. Yet: you are afraid of our poems: a mere breath. The army trembles when we enter a classroom. Hysteria ripples through the width of the country over an unorthodox opinion.

Given Stoffel Botha and F.W. de Klerk's responses, Horn's satire does not seem too excessive. The ministers' remarks would have given the security police further licence to harass politically committed writers and performers. No one could have guessed that this was the same de Klerk who as President would suddenly unban the resistance organisations in 1990, although George Bush did not seem surprised when he was quoted responding to the development in an SABC news broadcast an hour after de Klerk made the announcement on February 2, 1990.

Perhaps this unprecedented response was in recognition of a stalemate, es-

pecially as increasing numbers of whites were either leaving the country or joining anti-apartheid organisations such as the End Conscription Campaign. Rejecting the privileges of his class, race and profession, the speaker in Peter Horn's "Canto Four: Security Forces" (108) challenges the government's abuse of the country's resources to defend the interests of an increasingly tiny minority, and declares allegiance with those constructed as enemies. The irony emphasizes the extent to which the speaker contradicts the state's dichotomised construction of its beneficiaries and its enemies:

They see to it that I can sleep well: disturbed only occasionally by exploding cars and police stations, attacks on the army headquarters, and the homes of traitors.

They use my money well: helicopters circle above me, computers follow every step I make, caspirs rumble through the streets I walk...

They use my money well against me: the enemy.

### Cultural endeavours and organisations

Many festivals were banned or restricted and organisers were sometimes detained in the hysteria that swept the state. In 1986 three executive committee members of the People's Cultural Festival in the Western Cape were detained. Other community members stepped in to continue with the organising. The festival was banned the day before it was to begin (Kruss 184). Later that year a Christmas festival in Cape Town was banned at the last minute. The organisation Musical Action for People's Power then organised alternative events to cover the musicians' costs:

One of the noticeable effects on cultural work of increased state repression has been the way culture and cultural organisations have stepped into the vacuum of banned political organisations and imprisoned individuals. [T]his shifting of organisation has meant that a broad sweep of organisations from community groups to unions have been involved in cultural-political events (Slovo in Corrigall 59).

In 1988 a banned Detainees Parents Support Committee concert was taken over by the Federation of Transvaal Women. In 1989 the End Conscription Campaign was prevented from proceeding with what it called "Towards a People's Culture Festival" by the harsher regulations of the new state of emergency. Cape Flats residents took over the organisation of the festival, secured United Democratic Front and Cape Action League backing and together with organisations such as the Umkhonto Youth Choir from Paarl, the Loyodo Art School, and the Ambanyani dance team they put together a ten day festival at ten different venues in Cape Town and the Cape Flats (59).

From these examples it is clear that concerns that the number and diversity of member organisations would turn the UDF into a weak, amorphous organisation proved largely unfounded. In fact, the absence of a cohesive framework gave the democratic movement some protection against the state. UDF affiliates across the country were able to engage in a range of resistance activities as members of the national movement and count on its co-ordinating structures for support in developing their struggles. The national and legal standing of the UDF enabled developing affiliates to counter the onslaught of the state. At the same time the state found it difficult to destroy the UDF for its components could not be easily isolated for the application of repressive legislation or prosecution. Fledgling organisations were able to draw on the experience and expertise of a range of church, professional, labour and progressive business structures in the network

One such organisation, the Congress of South African Writers (COSAW), which was formed in 1987 with the explicit goal of challenging the repression, as is evident in its slogan: "Freedom for writers, writers for freedom." While COSAW's regional and local structures focused on grassroots development through readings, writers' workshops and the suitcase libraries initiative, the national structure played an important role as part of the mass democratic movement against apartheid, even though it was only loosely affiliated to the UDE.

In mid-1987 some 200 UDF delegates met to declare their support for a cultural and academic boycott to isolate the apartheid regime, its supporters and beneficiaries, and its international allies. Cultural workers and progressive academics across the country pledged their support for the decision. The boycott call had been initiated by the ANC President, Oliver Tambo. This was reiterated by the Culture in Another South Africa (CASA) conference that was held in Amsterdam in 1989 declared that

the total isolation of the apartheid regime must continue. Among the tactics to be employed in this campaign, the academic and cultural boycott are crucial, and must be maintained (Campschreur and Divendal 215).

In 1988 the Student Representative Council (SRC) of the University of Durban-Westville (UDW) hosted a Cultural Festival at which progressive artists and speakers from across the country were invited, including the cartoonist Jonathan Shapiro, who exhibited work that had been banned. Owing to its urban location, its long history of student and later staff struggles, and eventually a progressive head, the university by then offered a relatively free space for activists. In 1989, just days after acrimonious yet fairly successful defiance campaigns to desegregate our hospitals and beaches, the UDW SRC Cultural Festival hosted a national Conference on Democracy on the campus. It was judged safe to set up a day-long Oral Literature Workshop at the Ecumenical Centre Hall in central Durban, headlined by the CO-SATU poets Siphiwe Ngwenya and Madlizinyoka Ntanzi, and also attended by Nise Malange, Alfred Temba Qabula, Mi Hlatshwayo, and Mzwakhe Mbuli (no prior announcement of Mbuli's presence could be made in case the 'security forces' became jittery). Given the repressive national climate in which the festival was held it was very difficult for anyone, let alone myself as the organiser of the conference and the workshop, to see that the easing of the restrictions was only six months away.

### **International support**

The struggle against the apartheid regime had the support of the United Nations owing to the longstanding efforts of activists like Dennis Brutus. In 1975 the United Nations General Assembly had passed a resolution that declared the regime in South Africa to be "illegitimate" with "no right to represent the people of South Africa" (Asmal, Asmal and Roberts 184). This helped isolate the regime and its beneficiaries. The UN General Assembly at the same time reaffirmed "the legitimacy of the struggle of the oppressed people of South Africa and their liberation movements, by all possible means, for the seizure of power by the people and the exercise of their inalienable right to self-determination" (184). In 1983 the United Nations had called on "all South Africans to resist, by all means, the imposition of the new constitution" (184). By 1985 "international opinion against apartheid reached new heights, leading to an increase in political and economic pressure from abroad and greater support for the anti-apartheid struggle" (Odendaal in Hill and Harris 132).

At the launch of the UDF in 1983, before an audience of fourteen thousand people, Mzwakhe Mbuli performed his poem "I am the voice of international anger". 5 One of the most prominent poets of the UDF, Mbuli inspired thou-

sands of youth across the country to perform his work at political meetings or to create their own performance poems and songs. Mbuli's popularity owed as much to his message and performance style as to the methods of transmission that were used, which included setting the poems to music and performing them at concerts, and producing a series of cassettes. Peter Horn has pointed out that Mbuli's success lay in his ability to bend the English language "to the tongue, the ear and the thinking of the township, the mass democratic movement, the street committee, the trade union meeting" (*Review* 185-6).

The success of the international campaign for sanctions and disinvestment had much to do with the international support that political, cultural and religious organisations, and the trade union federations developed in concert with supportive groups overseas. The struggle in South Africa resonated with other struggles elsewhere in the world, and the support of other oppressed people and organisations was also important to the struggle for state power. The collapse of settler colonialism in Zimbabwe, Angola and Mozambique had the effect of intensifying the struggle in South Africa, for the recalcitrant apartheid state became more repressive and the inspired comrades became more determined to achieve freedom and democracy.

In countries that have suffered imperialist domination, nationalism is an important factor in the development of autonomy (for imperialism often needs to be challenged along national boundaries). Many resistance poets drew on the developments in other countries. As in the case of Mafika Gwala's tribute to Vietnam in "Vo Nguyen Giap", Bafana Buthelezi celebrates the popular victories of small countries who succeeded in repelling imperialist forces in "Tribute to Mapetha" (Ndaba 76-7):

in Vietnam and Cuba while the guns roared the days were grim but their day dawned the gun was powerful yet the people were more powerful.

Dikobe wa Mogale locates the complex challenges of the South African liberation movement in the context of the violations of power that occur across the world in "bantwini ngcipe's testament" (46-49). Beginning with Latin America the poem ranges through the Middle East to the Pacific and Asia:

i come from the Pacific where our home is being turned into a dumping ground for nuclear wastes I come from Asia where the violation of human rights and dignity continues unabated due to militarisation supported by the so-called superpowers

### Women writers

By offering a framework for addressing and contesting its contradictions the UDF network allowed for the deepening of democratic processes. The unity that developed under the aegis of the UDF represented a considerable achievement, given the history of systematic division and the destructive operations of the state. However, the challenge that the UDF had to address was that the unity of the oppressed could not be taken for granted or subordinated to nationalist ideals (which tend, as other struggles have demonstrated, to be middle class and male).

While it created space for multiple voices the UDF also provided a rich context for the development of new struggles. Issues that were introduced by sections of the UDF, such as women's autonomy and equality, squatters' rights, the abolition of the death penalty, land redistribution and ecology, were eventually carried as part of a package of transformation proposals of the movement as a whole. It was in the organisations of the UDF that women leaders like Albertina Sisulu, Victoria Mxenge and Cheryl Carolus came to power and prominence:

As well as challenging the state, grassroots social movements also helped to redefine social and cultural relationships within the community. New roles for women in public life emerged; the relationships between generations was continually contested, debated and reformulated; conceptions of citizenship emerged premised on participation rather than helpless passivity (The Posterbook Collective 75).

Gcina Mhlophe established herself as one of the most powerful performance poets and story-tellers during the 1980s. Her poem 'We are at war' (Brown, Hofmeyr and Rosenberg 159-60) is an exhortatory piece which reminds the audience that 'a woman's place in the struggle', a slogan used by activists in the 1980s to conscientise women:

Women of my country Young and old Black and white we are at war The winds are blowing against us
Laws are ruling against us
We are at war.

The statement 'We are at war' foregrounds the reality of the civil war that had long been suppressed by the state through the use of whittling constructs such as 'unrest' and 'black-on-black violence'. Mhlophe also sought to challenge the status quo through calling for solidarity between women who had long been divided by race and class. Not only did Mhlophe take on the state, she was prepared to identify and name realities that people in the mass democratic movement were still struggling over in the early 1980s. Articulating emerging realities under conditions of deep division and oppression requires the perspicacity and skills of a visionary or a prophet. Or perhaps Mhlophe was just invoking an early meaning of the word 'poet' as maker, that is, creator, of a new reality.

Women as a group and women activists in particular were marginalized on all fronts during the course of the national liberation struggle. They received little respect from their male comrades and male-dominated organisations, and were undermined as women when they fell into the clutches of the security police, as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) heard during the testimony of activists. Despite the strength of their contributions to the resistance movement, liberation organisations tended to treat women's rights as a matter of private conviction. Until well into the 1980s many women comrades tacitly accepted that the struggle for women's rights could only be fought after the national struggle was won. Gcina Mhlophe challenged the marginalisation of women's rights in her poem 'Say No' (Lockett 351-2) which articulates support for the long struggles of women and their organisations, such as the National Organisation of Women, through whose activism women's rights were gradually placed on the agendas of the liberation movement:

Say No, Black Woman Say No When they give you a back seat in the liberation wagon Say No Yes Black Woman a Big NO

Women's experiences and insights in the struggle were also not well represented, as even the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was eventually obliged to acknowledge. In Gcina Mhlophe's understated poem 'The Dancer' (90-1), a young woman recounts the toll of the struggle. Recounting her life in the political turmoil in the townships in the 1980s, the poem illustrates a daughter's

recognition of the difference between her mother's life and her own. Though both dancers, their experiences of this dynamic art form are polarised owing to the different periods in which they functioned. While the mother had been a popular wedding dancer when she was young, in the repressive states of emergency of the 1980s the daughter could only find occasion to express herself in the *toyi-toyi* dance of resistance in the menacing presence of the police at funerals of activists and other victims of apartheid oppression:

### Mama

they tell me you were a wedding dancer they tell me you smiled and closed your eyes your arms curving outward just a little and your feet shuffling in the sand; tshi tshi tshi....

Mama
they tell me I am a dancer too
but I don't know...
I don't know for sure what a wedding dancer is
there are no more weddings
but many, many funerals
where we sing and dance
running fast with the coffin
of a would-be bride or would-be groom
strange smiles have replaced our tears
our eyes are full of vengeance, Mama

Dear, dear Mama, they tell me I am a funeral dancer.

Through her delineation of the circumscribed subject position of the daughter, Mhlophe alludes to the sacrifices, losses and suffering that many communities endured to achieve transformation. Writers like Mhlophe demonstrate the process by which English is becoming a South African language. Such writers have done much to democratise the process, battling against problems such as access and linguistic chauvinism. English has served as the *lingua franca* in the liberation struggle, which had an enormous impact on its development as a South African language.

While addressing issues of transformation, various resistance poets also addressed the contradictions and limitations of their speaking positions. Nise Malange's poem "A Time of Madness" (Evill and Kromberg 14-17) addresses the complexity and the toll of inter-community battles in the Cape, brought on as a result of divisions over the 1986 "Black Xmas" consumer boycott. As the speaker struggles obsessively to forget the mayhem, she renders the

ongoing psychological consequences of the turmoil for communities across the country:

... the migrants, Started slaughtering people and burning their houses, Angered with the urban people's ban on celebrations

And whatever they did not destroy the soldiers finished, And we hurled petrol bombs, And they sliced with their pangas, And there was blood, too much blood And our parents were killed coming from work, Still sweated from the day's toil That I am trying to banish from my memory,

Malange courageously confronts a difficult problem publicly and the effect of the critique was to challenge those communities to remember that their real enemy was the apartheid-capital complex. In this poem as in the earlier examples, it is apparent that the experimentalism of UDF poets was not self-regarding or individualistic and that their innovations were in the service of communal goals in the resistance struggle.

Like Malange, the Cape Town-based Nyanga Theatre Players workshopped the play *Inde Lendlela* (The Long Road) to risk tackling a sensitive problem in the presence of hostile state: the bitter infighting in community organisations. The director of Nyanga Theatre Players, Phyllis Klotz (Anon "Nyanga..." 10) explained that they were driven by "infighting between popular leaders [which] often results in loss of life [and] makes the freedom road an unnecessarily long one."

In the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands more than 2,000 people died between September 1987 and 1990 (a toll that in the first 18 months alone exceeded that of 20 years of fighting in Northern Ireland), in what was effectively an undeclared civil war among UDF supporters and followers of the Bantustan leader Chief Buthelezi and his Inkatha movement (Fairbairn 87-90). Accompanying the popular history that was written about the slain trade unionist and community leader Jabu Ndlovu is Makhosi Khoza's poem 'Pietermaritzburg' (Fairbairn title page). Khoza's poem resists the silencing attendant upon the liquidation of activists. Ndlovu was a shop steward with the National Union of Metalworkers and an influential Imbali community leader, and she was killed, along with her husband and daughter, in a mysterious attack on their home in 1989. While Khoza's poem celebrates the power of the labour and civic leader, the rhetorical form invites the com-

munity to actively address the crisis that was threatening to escalate into a full scale civil war (with Inkatha supported by the apartheid state):

Where is Jabu?
A woman with flashes in her soul
A woman with fires in her heart
A woman with lion strength

#### **Funerals**

Under the states of emergency the only type of politically-related gathering permitted by the apartheid state was the funeral, although subject to strict delimitation and monitoring. The level of popular resistance expressed at the funerals led the authorities, in their re-imposition of the state of emergency in 1986, to place restrictions on "political funerals." Police authorisation of the time, date and place of a funeral was required. The funeral service was restricted to three hours. Public address systems, flags, posters and pamphlets were banned. Only ordained ministers were permitted to speak. No more than two hundred mourners were allowed, and the police maintained a high profile presence, to intimidate, disperse or arrest mourners (Hill and Harris 72). The apartheid state seemed to be threatened by the power of oppressed voices in unison.

This is borne out by Nise Malange's poem "State of Emergency" (Evill and Kromberg 24-5), which is a translation from the Zulu language original:

Freedom songs are banned, Freedom clothes are banned, Freedom speeches are banned, They choose their own priests, State of Emergency.

Malange's defiance as an activist emerges in the form of address that is used. The speaker addresses the victim of political violence in terms that are at once personal and abstract, parodying the curt, peremptory voices of the officers of the state:

Time is limited, Five minutes for a funeral Five minutes to bury you That's your funeral, State of Emergency. Read as a couplet the last two lines express a desire for the destruction of the source of the problems, the state of emergency.

In the poem "After" (Oliphant 448), Keith Gottschalk mocks the fears that fed the state's reaction to the funerals of activists who had been killed by the security forces. The poem suggests that even in death the "enemies of the state" remain as much of a problem as they had been in life. The last six lines have echoes of the resurrection scene in Percy Mtwa, Mbongeni Ngema and Barney Simon's play Woza Albert! (1983). In these lines Gottschalk insists that the dead activists have not been completely annihilated, including the final line which challenges activists to draw strength from the history of struggle:

Throughout all graveyards of our land they proclaim states of emergency: they cordon off our dead with razor wire they order roadblocks to stop wakes they place our dead in solitary confinement they forbid our dead visitors....

They suspect our dead are only pretending....
Their censors smash tombstones by night
ban inscriptions, wreaths & requiems.
Until, driven beyond endurance,
even our dead hold underground meetings
raise mounds of resistance
unearth alliances with the living:
guerilla a way to the light.

In our epoch the dead unite with the living.

The slaughter of activists were part of the security forces' "total onslaught" against the resistance. However, despite the scale of the killings, a surprising optimism characterised the literature, and corresponded with the spirit of the struggle against the state. Many resistance poets insisted on reinterpreting the meaning of the state sponsored killings that swept the country.

Some of the younger poets were militant and uncomprising. Lesego Rampolokeng's untitled poems indicate a familiarity with the work of Garvey, Du Bois, Malcolm X, Cabral, Neto and Fanon as the rap poet contextualises the struggle in South Africa as being in solidarity with the struggles of oppressed people across the world. He uses the heroic formulae of the *izibongo* to articulate militancy:

i ring the war bell to drive them back to hell

Of the same generation as Rampolokeng, Sandile Dikeni's rhythmic "Guava Juice" (Coetzee and Willemse 55) is as defiant and aggressive as it exhorts the comrades to attack the security forces ("dogs") with homemade bombs:

dance dance my hero dance around the fire of resistance dance at the success of your throw dance because the dogs are still at a distance dance for that guava juice

make make my young lion make another guava juice

make another one as strong as iron make many more until they beg for a truce make those many guava juices

arm me with a gun that spurts consciousness.

In this way, the popular-democratic literature of the resistance actively participated in what Mattelart had characterised as the "unequal, but dialectical, exchange with the dominant cultural grid with its norms, values, models and signs connected to ruling power" (Mattelart and Siegelaub 17). Without engagement in the currency of the dominant, the settler colonial regime may well have lasted another 350 years.

#### The UDF and COSATU

Through the matrix of the UDF the localised struggles of workers, township residents, commuters, scholars and dissident conscripts were linked as components of the national struggle against white minority rule and the apartheid-capital complex. As the political turbulence increased in the 1980s the unions began to play an increasingly political role. The largest trade union federation was the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) was created in 1985. Despite addressing its own considerable challenges the labour movement was also very committed to the struggle for a free South Africa. The UDF's relations with COSATU were very amicable and its commitment to a popular-democratic rather than a populist or vanguardist path

impacted positively on the alliance and was in fact strengthened by COSATU's attentiveness to democratic processes.

Perhaps in reaction to the oppressive role of the apartheid state most workers tended not to see their workplace struggles as being separate from their community struggles. There were significant affinities between working-class culture and the culture of other sectors of oppressed people in the 1970s and the 1980s. This is apparent in the style of COSATU worker poetry, which tended to be shaped by both union and nationalist discourse (Gordimer 38). The poetry of the worker *izimbongi* (praise poets) Alfred Temba Qabula, Mi Hlatshwayo and Madlizinyoka Ntanzi "shows the seductive symbols of the Zulu past being lured away from an aggressive ethnic nationalism and put to the service of a wider, more egalitarian cause" (Gunner 37).

COSATU grew very rapidly to well over a million members in 1990 (Baskin 448). However, despite its strength the labour movement decided, despite serious reservations from some of its unions, that the power of apartheid and capitalism could only be effectively challenged through a network of multiple interventions. By 1986 COSATU had decided that workers' power was a key element in the construction of people's power in the struggle for national liberation (Lambert 240-1). It is interesting that a worker, named only as John, from the Cape Town branch of the Food and Allied Workers' Union, asserts the corollary in "It's You the People":

It's you, the people, that make The unions strong (1989:118).

COSATU's decision not to focus solely on its own interests was also connected to its position of relative strength among the oppressed in South Africa. The federation recognised the extent of unemployment, and the fact that many people who had work were not able to join unions (eg., the vulnerable domestic workers, farm workers and casual workers). As a result, the labour movement sought social and political alliances not just with the middle class but with unorganised workers and with the dispossessed millions who faced even greater injustice and deprivation than themselves. While the focus of the cultural work in the labour movement had justifiably been on worker interests, COSATU cultural workers argued that worker culture is "not a city with walls around it. It is part of broader progressive culture" (Meintjies and Hlatshwayo 4). Cognisant of the scale of challenges that the resistance movement faced, COSATU cultural workers argued consistently that '[u]nion-based cultural workers, toughened by their own experiences, are in a good position to assist other cultural sectors in rural areas and regions starved of cultural resources' (5-6). That workers, too, had hopes of being broadly influential is apparent in Hlatshwayo's statement regarding his literary hopes: "I wanted to be a poet, control words, many words that I may woo our multicultural South Africa into a single society" (Sitas 52). However, it was generally acknowledged that although popular culture and working class culture overlapped at points, they could not be conflated. Indeed, workers needed to be strongly organised as an interest group, to enable them to form effective alliances with other progressive structures, as had happened in other liberation struggles across the world.

COSATU's influence in the middle and late 1980s was established through its attention to democratic practice. Using the discipline of mandates, report back mechanisms and consultation processes, COSATU taught the liberation movement transparent and accountable democratic processes. Organisations as diverse as the Congress of South African Writers (COSAW), the South African Youth Congress (SAYCO), the National Medical and Dental Association (NAMDA) and the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC), as well as the UDF, benefitted from the culture of democratic process that COSATU instituted. Middle class, public sector structures such as the South African Teachers' Democratic Union were initiated as a result of the vision, experience, resources and mediation skills of COSATU. Arising out of its concern for the development of other progressive forces in society, the worker federation set a powerful example of cross-class solidarity. The worker poet and cultural activist Alfred Temba Qabula's poem "The Wheel is Turning--The Struggle Moves Forward" (107) uses the wheel (a symbol of worker oppression and production) to attest to the fortitude of the resistance:

that is being fought around us
we are not turning back
we are wading through the blood
of our kinsfolk
when one of us falls
when one gets

another freedom-fighter of the exploited is born

detained

In this war

Qabula goes beyond the declarations of resolve to fight to develop a mythology of regeneration, as Serote had begun to do in the 1970s (Narismulu *Labour*).

The power of the democratic alliance of labour, community, non-governmental and professional organisations was demonstrated by the stay-aways in the Transvaal in 1984 and in Port Elizabeth in 1985:

Stay-aways involve one of the highest forms of working class action for they ensure that not only the worker lays down tools but that his whole community is involved in a strike against capital and the state. The successful stay-aways reflected the breadth of the organisational capacity of the community leaders and the links which had been cemented between youths, workers, students and trade unions (Campbell in Nyong'o 155).

The alliance engaged in mass action, strikes, stay-aways, boycotts, and calls for sanctions and disinvestment as an alternative to military engagement (which appeared less and less feasible as the 1980s wore on and the state either infiltrated or decimated most of the armed structures). Jeremy Cronin, who went on to become a UDF leader (before having to go into exile) has a prescient image in his poem "The river that flows through our land" (57), which anticipates the unity of the organisations that affiliated to the UDF, as well as the ideological convergence of COSATU and the UDF:

A swift stream in the high mountains, dropping dental, lateral
Clicking in its palate like the flaking of stone tools;
And a wide river that grazes the plains,
Lows like the wind in summer maize.
And a waterfall that hums through a turbine
And is whirled into light.

A river that carries many tongues in its mouth.

The "imagined political community" (Anderson 15) that the liberation organisations envisioned was entirely against the divisive logic of apartheid. In the South African resistance struggle the mystical aspect of Anderson's construct was supported by its material dimensions, as people across the country joined forces to challenge the apartheid state with a vision of a transformed society.

COSATU's support for the UDF's position on sanctions led to obvious contradictions, which the labour movement chose to contain as part of its solidarity with the mass democratic movement, the exiled liberation movements and the position of the international community (through the United Nations, the Commonwealth and the Non-Aligned Movement). In 1987 COSATU formally aligned itself with the ANC and the UDF by adopting the Freedom Charter as its guiding document, in effect "singing one with the voice of time," as Wally Serote wrote from exile in A Tough Tale (43).

One of the most important victories of the alliance was the two-day stayaway in May 1987, when 2.5 million people protested against the 6 May election that PW Botha had called to obtain a mandate to further suppress the struggle for democracy. Murphy Morobe, the UDF publicity secretary, argued that the stayaway

underscores the significance of our campaign for a national united action and the centrality of the UDF, COSATU and the entire democratic movement in any attempt at resolving the problems of South Africa (Baskin 190).

COSATU's contribution of 1.5 million workers and its national network to help co-ordinate the strike demonstrated its significance in the contest over power.

On 24 February 1988 COSATU was prohibited from engaging in any political activity. A few days later, on 28 February 1988, the UDF was effectively banned. By the end of 1988, eighteen progressive organisations were effectively banned (Wilson and Ramphele 226-7) and about 200 leaders and key activists had spent 30 months in prison (Webster and Friedman 18-19). The state had to content itself with restricting COSATU (and not banning it outright), for it was clear that the organisation was too strong to be destroyed merely by edict. COSATU responded to the restrictions placed upon it in terms that expressed its broad commitment to social justice:

the state is attempting to restrict COSATU to what they see as legitimate trade union functions. We reject this because there is no democracy in South Africa, and COSATU and other organisations are part of the extra-parliamentary opposition that are legitimately putting forward the demands and interests of our members both on the shopfloor and in the broader society (Baskin 269).

The unions coped better with the repression because of their location within the production process: management was dependent on the unions to negotiate with the workers (Pillay 333). It was much easier for the state to ban the political and community organisations than the trade unions, which have been integral to industrial relations.

COSATU's conception of its responsibilities as a trade union federation in the broad political struggle was unequivocal. Two massive stay-aways in March and June 1988 were illegal under the Emergency regulations. With the restrictions of February 1988 (which barred COSATU from political activities),

COSATU could not make any public calls for a stay-away, neither could it be involved in any of the organising. Despite this the three-day stay-away in June was the biggest mass demonstration at the time. It showed that despite the government's repression, mass opposition to its policies remained intense (Odendaal in Hill and Harris 137).

#### Conclusion

Despite the gagging of the UDF by the tiny and unrepresentative apartheid government in 1988 the UDF continued to work with COSATU as the Mass Democratic Movement. In the wave of defiance campaigns in 1989 the UDF declared itself unbanned. Having "brought the African National Congress back from the periphery to the centre of South African politics" (Seekings x) the UDF made way for the older organisation when the apartheid government unbanned it and other liberation organisations in 1990. However, the impact of the UDF continues to influence the democratization of the post-apartheid South Africa not least in the skills, resources, values and practices developed by its affiliates in the struggle for a liberated South Africa.

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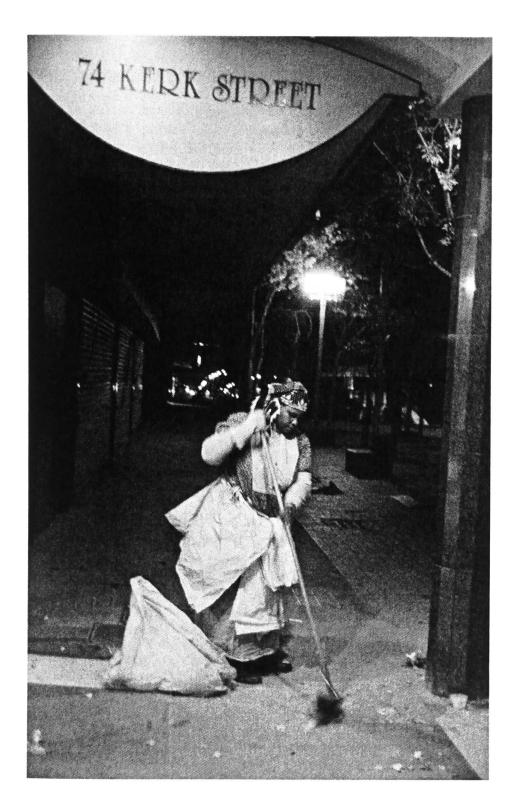
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#### **Endnotes**

- <sup>1</sup> The quotation is an extract from a song that was sung by protestors in Athlone township, Cape Town in 1985. The material that forms the basis for this essay first appeared in my PhD thesis (1998), and an earlier version of part of this article was presented at the Trans-Atlantic conference on Race and Xenophobia, Howard University, Washington, 13-16 October 2002.
- <sup>2</sup> Notwithstanding Ngema's subsequent work these are not populist plays: the audience is affirmed and challenged by turns to develop into active subjects.
- <sup>3</sup> This was addressed in some detail in my article on the conservative liberals, "Here be dragons."
- <sup>4</sup> It is likely that this title, as reported in the media at the time, refers to Mbuli's poem "The Voice of Anger" (1989: 46-7) which has the line "This is the international voice of anger."
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# 'CAN WE AS MOTHERS NOT TAKE OUR FIGHT TO THE ENEMY?': THE POLITICS OF MOTHERHOOD IN SOUTH AFRICAN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Zine Magubane

Black women in South Africa occupy a unique position. They are subject to oppression on the basis of race, and class, and gender. As an unnamed ANC member told Voice of Women: A Quarterly Magazine of the ANC Women's Section in 1982: "I am a woman, a worker, and I am black. Therefore I must fight for my freedom on three fronts." Their status has led them to have to make difficult choices and articulate views that many scholars have interpreted as hostile to feminism. The trenchant critique that Nomboniso Gasa made of the historiography of women in the 1950s can be extended to include the historiography of Black women's social activism more generally. According to Gasa, women's struggles have "not been studied on their own terms or for their own significance. The literature is often obscured by interpretations imposed on history... that intend to confirm one school of thought or the other." Likewise, Judy Kimble and Elaine Unterhalter make the point that many critics have failed to "comprehend the priorities of women in a national liberation struggle... engage with the actual conditions of women...and appreciate the general politics of the liberation movements." This essay uses the autobiographies of Black South African women to challenge one of the key theoretical misconceptions that have plagued analyses of African women's social activism in South Africa. The idea I seek to disprove is that Black women's decision to use motherhood as a motivation for social activism and cross-race coalition building represented an essentially conservative and anti-feminist viewpoint that failed to appreciate the differences between women.

In an 1989 interview that appeared in Lives of Courage: Women for a New South Africa, Ruth Mompati, the most highly placed woman in the external wing of the ANC at the time, and one of only three women on the ANC National Executive, reflected on how women's identities as mothers influenced their work with the Federation of South African Women (FSAW). FSAW was a multi-racial organization, formed in the 1950s, which organized and led an historic anti-pass protest in 1956:

Working with all women in the federation enabled us to realize that there were no differences between us as mothers. We were all women. We all had the same anxieties, the same worries. We all wanted to bring up our children to be happy and to protect them from the brutalities of life. This gave us more commitment to fight for unity in our

country. It showed us that people of different races could work together well.<sup>4</sup>

In 1956 FSAW organized 20,000 women to converge on the Union building in Pretoria to demand a meeting with the state president. This was the culmination of a series of anti-pass protests, which had begun in the early 1950s. FSAW's agitation against the pass laws has been criticized in some quarters for its failure to be "appropriately feminist" because of the manner in which ideologies about motherhood were used to ground and legitimate protests. Cherryl Walker, for example, assesses women's resistance against the passes in this way:

It is worth noting here that in the 1950s women in the antipass campaign rallied...in defense of their roles as mothers. It was the impact of the pass laws on their children...that was the main focus of concern, as reflected in FSAW and ANCWL [ANC Women's League] speeches, reports and pamphlets condemning the new legislation.<sup>5</sup>

Julia Wells is even stronger in her criticism. After characterizing FSAW's protest as "motherist" she goes on to assert that:

Motherism is clearly not feminism. Women swept up in motherist movements are not fighting for their own rights as women, but for their rights as mothers. ...Motherist movements must be recognized as limited in scope, duration, and success in achieving their goals.<sup>6</sup>

Likewise, Posel criticizes the anti-pass campaign because although it "usurped some of men's legitimate powers (authority) as head of household" these powers were "depicted and defended as necessary extensions of their roles as *mothers*—in other words, within the discourse of patriarchal relationships."<sup>7</sup>

Wells' statement that "motherism is clearly not feminism" assumes that we know what feminism is when we see it or, alternatively, that there is only one type of feminist consciousness. The notion that when a woman fights for her rights as a mother she inevitably sacrifices standing up for herself as a woman assumes a uniformity in women's experiences that we should open to further analysis and critical scrutiny. As Chandra Mohanty reminds us, feminist consciousness cannot be specified a priori. Rather, it must be defined with reference to the historical experience and political context of a particular society. Critiques like those of Walker and Wells fail to properly

appreciate the fact that "the state, shaped by a complex of social forces, has itself given a different content to motherhood according to race and class." With the aforementioned in mind, this essay will use the autobiographies of six politically active South African women to discuss just how their experience of motherhood was shaped by issues of race and class. In so doing, I will show that the type of analysis offered by Wells and Walker fundamentally misunderstands the material conditions under which African women lived and worked and how these material conditions shaped the content of their feminist consciousness.

I treat autobiographies as simultaneously a form of literature and a species of psychology. By that I mean autobiographies should not simply be seen as a transparent record of what "really happened" although they do give us vital information about the "facts"—at least from one person's perspective. The really interesting thing about autobiography, however, is that it is a reconstruction of the self. A re-telling of the past based in large part on who a person has become in the present. Thus, I will analyze how these women choose to remember their earliest experiences with their own mothers, showing that some of their most powerful memories are of humiliations their mothers suffered because of apartheid. I will also discuss how the women discuss and remember the role that apartheid played in robbing them of a proper mother/daughter relationship. As will be shown below, many of the women whose autobiographies I discuss draw parallels between their own fractured relationships with their mothers and the fractured relationships they have with their children. In both cases, life under apartheid provides a crucial link between the past and the present. The material lack they experienced in very distinct and particular ways as mothers and daughters provided them with a set of experiences which they then put to use in the process of actively constructing a link between autobiography and history or the personal and the political. These experiences were then re-interpreted and re-remembered once the women became politically active. As I will show, the re-interpretation of their experiences—whereby they came to see problems with childcare, domestic arrangements, marriage, and sexuality as both private struggles and public issues—was both the cause and the result of their burgeoning political consciousness. In the course of fighting for proper access to housing, childcare, food, and education they were able to discover hidden strengths that became seeds for the construction of a politically radicalized self.

In the following three sections I turn to a discussion of six autobiographies. The first, an unpublished autobiography, was written by Lilian Ngoyi, one of the founders of the Federation of South African Women in the 1950s, a president of the ANCWL, and one of the organizers of the 1956 anti-

pass protest where the phrase "You have struck a woman, you have struck a rock" was coined; the second, Frances Baard, a member of the ANC, FSAW, and key member of the African Food and Canning Workers Union (AFCWU); the third that of Emma Mashinini, Secretary of the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union of South Africa (CCAWUSA), one of South Africa's biggest trade unions; the fourth, that of Phyllis Ntantala, a prolific writer who was wife to ANC activist A.C. Jordan and mother to Pallo Jordan. And, finally, those of Sindiwe Magona and Caesarina Kona Makhoere, two participants in the 1976 uprising.

# 'Can We As Mothers Not Take Our Fight to the Enemy?': Motherhood in South African Political Discourse

In her autobiography, No Child's Play: In Prison Under Apartheid, Caesarina Kona Makhoere makes an impassioned statement about the role that mothers could and should play in the liberation struggle:

Since my release from prison, I have put my shoulder to the wheel. The people are organizing. At rallies, at meetings, at night vigils for fallen comrades, I have often asked: 'As mothers, can we let our children die for us? Let them die fighting the beast, die fighting the apartheid monster which makes our lives a tale of broken hearts? Can we, as mothers, not take the fight to the enemy? Can we not stand up and be counted?' 10

Although she penned her words in 1988, Makhoere was drawing on a long tradition of struggle whose roots can be traced to the 1950s when African women, particularly those in the ANC Women's League (ANCWL) and FSAW, first began the "strategic use of gendered images of motherhood [to] claim a voice for a population that would otherwise be ignored." 11

Einwohner, et. al. make the key point that gendered images can be a powerful cultural resource for social movement actors. "Gender can be used by social movement participants who wish to construct their image in a certain light, frame an issue in a particular way, or claim legitimacy as actors in a given arena." Gender is a uniquely *flexible* cultural resource that can be put to a wide variety of ideological uses. "What is important is that the range of possibilities is more or less available to all members of a culture for use either in staging or evaluating protest activity. The entire set of meanings may be understood as a set of cultural tools or a repertoire on which individuals may draw in service of various ends." 13

A careful reading of South African autobiographies, as well as South African history, shows that the critiques offered by Wells, Posel, and Walker ignore the type of militancy that African women grafted onto what might appear, at first glance, to be a simple-minded embrace of traditional roles. Colleen O'Brien makes the important point that:

There seems to be a myth surrounding the nature of South African women's participation in the struggle against apartheid. It is one which erroneously assumes that women, who must undertake almost complete responsibility for the welfare and survival of their families, are so limited by being passive, nurturing, and motherly that they cannot at the same time be powerful, independent, and politically active.<sup>14</sup>

Anne McClintock agrees that "African women have embraced, transmuted and transformed the ideology [of motherhood] in a variety of ways, working strategically within traditional ideology to justify untraditional public militancy." Indeed, as early as 1956, when FSAW first published the pamphlet A Call to All Mothers, it was clear that there was a strand in South African political discourse which viewed motherhood as source of power for women that "encompassed caring for all the children of their community and fighting for a better future for the community." A Call to All Mothers dispensed with the idea that mothers were weak and passive and instead represented mothering as a "bridge into social activism." For example, in answer to the question: "How can we get what we want for our children?" A Call to All Mothers offered this reply:

The time when women sat at home and wept or wished for better things for their children has long since passed. Women are now at the forefront of the fight in our country for a better life for all, particularly for our children.

. . . .

Our children's future depends on the extent to which we, the mothers of South Africa, organize and work and fight for a better life for our little ones.<sup>18</sup>

Similar attitudes were expressed by women all over South Africa, particularly in the wake of the signing of the Bantu Education Act in 1958. Phyllis Ntantala included a discussion of how mothers in Langa township framed their resistance to Bantu Education as an attack on themselves, their children, and African people as a whole. For Ntantala, "the fight against Bantu Education was a fight for the mothers of the nation." In A Life's Mosaic

she recounted how Winnie Siqwana, a member of both the ANC and the Communist Party, made this impassioned plea:

Education is the only hope the African people have, through which they hope to liberate themselves some day. ...I have lived in this location for years and I think I can say I know the wishes of the mothers here about the education of their children. I can say the same about all those fathers in the barracks and bachelors' quarters. Every one of them wishes to see his children educated. Go to the mines, the farms, the rural areas, there is not a single African parent who does not wish to see his or her child educated, to be in a better position than the parent.<sup>20</sup>

Dinah Mapille, also a member of the ANC and the Communist Party agreed that "the fight is for us, the parents, not for our children. Who ever heard of putting children in the forefront, in the front lines in battle? We want our children educated. But we can refuse to cooperate with Verwoerd in the schools boards and committees he wants to set up. That is our role. That is our fight."<sup>21</sup>

When we consider the question of women's consciousness—specifically the question of whether or not women failed to develop what Hassim termed "feminist ideological and procedural frameworks for politics"—we must not proceed from the basis of theoretical abstraction. Rather, we must deal with the actual political and social conditions that structured women's lives and thus exerted a profound influence both on their chosen methods of activism as well as on the ways in which they perceived their experiences. According to Mohanty, "the challenge of Third World feminisms to white, Western, feminisms has been precisely this inescapable link between feminist and political liberation movements."22 She goes on to explain that "Third World women's writings on feminism have consistently focused on the idea of the simultaneity of oppressions as fundamental to the experience of social and political marginality and the grounding of feminist politics in the histories of racism and imperialism. ... In addition, they have insisted on the complex interrelationships between feminist, anti-racist, and nationalist struggles."23 Mohanty thus warns us against the error of thinking about women as an "already constituted, coherent group with identical interests and desires regardless of class, ethnic, or racial location, or contradictions."24

Thus, the way in which African women engaged the question of women's emancipation can be seen as having been profoundly conditioned by the manner in which apartheid and its laws (particularly around labor and

mobility) produced them as gendered non-citizens. Indeed, the pass laws, influx control, and the industrial and agricultural labor markets relied on manipulating traditional gender categories like mother, widow, and wife in ways that supported Black women's super-exploitation in the labor market and, further, entrenched the status of Black people as a whole as non-citizens. As Marcus points out, "what the South African condition exposes is that it is not the family which is at the heart of women's oppression—although it is a very central site where their oppression is acted out—but rather it is the place of the family in social relations in general which is of particular importance to women's oppression. In other words, it is how women are placed in relation to social production, rather than reproduction, that is of primary importance.<sup>25</sup> Instead of jumping to the conclusion that using a traditionally gendered image like a mother necessarily implies capitulation to patriarchy, rather we can, in the words of Einwhoner, think of gender as a "cultural resource that actors in a social movement arena can use to further their goals."26 We must remain cognizant of the fact that even highly stereotyped cultural images—like that of the mother—are open to multiple interpretations and meanings are neither unitary nor static. In other words, "claiming gendered identities does not necessitate allegiance to traditional roles...There are many possible representations of gender, even within a single culture. Movement actors may therefore draw on different elements from the set of cultural meanings available to them."27 I will turn to a discussion of two of these elements—representations of childhood and representations of the politics of parental love—in the next section.

## Through the Eyes of a Child: The Genesis of Political Consciousness

Very few autobiographies recount happy childhoods. The South African autobiographies that I have chosen might, at first glance, appear to be a curious exception as a number of them open with descriptions of uncharacteristically peaceful and happy lives. Frances Baard, who was born in Kimberley in 1908, states, "I think it was much better in that time than it is now." Lillian Ngoyi, born in Pretoria in 1911, described her parents as "very religious" people who lived an "honest life." Emma Mashinini, born in Johannesburg in 1929, opens her story with the simple declaration that: "We were happy in our home." Phyllis Ntantala, born in the Transkei in 1920, thought her parents were "a near-perfect pair." Sindiwe Magona describes her life in Gungulu just after WWII as "filled with a real, immediate, and tangible sense of belongingness. ... I was not only wanted, I was loved. I was cherished." While Caesarina Kona Makhoere, born in 1955, declared her father "one of those people who got along well with others...though

a policeman he was never isolated by the people." As for her mother, she summed up the relationship thus: "she was my life." 33

The simple act of writing their childhoods into history—of insisting that they had childhoods—should be seen as having political dimensions. For although Blacks are often stereotyped as *childlike*, very rarely is it acknowledged that they actually have *childhoods*. As Hilda Bernstein explains, "while the black woman may be able to serve a useful function in the economy as a domestic servant, both in town and countryside (and to a limited amount in service and secondary industry in the cities) the black child is totally useless as far as the white regime is concerned, the most superfluous of all the worker's appendages."<sup>34</sup>

The insistence that their mothers be seen and acknowledged as mothers also has a political dimension. The invisibility of Black children as children and the invisibility of Black women as mothers were two sides of the same coin. In White nationalist discourse, Black mothers were simply non-entities. They were seen as overly fecund producers of subject and inferior races that threatened to swamp the White citizenry. They were not seen as sentient human beings, capable of having or expressing mother-love. Because Black children held absolutely no importance until they were old enough to act as units of labor power in service to the Apartheid economy, they were deemed objects that neither needed nor deserved parental affection and care. As Caesarina Kona Makhoere put it in her memoir No Child's Play: In Prison Under Apartheid:

You know, they treat us as though we are not human, as if our mothers just picked us up off the trees, like picking a fruit. The way they treat us, you would think our mothers never felt the pain, that they did not suffer at all bringing us up. For them it is only whites in South Africa whose parents cared when they brought them into the world.<sup>35</sup>

Lilian Ngoyi agreed that Black mothers were not accorded human status. Rather, they were seen as having the same lack of attachment to their offspring as mere brutes of the field.

To me it seemed as if we were treated like fowls, in this respect that a fowl has no decision what so ever over its own eggs. The owner of the poultry decides whether to give a neighbor the eggs, or put them through an incubator. ...I ask myself, is [sic] my child and grandchildren included in mankind?<sup>36</sup>

No one can deny that defining women solely with respect to their childbearing capacity has been a key mechanism for denying them representation and voice in the public sphere. However, we must never forget that nationalist regimes, particularly racist nationalist regimes have been able to manipulate the concept of motherhood in ways that define motherhood as having important public dimensions. Specifically, mothers and ideologies about motherhood have often been closely tied to the defense of racial privilege and put in the service of protecting the sanctity of Whitenesss. As early as 1903, members of the White South African medical establishment began using eugenics to promote the idea that the first duty of White mothers was to engage in what was then called "Empire-building" which meant producing healthy white children who were the foundation of the White race. "Nation-building was understood by these doctors to mean that whites as a 'race', and British origin whites in particular, were productive, intelligent and fit enough to maintain dominance over the majority of Africans and other non-white 'races' with whom white South Africans shared a common territory, if not a common national identity."37 White mothers and White children thus stood at the center of the White supremacist social project. Indeed, eugenicists were preoccupied with the issue of motherhood. As Klausen explains:

Doctors who contributed to the South African Medical Record identified white infant mortality and child welfare as issues crucial to those of their profession who were committed to constructing a strong Union: it was clear that the future of the Union depended on the white children of the day. If strength was found in numbers, these doctors argued then children were imperial assets.<sup>38</sup>

According to McClintock, the concept of the *Volksmoeder* played a similar role in the ideological consolidation of Afrikaner nationalism. The concept was premised on the idea that Afrikaner motherhood should be "mobilized in the service of white nation-building" and used for the legitimating of white domination. It was such that motherhood "became implicated in the racism that suffuses Afrikaner nationalism." <sup>39</sup>

Thus, in the context of apartheid, the love between a parent and a child is highly politicized. Furthermore, the rupturing of the parent/child relationship could often be attributed, at least in part, to the poverty families experienced because of apartheid. Routine distortions, like death or divorce, became catastrophic events because families were already so weakened due to the strains of absentee parents, financial hardship, and scarce resources. Ntantala and Baard, for example, had mothers who died when they were

very young. Baard had to leave school as a result and take on a job as a domestic worker because "there was no one to look after me, or pay my school anymore."40 For Ntantala and her siblings "the loss of a mother affected us profoundly...we had to learn quite early in our life how to cope, fend for ourselves and, above all, how to close ranks."41 For Mashinini, her idyllic childhood came to an abrupt end when her parents divorced. "The happiness of this home was shattered for me when my parents separated. ...Due to the break-up of my parents marriage our funds deteriorated and I was forced to leave school."42 Magona's life changed dramatically when her family moved to Cape Town after her mother became ill. They had been in Cape Town less than a week when their home was raided by the police in the middle of the night. She and her siblings huddled frightened as "piercing torches searched our eyes; blankets were rudely pulled away; loud foreign voices demanded names and relations of those in the house."43 When Makhoere's mother had to take a job that kept her away for weeks at a time, the family fell into disarray. "We had to look after ourselves and that created problems for us children."44 Ngoyi suffered similarly. She described how, because of the demands placed upon her mother, "sometimes I would be absent from school to attend to my younger brother."45

All of the women place the devastation that they experienced—particularly the loss of mother love—firmly within the context of apartheid. Indeed, in their recounting, although they acknowledge the events themselves as traumatic, the trauma itself comes to play a key role in providing a background and context for launching a damning critique of apartheid. In a number of the narratives, the critique focuses on the culpability of the white family, particularly white women and children, in disrupting the ties between Black mothers and their own daughters. Lilian Ngoyi expresses the brutal reality of this in her unpublished autobiography wherein she reflects on her childhood experiences as the daughter of a domestic worker:

My mother would take me with her to her place of employment. We would never be allowed into the house of her employers, we would remain under a tree, whilst my mother was ironing in the beautiful house and she was not allowed to breast feed her child in that house, she would come to us outside under the tree. At the same time I could see a big cat roaming in that house, even their big dog would roam up and down the house.<sup>46</sup>

Makhoere relates a very similar experience, seeing her own truncated child-hood as having resulted from the fact that her mother "worked for a white family as a domestic servant and spent most of her time slaving for them.

She was allowed only one day off every second Sunday. Every day she left home before sunrise and came back tired at sunset when it became dark; she was in no position to look after us. She was in no position to know what we were doing during the day." Magona was also left unattended for much of the day, as were many of the children she grew up with. "Those of us who had working mothers," she recalled, "would run to welcome them long before they were anywhere near their destination, their houses."

Having working mothers, especially mothers who worked as domestics, provided an important, early glimpse into the inequalities engendered by apartheid. The mothers were literally a bridge between the worlds of Black and White and provided a window into the inequities of the system. Mashinini recalls how her neighbor "worked in a white kindergarten, and she would be able to bring leftovers of sandwiches from rich children, and as she had no young children of her own she would pass those leftovers to me." Magona recounts a very similar experience. "Not a penny was every spent on a toy" by her family. Rather, the only source of toys was "the white world," where almost all the working women of her childhood were employed as nannies, house-maids, chars, and cooks:

These women brought, into the black locations, droppings off [sic] the white families they served. They returned with bags bulging with cold toast, stale bread, moulding cheese, milk, cake, and whatever other food was threatening to go off despite refrigeration. They came back with clothing—shoes, socks, hats, underwear, sweaters, dresses, raincoats, coats, gloves, blouses, skirts, pants, and anything else one can imagine, in various states of disrepair. Those who worked for families with children also brought toys to their homes. Books and comics were another offering.<sup>50</sup>

As was the case in Mashinini's neighborhood, the bounty was shared. In Magona's recollection, "whatever their own family composition, not one of those women was stupid enough ever to tell an employer they had no use for any gift. If one didn't have a child who could use a toy, a doll, a train, a dress, a slice of bread, a piece of cheese, a book, a pair of shoes, a raincoat, a comic book, old newspaper, or whatever else was being thrown out, one had enough sense to know there were scores of children and adults who could use anything, whatever state it was in."51

Magona's meticulous accounting of every type of item that came in, as well as the disrepair of those items (torn clothes and rotting food) is designed to evoke not only the material excess that is the norm for a White family in

South Africa but also, in recounting the deplorable state in which the offerings arrived, is a testament to the fact these donations should be seen as further acts of selfishness. Magona includes snatches of conversation "heard on the busses to and from the black townships" which further illuminate the politics of these 'charitable' donations. She thus recalls how "an old woman, a veteran domestic servant, says 'My sisters, that old stingy so-and-so I work for gives me things I wouldn't even take to the church rummage sale. But me, I know what these white women we work for think of us. I know how they think. If I don't take her rags she will hate me."<sup>52</sup>

These realizations play an important part in Magona's political awakening. As she explains below, it was only over time that she came to realize the political ramifications of the Christmas parties she attended as a child, sponsored by the Cape Flats Distress Association:

We went to these parties for two reasons and two reasons only: to get toys; to fill ourselves with cakes, pies, cold drinks, and sweets—things never on the grocery list in our homes. ... We did not question why it was that the beneficent were invariably white, the beneficiaries invariably black. We had no way of knowing about the broader issues that had given birth to the organization itself, let alone understand its mission, to say nothing of the inadequacy and limitedness of its undertaking. How were we to know that many of these kind ladies were the wives and daughters of the men who paid our fathers peanuts; fed their dogs T-bone steak; and ensured our poverty by voting in a government whose avowed task was making certain we would stay servants, serf-like and docile? We were children. 53

She thus makes an important distinction between acts of charity, aimed at the politically and socially voiceless, which ultimately sustain and maintain the status quo and political struggle which empowers those actors to speak and act for themselves. It is important that she ends the statement with "we were children" as she points the readers' attention to the fact that childhood—that period of innocence and powerlessness—must come to an end. What we are to understand is that African adults are continually made to feel and act like children by the apartheid power structure. Indeed, these women's autobiographies are replete with descriptions of the psychic distress they felt watching adults they knew and respected being humiliated as they were forced to assume a child-like stance with respect to not only White adults, but White children as well. Lilian Ngoyi recalled in her memoir how "it did not matter our black fathers ages or education. They got no more respect

than a white boy of five years. Because of their skins they remained boys and girls."<sup>54</sup> For some, like Makhoere and Ntantala, the humiliation suffered by teachers, who were very respected adults in their own communities but were nevertheless treated as sub-human by Whites, brought about the same types of feelings and led to similar types of realizations. When Ntantala was in high school at Healdtown for example, she observed how "there was no mixing between black and white teachers."

At the girls' school, the two matrons—both white—ate alone in their dining-room, while the African women teachers ate with the students in their dining-hall. At the boys' school, the white unmarried teachers ate with other staff in the Governor's living quarters, while the African staff ate with the boys in the boys' dining hall. ... I could not wait to get out of that place!<sup>55</sup>

Makhoere recalled how school became yet another occasion for apartheid militarism to intrude into students' lives as "two thirds of the teaching staff, including the principal and his deputy, were white soldiers from the South African Defence Force appointed by the powers that be." Makhoere describes the teachers as having brought "the most virulent racism into our schools," citing the example of the different standards of cleanliness afforded to Black and White teachers.

There was a staffroom for white teachers only, which had a clean, decent appearance. Even their toilets were sparkling clean. They had hired an old black man to keep them clean. The black teachers used a separate staffroom which was dark, very small and uncared for. They had to look after their own staffroom—because the principal did not allow the old man to look after it.<sup>56</sup>

These early experiences precipitate important shifts in the women's psyches. They are simultaneously overwhelmed by not only their own anger but also the shock of the realization of their own impotence and that of their parents. Ngoyi, for example, describes her psychic awakening in this way:

As I grew up I noticed hatred in the missionaries, for though they preached the gospel, when it came to a black man they too saw black. And love thy neighbor as you love your self did not exist. Oh! Well I thought to myself perhaps the Black man was made second by God just as there is brown sugar and white sugar. ... I, too, then became very religious, praying very sincerely that God should have mercy on us. ... As a child I started getting fed up as I sincerely prayed, but no answer, things went worse. Also I started thinking how can this White God, who will not look and answer our prayers [have us] be with him in his Glorious heaven?... Funny enough, while the African population was full in churches, most of the whites were in cinemas, some in tennis courts, they seemed most relaxed and had the best food. We were eating mealie meal porridge daily, had no sweets, no salads, except sometimes we get [sic] wild spinach. <sup>57</sup>

Magona also relates similar feelings of confusion and distress that arose within her after she witnessed her mother try (unsuccessfully) to defend herself after being called a Kaffir.

'Ukafile ngunyoko!' (Your mother is a kaffir!) On my way to the clinic near the railway line between the two stations of Retreat and Steenberg, I heard those words said with hot anger, rare in my mother who lost her temper every so often but seldom was angry. She startled me. I do not know what impact, if any, the words had on the fast-receding figure on a bicycle, of a young coloured man who had provoked them: 'Kaffir!' he had hissed, riding past. Besides this verbal outburst, I saw and heard little else by way of reaction from my mother. However, my whole being sensed her changed mood. Anger? Pain? Hatred? Or frustration? Something, I didn't know what, flowed wordlessly from her: I did not know all these words then, but I knew she was a different person from the one whom I stepped out of the house such a short while ago.<sup>58</sup>

For most of these women, relationships with fathers were also profoundly disrupted by the pressures placed upon families by apartheid. Ntantala is rare in her ability to say that her father "raised me, moulded me and instilled in me values I will treasure to the end of my days, values that made me socially conscious." Because of the elite status of her family, she is also the only woman who did not have to suffer by seeing her father, a clerk in the Land Office, humiliated. Indeed, she recalled with pride that "Tata was a terror to those assistant magistrates. He brooked no nonsense from them and would beat them up right in their offices if they were rude to him or showed any arrogance toward him; they always lost their jobs in the bargain. ... The magistrates, even though white, and the white clerks knew they were there to serve and were seldom rude to the African members of the service

with whom they worked."60 The other women were not so fortunate. They were forced to witness their fathers' emasculation, something they all related as having been profoundly distressing. For Magona, the truly frightening aspect of a midnight raid on her house by the police was not their guns or aggressive manner, but rather, the knowledge that the police had scared her father. This was something she did not allow herself to experience at the time, however. As she put it, "knowledge I would hide, for years even from myself, became mine that night: Father's eyes could also house fear."61 Makhoere's experience was perhaps the most traumatic as her father was "the one responsible for [her] being behind bars" as he had given away her hideout to his fellow policeman. Makhoere does place blame on her father for his lack of character, noting that "he would explain that one of the reasons for his actions was the fact that he had only a few months to go before getting his pension and he would have had to forfeit that. He looked really pathetic."62 However, she also faults the system within which he was embedded and which profoundly limited his choices. As she put it: "Even today I don't really blame him for everything that happened to me. He never deliberately tried to hurt me or my mother. He was trapped and could not help pointing out where I was hiding when I was on the run."63 Apartheid also provided the context for the breakup of Mashinini's family and the loss of her father. As she explains, his disengagement was due both to his personal limitations and the exploitative conditions he experienced working on a dairy farm. Even though her parents' sudden separation was a "terrible shock" she was already accustomed to her father's physical absence. "We weren't seeing much of my father at the time, since he was still working for the same dairy as before, seven days a week, and since he was provided with living quarters he would return home late at night and leave around three in the morning to cycle back to work."64 Like Makhoere, forgiveness becomes possible with the knowledge that the failings of the individual must be contextualized by knowledge of the political system. Only when she became politicized did she come around to the realization that she shouldn't "hold any grudge against him for leaving us when he did and for his many years of neglect."65

Thus, as children they feel the insult but don't yet have the understanding or awareness to truly comprehend it. All they know is the feelings of fear and personal powerless brought on by seeing their parents so reduced. In their reconstruction of their own path to political awareness and militancy, a number of the women make direct links between this early experience of loss and their present day political commitments. Careful reading of the texts, however, makes clear the extent to which their explicit linking of these early childhood experiences with their burgeoning political awakening is a strategic choice. Emma Mashinini, for example, begins her autobiography

by boldly stating that "I think that was my first fight for human rights, my own right to have a father." Later on, however, she throws the certainty of her earlier statement into question with her admission that she doesn't "exactly know" when she became politicized:

In 1955, for example, I was in Kliptown when the Freedom Charter was drawn up there, and the square that became known as Freedom Charter Square was like a stone's throw from where I was living. But at the time I really didn't know there was going to be this kind of meeting. There were many papers which were going about, and the meeting was clearly advertised, but it was only when my friends approached me that I really took notice of it. ... This was before the African National Congress was banned. All my friends were members, and I think the reason why I was not was because I had just got back from the rural area, and nothing meant anything to me apart from my children. It was when my friends came and spoke about this Congress that I took an interest.<sup>67</sup>

Likewise, Phyllis Ntantala credits the early loss of her mother with having taught her "what solidarity was and what it could do for us. This lesson was to stand us well in later life."68 Ntantala, however, does not make any attempts to hide the fact that she is deliberately reconstructing the past in a way that enables her to tell a particular story about the present. Indeed, this is why she chooses the metaphor of a mosaic. "A summary of events does not and cannot give the whole picture," she explains. The nuances are lost in a synopsis. The whole mosaic has to be seen—lines, dots, colours and all—in its totality, to be appreciated."69 Thus, although she insists that "this book is not a political thesis," nevertheless she avers that "I have used the story of my life and events in South Africa and North America as I experienced them. ... In drawing this mosaic we have gone back in time and history...for to understand the present, we must know the past; even to predict the future accurately, we have to know that past, as it was in the past that the seeds of the future were sown."70 Thus, the autobiography is a means of building this mosaic; the pieces of which are her early life and the values of "solidarity" she learned there, on the one hand, and a series of experiences with racism and discrimination which were an affront to them, on the other. In her words:

I chose the path of struggle and uncertainty. I trace the foundations of this attitude to my upbringing in a home where the less fortunate and destitute always came and

found help and succor. ... There had been stirrings in me even before I left the University of Fort Hare. The blatant racism at Healdtown where I went to school had opened my eyes. ... It was brought home to me in Cape Town that not until this system of exploitation of Man by Man had been smashed and disbanded could there be freedom in the world. ... Having understood this, I could not leave it to others to do. I had to be a part of it.<sup>71</sup>

Magona also insists that she was unaware of politics. "Poverty datum line, making ends meet, cheap or uncivilized labour and exploitation; all these were concepts as foreign to me then as the language of the Martians is to me now" is how she puts it.<sup>72</sup> She, like Ntantala, also conceives of her life as something of a jigsaw puzzle that she is only now assembling into a coherent whole. It is only this retrospective act of construction and reconstruction that, for example, allows three disparate events (taking out a pass, an accident in a pit latrine, South Africa becoming a Republic) that occurred when she turned eighteen to be not only yoked together, but also and more importantly, become signal moments of self-definition. Midway through the text she explains that:

1961 was my eighteenth year. From age sixteen, every African was obliged to carry a pass on his or her person at all times on pain of arrest. I had managed to postpone this by remaining at school, even though that was breaking the law. Now that I was leaving school, I complied. ...

The college still used a pit lavatory system. Sewage is thus not removed but lies rotting in pits six feet deep. ...One day, the floor gave way and two of the student-teachers plunged into the pit and drowned.

South Africa held a referendum in 1961 to decide whether or not the country should continue its ties with Great Britain and remain in the Commonwealth. The English element of the white South African populace favoured keeping this 'connection' whilst the Afrikaner element was for breaking ties with England. No one saw any need to consult with people of colour. The Afrikaner won the day, South Africa became a republic.<sup>73</sup>

Makona surmises that "these events are not really linked. But, perhaps it is because it is through them that I caught the first glimpse of my own impuissance, in my memory they are firmly twined; strands of the same hideous whole."<sup>74</sup> The irony of the juxtaposition of the pit latrine and

apartheid cannot be lost on the reader, however. It is clear that just as the two teachers literally "drowned in shit" all Blacks living under apartheid are also, metaphorically, legally, socially, and economically drowning in shit as well. Makona, like many of the other women, describes herself as feeling overwhelmed by her own powerlessness and impotence—a feeling that would only be countered by the feelings of empowerment that accompanied political engagement.

As will be discussed in the final section, this shift to political engagement was often closely tied to the experience of being a mother as women viewed motherhood as obligating them to care for all the children of their community and fight for a better future for the entire community. Women in FSAW and the ANCWL adopted a "particularly militant way of fighting for bread and butter issues, which made the linking up of these types of issues to broader political issues relatively easy."<sup>75</sup> An extremely effective method of mass mobilization involved politicizing people around bread and butter issues—housing, schools, food prices—which were typically domains of female concern. When these issues entered the realm of politics, however, they were seen less as sectarian gender issues and more as broad based political ones. Oliver Tambo is widely reported to have drawn two lessons for the ANC from FSAW's protests. "It illustrated, he said, 'how the people's daily needs can become the kernel of a united protest campaign' and recruit more people into the liberation movement."<sup>76</sup> Thus, in the final section I turn to a discussion of how "motherist" ideals and organizing practices actually helped to foster an even stronger commitment, on the part of mothers, to their roles as workers.

## Mothers to All Who Suffer: Motherhood as a Bridge to Social Activism

Because of her work in FSAW, the ANCWL, the ANC, and the Non-European Council of Trade Unions, Lilian Ngoyi was often referred to as 'a mother to all who suffer'. In her unpublished biography she explained her outlook on life in these terms: "The main thing is we do not want to discriminate. As mothers a child is a child." The preponderance of mothers in the South African trade union movement goes a long way towards explaining what Berger described as the "militant, politically aware female component within the Black working class" The composition of trade unions such as the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers' Union, for example, was between 60% and 70% female during the 1980s. They were "the first union in South Africa—black, white, or Coloured—to have an agreement that protected women's maternity rights." Furthermore,

women (many of whom were mothers) held "disproportionate numbers of leadership positions" in South African unions. <sup>81</sup> A number of studies have noted that not only were a high percentage of Black South African female industrial workers unionized "but in strikes and political actions were often far more involved than men." Thus, not only were these women committed and effective—oftentimes they outpaced their male counterparts. Emma Mashinini agreed that "I'm fifty-four... and I must say I've never had any difficulty because I'm a woman and a trade-union organizer... in fact there's a saying that women can explain things better to the workers than men!" In her autobiography, Mashinini recalled how a spy for management was discovered at a meeting in Khotso house and was "punched and kicked by the workers and even hit on the head by some women, with their shoes, until one of our officials stepped in and rescued him!" <sup>84</sup>

According to Berger, the South African case demonstrates that "the family cannot be viewed simply as a force antithetical to class consciousness."85 Berger's analysis of strikes that occurred amongst women in the textile industry reveals that women workers' militancy was the result of the burdens they bore as household heads. Indeed, her study found that "women who are heads of households are more prone to develop a stronger commitment to their work role because they become the principal breadwinners for their family. .... Women who are the sole support of their families are more likely to develop class consciousness than women who are still primarily dependent on men to support them"86 Sindiwe Magona describes how being left alone with three children forced her to "realize my own responsibility. It is not easy to ignore three pairs of eyes looking up to you. Three children. Mine; with all that entailed. Three children who depended, desperately and solely, on me."87 Frances Baard, who became a leader in the trade union movement, admits that when she first had children she "wasn't worried about politics. I didn't understand them. I just accepted things the way they were. And my husband didn't understand politics either. We just lived there in New Brighton, and he worked in the motor industry and I stayed home and looked after the house and the children."88 All that changed, however, when she had to take on more economic responsibility and began working at a canning factory in Port Elizabeth.

I had children at that time, and we suffered with our children. It was mostly women who were working in our factory, and many had children. ...I had to get a woman to look after my children, while I was at work. When I came back at night, they are already asleep. ...So they don't see me at all unless perhaps they get up in the night for something. ...Things went on like that, every day, working hard, get-

ting home late, and the conditions not good, and nothing to help the workers.<sup>89</sup>

Mashinini relates a similar experience. When she first married she stayed at home with her children. However, she and her husband soon discovered that "we could not manage on his pay. It would be used up before pay day and there would be no money to pay for food for the babies."

Both Mashinini and Baard were politicized by the experience of juggling the demands of work and family on a tiny salary. Mashinini went to work for a clothing company called Henochsberg, a factory that provided uniforms for soldiers. The oppressive conditions, alongside the knowledge that she was sewing uniforms for the people who oppressed her, led her to undergo a radical transformation:

It was my first job, apart from working as a nanny to white children when I left school, and I had not begun to develop any political awareness. But I was already angry. The hours my father had been forced to work had contributed to the break-up of my family, and my own need to earn money had put an end to my schooling. And no, when my three children were still young and I could have done with being at home to look after them, I was having to go out to work to earn a tiny wage, which we needed in order to survive. 91

Mashinini eventually became Secretary of the Commercial, Catering, and Allied Workers Union, an experience which showed her that she could not simply fight for her rights as a worker or a women or an African. The three identities were so closely intertwined that the battles had to be fought simultaneously and the battleground had to encompass both the community and the shop floor. "Other workers are seen as human beings, and the black workers are seen as underdogs," she wrote. "It is all the menial jobs, all the lowest jobs in the workplaces, that are the jobs of the black workers." Thus, while she recognized the Black and White women shared some common problems as mothers she was also well aware that:

While white mothers have problems of their own, such as having to see one of their boys leave to fight on the border, we can understand them, because we must also lose our children—to the security forces, or to fight against apartheid. But white mothers in this country do not have to suffer anxiety over what we call breadline problems. There is no other word for them. Breadline problems are questions of

who will care for the children when their mother goes to work? Who will pay the bills when the grandmother or friend cannot come one day and the mother must stay at home, even though she is not paid enough to be able to afford to lose that one day's money? Who will pay when she has to spend a day at the hospital waiting for an appointment? No. Our problems are not the same.<sup>93</sup>

For Baard, Ray Alexander, a Latvian immigrant who worked for most of her life as a trade union organizer in South Africa, was instrumental in helping she and her fellow workers become organized in the African Food and Canning Workers Unions (AFCWU). The relationship was such that Baard and the other workers called Alexander their "Mother."

She was a wonderful person, Ray Alexander. We used to call her our mother. When the government banned her in 1953 the workers came out on strike to say no, they can't do this to our mother, they cannot make her leave the trade unions like this. ... We found it was not so difficult to get the workers interested in the trade union because they knew that they were getting very little money.<sup>94</sup>

According to Berger, the AFCWU faced the challenging, but not unique, problem of trying to organize seasonal workers who were predominantly female. As Frances Baard explained:

The biggest problem that we had in organizing at these factories was that they are seasonal factories. ... When the season comes back again the workers go back to the factory. But it was not the same people working at the factory each year, they hire anyone who comes to look for work. ... And so each year we must start educating the workers again. 95

The canning industry tended to rely on seasonal workers in order to reduce costs. If the union hoped to keep workers engaged during the off season, they had to focus on fighting issues relevant to women as members of communities and families, rather than merely as workers. In other words, the unions were most effective when they "conceptualized gender concerns as family issues." According to Ray Alexander:

Sometimes we would say we are fighting for women, but of course we were fighting for women to get higher piece work rates; of course we were fighting for women to get crèches for their children, in the place or cloakrooms and so on. But, by fighting for the women and getting improvements for the women, we improved the whole setup of life for the family.<sup>97</sup>

African women were at the forefront of this initiative, expressing their class consciousness by taking the issue of unions into communities and, at the same time, bringing the problems of the community onto the shop floor. The 1980s were a time of tremendous strike activity, much of it initiated and sustained by women. As Mashinini recalled: "1980. It was a good year. The power of the unions was now coming on and for the first time we were saying to employers—this or that must not happen to members of our union."98 According to Luckhardt and Wall, SACTU called 1980 "the Year of Mobilization of the Workers against Racism and Exploitation." Indeed, the years 1980-1982 witnessed a series of industry strikes that "concentrated on the link between the work place and the community."100 Because Black female workers had to assume primary responsibility for the maintenance of the family and the household in both economic and emotional terms, they came to see domestic issues as having a strong political dimension and when their ability to support their households came under threat, they were willing to take political action. As Seidman explains, a broadly defined class consciousness where labor movements "take up issues beyond the workplace is a gendered process in which female workers' domestic responsibilities have made them more likely to raise community issues than their male counterparts." <sup>101</sup> Indeed, in an August 1984 National Women's Day meeting at Wits University, Cape UDF Secretary, Cheryl Carolus, reminded the audience that "it is women who struggle to feed and clothe the next generation in the poverty-stricken Bantustans. The women reproduce the working class and experience the greatest economic exploitation."102 This emphasis on family, rather than simply reinforcing traditionalism, actually "helped to build up a sense of women's common experience on the basis of class; for as working-class wives and mothers, they faced far different circumstances than middle-class South African women, who rarely held paying jobs and had domestic workers to relieve them of responsibilities for child care, cleaning, and cooking."103

It was due to these experiences that Ntantala, like the other five women discussed above, decided that her role as a mother must extend beyond providing love and affection to include imparting a sense of political consciousness. "I, who was close to them all the time, who took them to political meetings, distributed political leaflets with them, answered their questions on literature and history, and read to them their bedtime stories, knew that they were developing into the intellectuals that they are." <sup>104</sup> Magona

also became determined that she must be part of a movement for change, because of what it meant for her children. "Thembeka was eleven when I first gave thought to the meaning of black parenthood in South Africa," Magona wrote. Thinking that unless change came about, her daughter had no hope but to become a maid, she ends by asking in anguish, "how could I have brought a child into this world, one who could look forward to no better future than that?"105 Frances Baard agreed that she wouldn't stop working until freedom came, that she could "never be tired, even though I am a grandmother now!"106 While Emma Mashinini reflected on the damage being done to future generations by apartheid: "I grieve when I think of them as fathers and mothers of tomorrow; what are they going to tell and teach their children?"107 Makhoere ends her autobiography with the hope that the fathers and mothers of tomorrow would teach their children the value of unity and the benefits of collective action and struggle. For her. the mothers of South Africa were the ones bringing about this change. She thus concluded with this hopeful sentiment: The pace is changing, the world is changing around us. We are making it change. We are on the offensive. A luta continua. Victory is certain."108

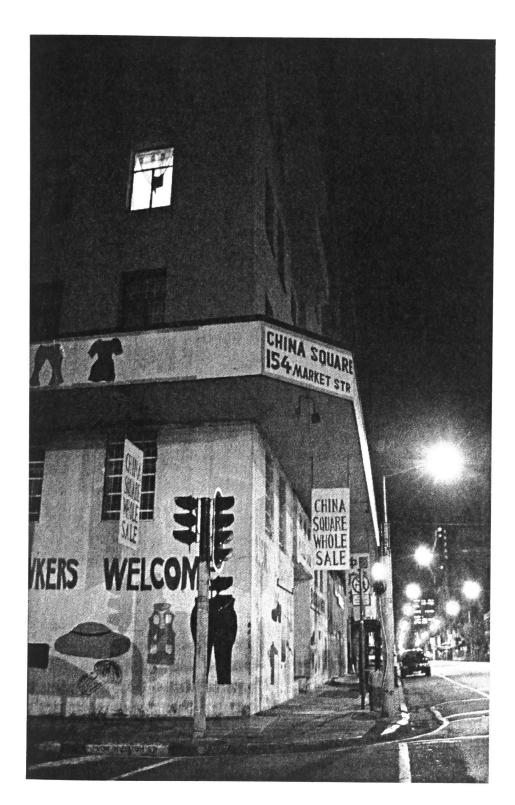
#### **Footnotes**

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- <sup>16</sup> M. Rivka Polatnick, "Diversity in Women's Liberation Ideology: How a Black and a White Group of the 1960s Viewed Motherhood," *Signs*, Vol. 21 (No. 3), 1996, 680.
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- <sup>46</sup> Ngoyi, Unpublished Autobiography, p. 1.
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- <sup>54</sup> Ngoyi, Unpublished Autobiography, p. 2.
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- <sup>57</sup> Ngoyi, Unpublished Autobiography, p. 2.
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- 60 Ntantala, Life's Mosaic, p. 49.
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- 62 Makhoere, Child' Play, p. 2.
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### "AS WOMEN WE HAVE MULTIPLE LIVES, AND WE NEED TO HONOUR ALL OF THEM":

### A CONVERSATION WITH MAKHOSAZANA XABA

Pumla Dineo Gqola

This conversation took place on 8 August 2008, on the eve of South African women's day at Xarra Books in Newtown, Johannesburg, in front of an audience that asked questions later. It occurred on the occasion of the launch of Makhosazana Xaba's second collection of poetry, In the tongues of their mothers (UKZN Press, 2008).

**Pumla**: What strikes me about the title poem is that you write precisely the poem that you say you want to write but are not ready to: a poem that partakes creatively in excavating women and their stories, that develops a language for speaking about women in ways that pay attention to the textures of our lives, their lives, that owns and embraces women in ways that are not akin to how women like those you evoke – famous, infamous, public, private – are seen as in relation to the men you want to shift out of focus. As we go into women's day, one of the ways in which women are *not* talked about is in this beautiful language that you create in this poem. Do you see any related, or cousin-projects to your chosen style of representation in South Africa?

**Khosi**: I think there are a lot of cousin and sister projects. One that is closest to my heart is biography because when you walk into any store and you compare the numbers of biographies of men to those of women, you find that there are very few. There are other related projects outside of biography, and indeed, whatever area you venture into there are possible cousin projects.

**Pumla**: Speaking about biography. In your other life you are Noni Jabavu's biographer. In this collection, in the poem "Fear" you speak about the power and possibilities of women's words, of your words, and that these often exist in the midst of incredible fear as a writer, even for you a writer who owns her voice and speaks the uncomfortable silences. In "Fear" you mention the fear of exposure, when we read and hear your voice. This expressed fear of being public, of being made public through your published words and how this can be debilitating. Yet quite clearly in your various writer capacities, you do not let it debilitate you. Instead you share with us this incredible gift that is your words that help us navigate being here in the world today.

Speak to me about what it means to give expression to that fear without letting it debilitate you.

**Khosi**: That particular poem was meant to be part of the first collection, but a few reviewers came back to me and said that they did not think it was a good idea to have a poem about fear in my first book because maybe it would expose me. So what happened is that we dropped that poem from the manuscript. What happened to me one day when I was reflecting on my life I started imaging that if I were to die then without having written whatever I felt I needed to write, I kept imagining myself coming back as a ghost. And I thought what do ghosts do? And most of them visit their relatives, and I thought that wouldn't be a wise thing to be a ghost bothering my family because I love them. That was one vision that kept going through my head. The other one was that I started imagining a hundred years from now, a world where in South Africa, things had been destroyed except for books. Anybody who would be around, finding the books that were there at the time of destruction, they would think that women didn't exist. They'd think that Black women didn't exist. They'd think that we were insignificant. But I think that the fear of dying without having written overcame the fear of being exposed. That switch just happened and I just don't care anymore. But the poem was written to acknowledge it because it was an important switch for me.

**Pumla**: Linked to that, one of the things you outline as part of the debilitation that you overcome in "Fear" is the absence of privacy, which you also explore in your poem "The speed of life." I'm interested in how you claim space that is private and not public, especially when you write as you do about the political, the personal, the intimate, the important. In "The speed of life" you speak about the yearning for privacy you do so through the language of the TRC, of reconciliation which jars somewhat for those who are trying to claim agency and importance by asserting presence in the public sphere and history, but also claim space that is sacred and private. When I read this collection, I could not help thinking about those poems in relation to each other, seeing them as in conversation with each other somehow.

**Khosi**: Now that's very interesting because I never would have put them together, but I can see where you're coming from. The idea of privacy is important because I am a very shy person; privacy is dear to me and I want to keep it that way. But when you choose to write, you can't but accept that you will be public as well. So to navigate the space between the two has been a constant agony for me. I didn't realise it was such a big agony until we were having a conversation in my writing group — when I used to have

a writing group in 2005 – and it was the kind of writing group where we talked about our work but we also talked about our lives. So, the book came out in January and in October, we were having this conversation and people were saying Khosi you've become very quiet about the book and since the book. What's this about? And I didn't make an immediate connection at that time but with the discussion that we had it became very clear to me that the exposure that the first book had done for me made me feel so exposed that I was trying to pull back even within the context of my writing group which was a very safe space for me. I was trying to keep to myself. I was not saying as much as they were used to me saying. It was interesting to me that the group then sat and gave me that feedback, and they were saying to me now you're out there, just be out there, you can't have your cake and have it, and I was trying to say maybe I can. So, I think it does continue to bother me, and I've had to find a way to define the line. Have I answered you?

**Pumla**: Yes, you have. As you know, I loved these hands in its textures, seeming contradictions, its unapologetic politicalness, its intimacies. Many of these things are captured in that title poem. All of these things are there alongside a gentle softening, which is picked up on in this collection. We can see this in the vulnerability exposed when you speak about the relationship between public violation of women and the use of women's possible sexuality against them in being violated, on the one hand, and the importance of claiming your own desire, our connections as women, our love for other women sexually, politically, psychically and so on which I think is in the surprising moments of the poems which contain elements of surprising desire and memory such as ... longing for a lover gone and in another poem, the poem "At the Long Table Restaurant" ... My question related to that is about why you think it is important for Black women who love other women to claim sexualities in ways more interesting than the banal violent ways in which sexuality and our sexiness is often used against us in South Africa? I know it is a conscious process. But why is that important for you?

Khosi: I think it is important. Having always worked with women as a political activist, and for a particular while as a women's activist, one of the things in South Africa and the world which we have attempted to claim constantly is for women to claim for themselves what they want to claim for themselves: ownership of their bodies, acknowledging our special desires whether with men or women, the intimate lives of women, as part of what the women's movement all across the world has tried to do. So it comes out because it needs to be expressed; I feel like I can't hide it because it's crying out loud and it wants to come out. So, coming back to the question of the public and the private: the issue is that whatever it is that you think is private, actually has been experienced by somebody else somewhere. So,

we may be unique. I may be unique because I am Khosi and I'm a feminist and I look like I do, but human experience is the same everywhere. So, the degree to which we claim our power has to do not only with all our common experiences no matter how seemingly new. When you talk to writers, they often say that there isn't anything that has not been written about because human beings have been around for so long. So while I don't think that there is anything that I have experienced in my lifetime or in 2000 and whatever that no one else anywhere in the world has not experienced. So in a sense, then, our private experiences are also our public experiences because you know that you can't be that different, you can't. I think what encouraged me a lot to just say this kind of thing was that some of the responses I was getting from the first book with people calling and writing to me, saying 'that poem spoke to me' or 'that poem was my experience' and 'that poem was me. How did you know that had happened?' confirmed that you can't be so unique that

**Pumla**: Linking to the public-ness, the shared-ness that you evoke of seemingly private and individual experienced. I am struck in your poem "March 2006," which I read to be about a specific trial, the Zuma rape trial...

Khosi: It is.

**Pumla**: ... and the larger important issues of voice, of personal freedom of women's lives and you speak about it through the language of David and Goliath, with Khwezi being David. Unlike in the historic David and Goliath biblical narrative, Goliath won in the 2006 case. Alongside that poem, I read "For Fanny Ann Eddy," a remarkable woman activist, unapologetically loving politically, erotically, sexually, psychically of other women and women's spaces who was killed because of her choice to prioritise women. In the first you cast a fresh eye on a moment that we experienced as a moment of defeat, but not quite in your poem. In the second, a celebration of a woman not otherwise celebrated, the kind of woman that we're often invited to dis-own and dissociate ourselves from. It's hard not to think about these poems as linked to a larger project in your work, like the writing of the biography of a difficult foremother, Noni Jabavu. For me these seem linked. Are they for you?

**Khosi**: What is important to acknowledge and speak about, to be public and unapologetic about, is that as women we have multiple selves, we have multiple lives, multiple identities and we need to honour all of them. *That* for me is important. Coming to the poem about the rape trial, I wrote that trial on the Sunday before that trial was starting and yet I was feeling depleted, very angry, very sad, like 'what did we fight for?' It expressed what I was

feeling at the time as I was anticipating the start of the trial the following morning. I wasn't feeling hopeful.

**Pumla**: Changing direction slightly, in the opening poem of your second collection... you return to your father several times in your poetry, in the first collection with a loving ambivalence as well as in this one. You open your second collection with a poem about being haunted by your father in a way as you watch boys being talented and very present making you wish your father was your son. This is also a poem about continuities: ways of being boys and men in interesting and difficult ways of inhabiting masculinities with possibility. Why is this important for you as someone who spends the bulk of her work writing about the textures of women's lives.

**Khosi:** A lot of us have fathers, brothers, and they constitute the other part of human nature. But the context of this poem has to do with the fact that the poem is about my dad's love for music and how he managed to pass on that love to me. This second poem had originally four more stanzas of what would happen if my father were my son and it contained a lot of wishes and how I would have raised him differently as a boy, how I would have protected him, how I would have fought for him. Because he was a musician, I imagined myself sending him to that school and he would have been one of those boys, and he flourishes and becomes the best musician in the country. In that version, I have lots of dreams and lots of stanzas, but in the revising and revising I just cut it there. Somehow it didn't feel right to have all those other things, but also because as it stands it helps you question a lot. It helps you to start imagining certain things. So the specific context about this is about how we as people need to be conscious of how we raise our children, for those of us who choose to have children. It's also about how in time it was difficult for my father which would have been different had he been born at a different time. He probably would have made it. When you start listening to how eventually Black boys started going to that school, it was because they had beautiful voices and they got scholarships. And some of them excelled and are musicians to this day. So he probably would have made it. So, it's a poem about my father and I, but it is also a commentary on the general because a lot of our parents lived in times that it was far too hard for them as Black people to even dream sometimes. So, it's all of those things.

**Pumla**: Why is it the opening poem for this collection?

**Khosi**: It just felt right because the other one was the opening for these hands. That first poem is under the category of 'autumn'. To talk first about the categories in the book, I am very attuned to seasons. I go into a depres-

sion in winter and I want to kill myself; in summer I'm happy and I love the sun and the sound of rain on my window. The two seasons in between represent for me something else; spring represents the beginning of summer and autumn represents...The way I characterised the book was speaking to the tone and the emotions of the poems as it relates to the various ways I relate the seasons. Choosing to make it first was also part of the fact that I wanted to start with autumn somehow and the poem that fit that category was one that was much more personal rather than political. It's both, but the starting poem was of course personal.

Pumla: On that personal and political note, I am often struck by how much of your poetry combines things that we don't usually imagine being in the same conceptual space: you get the extremely sexy and sensual to rub up against the unapologetically critical, political, subversive consciousness. One of the things that particularly strike me as exciting about living in Johannesburg right now as a lover of words and the complete believer that words help us make the world, as Gayatri Spivak tells us, wording as worlding so that writers make the world rather than simply reflecting on the world and mirroring it to us is a cultural and creative flourishing and energy in the space. People like Myesha Jenkins, Lindiwe Nkutha, Niq Mhlongo, Bandile Gumbi, Khwezi Gule, Siphiwe Mahala, do you feel a sense of community as a creative person who lives in Jo'burg at this time? And if you do, who is your community?

**Khosi**: Do you want me to count everybody?

Pumla: No, no, no, no.

**Khosi**: I feel very excited living in Jo'burg at this time and I'm glad I live here rather than anywhere else because as you all know, Jo'burg holds all of us and where we come from. It's filled with opportunities; whatever we're looking for, somehow we're able to explore it enough and we end up finding it no matter how long it takes us. So, yes, I feel like there is a community. I love the recognition of walking into a room and knowing that so and so who is a writer is there even if it is at the supermarket, not necessarily in a creative space, but knowing that I was in a mall and I bumped into so-and-so and we ended up talking about words and their writing and the conference they were going to, or they were reading somewhere. It's a lovely feeling for me and the fact that there's more and more Black women within that space, within that community – that they make it up, that they're making it their own and they are defining it for themselves. It's very exciting. I feel it, it's palpable, it's one of the things I have dreamt about for a long time.

**Pumla**: Yes, that is remarkable. Let's talk about those Black women. Why do you think that is? As a writer and teacher of literature myself, one of the things that is most notable about contemporary South African poetry and literature more broadly, is the shift in few Black women publishing poetry previously to the space being made up of the most outstanding and just gob-smackingly brilliant poets we have today being Black women. What is it about South Africa today that allows us to have Makhosazana Xaba, Myesha Jenkins, Napo Masheane and Lebo Mashile and so on?

**Khosi**: My theory about why it is relates back to what I said earlier. I don't think that the fear of dying without having written or expressed yourself is mine alone. So I imagine that some of the women are writing because we too fear to be exposed but decide to write rather than die without having written. That could be one, but I also think the fact of coming into this democracy, the fact of opening up of spaces, the fact of being able to say I can choose to write – at least for me – is something that in my previous political life felt like a luxury. I thought that what was important was struggle, that we had to win freedom, that the immediate post-apartheid moment was about getting things into order, being involved in that and being very active in that. It feels to me like this time is about opening up and being a luxury and I feel like I can just indulge. But also related to the earlier shifting of intensities of fear, it felt like I am growing old, if I don't write, I might just die without having written, so that was important for me. I think the broad political space allows for a lot of openness and the idea to be daring and to be just me instead of doing what has to be done. Doing what I'd like to do.

**Pumla**: You do so much work concerned with remembering women that live with us and women that went before us in sophisticated and nuanced ways. So how would you like to be remembered, Khosi? In a hundred years when people come to your name, your work, who do you want that to be?

**Khosi**: I want that to mean someone who was passionate about women as human beings, about their lives, their complexities, what they cared about, what they contributed.

**Pumla**: You're a significant figure in contemporary South African literature. What does that mean to you?

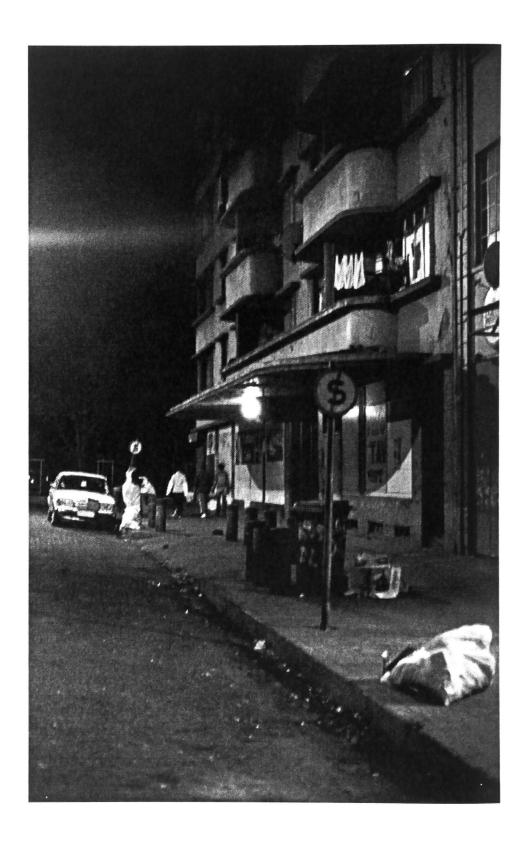
**Khosi**: I don't always feel significant. It really feels as though I am really just emerging. There are so many things I still want to write to deserve the label. In my heart and head it feels like I still have such a long way to go. So, I feel like significant will describe me when I have achieved all those things.

**Pumla**: That's interesting because I was not speaking of significance only in terms of quantity. Your poetic contribution to the South African literary landscape is of such a manner that it shifts how we think, look, imagine and see creativity and poetry. So that was the sense in which I spoke of your significance. There are writers who pen volumes without that impact being felt in the tradition within which they write.

**Khosi**: Ja, I hear what you're saying. I think I wasn't thinking about poetry specifically. In my head I was thinking about impact in multiple genres because each genre demands a specific language and are able to achieve differently.

**Pumla**: Thank you very much, Khosi, for speaking to me.

**Khosi**: Thanks for coming.



### **USABLE PAST:**

# LANGUAGE, ORAL TRADITION, SONG, AND THE MOBILIZATION OF NORTHERN NOEBELE ETHNICITY IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA, 1994-2004

Sekibakiba Peter Lekgoathi

### Language Planners, Experts, Culture Brokers and the Politics of Orthography of Northern Ndebele

In August 1997 thousands of people who identified themselves as the Northern Ndebele marched to the Union Building in Pretoria to submit a memorandum to protest against the continuing marginalization of the Northern Ndebele communities—which have historically been part of the political landscape—in the new South Africa. In the opinion of the organizers, this marginalization was reflected in the post-apartheid government's failure to grant the same recognition to Northern Sindebele as to the other eleven officially acknowledged languages. They submitted a memorandum listing their demands, which included financial support for efforts to develop Northern Sindebele into a fully-fledged written language, so that it could be taught in schools to the Northern Ndebele children. They also pleaded for the recognition of their language as the country's twelfth official language and submitted a short manuscript of excerpts from the Bible translated into Northern Sindebele language to the president of the country in order to strengthen their demand for financial support for the development of their language, as well as to demonstrate that it was indeed possible to reduce it to writing like all the other official languages.<sup>3</sup>

The Mandela government was conscious of the potentially divisive nature of politicized ethnicity, or political tribalism. The "rainbow nation" was still in its infancy and needed to be handled tenderly. Perhaps fears that this fragile nation could be shattered in its infancy played a major role in the acceptance of the memorandum which the Northern Ndebele nationalists submitted together with a small book manuscript. Addressed specifically to the State President R.N. Mandela, the manuscript titled *Livi Elimnandi* (meaning "the sweet word") consists of translations into Northern *Sindebele* of some biblical texts. Its author, Percy M. Nyadlo, is one of the prominent Northern Ndebele nationalists, a local schoolteacher and linguist. He gave the following reason for writing the manuscript:

This was in preparation for the historical moment when we marched to Mandela at the Union Building to submit our memorandum in August 1997, so that we could give this booklet to our great leader [Nelson Mandela]... Our wish was that he would pass it to the educational authorities and say: "Look here, you are saying that [Northern] Sindebele doesn't exist but I received this booklet. Will you read it to me so that I can get a sense of its contents." Yes. So we left it there and so far we don't know how they have evaluated it.<sup>5</sup>

Two remarkable points need to be noted about the manuscript and its contents. The first is that the beginnings of the reduction of African languages, specifically Sesotho to written form, in the northern and eastern parts of the Transvaal by the German missionaries in the nineteenth century had invariably involved the translation of biblical texts to serve the Christianizing mission. Over 130 years later, Nyadlo seemed to be simply following in the footsteps of the German missionary pioneers by appealing to the sensibilities of the Northern Ndebele converts who might have had an interest in reading the 'holy word' in their language. The second point relates to the reverence for literacy in contemporary African society. Within the world in which written texts have come to command absolute respect and almost unquestionable authority over oral texts, the manuscript was produced to demonstrate that Northern Sindebele could indeed be reduced to writing and that it had the same qualities, force and cultural usage as any of the officially recognized languages in the country.<sup>6</sup> It does seem, however, that both the protest march and the book manuscript had the desired effect because shortly afterwards the Northern Ndebele nationalists were advised to knock at the door of the language planners, the Pan South African Language Board (PANSALB).7

Headquartered in Pretoria's city centre, PANSALB was established in accordance with the Pan South African Language Board Act No. 59 of 1995, to promote multilingualism in the country. Its governing structure is made up of twelve board members and by June 1999 the top three positions were occupied by black women.<sup>8</sup> This is a group of politicians and academics drawn mainly from the languages and linguistics departments of the country's universities now working for the new government as language planners. PANSALB is the primary language planning agency or wing of government. It seeks to accomplish the mission set out above through the development of previously marginalized languages by

...creating the conditions for the development of and the equal use of all official languages; fostering respect for and encouraging the use of other languages in the country; and encouraging the best use of the country's linguistic

During 1998 PANSALB had to address the protests not only from representatives of the Northern Ndebele nationalists but also the Baphuti and Valovedu (Lovhedu), who argued that their languages be accorded equal status to that of the eleven official languages. In response the Board advised the language groups concerned to "approach relevant government departments that deal with this issue" as this was a political matter. In the meantime, however, the Board called, in relation to the Northern Ndebele, for a research study to determine the linguistic relationship between Northern Ndebele and Southern Ndebele languages, to determine whether the former was not just a local variant of the latter. 10 In 2000, Professor Arnett Wilkes from the Department of African Languages at the University of Pretoria was commissioned by the Board to research this issue.<sup>11</sup> Wilkes' findings contradicted the government's argument that had been based on colonial linguistic and anthropological scholarship that saw Northern and Southern Ndebele languages as variants of the same language. 12 He found from his research that Northern Ndebele language was "still widely spoken in most, if not all the Northern Ndebele communities" in the Limpopo Province. Furthermore, he insisted that the language was independent and distinct from Southern Ndebele and that it "has developed out of a mixture of different languages." He then concluded that blending the two was destined "to fail as it inevitably will lead to the creation of an artificial speech form that the Ndebele people are certain to reject."<sup>13</sup>

This linguistic finding gave added impetus to the Ndebele nationalist agitation. Molomo and others now had something to stand on in their quest for the accommodation of Northern Sindebele within the constitutional provision that accorded official status to Southern Ndebele, so that the language could have its fair share of the national resources and prestige. The role played by the modern elites, especially teachers, within NANO in harnessing and articulating the sentiments of non-elite Ndebele men and women on the issue of cultural marginalization is very significant. It is quite common to hear ordinary Ndebele people, especially the elderly, lamenting the fading of their language because of the dominance of Northern Sotho and other dominant languages in the schools. The response to this by cultural activists such as Nyadlo, Molomo, Kekana and others is that to ensure the survival and growth of the language it has to appear in print. 14 Virtually all of them have been very vocal about the need to produce educational material in Sindebele for use in foundation grades of schools situated in predominantly Northern Ndebele communities.

Although PANSALB would be drawn deeper into the Northern Ndebele's

language struggle in the post-1994 period, work on Northern Ndebele orthography—albeit fairly scattered and thin on the ground and mostly by indigenous scholars—has a longer history dating as far back as the 1940s. <sup>15</sup> Ndebele consciousness and the quest to develop their language into a written form were accentuated by the homeland system. But the fighting spirit did not dissipate along with abolition of the Bantustans. Molomo had this to say about what drove him in the direction of the language struggle:

This feeling of Ndebele consciousness, the one about our desire to speak our own language and so on, was brought about by the creation of the homelands. Yes. It was brought about by the homeland system. That was because some people took it for granted that simply because they were the *Bapedi* and they had a written language, we [the Ndebele because we only had a spoken language] are nothing. We are nothing! In other words, we are going to dwindle... Ndebele consciousness was strengthened by domination. <sup>16</sup>

On the contrary, the flames were rekindled by the recognition of eleven official languages excluding the Northern Ndebele. That perhaps explains why to this day Molomo has remained an ardent advocate of his mother tongue, the Northern Sindebele language, and a sharp critic of the current language policy in the country. He has been as dedicated in his old age to the codification of the language as he had been when he was still a young energetic teacher and an ethnic nationalist organizer. Together with a group of the new educated elite, mainly schoolteachers, from different Ndebele communities in the countryside, Molomo is presently organizing seminars and workshops for the development of the language so that it will receive recognition as a written language, as well as for its introduction in the schools for children whose mother tongue is Northern Ndebele. In his study of black church leadership in the northern parts of the country, M.S.J. Ledwaba hints that there has been a significant "progress" in the Mašašane area through the activities of the head of one of the local schools." Molomo has singlehandedly masterminded the art of agitating and petitioning PANSALB to put in place concrete steps for the development of the language, particularly in the aftermath of Professor Wilkes' findings. However, although a committee dealing specifically with the Ndebele language issue has been formed to look into the grievances of the Northern Ndebele nationalists, so far there has been very insignificant movement on the part of the authorities. 18 Wilkes attributes this lack of progress to

The perception prevailing among language planners and other decision makers that... [Northern Ndebele] language

is a variant form of Southern Ndebele and that consequently it will be in the best interest of both these languages if they are harmonised into a single unified language.<sup>19</sup>

There are several other local linguists who have played a role in the language struggle. Percy Nyadlo, for example, claims to have written several studies covering folktales, oral traditions, and Northern Ndebele customs.<sup>20</sup> In his own words,

It was in 1969 when I started this Ndebele issue because when I was growing up this issue had always concerned me and I noticed that the elderly men in my community spoke a purer type of *Sindebele*. Yes, and they really loved their language and they were also wondering why their language was not being taught in the schools. So, even now I still have my first books in which I wrote down this language but I don't quite remember where exactly I stored them... Yes, that is where I began to document a sort of Sindebele grammar with them [the elderly people]. I documented a lot of things including the history, showing where we originated from and how we left and where we went... Alright, I walked that solitary road getting information from the old men in the area where I was a teacher, until in 1975 when I posted a manuscript that I had written to Van Schaik [Publishers] with the title "Ndebele Grammar." They returned it and said, "No, it looks exactly like Professor Ziervogel's... We cannot publish two things that look alike."21

This negative response from the publisher did not discourage Nyadlo and he persisted in his research and writing until his first encounter with members of the Northern Ndebele National Organization (NANO) at one of their meetings in the north. After that encounter Nyadlo worked with even more determination and energy to have the language written down.<sup>22</sup>

Gojela Peter Kekana, one of the prominent Northern Ndebele nationalists, a member of NANO and teacher at one of the local primary schools, developed an interest in the history of his community since childhood:

From when I was very young I lived and spent a lot of time with old men...some of them have died...even elderly women.... They used to relate the stories. But I often took initiative in enquiring from them. If there was anything historical bothering me I would try to find out

what happened and so forth. Why was it that there was no church here? Why is it that we don't have schools in our community? Then they would explain and say: "My child, here we didn't have schools for these reasons....You see, the Mandebele never wanted to have anything to do with the church. They didn't want to have white people near them because they feared that they would take away their land."... Now that thing, this hostility towards the churches, wekhethu (addressed to the interviewer, meaning "my next of kin", or "relative"), or the rejection of missionaries, in my opinion shows the political savvy of those elderly men back then. I am very grateful to them. This Sindebele language, you would not be sitting here with me right now expressing ourselves in it... White people often imposed mission stations upon the royal families. And by imposing it upon the royal family they destroyed Sindebele completely. They destroyed it. This tendency, of rejecting what we call mission station in this community, in my view, was the best thing that could have ever happened; those elderly men were very intelligent. As I speak now you would not be here with me had it not been for their resistance. We would not even have any knowledge of Sindebele.... When I was growing up I found myself developing a deep appreciation of traditional things.<sup>23</sup>

It was because of Kekana's strong identification with his Ndebeleness and notably with the distinctive Northern Sindebele language that he became more involved in the cultural activities of his community in the 1980s. When in the late 1980s Isabel Hofmeyr was conducting her doctoral research on the stories of the 1854 Boer siege of the Kekana at the cave of Gwaša, she employed Kekana as one of the local interviewers. This inspired him to conduct further research on the conflicts with the Boers and the pre-colonial history of the area. Independently Kekana recorded these local oral histories collected from the elderly people and created a personal archive. He even contacted the local museum in town for its collection of the history of the relations between the Afrikaners and the local African communities. 25

In 1997 Kekana became more directly involved in the Northern Ndebele nationalist movement. This started with his collaboration with a few other Northern Ndebele-speaking teachers "in forcefully introducing Northern Sindebele at the local Magemi Primary School without the approval of the provincial government officials."<sup>26</sup> Gojela and his colleagues apparently translated the first grade African languages (Northern Sotho) syllabus into

his mother tongue in an attempt to meet the needs of the Northern Ndebele learners at the school. The parents had apparently been consulted prior to the decision to introduce the language and they were keen about the idea of Northern Ndebele being introduced as a language in the schools provided the teachers supplied the children with suitable books.<sup>27</sup> However, these efforts came to nought after the learners had passed the grade and they could not progress to the next grade level to learn the language. The government officials "insisted that they should be taught thoroughly in Northern Sotho in Grade Two." This, however, did not dampen the enthusiasm of the ethnic nationalists and they pursued the matter without any tangible monetary assistance from government.

Nyadlo took a parallel initiative in the Bakenberg area. Nyadlo focused his energies at Malemocha Primary—the local school where he taught.<sup>29</sup> In the beginning he had to contend with widespread hostility on the part of his fellow teachers. He attributed their resentment to the fear instilled by the Bantustan administration of Phatudi in 1977. Chief Dennis Langa and some of his headmen in the Mapela-Bakenberg region had confronted the administration in that year demanding their Ndebele identity. Phatudi's response was: "If you want Ndebele identity, pack up your belongings and relocate to Mahlangu's land (Kwa-Ndebele)." Almost seventeen years later, the wound had still not yet healed around 1995 when Nyadlo joined NANO and started mobilizing people in the area for the recognition of Northern *Sindebele*. Many people still feared that they would be forced to leave the area:

Many teachers are still afraid because they came of age under the dominance of Sesotho, when everywhere you went there was a general belief that Sindebele is nothing. Now, right now if you start saying to them Sindebele is a separate language that warrants recognition, they tend to be overwhelmed by this deep-seated fear and their reaction is that this thing can't possibly happen....At Malemocha School when I first introduced the issue of Sindebele language, there was no cooperation among us. Yes, to such an extent that it seemed we were going to split into two factions. But the strange thing was that the non-Ndebele teachers such as those from Matlala, were the ones who supported me. They supported me. Yes. But those who were Ndebele in terms of their history and culture did not want to have anything to do with this. I remember one day when I translated a Sesotho Christian hymn called "Re ya go boka morena" (We praise you lord). So, I translated the hymn into Sindebele and informed the children that the following day we were going to teach other learners how to sing it in *Sindebele*. Indeed we printed the hymn and gave each learner a copy. Well, I noticed that some teachers were antagonistic, and they influenced some of the learners to be resentful.<sup>30</sup>

The antagonism only dissipated after Nyadlo and other Northern Ndebele nationalists flew from the local airport to Johannesburg International airport for the discussion with government officials of the status of their language. <sup>31</sup> In a country where boarding an aeroplane is associated with the most affluent and privileged, this demonstrated to all and sundry the elevated status of this marginal language, and hence its advocates began to command some degree of reverence and envy.

The small gesture of flying from Polokwane to Johannesburg did not mark the end of problems for the Northern Ndebele nationalists. In the pioneering workshops to develop the language held at the University of Pretoria and locally at Mokopane, for example, the partcipants had to make enormous personal financial sacrifices to see the process off the ground. Gojela Kekana recalls:

Our initial workshops did not involve PANSALB. We often dug deep into our own pockets. For years we have been going up and down pooling our financial resources together to hire transport to go there [to Pretoria]. When we arrived there we would buy our own food. Yes. It was only after a while that we became aware that PANSALB could help us out. We often held our workshops at Mokopane College and those who came from remote areas would be provided with accommodation there. We had breakfast and dinner. Those who came from faraway places used to sleep there...many times. We even held some of our workshops at Park Hotel in town [Mokopane]. That is where we often went to discuss orthography and spelling of Northern Ndebele language. This booklet that says PANSALB and so forth (holding a copy in his hand) is one of the products of the workshops. We often spent several weeks at the University of Pretoria. The workshops involved teachers' organizations from around here at Mokopane, Kalkspruit, Mašašane, Sebitiela, Mapela, Tiberius, and other places. The idea was that those who attended these workshops would spread the message in their own communities.32

PANSALB organized a number of workshops in consultation with NANO,

where people with an interest in the development and standardization of the Northern Ndebele language were invited. One of these meetings was held from 6 to 8 December 2000, at Mokopane College of Education in Mahwelereng. At the time, NANO was campaigning vociferously for official recognition of North Ndebele language and its introduction in schools for children who speak the language as a mother tongue, particularly in Limpopo and Northwest Provinces. In these areas the Northern Ndebele people constituted a significant proportion of the local communities. The organization has been quite concerned that many Ndebele children have been compelled to study either North Sotho or Tswana as a mother tongue at school, which has had the effect of rapidly facilitating the Sothoization or Tswanaization processes and the apparent demise of Ndebele culture. In fact the December 2000 workshop was not the first of its kind. The first initiative, also under the auspices of NANO, took place as early as 1996 but the momentum could not be sustained due to a range of problems including lack of finances and poor organizing on the ground.<sup>33</sup>

A Zulu language expert, Professor Wilkes, was in fact the facilitator of the December 2000 workshop. Some of my informants credit him for playing a key role in standardizing the Swazi language and South Ndebele language. In him the Northern Ndebele activists—such as Reverend Molomo, Percy Nyadlo, Gojela Kekana and many others—saw a powerful ally who had the expertise that was a prerequisite in legitimating their claims about the uniqueness of Northern Ndebele language.<sup>34</sup> PANSALB underwrote the workshop financially.<sup>35</sup> The workshop attracted participants from different Ndebele communities in the Northern Province. Over one hundred participants – overwhelmingly teachers – attended the workshop. Most of them were accommodated at the college for the duration of the workshop to avoid transport problems to and from the remote parts of the Province. Many participants came from areas such as gaMašašane, Mahwelereng, and Mošate (Valtyn). A few teachers came from the Bakenberg area, but the Ledwaba and Zebediela had no representatives at the workshop. Reverend Molomo pointed out that invitations had been extended to all Ndebele communities in the Northern Province, and could not hide his disappointment that some, especially those from the two areas mentioned above, did not turn up. Perhaps the attendance level was indicative of the relative strength or weakness of NANO mobilization in the area, as well as the degree of enthusiasm for a uniquely North Ndebele identity.

PANSALB's sponsorship of the workshop is very interesting in light of its stance held as late as 1999 that Northern Ndebele does not meet the requirements necessary to qualify as a language. At the time they classified it as a dialect, but because of the pressure exerted by NANO, they were compelled

to commission a study to establish whether *Sindebele* was a dialect or language. Apparently some of the qualities that distinguish a language from a dialect are the numbers of people using the language or dialect on a regular basis, and the extent of its distinctiveness from other languages around it. Lovhedu was cited as a prime example of a dialect paralleling *Sindebele*.

At the December 2000 workshop the discussion centred around standardizing Sindebele as a written language in light of its pending introduction at foundation level in certain pilot schools in the province. Professor Wilkes facilitated almost all discussions, dividing the Sindebele word categories into "nouns, pronouns, the qualificative, predictative, descriptive, conjunctive, and the interjective." He would start by writing a word in an Nguni language, especially Zulu, and then ask the participants what it was called in Sindebele. Thereafter, he would ask for synonyms as well as for suggestions as to how it should be written in Sindebele. Because of its minority status in a predominantly North Sotho area, Sindebele has unavoidably borrowed many Sotho words, quite often to the chagrin of some of the more conservative participants in the workshop.

At the workshop there were visible divisions between the participants who acknowledged and accepted these Sotho influences in the language, and those who sought to purge *Sindebele* of those influences. Madimetja Percy Nyadlo, a teacher from the Bakenberg area and a linguist in his own right, aligned himself with the latter group. He argued that *Sindebele* was an Nguni language, and therefore the workshop should strive towards resuscitating the language to its 1930s level, purging it of Sotho borrowings and going back to its original distinctiveness:

A language which has been marginalized for a long time tends to change or deteriorate. Right now the *Sindebele* language that is spoken here today even you can hear that no, this is just a different thing altogether. It is a mixture which you can't understand where it comes from. So, we must get the right words and then—let me say I'm doing a sort of—I'm busy doing research on the terminology. This is in preparation for the next stage of writing so that when that commences the people should not be going this way or that way. They should know that these are the relevant words to use.<sup>36</sup>

In order to restore the "purity" of the language, Nyadlo is conducting research which involves interviewing the elderly people in the Northern Ndebele communities in the Mokopane area to find out the uniquely Ndebele words which have been phased out in daily communication in favour of Sotho words.<sup>37</sup> On the side of the local intellectuals who have accepted the Sotho influences as well as the distinctiveness of Northern *Sindebele* from Southern *IsiNdebele*, are individual activists such as Gojela Peter Kekana:

We are often incorrectly lumped together with the Southern Ndebele. It is often said that there can only be one Ndebele language to which all of us—North and South Ndebele—should belong. That is not correct because we [Northern Ndebele] separated from those people a long time ago, not recently. Furthermore, their culture and customs have diverged from ours. Their norms and values—I don't know how to put it—but even the kinds of traditional games that youngsters play are totally different. You see? Even their traditional music is not like ours. But they are our people—we share common origins. It is in the same way that the Batswana, Southern Sotho and Northern Sotho are part of the same family. They originated from the same n'gudu [tree trunk, meaning source]. When we say "Ndebele" they also say "Ndebele." We originate from the same source. We were never forced to belong to the Manala and the Ndzundza Ndebele.... Even the language is no longer the same. For example, they say "thoma" (start) and we say "kxwala"...Like the Zulu they say "izinkomo" (cows) and we say "tikxomo"... That is why we are saying that there should be two recognized Ndebele languages—Southern Ndebele and Northern Ndebele.38

Far from speaking with one voice, the Northern Ndebele nationalist organization represents different individuals and groups of intellectuals who have conflicting strategies for attaining the major goal of official recognition of their language.

# Oral Traditions, Memories of the Makapansgat Siege, and the Mobilisation of Northern Ndebele Ethnicity

Besides language, memories of the Makapansgat siege were yet another living tradition that the Northern Ndebele ethnic nationalists invoked in their struggle for the recognition of *Sindebele*. It has been over 150 years since the brutal siege of Makapansgat in present-day Limpopo Province took place (Makapansgat is known to the local Ndebele communities around the area of Mokopane as *Legolo la Gwaša*, meaning the cave of Gwaša).<sup>39</sup>

Situated on the farm Makapansgat about 16 km northeast of the town of Mokopane, the cave of Gwaša was a setting for the gruesome massacre of approximately 3,000 people by the Boer commandoes in September 1854. 40 The victims were the subjects of the chiefdom of the Kekana Ndebele chief Mughombani (in *Sindebele*) or Mokopane (in *Sesotho*), or 'Makapaan' in corrupted Dutch. To this day the cave has been treated as a sacred site and holds a very special position in the hearts and minds of most Kekana Ndebele people descended from Mokopane.

The Gwaša cave is one of several caves situated in the Mokopane Valley (or Makapansgat Valley), which has a reputation internationally among archaeologists and palaeontologists for its rich fossil deposits and unique record of hominid habitation and evolution dating back to over three million years ago. But it is also an important cultural and political symbol in the history of both the Kekana Ndebele chiefdom of Mokopane and the Afrikaner nationalists. The Gwaša cave in particular has been the most pivotal icon in the mythology of Afrikaner nationalism and an important heritage site since the 1930s. Often perceived as the Transvaal counterpart of the battle of Blood River, where the Boers overpowered the Zulu warriors in Natal, the Makapansgat siege has been given a perpetual place on other monuments, as well as in a series of contemporary popular magazines—such as Die Huisgenoot and Die Brandwag—and in books, public memorials, and even recently in magazines, booklets and brochures targeting the tourist market.<sup>41</sup> For example, the young Paul Kruger is depicted on one of the four reliefs at the bottom of Kruger's statue on Church Square, Pretoria carrying the lifeless body of Piet Potgieter from Makapansgat. Each relief represents an incident in the life of the President of the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR). 42 Rather than rehashing this myth, I will examine here the different and sometimes contradictory oral traditions told by local people about the 1854 massacre as well as contemporary songs about this historical episode and the position of the Northern Ndebele people in post-apartheid South Africa. Like their language the Northern Ndebele's oral traditions have not yet been securely institutionalised in a pantheon of national heritage sites, although possibilities exist for them to find such a place. 43 The fact that these stories reveal many contradictions should not be seen as grounds for their dismissal as sheer fabrication.

There is some scholarly literature on the 1854 Gwaša cave siege. <sup>44</sup> The most authoritative remains the book by Isabel Hofmeyr (1993), a professor in the African Literature Department at the University of the Witwatersrand. The siege incident properly fits into a larger story of the escalating Boer invasions into the Northern Transvaal, which started in the 1840s. The Boers departed from the Cape because of dissatisfaction with British administration of

the Cape Colony, in particular the abolition of slavery in 1833. However, there were in their midst individuals who were attracted by the abundance of game, especially ivory, in the northern hinterland. After a couple of altercations with Mzilikazi's regiments, the Boer settlers, with the help of their Griqua and Barolong or Bakgatla auxiliaries, fancied themselves at last in control of the Transvaal once they had forced Mzilikazi to flee across the Limpopo in 1837. The defeat of Mzilikazi had an important bearing upon the attitude of the white frontiersmen even though their occupation of the Northern Transvaal failed to take root instantly, as indigenous groups resisted violently well into the 1890s. The attitude of Boers was that all the land previously ruled by the Ndebele king was now subject to their authority. And since they were in possession of guns, they were quite quick to use them to enforce their rule.

The emigrant Boers' perceptions of Africans were largely dictated by their experiences and practices of slavery in the Cape as well as on the frontier and tried to revive this institution in the interior. The Ndebele chiefdoms were some of the communities in the Transvaal that these Boers started to raid for slaves as they were situated along their main routes to the far north. In addition to practising slavery the new invaders ignored African claims or rights to land, a critical means of livelihood in pre-colonial societies. Consequently, conflicts soon arose when the Boers arrived in the Waterberg region. 46 By 1854 white settlements had been established in the southern and eastern parts of the Transvaal. In the north there was also Schoemansdal and traffic increased between these towns. The route from Schoemansdal to the southern settlements passed through Makapanspoort near Potgietersrus/Mokopane. The old road through the Strydpoort Mountains, which the white travellers had been using in their trek to the north since 1837, was abandoned in favour of the shorter one through Makapanspoort. 47 The capital of Mokopane, chief of the Kekana Ndebele, was situated on what is now the farm Pruissen 48-KS, just east of the new route. Lekalakala, who was one of Mokopane's Sotho headmen, lived near Sefakaola Hill to the west of the route. The new path passed right through the territory of the Kekana Ndebele chief Mokopane, thus providing a perfect setting for what has been dubbed in Afrikaner historiography as the "1854 massacres."

The massacres involved 28 Boers – including women and children – who were brutally murdered and severely mutilated in three separate incidents that appeared to be a well-orchestrated plot in late September 1854. Fourteen of them were killed by the Kekana of chief Mokopane – twelve at "the Lion's bush" (esikgweni sengwenyama) or Moorddrift about 11km south of the town of Mokopane on the Mogalakwena River. Two Boers were killed at Mokopane's capital at Chidi on the farm Pruissen 48-KS. The

remaining fourteen met their gruesome deaths at the hands of the Langa under Nongumbane (Mankopane in Sotho) at the hill of Fothane, known as Moordkoppie in Afrikaans. The group massacred at Fothane consisted of Hermanus Philippus Potgieter, his two sons, his three sons-in-law, and their wives and children. A man of doubtful character, Hermanus Potgieter was a younger brother of Andries Hendrik Potgieter, leader of the second party to leave the Cape Colony in 1836, and one of the commandant-generals of the Soutpansberg region. Early written sources suggest that in stark contrast to his highly respected elder brother, Hermanus did not belong to the better class of settlers. He had been on the frontiers of civilization since his earliest youth, first in the Cape Province and then in the Transvaal. Not only was he an elephant hunter but as it turned out, he also made outrageous demands on African polities for tribute and raided them for slave children.<sup>48</sup> These depredations, as well as the incessant arrival of white settlers in their part of the country, were becoming a threat to the sovereignty of Mokopane's and Mankopane's polities; hence the retaliatory attacks and the resultant killing of the 28 Boers.<sup>49</sup>

The two Ndebele chiefs had hoped to scare white settlers away and check their influx in the area. As it turned out, however, the opposite happened. Boer reprisals followed. The local Boers asked for help from Pretoria to reinforce the local commando. This assistance took some time to arrive, which gave Mokopane and his people sufficient time to take refuge in the cave of Gwaša. Since their arrival in the area the people of Mokopane had used these caves on numerous occasions previously when facing similar attacks by enemies. The commando from Pretoria only arrived late in October and on the 25th the two commandos, assisted by some Kgatla auxiliaries, unsuccessfully stormed the caves. Thereafter, the Boers tried to blast the roof of the dolomite caves, and when this too failed, they placed a large quantity of wood at the mouth of the cave and set it alight so as to suffocate those within. This also failed. The Boers then laid siege to the cave, tightening it considerably to prevent people escaping by night. About two weeks later the besieged people began to surrender, by which time multitudes had already died of starvation and dehydration.<sup>50</sup>

Before we turn to a discussion of how local people account for the siege in their own words, some general remarks are in order. The first is that the most coherent oral traditions of the siege are invariably those collected from individuals associated with the ruling lineage. This can be explained by their vested interest in retaining memories of the siege as these reinforce the legitimacy of their claims to chieftainship. Although the 'commoners' or non-royals have general knowledge of the 1854 siege, their grasp of the specific details tends to be limited and quite often vague, especially among

people living in the areas lying outside the chief's capital.<sup>51</sup> Secondly, the stories that local people tell often represent an assortment of oral traditions and Afrikaner nationalist interpretations. The latter were perpetuated, inter alia, through school textbooks. Many of the 'expert' informants on the siege story spent a few years in the Bantu education schools and thus imbibed the Afrikaner nationalist version of the past. Thirdly, some of these 'oral historians' have in fact collected written ethnographic accounts of their people; in the context of ongoing disputes over succession to chieftainship in many rural communities, some literate 'local historians' have visited local and national archives in search of material that they use to bolster or dispute claims by certain individuals to chieftainship and/or land. It should thus not be assumed that the oral traditions collected from local people that we use as raw data for the historical reconstruction of the local histories and heritage sites are somehow untainted by written accounts or that they are somewhat "pure" or authentic, although they do provide important insights and new perspectives never previously fully captured. We should bear in mind that sometimes stories that local informants claim were passed orally from their ancestors have in fact been learned from textbooks and other documentary sources, and sometimes some creative combination of oral and written accounts does take place.

Turning to the issue of the siege at the cave of Gwasa itself, there are numerous versions even within the Kekana Ndebele community of Valtyn (Mošate), the direct descendants of the survivors of the siege. At the core of these various renditions is the issue of Boer encroachment on local people's land and resources. Kenneth Kekana, a ninety-three-year old man who is regarded as an authority on the subject of the history of the Kekana (he was eighty-nine years old at the time of the interview in 2001), begins the story with the discussion of the 'expulsion' of the Boers from the Cape following the British takeover at the end of the 1700s. When the Boers arrived in the Northern Transvaal in the 1830s and 1840s the Kekana chiefdom was already established at Pruissen under chief Setšwamadi (Mokopane II). Conflict ensued when a group of Boer settlers shot dead the chief's son on the banks of the Mogalakwena River near a place now known as Moordrift. The Boers who were camping at Moordrift came across the Kekana hunting party carrying a young buffalo (inyathi). They demanded to know who the leader of the party was and the group pointed at the chief's son. All of a sudden, and without provocation, the Boers shot him dead. The hunting party carried the corpse and the carcass of the young buffalo back home, and conflict ensued.<sup>52</sup> This oral story shows remarkable similarities with the oral traditions contained in Jackson's study (from the NAD's Ethnological Section).

The issue of the killing of a young Kekana man seems to speak directly to the problem of the Boer encroachment on the land of the Kekana. Not only did the Boers appropriate the territory of the Kekana but also arbitrarily imposed new laws foreign to the ways of life of the locals. These included prohibitions around game hunting, more especially of young game. Whereas it is very unlikely that the Boer trekkers of the mid-nineteenth century would have been knowledgeable or keen about conservationism, the account of the killing of the young buffalo seems to stem more from the conservationist policies rigorously implemented in the reserves and 'Trust' farms by the segregationist government in the 1930s and 1940s, and by the apartheid government in the 1950s to the late 1970s, which formed a major part of the consciousness of the elderly storytellers.

Nevertheless, the murder of the chief's son as a catalyst for conflict between the Ndebele and the Boers is corroborated in other oral traditions I collected. In the rendition of a renowned female storyteller, Lucky Kekana, the young man killed by the Boers was the son of the local headman (nduna) Ntata. The young, hungry herdsman could not resist the smell of "braai pork" (barbeque pork) coming from a group of Boer hunters camping on the banks of the Mogalakwena River.<sup>53</sup> His only sin was the courage to ask for food from the Boers. Another informant, Gojela Peter Kekana, a local teacher and also member of the ruling lineage, refers to the young man who was shot dead as the son of the councillor (mokgomana). He was apparently returning from a hunting expedition in the company of other boys and their dogs. 54 The latter story supports Kenneth's insofar as the issue of the young buffalo was concerned. Despite minor variations, however, all traditions converge on the fact that the violent and bloodthirsty Boers spilt innocent royal blood, as well as on the idea of Boers' lack of hospitality. According to Lucky Kekana's version the incident so infuriated Headman Ntata that he retaliated by ordering his *mabutho* (warriors) to teach the Boers a lesson. They killed the Boers except for a little boy and a girl whose hair they decorated in a style called ndlopo by Ndebele speakers and tlopo by North Sotho/Pedi speakers, smeared their whole bodies with red ochre, and sent them back to the Boer community.<sup>55</sup>

Kenneth's account is different. He insists that Chief Setšwamadi (Mokopane II), outraged by his son's killing, sent a messenger to report the incident to the neighbouring Langa Ndebele chief Mankopane who was experiencing similar problems with another groups of Boers. The two chiefs decided to teach the Boers a lesson by launching a simultaneous attack. On the day that the Kekana attacked the Moorddrift group, the Langa attacked the group that was giving them a headache in the area. <sup>56</sup> This is corroborated by Gojela's account. The Kekana group killed almost all the Boers in the

group except for the young woman whose life was spared so that she could convey the message to others about the fate of her people. But before they let her go, they dressed her in Ndebele clothing, gave her a typical Ndebele haircut called *ndlopo* and adorned her with red ochre.<sup>57</sup> Gojela, on the other hand, is adamant that the Ndebele warriors massacred everyone in the Boer group except for children and women whose heads they shaved and smeared with ochre before letting them go.<sup>58</sup>

On seeing this, the Boers were infuriated, thinking that the children (in Lucky's version), the young woman (in Kenneth's account), or the women and children (in Gojela's rendition) had been skinned alive. In order to amplify the notion of African savagery, which justified harsh retributive acts against them including killings, the Afrikaner account of the siege puts stress on the incident of skinning the white woman alive. This account is vigorously disputed by most Ndebele informants, including Gojela, who says, "She was never skinned alive contrary to what the Boers were saying then. No, they [Ndebele] never committed such a brutal act."59 Meanwhile Boer groups had already established settlements in other areas to the south, such as Haakdoring, Naboomspruit, Nylstroom, Warmbad, all the way to Pretoria. Along these communities the message was sent to the seat of government in Pretoria about the "massacres" at Moordrift and Langa's chiefdom. Pretoria sent a Boer commando with reinforcements on a punitive expedition, which, in Lucky's story, Ntata's warriors tried in vain to repel. In the process some Kekana people were killed but most fled to the chief's capital from where the chief ordered everyone (young and old) to take refuge in the cave of Gwaša together with their personal possessions – livestock, crops. The Boers came after them searching and upon realizing that they were hiding in the huge cave, they laid siege to it for about a month.

Lucky Kekana insists that the heir to the throne of the Kekana was a five-month old baby, Mokopane III. His father Setšwamadi was aware that the war was not going the way of the chiefdom as they had been besieged and he was worried about the fate of his people, and especially that of the heir. So, he called his subjects to a gathering in the cave to give up all the children to the Boers. As the majority of the subjects showed some reluctance to do as the chief instructed, Setšwamadi ordered Mokopane's mother with the little Mokopane out of the cave, upon which others followed suit and they surrendered their children to the Boers. The commander divided the children among the Boer commando to be used as indentures (inboeksellinges) or forced or captive labourers. They showed no mercy upon the people remaining inside the cavern and piled wood at the mouth of the cave and put it on fire so as to burn or suffocate those hiding. While many people were burnt alive together with the cattle, goats and other possessions, others

managed to escape through underground tunnels leading into other caverns until they found a way to the neighbouring Kekana chiefdom of Zebediela, from which they had split off in the first place several generations before. While it is hard to prove the factuality of the story about the underground tunnels connecting the two chiefdoms, its details are important insofar as they reveal the degree of ethnic solidarity and mobilization by the culture entrepreneurs taking place at the time of the research.

Another issue that most versions agree upon relates to the Kekana's killing of a Boer commandant-general, Piet Potgieter, son of Andries Hendrik Potgieter who had succeeded his father into that position. The town of Potgietersrus (now called Mokopane), which was rebuilt in the 1890s, was to be named "Pietpotgietersrust" in his honour. Potgieter was shot dead by a Kekana marksman as he was trying to peep into the cave from the upper lip of the cave's mouth to see whether the fire had caught on inside the cave or to see if the Kekana people were suffocating from smoke inhalation. He fell right inside the cave. That, according to Gojela, was a major blow to the Boers. However, the young Paul Kruger showed his strength and courage by descending down that cave despite being repeatedly fired at by the armed Ndebele men. Quite clearly Gojela's story resonates with the Afrikaner interpretation immortalised in public history and popular publications. It is not unlikely that the informant either read this somewhere else, or he heard it being related second hand by the local elderly but also literate informants.

Although severely depleted and weakened, members of the Kekana Ndebele chiefdom who survived the siege reconstituted themselves into a community at Pruissen and shortly thereafter Setswamadi died, having apparently committed suicide by taking poison. The chiefdom was then relocated further westward to the fertile area around the hill called Sefakaola, which was part of the land taken away from the Lekalakala people (a Sotho group). The capital of the chiefdom was established on the summit of the hill. In the meantime, the Ndebele people, including the children who had been captured at the cave of Gwaša, had been divided among the Boers as booty and turned into indentured servants on farms alongside the Magaliesberg Mountains in the Western Transvaal. This means that Mokopane, like other young captives, grew up on white farms. None of the Kekana people knew where they were. Although Setšwamadi's brother, Makute (also known as Magemi) took over as an acting chief, there was concern in the newly reconstituted Kekana chiefdom that there was no apparent heir since Mokopane's abduction by the Boers. A search for him commenced almost fifteen years later so as to avoid the disruption of chiefly succession. Traditional healers (tinyanga) were called to the capital (emošade) to figure out the direction they should take in their search for the boy. They pointed out that he was in the direction of De Wilt, the area around the Kgatla chiefdom of Mmakau near Brits in the North West. A group of men was sent to Mmakau where the Kgatla people showed them great hospitality and provided crucial leads about the whereabouts of Mokopane. According to Lucky's rendition of the story, the Ndebele men 'stole' Mokopane and brought him back to the chiefdom where he took over the throne at the unlikely tender age of twelve years. In Kenneth's version negotiations were entered into with the Boer owner of the young Mokopane (who had adopted a Dutch name 'Klaas') and after paying a hefty sum of compensation in the form of livestock and elephant tusks, his release was secured. The young Mokopane III, acculturated as he was, had to undergo Ndebele initiation together with young men of his age group before he could take over as chief. In short the various traditions of the siege of Gwasa are hedged around with the politics of succession to chieftainship, and their emphasis is on the tenacity and resilience of chieftainship in spite of the destructive white encroachment on the land and culture of the indigenous people.

There are also conflicting accounts of the causes of the defeat of the Kekana. Some claim that lack of access to water precipitated the surrender as people began to die of thirst or were shot down running to the stream below. Others hold that there was a stream passing through the caves but that the Boers diverted it and so precipitated surrender. Yet others claim that water was in fact plentiful and it was disease that eventually killed people or drove them from the cave. Whatever the situation may have been, by 17 November Ndebele resistance had almost ceased and Boers could enter the cave without being fired upon. By 21 November M. W. Pretorius, leader of the Boer forces, "broke open his laager," partly to mount a punitive campaign against Mokopane's ally, Mankopane, and partly because the smell of rotting flesh had become overwhelming. While the extent of fatalities will never be clear, Pretorius reported that 900 bodies lay in front of the caves. He estimated a further 3,000 to be inside. As regards booty, the Boers claimed to have taken 6,300 large and 1,200 small stock from the surrounding area. Together with the people taken as prisoners of war, the stock was divided among the commandos. 61 The Boers also found 450 kilograms of ivory in the cave and this was auctioned off. The Kekana were definitely dealt a severe blow but they were not down and out, at least not as yet.

In the aftermath of the siege and the defeat of the Kekana, their capital relocated to the summit of the Sefakaola Hill further westward but still within the vicinity of the Boer settlement. Mutual livestock raiding continued, but the Boers, despite their earlier victory in the siege, lacked the numbers and military resources to impose their authority in a significant way.<sup>62</sup> The two

sides were embroiled in a low-level war, the type of stalemate that was only broken in the 1890s when the British became involved and subordinated African polities.

Having dealt with Mokopane, the Boers then went after his ally, Mankopane, who fared better on a defensive mountain stronghold from where he repulsed Boer attacks. While the Boers by and large remained a relatively weak group unable to assert political hegemony in the area, the conflict in the region continued to bubble up and in 1858 the Boers mounted another campaign against Mankopane. Ten years later, in 1868, the Boers, led by Paul Kruger, again turned on the chiefdom of Mokopane but the chief's forces defeated them and sacked the village of Pietpotgietersrust. In 1870 the village was abandoned, and it was not until the 1890s that the Boers, with the assistance of the British, could claim anything like decisive authority over Ndebele communities in the region. Thus mutual hostility was a primary characteristic of interactions between Boers and the Ndebele and oral traditions about this relationship exist, which are often used and manipulated by ethnic nationalists in their quest for Ndebele ethnic consciousness.

## Memory, Song, and Performance in the Mobilization of Northern Ndebele Ethnicity

Beside oral traditions as important conduits for the preservation of heritage, there are other artistic forms that the Northern Ndebele ethnic nationalists have increasingly employed to transmit critical information about the past of their communities. Some ethnic nationalists in the Valtyn community, such as Gojela Peter Kekana, have been involved in forming musical choirs to promote awareness of heritage issues such as the Gwaša siege, to advance Ndebele ethnic identity and solidarity among the dispersed Northern Ndebele groups, as well as to promote the struggle for recognition of Northern Ndebele language as part of our national heritage. The emotional topic of the 1854 siege and popularizing memories of that episode are being deployed strategically to promote the growth of the troubled and controversial Northern Ndebele ethnic nationalism today.

One such celebration took place on 24 September 2000 at Mošate Valtyn, which I had the privilege to attend as an invited guest. The activities of the Heritage Day commemoration commenced at around 12:00 noon, most of which had a cultural thrust, with concerns being raised about the erosion and rapid disappearance of Ndebele ways and language as a result of modern schooling. Several speakers urged the elderly to teach the younger generations about some of the old ways as a way of safeguarding Ndebele

culture that was facing extinction. Since one of the major concerns of my project is to look at the content of the cultural message marketed by cultural entrepreneurs, I paid close attention as well to the meanings behind the cultural performances that were on show. Juvenile girls performed traditional songs and dances; a youth choir performed some choral music; women were dressed in what they perceived as "traditional Ndebele dress" (some people might have seen it as Pedi traditional dress) and entertained the audience with their traditional dances and songs. Young men beat drums and performed the traditional tikqolo dance. Calls were made through songs and performances for North Ndebele unity in Zebediela, Mokopane, Bakenberg, Mašašane, Hammanskraal and other areas. Most of the songs invoked the history of the struggle of the Ndebele people against Boer domination in the nineteenth century, putting emphasis on the suffering caused by the siege of 1854.

A number of songs were performed in the medium of Northern Sindebele at that public function. Such performances often take place at public functions organized by the provincial government, including ceremonies for the installation of dikgoši (chiefs) in and around the Limpopo Province, at funerals of chiefs and ordinary people, as well as in awareness campaigns such as HIV-Aids, "World Aids Day," and "No Tobacco Day." Kekana asserts that,

These youths are regularly called upon to perform. And they sing in *Sindebele*. All that we are trying to do is to revive this language using different means.... Right now we have more than forty songs in *Sindebele*, some gospel songs in *Sindebele*, as well as Ndebele cultural music....I made an example and said to them: "Look at the Zulu where it is not only adults who sing and perform but also the youths. And you should always remember that you are not only doing this for yourselves but also for your children so that the next generations will find this *Sindebele* language having been preserved." 65

Because of the nature of performance, singing has proved to be a more resilient and effective weapon not only in the promotion of the uniquely Northern Ndebele language but also in the much wider dissemination of knowledge about the story of the siege of Gwaša. The knowledge of the Gwaša story would probably disintegrate to a point of uselessness if left to the already diluted medium of the oral traditions. Through songs and performances calls are made for Northern Ndebele unity in Zebediela, Mokopane, Bakenberg, Mašašane, Hammanskraal and other areas. Most of the songs

invoke the history of the Ndebele's struggle against Boer domination in the nineteenth century, and especially the sufferings caused by the siege of 1854. Two examples will suffice:

### Song transcript

Ligolweni la Gwaša (2X) Ngulapha bo-koko na bo-mkhulu bethu Ba thobele khona Khumbulani, khumbulani Ligolweni laseGwaša

Maburu, mbabambhi Nge kubulala sichaba sokxe

SeMandebele akaMughombani<sup>66</sup>

#### Song translation

At the cave of Gwaša (X2)
It is where our grandmothers
and grandfathers
Are sleeping
Remember, remember
The Cave of Gwaša

The Boers are evil
For killing the entire Ndebele
nation
Of Mokopane

Another song, bearing more or less the same message and drawing upon the same lyrics as the one above, was performed to a different tune by a group of little girls whose ages ranged from about five to ten years old, which shows the degree of ethnic mobilization in the local community of Valtyn. The song goes as follows:

### Song transcript

Ligolweni la kaGwaša Sitšhaba sa kaMghombani Asi yeni ku li bona

Sitshaba sa kaMghombani Bo-koko na bo-mkhulu

Ba thobele khona. 67

### Song translation

At the cave of Gwaša
The nation of Mokopane
Let us go there and see it
(the cave)
The nation of Mokopane
Our great grannies and
great grandfathers
Are sleeping there.

The siege incident has thus become a key symbol around which Northern Ndebele ethnic nationalism in the Mokopane area is fast becoming crystal-lized. While emphasis in this song is put on the suffering that the Ndebele experienced, other songs and praise poems stress the bravery and heroism of the Ndebele that precipitated the siege. After being besieged for three to four weeks, during the course of which they ran out of water and food, the Ndebele surrendered. Their numbers had been hugely depleted by death from starvation and fumes from the fire that the Boer commandos had lit at the mouth of the cave to smoke people out. The late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Afrikaner dominees (pastors) and intellectuals forged

Afrikaner nationalism by embellishing the actual suffering of the Boers at the hands of their black foes and 'wicked' British imperialists with mythical happenings. In the same way the Northern Ndebele 'nation' is being built around memories of Boer barbarism. A new dimension has been added onto North Ndebele identity—a stress on North Ndebele suffering due to Sotho domination. This, the Ndebele are often reminded, contradicts their militaristic heritage prior to white conquest.

Political figures such as the late Chief Johannes Shikoane II of Zebediela, who vehemently resisted inclusion in the Bantustan of Lebowa and fought for the secession of Northern Ndebele chiefdoms, have been elevated to the status of martyrs in the Northern Ndebele mythology. This is a classic case of an ethnic community in the process of re-imagining its past and of self-realization. The idea of the Northern Ndebele as a nation is manifested sharply in the works of Petrus Nyadlo, another ethnic broker associated with NANO. Petrus, like his father Percy Nyadlo (discussed above) is passionate about the Northern Ndebele language struggle. Like his father he has taken up teaching as a career. Unlike his father who is a linguist, the younger Nyadlo is an up-and-coming poet, local historian and musician. He was also in attendance at the local Heritage Day celebration held at Valtyn, where he recited a couple of his poems. One of the poems was a eulogy of Chief 'Semanjemanje' Shikoane II of Zebediela, portraying him as a hero in the struggle against Pedi domination.<sup>68</sup> Another was a praise poem of the nineteenth-century Langa chiefs who fought courageously against white colonialism.

The second example below is a song that was addressed to the provincial government:

# Song transcript

Ngwalelani Somatlhodi (X2)<sup>69</sup> Le mmote Kore Sindebele si ya fundwa

Sisotho SiShangane SiVenda Sindebele Ti ya fundwa.

## Song translation

Write to Ramatlhodi (X2)
Inform him that
Ndebele language is being
taught
Sotho language
Shangane language
Venda language
Ndebele language
All these are being taught.

At the time of the performance of the song, Ngwako Ramatlhodi was the premier of the Northern Province, subsequently changed to Limpopo Province. The song urges the Northern Ndebele to express pride in their cultural heritage, especially language. The call to write letters or petitions to Ramatlhodi symbolizes an assertion of equal status of Northern Ndebele with other regional languages. This is one of the key demands around which the ethnic nationalist organization has proved effective in mobilizing certain communities. But social and political commentary was directed not only at the provincial leaders but also at the national politicians:

When President Thabo Mbeki was here, I was the one who welcomed him here [with my youth choir], and we sang Ndebele songs, such as (singing) "Siyamthanda Mbeki, siyamthanda Mbeki, siyamthanda Mbeki. Nguye papa wethu." (We love Mbeki, we love Mbeki, we love Mbeki. He is our father). The young men would sing along from behind in a chorus saying: "Ufikile, ufikile..." (He has arrived, he has arrived..."). I tell you if you could hear that song, tears would start welling in your eyes.<sup>70</sup>

The various appeals to Northern Ndebele nationalism through the language struggle, oral traditions, songs and dance have clearly paid huge dividends in terms of a significant following in some areas but not in others. In the community of Zebediela, which was one of the major hotspots of confrontation with the Lebowa Bantustan authorities in the 1970s and 1980s—the response to ethnic mobilization has been both lethargic and lukewarm. The attitude has been promising in some villages on the southern side of Zebediela—places such as Magatle, Molapo, Droogte and others—where "there are many interested people but poor coordination ensures that the information about our activities never reach their ears. If they had access to the information we would have a lot of support from Zebediela."<sup>71</sup> Kekana seems to believe that access to a vehicle would remedy the problem of organizing these outlying areas.<sup>72</sup> Molomo, however, attributes the problem of Zebediela to the issue of poor leadership and disarray within the royal family.<sup>73</sup> Kekana explains some of the problems among the Northern Ndebele communities in Zebediela and the neighbouring Ga-Ledwaba:

The real truth about the situation at Moletlane is that more especially in the royal family, the Kekana teachers and those from Ledwaba's place that we have had meetings with in the past is that they have very low self-esteem or confidence concerning their sense of being Ndebele. You often hear some of them complaining: "Hey man, I can't even speak Sindebele." We would respond that, "Here we are interested not only in those people who speak the language but also those who can't. For as long as you are

interested in the Ndebele issues even though your identity is not necessarily Ndebele, then you are welcome to join. And we do permit members to speak in *Sesotho* if they cannot speak *Sindebele*."<sup>74</sup>

Based mostly in the countryside in contrast to the urban migrant elites of the 1960s and 1970s, the youthful Northern Ndebele nationalists of the 1990s and the 2000s seem more determined to pull all stops in order to achieve their goal of language recognition.

#### Conclusion

Several critical points need to be emphasized in concluding this paper. The first concerns the visible shift in the nature and composition of the leadership of the Northern Ndebele nationalist movement. In the 1970s and 1980s urban-based elites and migrants played a pivotal role in striving for secession from Lebowa and Bophuthatswana in favour of incorporation into KwaNdebele. Few women were involved; the driving force behind the early movement was mostly male migrants and a number of rural based chiefs and their supporters. By contrast, from the 1990s to the present rural based elites—mainly schoolteachers, both male and female—have been at the cutting edge of the struggle for recognition of Northern Sindebele language. Whereas in the 1970s and 1980s the ethnic nationalists were fighting for an exclusive Ndebele identity and an ethnic enclave within the context of the Bantustan policy, in the post-apartheid period the tussle has shifted to the demand for recognition of the Northern Sindebele as one of the historic national languages within a unitary South African polity.

In this struggle for recognition of Northern Ndebele identity, language, oral traditions, songs and performance have been drawn upon by the new cultural entrepreneurs in a way that the older ones had failed to do. Traditions only survive if they change to reflect current realities on the ground. The new cultural activists have not been oblivious to the realities of living cultural traditions As South Africa has been undergoing transition, many of its public institutions and monuments have also been in the process of revision. The Kekana Ndebele of Mokopane have been witness to some of these transformations. Members of the ruling lineage have expressed a wish for a plaque to be designed at the Historic Cave as a monument to, and a tangible, permanent inscription of, both the suffering and heroism of the Kekana during the siege of 1854. For about a century Makapansgat has been a public symbol of Afrikaner nationalism. Amid contestation and struggle a new chapter is now beginning to be written for the Gwaša cave site to serve

either as one of the icons of a broader African nationalism in the country, or as a symbol of a narrow Northern Ndebele ethnic nationalism, or both. At the moment the issue of Makapansgat is still in flux and there is still too much dust in the air to determine which one would triumph.

#### **Footnotes**

- <sup>1</sup> Sowetan 28 August 1997.
- <sup>2</sup> The new constitution has a number of provisions that protect various languages and cultures in the country. Chapter 1, Clause 6 (1) mentions Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, and isiZulu as the country's official languages. Clause 6 (2) says that "recognizing the historically diminished use and status of the indigenous languages of our people, the state must take practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of these languages." Clause 6 (5) provides for national legislation that would establish a Pan South African Language Board. which must promote, and create conditions for, the development of all official languages, as well as for the sign language and the virtually extinct Khoi, Nama and San languages. The Bill of Rights (Chapter 2) also has numerous interesting things to say about individual rights to education in the official language of choice. Refer to Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996, Act 108. <sup>3</sup> The Northern Ndebele nationalists were not the only group jostling to have their language recognized as the twelfth official language. There were also the Lovhedu, Phuthi, Khoi, and others. Interview, Madimetja Percy Nyadlo, Bakenberg, Mokopane, 14 October 2000.
- <sup>4</sup> Nyadlo, M.P. "Livi Elimnandi' [The Sweet Word]: (A Biblical Translation into Ndebele)," Unpublished Manuscript addressed to the State President R.N. Mandela (not dated).
- 5 Ibid.
- <sup>6</sup> The Northern Ndebele language is one of the many languages apart from the eleven official languages, which have not attained official status in the country's constitution in part because they are perceived to be spoken by a very tiny minority of the population. There has been an ongoing debate between the Ndebele nationalists and government as to whether Northern is a language or a dialect. The government's assumption was that it was a dialect of the Sindebele language that attained full recognition as one of the country's eleven official languages. According to the statistics provided by the *Economist* (1995), there were roughly 588,000 Transvaal Ndebele in the country, a mere 1.5 percent of the population of 39,189,000. It would seem, however, that this figure excludes the Northern Transvaal Ndebele as it refers specifically to the Ndzundza and Manala, which are groups that have been classified as Southern Transvaal Ndebele. Cited in http://www.sil.org/ethnologue/countries/Sout.html. Nevertheless, Molomo's claims that there are over six million Northern Transvaal Ndebele is a gross exaggeration and very unlikely although it is significant as a political statement. <sup>7</sup> Interview, Madimetja Percy Nyadlo, Bakenberg, Mokopane, 14 October 2000; Interview, William Lesiba Molomo, Mamelodi, Pretoria, 02 March 2001; Interview, Gojela Peter Kekana, Mošate, Valtyn Village, Mokopane, 29 December 2003.

- <sup>8</sup> The racial and gender composition of the Board seems to be an attempt to ensure that there is a balance among the different groups, i.e. it reflects the rainbow character of the nation. The positions of chief executive officer and chairperson were occupied by African women, and an Indian woman occupied that of deputy chairperson. Pan South African Language Board. *Annual Report*, June 1999. See the inside of the cover page.
- <sup>9</sup> In addition, by the terms of Section 8 (8) of the PANSALB Act No. 59, provincial language committees, national language bodies, and national lexicographical units were put in place to focus on projects and research studies. These fall under six focus areas, namely; (a) Status Language Planning, (b) Language in Education, (c) Translation and Interpreting, (d) Development of Literature and Previously Marginalized Languages, (e) Lexicography, Terminology and Place Names, and finally (f) Language Rights and Mediation. PANSALB, *Annual Report*, June 1999: 13, 16.
- 10 Ibid., 27.
- <sup>11</sup> Professor A. Wilkes specializes in the Zulu language at the University of Pretoria. His interest in Northern *Sindebele* started with the resurgence of Northern Ndebele identity after 1994. Many of my informants refer to him as "one of our key allies" in the struggle for recognition. For example, at one of the gatherings of the language activists organized by the PANSALB on October 31, 1997 at Johannesburg International Airport, Wilkes formed part of the Northern Ndebele delegation. See, for example, Interview, Madimetja Percy Nyadlo, Bakenberg, Mokopane, 14 October 2000; Interview, William Lesiba Molomo, Mamelodi Township, Pretoria, 02 March 2001; Interview, Gojela Peter Kekana, Mošate, Valtyn, Mokopane, 29 December 2003.
- <sup>12</sup> Earlier scholars, mainly linguists and anthropologists attached to universities and the Ethnology Section of the Department of Native Affairs, had believed that the Northern Ndebele language had for all practical purposes ceased to exist as its speakers had rejected it in favor of Northern Sotho, the dominant language of the surrounding ethnic groups. See, for example, Wilkes, A. "Northern and Southern Ndebele Why Harmonisation will not work," *Southern African Journal of African Languages* 21, 3, (2001): 1; Van Warmelo, N.J. *Transvaal Ndebele Texts*, 1930.
- Wilkes, A. "Northern and Southern Ndebele Why Harmonisation will not work," *Southern African Journal of African Languages* 21, 3, (2001): 1 and 24.
   Interview, Madimetja Percy Nyadlo, Bakenberg, Mokopane, 14 October 2000; Interview, William Lesiba Molomo, Mamelodi, Pretoria, 02 March 2001; Interview, Gojela Peter Kekana, Mošate, Valtyn, Mokopane, 29 December 2003.
   The main early publications are Ziervogel, D. *A Grammar of Northern Transvaal Ndebele*. Pretoria: Van Schaik, 1959; "Notes on the Noun Classes of Swati and Nrebele," *African Studies* 7, 2-3, (June-September 1948): 59-69. In recent years Ziervogel's book has become an inspiration and tangible evidence for the Northern Ndebele linguists and nationalists that their mother tongue can and

should be written. Apart from those two publications, there were a few earlier attempts by Van Warmelo's African researchers to write down the stories they collected for the Native Affairs Department's Ethnological Section. Some of these writers preferred to jot down the stories they collected in the Northern Ndebele language rather than in Northern Sotho, perhaps as proof even back then that the language could be standardized like other written indigenous languages. These stories form part of the manuscripts that constitute the Van Warmelo Collection in the national archives. Eucharius Ledwaba, Sethosa, Jonathan M. Maraba, and C.M. Mokgohlwe are some of these researchers (discussed fully in Chapter Three). While they wrote most of their stories in Northern Sotho, some made an attempt to write in Sindebele. This perhaps points to the fact that the desire for the language to be put down in written form is not as recent as it appears. From the 1960s onwards this work was carried forward by more literate people, especially schoolteachers in the different Ndebele communities in the north. When Lesiba William Molomo, a schoolteacher in the township of Mamelodi in Pretoria joined the Ndebele nationalist movement in the late 1960s, he was more enthusiastic about the development of the language than the politics of unity with the Southern Transvaal Ndebele. Aphane recalls how upon assuming the leadership position in the Ndebele nationalist political organization, Molomo almost immediately tried to reorient the organization away from the immediate problem of ethnic unity to the language struggle. See Interview, Maesela William Aphane, Mamelodi Township, Pretoria, 05 March 2005.

<sup>16</sup> Interview, William Lesiba Molomo, Mamelodi Township, Pretoria, 02 March 2001.

- <sup>17</sup> Ledwaba, M.S.J. "The Development of Indigenous Leadership in the Church of the Province of Southern Africa, with Special reference to the Diocese of St. Mark the Evangelist," Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Pretoria, 2004: 51.
- <sup>18</sup> Interview, William Lesiba Molomo, Mamelodi Township, Pretoria, 02 March 2001.
- <sup>19</sup> Wilkes, A. "Northern and Southern Ndebele Why harmonization will not work," *South African journal of African Languages*, 21, 3, (2001): 1.
- <sup>20</sup> Interview, Madimetja Percy Nyadlo, Bakenberg, Limpopo Province, 14 October 2000.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Ibid.
- <sup>23</sup> Interview, Gojela Peter Kekana, Mošate, Valtyn Village, Mokopane, 29 December 2003.
- <sup>24</sup> The informant is only identified as Peter Kekana in the Acknowledgements section of Hofmeyr's book. See Hofmeyr, I. "We Spend Our Years as a Tale that is Told": Oral Historical Narrative in a South African Chiefdom, 1993: xv.
- <sup>25</sup> Interview, Gojela Peter Kekana, Mošate, Valtyn Village, Mokopane, 29 December 2003.

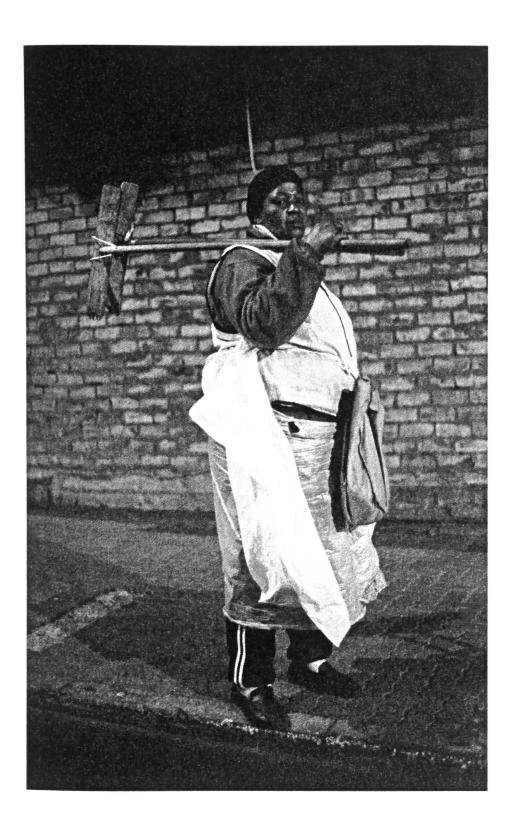
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Ibid.
- <sup>29</sup> Interview, Madimetja Percy Nyadlo, Bakenberg Village, Mokopane area, 14 October 2000.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Ibid.
- <sup>32</sup> Interview, Gojela Peter Kekana, Mošate, Valtyn Village, Mokopane, 29 December 2003.
- <sup>33</sup> Interview, Lesiba William Molomo, Mamelodi Township, Pretoria, 02 March 2001.
- <sup>34</sup> Interview, Madimetja Percy Nyadlo, Bakenberg Village, Mokopane, 14 October 2000.
- <sup>35</sup> Interview, Gojela Peter Kekana, Mošate, Valtyn Village, Mokopane, 29 December 2003.
- <sup>36</sup> Interview, Madimetja Percy Nyadlo, Bakenberg Village, Mokopane, 14 October 2000.
- 37 Ibid.
- <sup>38</sup> Interview, Gojela Peter Kekana, Mošate Valtyn Village, Mokopane, 29 December 2003.
- <sup>39</sup> "Makapansgat" is an Afrikaans name meaning "the cave of Makapan." Makapan is a Dutch corruption of the name of the Kekana Ndebele chief Mughombane, which in turn goes by its popular Sotho variety, Mokopane.
- <sup>40</sup> A researcher from the Archaeology Department at the University of the Witwatersrand, Amanda Esterhuysen, is currently conducting research of the material cultural in the cave of Gwaša. Her preliminary findings indicate that the number of over 3000 dead is probably accurate.
- <sup>41</sup> A considerable portion of the article entitled "Caves of Antiquity" is devoted to a discussion of the 1854 siege looking at the reasons for, and outcomes of, the incidents. Like most discussions of the siege, the article tends to reproduce Afrikaner myths that reinforce notions of African barbarism and nefariousness while invoking the apparent authenticity and purity of oral tradition. See, for example, The Northern Province Tourism Board. *Makapansgat: Northern Province South Africa*, Reprinted from Getaway Magazine, (No date).
- <sup>42</sup> Hofmeyr, I. "We Spend Our Years as a Tale that is Told." 1993: 139
- <sup>43</sup> Movement towards institutionalizing the perspectives of local people was made in the recent declaration of Makapansgat, now called Mokopane's Cave, as a national heritage site. Applications were also submitted early in 2003 to have the site recognized as a world heritage site (WHS), and it has now attained that status.
- <sup>44</sup> See, for example, Jackson, A.O. *The Ndebele of Langa: Ethnological Publications No. 54*, Republic of South Africa, Department of Co-operation and Development, (1983); Naidoo, J. *Tracking Down Historical Myths: Eight South*

African Case Studies. Johannesburg: Ad Donker, 1989.

- <sup>45</sup> Hofmeyr, I. We Spend Our Years as a Tale that is Told, 1993: 109.
- <sup>46</sup> The ZAR's 'Volksraad' formulated a policy in 1853 that stipulated that 'no one who is not a recognised citizen shall have any right to possess immovable property in freehold.' In Boer Republics non-whites were not recognised as citizens.
- <sup>47</sup> See Loubser, J.H.N. "Ndebele Archaeology of the Pietersburg Area." MA Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1981: 17.
- <sup>48</sup> Jackson gives in addition various other motives for the murder of Hermanus Potgieter and his party. One story he tells is that Potgieter came across the youngest brother of the Kekana chief Mokopane where he had killed a buffalo calf while hunting. It is said that Hermanus flew into a rage and insulted him for having killed a calf instead of a full-grown animal, and thereupon shot him dead. Another story is that a young man ridiculed Hermanus Potgieter's son and that the father lost his temper and shot him. A third story is that he aroused the anger of the Ndebele by shooting a big snake which happened to accommodate the spirit of a deceased Kekana chief in a tree near the headquarters of the Kekana chief Mokopane. For further reading, see Jackson *The Langa Ndebele*, 14-15. See also Hofmeyr, I. *op cit.*, 110.
- <sup>49</sup> The murder of 28 people was a major shock and setback for the Boer settlers in the Transvaal who probably numbered in the hundreds.
- <sup>50</sup> Hofmeyr, I. op cit., 110.
- <sup>51</sup> Some of the non-royals interviewed were communities living in Mokopane Valley itself, the vast majority of whom are not descendants of the Kekana but later arrivals who came to the area as farm labourers.
- <sup>52</sup> Interview, Kenneth Kekana, Valtyn Village, Mokopane, 19 December 2001.
- 53 Interview, Lucky Kekana, Valtyn Village, Mokopane, 18 December 2001.
- <sup>54</sup> Interview, Gojela Peter Kekana, Valtyn Village, Mokopane, 29 December 2003.
- <sup>55</sup> Interview, Lucky Kekana, Valtyn Village, Mokopane, 18 December 2001.
- <sup>56</sup> Interview, Kenneth Kekana, Valtyn Village, Mokopane, 19 December 2001.
- 57 Ibid.
- <sup>58</sup> Interview, Gojela Peter Kekana, Mošate, Valtyn Village, Mokopane, 29 December 2003.
- 59 Ibid.
- 60 Interview, Lucky Kekana, Valtyn Village, Mokopane, 18 December 2001.
- <sup>61</sup> A similar sort of Boer plunder is recorded by Delius (1989) in the case of the defeat of the Ndzundza Ndebele chief, Nyabela. See, for example, Delius, P. "The Ndzundza Ndebele: Indenture and the Making of Ethnic Identity," in P. Bonner, et al., eds., *Holding their Ground*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1989.
- 62 Hofmeyr, I. We Spend Our Years, 1993: 44.
- <sup>63</sup> Since the democratisation of South Africa after April 1994, the 24 September has been declared a public holiday as a day of celebrating our cultural diversity. Cultural activities are organized at provincial level and the different cultural

groups in each province commemorate the occasion at a central location. In the Northern Province celebrations often take place in Polokwane. However, in that year the Mokopane Ndebele, who were still mourning the recent death of their chief, decided to honor the occasion by secluding themselves in accordance with old customs and they held a separate commemoration at the chief's place in Mošate. This in a way served the Ndebele nationalists well as they could use the occasion to vent out their frustrations at the apparent exclusion of the Northern Ndebele in the new South Africa and rouse 'nationalistic' feelings among those in attendance.

- <sup>64</sup> Interview, Gojela Peter Kekana, Mošate Valtyn Village, Mokopane, 29 December 2003.
- 65 Ibid.
- <sup>66</sup> Song performed at the Mokopane Heritage Day Commemoration by a group of youths (boys and girls), under the guidance of Gojela Peter Kekana, on the farm Makapansgat, 24 September 2000.
- <sup>67</sup> This was another song performed at the Mokopane Heritage Commemoration by little girls. Ibid.
- 68 "Semanjemanje" is a Ndebele nickname given to Shikoane II because of his constant usage of the term. "Semanje" means "the modern way." George Maboni Kekana described Shikoane as a chief who often said: "Bjale ke pušo ya semanjemanje. Re buša sebjalo...re ibapile ka sekgale sa borena, sa bopapamogolo." Translation: "Now our rule is the modern one. We govern in the modern way... although we are also drawing upon our ancient traditions of our forefathers." 69 "Somatlhodi" is the Ndebele-ized form of the name "Ramatlhodi." Ngoako Ramatlhodi was premier of the Northern Province, now Limpopo, from 1994 to 2004.
- <sup>70</sup> Interview, Gojela Peter Kekana, Mošate Valtyn Village, Mokopane, 29 December 2003.
- 71 Ibid.
- 72 Ibid.
- <sup>73</sup> Interview, William Lesiba Molomo, Mamelodi Township, Pretoria, 02 March 2001; Interview, Daniel Kekana, Meadowlands, Soweto, 16 October 2000.
- <sup>74</sup> Interview, Gojela Peter Kekana, Mošate Valtyn, Mokopane, 29 December 2003.



# 'A NATIVE VENTURE':

# SOL (SOLOMON TSHEKISHO) PLANTIE, DEFINING SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE

Victoria J. Collis-Buthelezi

What is South African literature? What was it? Two questions sparked by Sol Plaatje's foreword to his novel, Mhudi: An Epic of South African Life a Hundred Years Ago. South Africa has eleven national languages: Afrikaans, English, isiZulu, isiXhosa, seSotho, sePedi, siTswana, TshiVenda, siSwati, Xitsonga, and isiNdebele. Any definition of South African literature must attend to literatures produced in all eleven languages. Which begs another question: what is literary in this national context? For instance, is orature literary? And if so, what should our practices of reading South African literature look like? The legacy of apartheid looms in these questions as well as their answers. Afrikaans and Afrikaans literature bear the stain of apartheid perhaps most notably, but last year's rash of xenophobic violence suggests that language and national belonging remain contested in the new South Africa as much as in apartheid South Africa, albeit differently, such that the question is not only one of racial identity but ethnic as well. In South African Literatures Michael Chapman suggests that the problem of defining South Africa literature comes down to

[w]hose language, culture or story can be said to have authority in South Africa when the end of apartheid has raised challenging questions as to what it is to be a South African, what it is to live in a new South Africa, whether South Africa is a nation...what its mythos is, what...to be forgotten and what remembered as we scour the past in order to understand the present and seek a path forward into an unknown future. (Chapman)

Or, to interject geography into Chapman's more temporal emphases, the problem of defining South African literature can be understood as a crisis of borders around the question of what and who counts as South African. If "[a]partheid was/is," as Mark Sanders contends in Ambiguities of Witnessing, "in the most general terms, an interdict against the development of a social formation" it engendered a South Africa characterized by its hyper-anxiety around border crossings (Sanders, 34). It falsely constructed borders between urban and rural, white and black, settler and native, South African and not. New South Africa must define the social formation that it wishes to develop. In other words, which borders are to be crossed or

removed, and which fortified. The underlying thrust of last year's xenophobic violence was a sense of dangerous national border crossing having transpired; "amaKwerekwere [foreigners]" were being asked to go home.\(^1\) The African National Congress (ANC), though heavily reliant upon border crossing as a liberation movement, found itself paralyzed as a political party and executor of the state to act swiftly and decisively against the nativistic attacks upon immigrants from other parts of the region and the continent.\(^2\) That the language of externalization of the victims was isiZulu adds to the complexity of the problem of constructing a new South African nation, a South African lingua franca and a South African literature. Perhaps then Afrikaans becomes the lingua franca of the past and isiZulu the lingua franca of the present and future?

Of course, it was never as simple as my proposed linguistic binary between an apartheid Afrikaans past and a democratic isiZulu present/future infers.<sup>3</sup> Plaatje's Mhudi seems to reveal a striving for national belonging betwixt the two, Afrikaner and Zulu (Matabele) as it addresses the fate of the Barolong who forge alliances with the Afrikaner (Boer voortrekkers)<sup>4</sup> after both groups were decimated by the Matabele, only to portend the foreclosure of that alliance because of the Afrikaners' rejection of racial equality. The first paragraph of Plaatje's foreword to Mhudi reads: "South African literature has hitherto been almost exclusively European, so that a foreword seems necessary to give reasons for a Native venture" (Mhudi xi). 5 It is remarkably self-aware about the novel's unique, perhaps audacious, intervention in the South African literary canon of the early twentieth-century. Mhudi's imagined reader, according to its author, requires an explanation for the existence of such a book. He explains that "[t]his book should have been published over ten years ago, but circumstances beyond the control of the writer delayed its appearance" (xi). What were the circumstances that delayed the appearance of the novel? The urgency for explanation of 'a Native venture' suggests that the circumstances may have been, not only the subject of the novel—the fate of the Barolong after 'Mzilikazi's<sup>6</sup> tax collectors were killed' (xi)—but the writer's identity. South African literature was a project of settlers—English, Dutch, white—not of natives. (What of coloured and Asian South Africans?)

The title, "A Native Venture': Sol (Solomon Tshekisho) Plaatje, Defining South African Literature," emerges out of this awareness of the novel's entrepreneurial spirit within the South African literary canon of its time. With this first sentence Plaatje initiates a dialogue around the stakes of South African literature and the role of 'the native' author in it. The first edition of the novel was published by the Lovedale Press for posterity in 1930; thus, the circumstances that prevented its earlier publication did not recede as much

as the writer was able to circumvent them via an All-African mission press. Yet, although the publishers are African, Plaatje sees the novel as having the following "two objects...(a) to interpret to the reading public one phase of 'the back of the native mind'; and (b) with the readers' money, to collect and print (for Bantu Schools) Sechuana folk-tales which, with the spread of European ideas, are fast being forgotten. It is thus hoped to arrest this process by cultivating a love for art and literature in the Vernacular" (xi). Plaatje's objects for the book assert the racial and ethnic segregation of South African literatures. The 'reading public,' for whom the book is written in English is not necessarily the reading public for the future Tswana folktales that the profits from *Mhudi* will engender. Though the book is not written primarily for an indigenous African reader, the profits from its circulation in the market are meant to build Tswana (African) vernacular literature. The first known full-length novel by a black South African is not only written to inject a black authorial presence in South African literature but to initiate a black vernacular literary tradition separate from it. The foreword belies Mhudi as duplicitous, both novel and ethnography, being and not being the native informant, a bridge and an impasse through which Plaatje affords readers access to the back of the native mind as ethnographer and native informant, yet withholds information (the Tswana folktales) for another set of readers, the indigenous Africans about whom the novel is written. The knowing of the native that the native informant is meant to afford, it is suggested, is deferred until the future of the publication of the folktales and transferred to the indigenous reader. Borders are traversed yet transparency does not ensue.7

If Mhudi was intended to reveal the back of the native mind of the 1830s—taking the foreword and the subtitle of the novel, An Epic of South African Life a Hundred Years Ago, at their word—Native Life in South Africa was written to reveal the back of the native mind in the 1910s, in order to exact the reader's sympathy and thereby incite him or her to act against the Natives' Land Act, No. 27 of 1913. Both were written in the 1910s, Mhudi and Native Life in South Africa: South Africa, Before and Since the European War and the Boer Rebellion. It is important to note that the foreword to Mhudi is dated August, 1930. The novel and its foreword are artificially ordered. The most recently written appears before its predecessor and we are asked to understand it on the terms that the latter (written) text prescribes. The foreword is written after the shattering of racial equality in a unified South African nation. The parts of both books taken together offer an arc between the initial post-Union of South Africa moment and the pre-apartheid period. To read the two works together invites us to think about the birth of South African literature through the birth of the South African nation-state and the limits of that state. Jointly they evoke the challenges of Afrikaner and African nationalisms, as well as hope for global, humanistic equality and the possibilities of Pan-Africanism.

As a piece of journalistic, sometimes propagandistic, non-fiction prose, *Native Life* is written around the same time as *Mhudi*, is published over a decade earlier. First in 1916 by P. S. King in London, and then serialized in 1922 by W. E. B. Du Bois in *Crisis* during Plaatje's stay in the United States. Plaatje writes them during a period of travel between South Africa, England and North America. In her foreword to a later edition, Bessie Head explains that *Native Life in South Africa* was

wide and deep in its historical reach[, it is a] full portrait of the times ... and we are presented with a view of history reaching back nearly five hundred years and up to a period of change and transition [that surrounded the Natives' Land Act] as it affected the lives of black people [in South Africa]. .. a book of flaming power and energy, astonishingly crowded with data of the day-to-day life of a busy man who assumed great sorrows and great responsibilities, who felt himself fully representative of a silent, oppressed people and by sheer grandeur of personality, honoured that obligation... The book may have failed to appeal to human justice in its time, but there is in its tears, anguish and humility, an appeal to a day of retribution. (Head, "Foreword" Native Life in South Africa, iii)

The description also befits *Mhudi*. Reading *Mhudi* and *Native Life* together allows us to engage questions of genre and geography, the native informant and the land. *Native Life* documents the upheavals of indigenous South Africans as a result of the Natives' Land Act passed by the South African parliament in 1913. Land, it seems, remains at the center of both books. Access to land, lack of access to land; alliances among groups over land, disputes among groups over land; and ultimately the impossibility of citizenship without ownership of land, whether as an individual or a group erupt as the catalysts for indigenous resistance to colonial or national authorities.

Sol (Solomon Tshekisho) Plaatje was on his way to London in 1914 as a member of a South African Native National Congress (SANNC)<sup>8</sup> deputation that hoped to garner British support against the Natives' Land Act. The deputation was selected by committee vote. It included: Thomas Mapikela, Reverend Walter Rubusana, Reverend John Dube, Saul Msane and Plaatje. The act prohibited indigenous South Africans from purchasing land outside of designated 'native areas' unless by special dispensation from the Gover-

nor-General and mandated that African heads of household (men) living, working, and renting on farms give over their cattle and the labor of their family members to the owner of the farm. The scarcity of land in native areas or Locations had resulted in overcrowding and some Africans, as a result, "settled on the farms of white farmers" (NLSA 18). Locations were only "but one-eighteenth of the total area of the Union [of South Africa;" one-eighteenth of the Union's land resources for 4 500 000 'natives,' "leaving the remaining seventeen parts for the one million whites" (18). Although No. 27 enacted land regulations for rural areas, Plaatje understood it as the beginning of the South African native's conversion into "a pariah in the land of his birth," as it took away his right to acquire land individually across the Union (16). Its "object," Plaatje asserts in Native Life in South Africa, "is to prevent the Natives from ever rising above the position of servants to the whites" (45). If No. 27 were not repealed by the British government, the Union of South Africa would not bring about the extension of the Cape Liberal Tradition and the non-racial Cape franchise 1853,9 which promised "equal rights to all civilized men" to the other three provinces of the Union, previously the Transvaal colony, the Orange Free State and the Natal colony. Rather, it would precipitate the extension of the Free State laws through the rest of the Union. Through its land policy, the South African parliament sought to retribalize Africans and control African labor.

Despite the exclusion of African concerns and interests from the negotiations that led to the unification of the Cape Colony, Natal Colony, Orange Free State, and Transvaal Colony into the Union of South Africa, Plaatje and other members of the African intelligensia remained hopeful that the success of the British in the South Africa war would bring about the eventual extension of the non-racial Cape franchise. However, the Natives' Land Act begins the death-knell of that extension. *Native Life in South Africa* reads simultaneously as an appeal to the Cape (British) Liberal Tradition, Plaatje's "English ideas and sentiments," and a eulogy to its passing. It is both a poignant attempt at resuscitating the "Imperial factor" and grief and mourning of the passing of it. While some Africans sought the comfort of their shared Christian faith with the Afrikaners, Plaatje explains that

some other Natives, remembering what took place before the South African war, took a different view of these religious incidents. Those Natives, especially of the old Republics, knew that the only dividing fence between the Transvaal Natives and complete slavery was the London Convention; they, therefore, now that the London Convention in fact had ceased to exist, had evil forebodings regarding the average Republican's treatment of the Natives, which was seldom

## influenced by religious scruples. (Plaatje, 44)

The 'Natives of the old Republics' intimate discomfort with Afrikaner rule in lieu of British Empire. The removal of the South African colonies from the British Empire foreshadows a corrosion of African rights and progressive liberalism in South Africa.

The rise of the South African nation-state forebodes the disenfranchisement of black South Africans rather than an amelioration of their oppression. In Chapter XII: "Passing of the Cape Ideals," Plaatje explains that "we," black South Africans and Cape Liberals, are the loyal subjects of the British Empire in South Africa. And it is "we [who] sing the funeral dirge of Cape ideals," while "the Republicans sing songs of gladness." It is a death announcement. "What would Sir George Grey, or Bishop Gray, or Saul Solomon, say of this?" he asks his reader and therein reifies these three men not only as "Empire Builders," but as ancestral spirits that the living Empire Builders must mollify by reviving their empire. "What would these Empire builders say," he continues

if they came back here and found that the hills and valleys of their old Cape Colony have ceased to be a home to many of their million brawny blacks, whose muscles helped the conqueror to secure his present hold of the country? What would these champions of justice say if they saw how, with her entrance into the Union, Cape Colony had bartered her shining ideals for the somb[er] history of the northern states, a history defiled with innocent blood, and a territory soaked with native tears and scandalized by burying Natives alive; and that with one stroke of the pen the so-called federation has demolished the Rhodes's formula of "equal rights for all civilized men, irrespective of colour?" How are the mighty fallen! (Plaatje 103)

Plaatje depicts the South African nation-state as an organ of oppression. In response to what he presents as the malevolent use of the apparatus of the (nation-) state by the Boers, Plaatje articulates the beneficence of (British) empire: Cape Liberalism. But, is *Native Life in South Africa* a celebration of empire?

The promise of the Cape franchise attracted Pan-Africanists such as Henry Sylvester Williams who sought to achieve equal rights for all races within the British Empire, and eventually the rest of the world. They understand themselves to be fighting for Britain to give her colonial subjects which its

national citizens received: the opportunity to progress through education and citizenship. Native Life in South Africa documents the large scale forced migrations of previously landed farmers as well as tenant farmers throughout the Union of South Africa as the ultimate betrayal of the Cape Liberal tradition of Rhodes. It is therefore complicit<sup>12</sup> in the 'Cape to Cairo' imperialism Rhodes championed. Celebratory of it, I am not sure. This betrayal of a freedom promise is not exceptional to South Africa. Other parts of the Empire battle to fulfill it and Plaatje is aware of this. In his pamphlet, "The Mote and the Beam" (1922), he suggests a racialized dimension not only to the problem of being black in South Africa, but also within the empire. He exposes the inequity of South Africa's reward after World War I in the absence thereof for Jamaica, Trinidad or Bermuda. "But it is consistent," he explains, "with the South African paradox that, whereas Trinidad and Bermuda got nothing for their pains, South Africa alone has annexed the diamond fields and cattle ranches of German South West Africa" (Willan, 276).

Yet, Plaatje scripts Native Life in South Africa, in large part, as an appeal to "English ideas and sentiments" that seeks complicity in the power structure in order to reignite the more benign friendship of British imperial power. It is not so much a pro-imperialist book as an anti-nationalist one against Afrikaner nationalism. He seems to understand the Union of South Africa as the political manifestation of white male friendship predicated upon the dispossession of the black African—the privileging of racial bonds over class or ethnic. "The gods are cruel," he laments, "they might have warned us that English men would agree with Dutch men to make it unlawful for black men to keep milk cows [and land] of their own" (Plaatje, 82). Interracial friendship is attempted along British national-imperial lines. He expounds upon African loyalty to Britain in her pursuit of imperial majesty. To ignore that loyalty would be to topple the empire.

Plaatje's critique of the nation-state, and albeit episodic celebrations of (British) empire, compels a rethinking of postcolonial nationalist narratives of decolonization in which the rise of the postcolonial nation-state is often understood as anti-colonial success and the means by which (racial) equality and justice was achieved. The political community that Plaatje imagines in *Native Life in South Africa* is not Benedict Anderson's *nation* but, at times the British Empire, or colony, and at others a black transnation forced into movement as a result of parliamentary decree. Leon de Kock writes of this as a "civil imaginary" in "Sitting for the Civilization Test: The Making(s) of a Civil Imaginary in Colonial South Africa" that represents a "desired identification with the colonizing culture as an act of affirmation, a kind of publicly declared 'struggle' that does not oppose the terms of a colonial

culture but insists on a *more pure* version of its originating legitimation" (de Kock, 392). The colonial subject seeks to make the claims of the culture of the colonizer ring true.

Each chapter of Native Life in South Africa begins with an epigraph from the Bible, missionaries and Enlightenment philosophy or Victorian literature. Chapter III: "The Natives' Land Act," commences with Reverend Amos Burnet: "I blush to think that His Majesty's representative signed a law like this, and signed it in such circumstances" (Plaatje 36). The first chapter begins with "The Song of Songs," "I am Black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar,/as the curtains of Solomon" (12). Chapter IX begins with a revision of Shylock's response to Salarino in Act III Scene i in Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice:

He hath disgraced me and laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies; and what is his reason? I am a Kafir./ Hath not a Kafir eyes? hath not a Kafir hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? Is he not fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same summer and winter as a white Afrikan[er]?/ If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that.

Plaatje reinterprets the speaker's essential truth through his revision. It is does not begin with the equanimity of exacting revenge as Shylock's does. Nor does it emphasize the financial loss of "half a million" for which Shakespeare's Shylock seeks recompense. Plaatje's Kafir—Arabic for 'heathen,' unbeliever or infidel (OED)—demonstrates the dangerous absence of the Afrikaner's reciprocal acknowledgement of the humanity of the Kafir. Plaatje invokes the supposed inferiority of the Kafir in order to unveil the Afrikaner's and the (European) Christian's duty to bring unbelievers to God. If we think of the Kafir as the soon-to-be or newly converted Christian, this passage indicates the tragic flaw of this kind of prosyletizing that operates in concert with racial capitalism: it will produce a similar response. Plaatje refers to the Natives' Land Act as part of "a war of extermination against the blacks" of South Africa in other parts of Native Life in South Africa. But, here, through the reciprocity evoked in the final sentence—'If we are like you in the rest,/we will resemble you

in that'—we see that any war to exterminate black South Africans, will exterminate those who implement it.<sup>13</sup>

In Ambiguities of Witnessing, Mark Sanders poses the following question in his chapter on reparation: "[w]hat are the deeper links, already suggested in the Truth Commission's report and in Plaatje's Native Life in South Africa, between reparation and mourning" (Sanders 128)? I am not sure that reparation is most helpful for us, not because compensation is not demanded by Plaatje and the Kafir speaker mentioned above, but because Native Life in South Africa precedes not only the Truth Commission, but the wrongs around which it is intended to achieve reconciliation. The mourning that Native Life in South Africa participates in is linked to something akin to reparation (future), perhaps prevention (past) of the wrong (present) that will necessitate reparation. Native Life in South Africa operates in the past of the Empire, the present of its death, and the future of the colonial subject's loss and mourning of it. The loss of Empire also means the loss of a particular subjectivity and the possibility of the rights of that subjectivity. This does not necessarily make Native Life in South Africa a vindication of Empire, however. Plaatje's rhetoric employs nostalgia for the ideals of the British Empire, perhaps both to embolden British parliamentary action and public outrage, and to reify the hopeful past of Cape Liberalism in the present of muscular Afrikaner nationalism.

Plaatje deploys a similar play between past and present in Chapter II of Native Life in South Africa, "The Grim Struggle between Right and Wrong, and the Latter Carries the Day." Here he recreates the parliamentary scene in which the Natives' Land Act passes. The chapter title suggests a reenactment of the struggle between right and wrong in present tense. While the scene is reenacted as if drama, the shifts between the narrator and each member of parliament (third person when narrator takes over and first person when speaker is allowed to speak directly), and past and present tenses, pull the reader into a drama that has already been acted out. The scene opens with General L. Lemmer having "asked the Minister of lands:—(a) How many farms or portions of farms in the Transvaal Province have during the last three years been registered in the names of Natives; (b) what is the extent of the land so registered; and (c) how much was paid for it?" The Minister of Lands then "replied." The narrator then explains that "[s]ome very disturbing elements suggest themselves in this question and in its prompt answer" (NLSA 22). Lemmer and the Minister of Lands speak and are registered in the past tense, while the narrator interprets in the present. In other words, the performance of the drama occurs in the past tense, but the reading of it within Native Life in South Africa as we read it transpires in the present tense. The death cannot be revoked, it has always already happened in the theater of this book. But Plaatje as narrator represents the mourners leaving the funeral of the past and the future, and active in the present through their participation in the act of mourning.

Colonial South Africa, comprised of Boer Republics and British Colonies, enabled possibilities of equality for non-Europeans that a unified, white South African nation-state did not. The tears of the 'silenced and oppressed [black] people' expelled from farms occur in part because of the realization that they slowly come to as they move from farm to farm and town to town; the next colony does not offer reprieve, they are all united under the Union. Inter-colonial movements enabled fissures, liminal spaces, in which colonials could at times circumnavigate the colonial systems under which they existed. Among what Edward Said terms the "adversarial internalizations" engendered by coloniality, inter-coloniality at times generated interstices in which different colonials met, and multiple colonialisms and colonialities were manipulated, circumvented and applied. The Union of South African was a concession among whites in South Africa after the Anglo-Boer War in which British and Boer cohered into one nation under Afrikaner nationalism, the specter of which emerges in Plaatje's Mhudi (1930).

As stated earlier Mhudi was written contemporaneous to Native Life, but only published in 1930 due to Plaatje's inability to find a publisher. In the novel, Mhudi and Ra-Thaga, Barolong survivors of the Matabele pillaging of Kunana find refuge with Chief Moroka-a-Sehunelo at "Thaba Nchu in the land of the Basuto" (Mhudi 67). Moroka is the head of another Barolong clan and accepts not only Mhudi and Ra-Thaga, but their chief, Tauana, other Barolong and Boer voortrekkers, who leave the Cape Colony under Potgieter and Sarel Cilliers to escape British persecution. In part, this persecution appears most profound when the British emancipate all slaves in the British Empire in 1834 and many of the Boers who leave the Cape do so to avoid having to relinquish their chattel slaves onto themselves. The black South Africans who arrive at Thaba Nchu become citizens of Moroka's 'nation-state.' The voortrekkers however, "only want one ruler and that is God...no man or woman can rule another." Although the chiefs find that anomalous—"[t]he Bible," the rejoin, "says when the children of Israel had only God as their ruler they gave Him no rest until He anointed a king for them" (70)—Chief Moroka grants the voortrekkers land at Moroka's Hoek. The Barolong<sup>14</sup> people under Moroka are an amalgamation of (black) peoples. In contrast to the Union of South Africa, Moroka's 'nation-state' is multi-ethnic as well as multiracial. White citizenship is different in Moroka's nation because whites desire it to be so, so because (black) authority mandates it. The Barolong even go to war with the Boers against the Matabele, by whom both groups have been ill-treated.

In the novel, the Matabele, under Mzilikazi, try to constitute a 'mutliethnic' black, pan-African nation based upon indigeneity that begins to fall apart when the Matabele massacre the Barolong at Kuana. Yet, as both the foreword and the novel itself inform us, that massacre though violent comes as a result of Chief Tauana's execution of Mzilikazi's tax-collectors, Bhoya and Bangela. Tauana decides to kill them "without informing his counselors" (5). Tauana acts impetuously to the detriment of his people. The critique offered of Mzilikazi's pan-African nation-state is not that it subsumes the Barolong at Kunana or other groups into itself through taxation. In this way he brings "fresh discipline" (4). But, with this fresh discipline "they also introduced manners that were extremely offensive" to the Barolong, such as "walking about in their birthday garb" (4).

Of the three models of African nationhood—Moroka's multi-racial/multiethnic state, Mzilikazi's pan-African state, and Tauana's single-ethnicity— Mzilikazi's falters as a result of cultural insensitivity and Tauana's fails because of its weak governing structure and implementation while Moroka's is destabilized not as a result of its political, legal, cultural or economic structures. It's only flaw is the unwillingness of the Boer to enter into equal reciprocity. Even those Boers who befriend the Baralong seem unable to accept their friends as equals rather than laborers. Friendship between Boer and Barolong emerges as one in which the Boer does not understand the Barolong as partners within a nation but as laborers within Boer domesticity. This is perhaps why Mhudi seems to prefer the Matabele; if your men surrender to their rule you become their equal, surrendering to the Boer means perpetual inequality. For instance, when it is time to negotiate the terms of dividing the land they will capture when they defeat the Matabele, the Boers strive to institutionalize this inequality offering that the Boers get the land and the Barolong the cattle rather than sharing the land equally, although the land was originally Barolong land under Chief Tauana (125). In the end the interracial friendship modeled here makes the share of resources and power inequitable, and results in the betrayal of the black fellow (the Matabele). Even in the interpersonal Boer/Barolong friendships that emerge between Ra-Thaga and De Villiers and Mhudi and Hannetje, De Villiers' intended, can only understand their friendship as one of employer to employee. She has come to care deeply for Mhudi, she explains at the end; thus Mhudi and Ra-Thaga must come live with her and De Villiers. Mhudi must be their children's "ayah" (or Hannetje's kaffir meid). Hannetje can only understand their friendship as one of demand and supply of black labor.

In A Critique of Postcolonial Reason (1999), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak thinks through the construct of the native informant as gendered female. In Mhudi, the native woman is the central figure. Mhudi acts as the conduit through which the reader comes to perceive in the novel. We get to understand the Boer at Moroka's Hoek through her. When she recovers from malaria her "presence [is] an additional help at the wagons" because [t]he demands of the war had necessitated the bulk of the native servants of the Boer being at the front with the armies" (Mhudi 156). She is not asked of her own wellbeing, though she has been missing for some time and suddenly appears out of the ether. It is Mhudi who sees the Boers, not as a fulfillment of the Barolong dream to fight the Matabele, but as more dangerous than the Matabele because at least the Matabele "w[ould] spear you to death and put an end to your pains," whereas the Boers torture their 'offenders' (Mhudi 111). But Mhudi is not the only native woman who understand the Boer in this way. When other women of Thaba Nchu learn of a Boer couple's torture of their Hottentot maid, they extend to the Boers the title of "Ra-Thaga's friends" to distance their relation to them. Rather than the Barolong's friends, friends of the nation, they become only Ra-Thaga's friends. Ra-Thaga, who nearly loses his life at Moroka's Hoek for drinking from the communal water trough, keeps the incident a secret from his wife and the rest of Thaba Nchu. Despite their warning that "were he not a Morolong he would be paid for his presumptuous act with a lacerated back," Ra-Thaga does not allow himself or the Moroka's nation to think of the Boers at Moroka's Hoek as no longer worthy of their friendship and cooperation. Though he lessens the frequency of his visits to the Hoek, he and "De Villiers both agre[e] not to let Mhudi hear anything of the latest escapade of 'her husband's friends'" (112). Mhudi is informant both to the reader and her fellow citizens of Thaba Nchu.

The network of women who circulate knowledge extends beyond Thaba Nchu. When the Barolong and Boer forces are at Tlou's village it is the "[w]omen [who] f[i]nd all sorts of pretexts for visiting" to see the Boers, but "only such men as came on business sometimes managed to catch a glimpse" of the white men (113). Mhudi and Umnandimeet, Mzilikazi's favorite wife, meet during the war between the Barolong and the Boers and the Matebele. They are both searching for their husbands and through this common purpose for a strong bond. They attempt to broker a ceasefire. Mhudi asks Umnandi to "urge [Mzilikazi] to give up wars and adopt a more happy form of manly sport." When Umnandi explains that Mzilikazi will be nothing as a king without a kingdom, Mhudi decries "that men in whose counsels we have no share should constantly wage war, drain women's eyes

of tears and saturate the earth with God's best creation—the blood of the sons of women." Umnandi responds that only when men are no longer on earth will there be no war (169). This exchange, between Mhudi and Umnandi, makes the woman figure as more than native informant in this novel. It presents another option for African nation-building, the feminine approach, that does not subscribe to "might is right," as Ra-Thaga tells Mhudi is the way to the world (49), but to a more universal notion of justness and ethical responsibility.

Although native women seem to be the most evocative of this approach in the novel, Hannetje also challenges the Afrikaner masculinized exertion of power that transpires as the Boer wagons are on their way to meet up with Ra-Thaga, De Villiers and the others at Tlou's village. She asks her mother to intervene on Jan, a young San's behalf, who "was dragged along, tied up and mercilessly punished" for no crime except being San like Dancer before him who was also "flogged till he was half dead" because he lost control of his wagon momentarily (166, 165). This womanly resistance does not appear to be widespread amongst the Boers of Moroka's Hoek. Though Hannetje intercedes to her mother on Jan's behalf, her mother remains silent. Interestingly, Hannetje does not beg lenience for Dancer, who is understood to have done something wrong. Mhudi tells Ra-Thaga and the readers of Hannetje's goodness, of which she says "[t]he Boers are cruel but they sometimes breed angels" (166). Hannetje is one such angel, but they are rare, and even her ability to think of Afrikaner-Barolong, white-black, interaction outside of the labor market is limited. However, if we return to Native Life in South Africa women's, white and black, role in the struggle against the repression of the Union government, each gets a chapter. Chapter VI: "Our Indebtedness to White Women," and Chapter VII: "Persecution of Coloured Women in the Orange Free State." Although, still within the framework of labor, it is Mrs. V who utters the hypocrisy of the Natives' Land Act: "White men have suddenly become brutes and have expelled Natives with whom they have lived from childhood— Natives whose labour made the white man wealthy are turned away by people who should treat them with gratitude" (NLSA 62). She recognizes the economic folly of such a law as well as its unchristian underpinnings, telling her husband that were they to abide by it, God would turn his back to them (65). Here intercession makes (white) authority pull back its threat of eviction. Mrs. V is also named Hannetje. Like Mhudi does Hannetje in the novel, Aunt Mietje whose family is able to remain on the farm in Native Life in South Africa under previous conditions, considers her Hannetje to be "not a Boer vrouw, [but] an angel" (66).

The chapter on the plight of black women in the Free State follows

immediately after. Plaatje explores the wrongs of the colonial system met out upon black women, not as mere figures for the nation, but as subjects. He wants to expose irony of the Empire "waging a terrible war for the cause of liberty" coterminous to the issuance of "a Basutoland Proclamation...[that] decrees that under certain penalties, no native woman will be permitted to leave Basutoland 'without the permission of her husband or guardian" (70). The nostalgia for the Empire that erupts elsewhere in the text seems to subside here as Plaatje tells his reader of the sexual violation to which the pass laws of the Free State subjects the black women of that province, and the failure of the civilizing mission to provide similar protection to "the native girl" that she was afforded "[i]n her primitive state" (71). Plaatje understand black women's oppression as a part of the unjust state structure that needs to be rectified. Further, he seems to hold up their modes of resistance—nonviolent rejection of the pass—and patriotism—once the war commences they "forg[e]t their own difficulties, joi[n] sewing classes, and hel[p] to send clothing to the afflicted Belgians in Europe (72)—as shining examples of how all British subjects, black and white, male and female, should engage the polity.

Native Life in South Africa and Mhudi resist the nation-state as the most viable political form for decolonization or liberation. They challenge systems of relation to power and relating to each other. Mhudi holds multiple narratives of nation: Mzilikazi's pan-Africanism, Moroka's multi-racial/multiethnic nation-state. Taunana's ethnical and racial homogeny, Mosheshe's black internationalism, that emerges toward the end to aides Mzilikazi's Matabele nation, and Afrikaner nationalism. Mzilikazi's pan-Africanism and Mosheshe's black internationalism seem to fair the best of all, as both in Mzilikazi's words recognize the unwillingness of the Afrikaner to "return their so-called friendship with honest friendship" (Mhudi 179). Yet, in Mhudi and Umnandi's friendship and exchange we get a change to all of these attempts at annexation and land-grabbing. Some are less just than others and thus less sustainable, but ultimately there remains skepticism about all nation- or inter-nation-building projects. Native Life in South Africa, on the other hand suggests at times another kind of relationship to the colony, one that entails inter-colonial movement and shifting strategic alliances. In Plaatie's application it is among the Free State, and the Natal and Cape Colonies. When the Union of South Africa "demolished the Rhodes' formula of "equal rights for all civilized men, irrespective of colour," it also removed the potential for liberation through inter-colonial movement that a non-unified South Africa allowed for, whereby colonized subjects could move from one colonial space to another, in order to avoid subjection to undesirable legal or social practices. The stories that Plaatje records in Native Life are often of those who, upon loss of land in the Free

State, attempt to migrate to Natal or the Cape, only to realize that the dispossession of land that forced them to leave their homes was not 'local' to their particular colonial (or republican) space but, 'national.'

We began with the following set of questions: what was/is South African literature, what counts as literary within this national context and what practice of reading does it afford? Plaatje offers a useful refusal to answer in response. He instead engages in a practice of the kind of liminality and strategic shifting that South Africa engendered before the Union of South Africa formed in 1910. His foreword to Mhudi and his own writing practice denote a multi-lingual cacophony rather than an acceptance of the African Authors Conference resolution that "Africans must write for Africans, but English is the medium through which Africans can be reached. It is impossible to produce a national literature through the use of a tribal language; only tribal literature will result" (de Kock 393). As he writes his novel in English he acknowledges the exclusivity of that mode of writing and reading. His (English) South African literature works toward the production of siTswana vernacular literature. In Native Life in South Africa languages of South Africa appear together. Is it a case for the practice of heterogenous national South African literature? In "No Longer in a Future Heaven': Women and Nationalism in South Africa," Anne McClintock argues that

[f]or this reason, nationalisms are dangerous, not as Eric Hobsbawn would have it, in the sense that they should be opposed, but rather in the sense that they represent relations to political power and to the technologies of violence. Nationalisms are contested systems of representation enacted through social institutions, and legitimizing, or limiting, people's access to the rights and resources of the nation-state: land and water, political and economic power, children, food and housing, the technologies of violence. Nations are situations under constant contest. (McClintock 104-5)

In Native Life in South Africa and Mhudi Plaatje resists the temptation to argue for another kind of nationalism to guard against Afrikaner nationalism. His rhetoric venerates British imperial-nationalism as he exposes its fallacy both in terms of racial and gender equality. Plaatje's central system of relations is friendship. The possibilities of political, social or economic cohesion occur through and in terms of friendship. Mrs. V and Aunt Mietje, Hannetje and Mhudi, Mhudi and Umnandi, Ra-Thaga and De Villiers, each friendship allows and forecloses particular possibilities of peace and liberation that are

not limited to the nation. Friendship, as domesticity, may seem to be an easy carry over from the Victorian era of Kipling and other such imperialists. Is Plaatje attempting something different? Domesticity, I suggested earlier as the only way in which the Boer voortrekkers in *Mhudi* can incorporate the Barolong as friends. Interracial friendship occurs within the unequal terms of their domestic sphere, which denies the racial other a home of his (or her) own.

Rather than Empire, imperialism, nation, nationalism and national literature, Plaatje's friendship may be rejecting domesticity for democracy. Jacques Derrida defines democracy as equality. If we use this working definition of democracy "you see why friendship is an important key, because in friendship, even in classical friendship, what is involved is reciprocity, equality, symmetry, and so on and so forth. There is no democracy except as equality among everyone...an equality which can be calculated, countable: you count the number of units, of voters, of voices, of citizens."15 At the same time the cleavage of friendship from domesticity that Plaatje presents, particularly through Mhudi and Ra-Thaga's rejection of De Villiers and Hannetje's offer of employment, may afford the possibility of reconciling equality (democracy) with singularity; a reconciliation that requires hospitality and perhaps multiple domesticities. The literary practice that Plaatje summons in his foreword to *Mhudi* may then be a practice of multiple (linguistic) domesticities, not only within the literary canon but in the 'democracy to come' of the promised text.

#### **Footnotes**

- <sup>1</sup> In a May 2008 article in the *Mail and Guardian* Nicole Johnston and Riaan Wolmarans explain the scene at Jeppestown police station, Johannesburg, where immigrants sought refuge in the face of the xenophobia that first erupted in Alexandra and then spread to other squatter camps, townships and low-income enclaves of the city and the provinces of Mpumalanga and KwaZulu Natal. Over 300 male foreign nationals were kept in the Jeppestown precinct to protect them from the violence, while women and children were taken to another location. Twenty-three year old Malawian, Mohammed Namgoma (23), a Jeppestown resident reported that the mob that forced their way into his home, attacked him and said that "the amaKwerekwere [foreigners] must go home."
- <sup>2</sup> Former South African president, Thabo Mbeki, took over a week to respond to the attacks and displacements. With few exceptions, the ANC seemed unable to act.
- <sup>3</sup> Attempts by the apartheid state to make Afrikaans the lingua franca through Bantu education were rebuked. Zuluness as a cohesive ethnic, or national (in the vein of iSizwe), identity is contested. Zuluness as a cultural and linguistic identity operates as Inkatha Freedom Party association, pro-Zuma rhetoric (100% Zulu boy), but there are also challenges to Zuluness being raised. See *Zulu Identities:* Being Zulu Past and Present edited by Benedict Carton, John Laband and Jabulani Sithole for more on the contestations of Zuluness.
- <sup>4</sup> The emancipation of slaves throughout the British Empire on August 1, 1834 prompted many Boers to leave the Cape under the British, to create in dependent Boer republics. In my later discussion of Mhudi I will explore the strain that Boer 'slaveholding' (of Griqua) practices put upon the alliances between Barolong and Boers in the 1830s.
- <sup>5</sup> I cite *Mhudi* and *Native Life in South Africa* as NLSA to differentiate for the reader between the two Plaatje books.
- <sup>6</sup> Mzilikazi, once one of Shaka's generals, who broke off from the Zulu nation and forged his own kingdom, the Matabele. He moved north from Zululand and worked to incorporate the other groups he encountered as it is said Shaka did through the mfecane (that this happened is still debated). He eventually moved north beyond the present borders of South Africa into Zimbabwe.
- <sup>7</sup> I am alluding here to Gayatri Chakravorty's figure of 'the native informant' in A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present (1999), in which Spivak charts the native informant across history, philosophy and literature as a necessary figure for the European Enlightenment of Kant, Hegel and Marx and its humanism and rationalism. The foreclosed native informant engenders the possibility of 'Man.' It seems to me that Plaatje plays with the bifurcation of Man and the native informant, as well as the colonial subject and the native informant, that Spivak explores. This will be taken up again later as I believe this play on these bifurcations or binaries is a vital element of Plaatje's

notion of how to resist and the role of literature in any such resistance.

- <sup>8</sup> Forerunner to the ANC (African National Congress), SANNC was founded in 1912. It was renamed ANC in 1926.
- <sup>9</sup> The Cape franchise of 1853 allowed Coloured men to be placed on the voters' roll, granted that they filled the following conditions: occupied, for twelve months, property valued at £25 and earned a salary of £50, or of £25, if board and lodging was provided by employer, and not deducted from salary. See Stanley Trapido, "The Origins of the Cape Franchise of 1853."
- <sup>10</sup> First appears in Chapter XV.
- 11 Williams moves to the Cape from London at the behest of F.Z. Peregrino (of Ghana), the owner and editor of The South African Spectator and other Africans of the diaspora. From colonial Trinidad, he becomes the first black barrister called to the Cape bar in 1903. In 1900 he had organized the first Pan-African Conference, which Du Bois would revive after the first World War as the Pan-African Congress. South Africa was so prominent at the conference that Peregrino referred to it in The Spectator as the 'Pan-South African Conference.' This pre-World War I Pan-Africanism argues for equality across the empire as opposed to decolonization. Williams and Plaatje knew each other. How well is unclear. Williams submitted an article to Plaatje's newspaper, Tsala ea Becuoana, and when Williams left the Cape in 1907, Plaatje announced his 'temporary' departure from the Cape in his paper. Plaatje familiarity with W. E. B. Du Bois revival of the pan-African movement after the war is more widely known. Neil Parsons describes Plaatje as "[d]isallusioned with the flabby friendship of British liberals, [and] increasingly drawn to the pan-Africanism of W. E. B. Du Bois" (NLSA 3). But, The extent of Plaatje's knowledge of Williams' pre-World War I Pan-Africanism is unknown. See Saunders 2001.
- <sup>12</sup> See Sanders, Mark, *Complicities: The Intellectual and Apartheid* (Philosophy and Postcoloniality), 2002.
- <sup>13</sup> This reciprocity resembles the ubuntu of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission under Archbishop Desmond Tutu which defines humanity as "a person is a person through other people." See Sanders, *Ambiguities of Witnessing*, for an in-depth analysis of ubuntu.
- <sup>14</sup> The Barolong are a clan within the Batswana.
- <sup>15</sup> See Geoff Bennington's interview of Jacques Derrida, December 1, 1997 at the Centre for Modern French Thought, University of Sussex.

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# THE NEW VOICES:

# POETRY AS SOCIAL COMMENTARY IN THE POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

Vuyisile Msila

#### Introduction

The late South African poet Ingoapele Madingoane writes in his epic poem africa my beginning:

azania here i come
from apartheid in tatters
in the land of sorrow
from that marathon bondage
the sharpeville massacre
the flames of soweto
i was born there
i will die there
in

africa my beginning and africa my ending

Madingoane was one of the finest poets who rose to prominence during the seventies. His contemporaries were poets such as Mafika Gwala, Sipho Sepamla, Mongane Serote and Dennis Brutus to mention but a few. These poets wrote about Black pride, Black struggle and Black hope. They were political activists who rose simultaneously with the Black Consciousness movement. In their poetry these poets did not necessarily follow traditional literary styles. For example, in his "proemdra" (Prose, Poetry and Drama in one) Mothobi Mutloatse wrote:

We will *donder* conventional literature: old fashioned reader and critic alike. We are going to pee, spit and shit on convention before we are through.

These poets did not have to follow convention after all: they were fighters and conventional styles were secondary to their cause of "storming the castles" of the apartheid South Africa. South African Black literature up to the seventies portrayed above had undergone tremendous transformation since its inception. Most shifts in literature were necessary to make literature to reach the larger masses. In the beginning, much Black literature catered to the middle classes. This problem could be attributed to two factors. On

the one hand, initially writers wrote for certain classes due to (among others) economic reasons. On the other hand, other writers wrote because of their societal position, i.e., they had become writers because of their societal position. The latter had some power and they could manipulate the language of power. Early Black writing of the twenties and thirties tended to be stilted and imitative of Whites (*Staffrider* Vol. 8 no. 1 1989:50). However, writers needed to transcend various hindrances in their environment as they embrace a People's Literature. Using People's Literature meant that writers sometimes discarded conventions as they took it upon themselves to write about ordinary people's struggles, pains and joys. This was a challenge to poets writing post-Sharpeville in the sixties (to the present). The questions posed to emerging South African poets were many, but the focal questions were as follows:

- Their position today. Do they have people who listen? Do they have the ears that the seventies' poets received?
- What motivates them to write poetry? Where do they get themes in the present day South Africa?
- How do they see their role as social critics?
- What are their views on liberation poetry before the new dispensation in South Africa?
- Should poets continue from where the previous poets left or should they explore new themes?

Literature, especially People's Literature, is about sharing the people's experiences. When people write about these in various ways it is with the hope of highlighting these so that the larger society could be aware of what is happening around them. "People's Literature is not for the reader who is looking for experience intensified by the writer; it is for those whose experiences exceeds the intensity of words. People's Literature is not meant so much to enlarge the readers' understanding of the worth and dignity of that world" (Gordimer 1990: 38). Literature needs to reflect the consciousness of the masses. It should move away from reflecting the culture of the elite.

### Ken Saro-Wiwa once stated:

Literature must serve society by steeping itself in politics... writers must play an interventionist role. My experience has been that African governments can ignore writers, taking comfort in the fact that only few can read and write. The writer must be the intellectual man of action. He must take part in mass organisations. He must establish direct contact with the people. (1996:21)

There was a time in South Africa when poets were both fighters and writers in their society. Richard Rive once pointed out that there was a time in South African history when it was incumbent upon Black writers to define the happening while they were simultaneously political activists who fought a system (Staffrider Vol. 8 no. 1 1989:48).

Presently, it appears that South African poets are concerned as to which direction their writing should take. Shava (1989:146) quotes Mongane Serote's response when he was asked about the direction of Black South African poets: "What direction does the liberation take in 1980s?" This is a question that one needs to think about. As the liberation struggle was fought, other struggles surfaced for writers to tackle. Shava conceded that besides demonstrating that Black writing is seen as part of the struggle for freedom. Serote's answer implied that protest in Black writing differs from period to period depending on the changing political landscape.

Literature is embedded in our culture and society. Both of these are products of history. The implication of these is that it would be unrealistic for a creative writer to write about that, which is not influenced by history. A colleague of mine once questioned the pain and anger reflected in many Black poets' works. He said that it was high time that Black poets should stop being angry and write "happy poems" - that they should write about marigolds, geraniums and love. He also contended that now that liberation in South Africa had been attained, there is no place for angry literature. I presume that the Kenyan writer, Ngugi would have answered him by saying that such an attitude to society "is often the basis of some European writers' mania for man without history - solitary and free - with unexplainable despair and anguish and death as the ultimate truth about human condition" (Ngugi 1997:71). Writers are influenced by a history; they have to do this otherwise they would be obsolete and irrelevant. If writing about their history makes them appear angry Africans, so be it. Chinua Achebe also once stated that African writers should be social and political in their approach to writing if they do not want to be irrelevant:

It is clear to me that an African creative writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of contemporary Africa, will end up being completely irrelevant – like that absurd man in the proverb who leaves his burning house to pursue a rat fleeing from flames. (Achebe 1975: 78)

There is nothing to be ashamed of if literature reflects pain, suffering, politics etc. Even in the post apartheid era. Creative writing should reflect the anger displayed by the people living in the soggy shack. It should show

the emotions of the young woman who begs for a living in the streets. It should reflect the misery of a former exile who is now frustrated in his home country. It should exhibit the happiness of the seventy-year old elated to cast his vote after decades of struggle. Writers need to create a new world that reflects their society. Even in post-liberation South Africa, we need to frequently look back as we focus in the present and plan for the future. Attaining liberation is not an indication that pain will dwindle. Liberation is not a signal that corruption will die. Nor is it an indication that we are all equal. Creative artists need to reflect these realities and truths before literature becomes a far-fetched irrelevant material.

Shava (1989:146) contended that two dominant literary trends have determined the shape of Black writing after 1976. On the one hand, there is a continuing tradition of resistance literature and one of its common elements is the role of resistance. On the other hand, other writers and critics are seeking to create new insights in Black writing. The latter argue that themes against apartheid are overworked and less engaging; they also point out that writing should transcend the advocacy of mass action and the recording of mass action and the recording of mass suffering. However, to hide political writing making it subtler than direct and being descriptive is one characteristic of creating literature for the elite. People should perceive their experiences reflected in literature in a way that they would understand. We do not want a People's Literature where meanings are implied. It is the challenge for writers to express the daily lives of the people. This is exactly what many young poets showed in this study.

Black writers of today have a challenge of employing the indigenous languages when they write as well. In the past the language of the struggle in South Africa was mainly English; as a result many writers used this language as a medium. However, the problem of indigenous languages needs to be addressed immediately otherwise writers will be paying lip service to transformation if they pretend to cherish it while they are neglecting their languages. The problem in our society is that writers neglect their indigenous languages as they strive to appeal to speakers of English and other languages. Language debate is still a very contentious one because it has economic implications as well. However, the richness of our countries' heritage needs to be highlighted by writers as they write in other languages as well. If writers use the other indigenous languages in South Africa the rate of literacy might rise. Moreover, when we use the language of the reader the mind becomes "decolonised." Language is one powerful weapon that writers can use to transform our society.

## The poets' views on contemporary poetry

Many of the poets interviewed are younger than thirty-five and they believed that poets still have a role to play as "social and political watchdogs" in their society. Like their predecessors they use varied styles in their poetry. They claim that there are few people interested in reading poetry and many are opting for performance poetry because many people who abhor reading are able to listen when they hear poetry recited. Just before the 1940s Black poets such as Dhlomo wrote challenging works that examined the society. However, the poets found that they were producing works mainly read by sympathetic Whites who had political and economic clout (*Staffrider* Vol. 8 no. 1 1989: 50). The Black poets interviewed frequently cited the dwindling numbers of Black people reading poetry. As Nonhlanhla puts it:

There is no culture of reading in our society. My friends and I used to compile our poems into small chapbooks; however, we soon discovered that people were unwilling to buy them. Even those we gave for free we would soon realise that they never read our stuff.

#### Pandelani who avers verifies Nonhlanhla's view:

We do not have people to read our poetry to. It seems the people presently are not interested in poetry. We normally meet as poets but we usually have ourselves to read to and listen to.

This absence of an audience appears to frustrate many poets. Many feel that they do not know the reasons behind this because they all select a variety of themes to write about. One still finds the themes of the past common among these poets. The history of the struggle especially on heroes such as Bantu Biko, Nelson Mandela, Abraham Tiro, Mmangaliso Sobukhwe and many others seems to be common among many of these poets' works. They write about events such as June 1976 (Soweto protests), about the Sharpeville massacre of 1961, about the Bambatha Rebellion of 1911. There are still many who have adopted the style of the 1970s poets such as Oswald Mtshali, Mafika Gwala, Mongane Serote and Sipho Sepamla. However, these young poets have also added new contemporary themes dealing with issues such as the AIDS pandemic. They write about love as well as criticising their government. In fact I found love themes persisting in many poets' works. Their poetry is poetry that moves between anger, despair, hope and love. There is anger because they think that the society is not as just as it should be. There is despair because as one of them puts it, "our lives would not

be better," But others showed hope in the new dispensation, the hope of having toppled the apartheid past hence they are also able to portray the romantic love as well because people are now able to lie down and love. However, there is also the hopelessness of the society that has sick moral values, many said they capture these.

All the poets in the sample write about the present political situation in South Africa. Black poets have always done this in South Africa. In the 1970s for example, the poets were inspired by Black consciousness, and they used poetry as one of the tools of showing their desire to change the political situation. It was performance poetry of poets such as Madingoane (cited at the beginning of this paper) in particular that inspired many Black poets. Among the poets in the sample however, there were two groups of poets when it came to writing about the political situation in South Africa. On the one hand there were those who were praising the present political changes and government. This group feels that the present government in South Africa has done much to change the poverty of the people. On the other hand some poets believe that there is still much that needs to be changed in the system to better the lives of million people in South Africa. The following poems are extracts from three poets in the study.

#### Thembi writes:

i see people trudge hoping for the next elections hoping to get a million houses million promises million disappointments these politicians are liars

(from *Promises*)

Thembi's poem displays disillusionment to government delivery. To her, the people still "trudge" as the politicians never fulfil their promises such as building the people's houses. Pandelani and Velile's echo Thembi's poem. These two poets write:

Why should we vote
When many cough in shacks
Spit blood of pain
And see tears like rain?
They sever their hopes
In cold dongas.

(from Wasted)

i still forget the joys
forgetting that i can glide
for i'm still chained in miseries
of struggles within,
yes i have freedom
but look at my brothers
whose souls are still chained
and my pocket that is still bare,
i'm squeezed in this new house
like my brother who died in
a pretoria jail back in '77.

(from Vanished)

These are some of the poems from the poets that evoke pain even after the attainment of democracy and freedom. These poets portray the harsh realities of an economy that tends to worsen the lives of poor Blacks in South Africa. To them poetry should be the voice that reflects the conditions of the poorest of the poor. To these poets, poetry should highlight the injustices that persist in the democratic South Africa. As one of them puts it:

Freedom did not totally erase poverty, joblessness and powerlessness. We need to write about these issues to sensitise the haves – they should know that there are still many people who struggle.

Tumi validates the above by stating:

Ten years of freedom has meant nothing to some. As an artist I think we need to reflect the diverse responses of the people to freedom. I do this a lot in my poetry. To some freedom has brought shattered hopes. Listen to my poem here, which I have called, "Shattered Dreams":

The future, the glory All those brittle hopes lie In pieces on our feet Like broken drums Like shattered dreams.

However, although there were these pessimistic poets, some were more encouraged by the potential shown by the majority government. This group sees the years after 1994 as years of true political participation. Their poetry shows them singing praises to freedom and the present government.

In a poem called "Victory," Lulama writes:

and the np's rule was submerged as from distant lands leaders emerged to bring us hope to give us bread and decades of victory

In this poem the poet shows us that she is optimistic about change. She sees hope and glory in the present South African government. Let us compare her poem to Tolo's who writes in his poem, "Freedom":

We no longer see that sadness As we embrace true joys That freedom brought. No more heavy dirges But memories of the victorious Freedom songs.

Again Mandla shows the trust in the government of the day when he writes in "Pastures":

When freedom fighters chanted Viva ANC! Viva Umkhonto! Viva PAC! Long Live Poqo! Now they have marched back home To taste these fruits Of freedom.

These poets reflect the opportunities, the hopes and joys that freedom has brought in South Africa. Through their poetry, we see the ideal life that freedom has brought to the South Africans who can now live freely in a country of their birth. Mandla states:

My poetry reflects the joy and excitement of having power in my country. As a poet, I feel that it is necessary for me to display the good life that freedom has brought to my compatriots.

Apart from the political issues some poets write about culture. They show the nostalgic themes experienced as a result of losing the African cultures. They explore the old themes of the encounter between Africa and the West. These poets show that after its encounter with the European values

during colonisation, Africa has suffered until today. In "African Drums" Zola writes:

the forlorn drum still lies as the *kwaito* rhythms obfuscates, the drum is dim as it sounds its doleful song the children turn their backs for other sounds.

Zola shows the nostalgia that has been shown repeatedly by African poets before. The drum symbolises African values and it is defeated by new sounds, represented by kwaito — a new kind of township music in South Africa. Using similar images of music for the dwindling African values Liziwe writes in her poem called "This House":

Who will be brave enough here
To go and tell mama
That we have forgotten to sing
Her songs?
Who will tell her we won't return
From this river
For we have broken her calabash?

The image of Africa here is used by portraying her as a female figure. The children are scared to go back to her and tell her that they no longer follow traditions. Another poet, Winnie recites her poem "Return":

Only a few embers remain
Telling us that our cultures are gone.
Where were you ignorant ones?
Who in this house will keep us sane?
Bring back the cattle
Bring back my culture.

Combined with the idea of culture is the quest for an identity. There seems to be mixed feelings when it comes to the expression of identity for these young poets. On the one hand, other poets feel accomplished and satisfied while others feel at a loss and inadequate. In his poem "I AM" Jola writes:

I am the black man
I am the black woman
Who has crossed the namib

And the sahara
To feed their dreams

I am the black man
I am the black woman
Who has liberated this
Black nation.

Jola says that he realises the role that black men and black women played in the struggle for liberation. He says that this makes him feel proud to be black. Liziwe reflects similar sentiments in her poem, "Bring back." In the poem she says she feels that black people should go back to Black Consciousness to look into their black identity. She claims that black people in South Africa still need to find their identity. Liziwe writes:

i'll go to the river tomorrow to ask my people to bring back my blackness and myself i'll go to the river to wash off the whiteness of my soul to remain true and black.

These poets also tackle topical issues on health. Only four poets do not have poems on the AIDS pandemic. It appears that many poets in South Africa see the pandemic as a societal problem that needs attention. Many draw the pictures left by the sickness as Winnie highlights in "The Aftermath":

emaciated and dehydrated he looks at the red sky counting his days between the clouds whose birds disappear one by one

In another poem called "Losing" another poet draws this picture:

her gaunt face dazed by this plague she is the voice whose owner has lost hope

Others writing about this disease have tended to politicise it by focusing on the government's AIDS policy. Nonhlanhla defiantly states:

manto failed to give him ARVs he crawls for strength he falls unconscious, he thought they were for the people yet they let them die.

Another one also defiantly addresses the president of South Africa:

Mr President, why do you say You do not know me? I'm the girl you saw raking bins Downtown.
They played with my girlhood And now I die from that sting But president help...
Your cabinet does not care.

Township life also features very much in the poems. The poets seem to reflect the good and the bad in their townships. These are the places where death comes easily. These are also the places where many enjoy themselves in a neighbourly fashion. When writing about the township life the poets portray them as sources of strength, history and life. In "Shebeen," Thembi says:

i drink my last glass listening to bra hugh and the tick-tock once more i should move my heart tells before they cordon streets with knives and guns as they lick blood in the dark...

Songo also captures township scenes in his "Last photo":

No one heard Meva that night When he bellowed between the shacks like a goat, They found his face gazing A pool of blood His body dangling on a barbed wire.

Again Tolo portrays another picture:

this hi-fi plays we know its friday night, new brighton wakes up joys rekindled before sunday comes.

The young poets also tackle the love themes. They look at betrayal, loss of trust, intimacy. They show love as a source of disappointment, of strength, of joys and sadness. In "Missing you," Zola says:

wish he could come with his pen to write between my pages with much pleasure and passion, that they may read what love is

All these poets stated that they have a role to play in teaching the society how it needs to react to the present day injustices and challenges. There are those who still feel that they need to move the society to stand up for their rights. Some also believe that they need to teach the government officials what they should do to lead the people fairly. These young people have many ideas as to how change could be realised. In the poem "Why," Fred calls:

Why go to the ballot box
When my granny still sleep
Beneath the gaze of the stars?
Why vote
When MPs drive Pajeros and BMs
As they die on the sidewalks?

Velile also speaks to the people in "Choices":

go tell your mothers that we were misled, go tell your fathers we remain powerless, while others lick honey kissing thick cigars.

However, there are also those poets who see their role in inspiring the people to support the government. Songo recited this poem:

They could not bend the spear As it cut through colonialism And drowned white conquest, Follow the spear of the nation It liberated you
Follow the people's leaders
Who have always stood by you.

#### Velile also writes:

Now we have freedom
Let's protect our rights
And dreams of endless leaders
Biko
Mandela
Sobukhwe
Let us salute
Amandla!
For the land is ours again.

The young poets also look at the basic rights enshrined in the South African Constitution. The themes on children's rights and reconciliation among races feature much in their works. These are the themes dominant in post-apartheid South African society. Among these themes is feminine affirmation.. Women writers see some of their poems as media to fight the historically patriarchal society. Women want to assume their positions as men have; they affirm their rights as citizens of a truly democratic society. In her poem "Void," Nonhlanhla says:

what gave you the impression that i was happy when you left me dirty and unsatisfied this morning? don't you know that i am a woman!

Sami also shows the strength of women in her Sacrifice:

Women till this land
With their sinews and their wisdom,
While men talk
They fight the enemy
They also feed the nation.

In this poem the woman assume the role usually thought to be belonging to men. She is a thinker, a provider and a protector. In the poem men are busy talking while the women work the land. Thembi also draws the picture of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela as an icon of the liberation struggle in "The Nest." She portrays Winnie as a strong mother who withstood apartheid to rear her children:

You defeated the apartheid regime Reared your house Alone. Outfoxed the wily SBs, Gradually raking the gold of freedom Never forgetting to feed the nation.

All the poets also saw themselves as social critics who should stand up and write about the squalor, hunger, corruption and despondency of the people. They see this as a role that poets should uphold:

No one should deny us that role. Previously poets wrote about the ills of the past government. Why can't we? If we feel there is something to celebrate in our society we should write about that... If we feel that the government is letting us down, why not? We should also write about this.

I found it peculiar to find that these young poets still saw their social and political role to write about colonialism, imperialism and the histories of domination. Many of them agree that the works of poets before them inspired them. However, the question I found interesting was whether they do not find old themes boring? It is easy to pick up that the new generation of poets produce works that reflect a history. The plethora of works produced show that there is a consistent culture of tracing the past. In the past there was a general belief that Black poets were supposed to assume the dual role of fighting as well as writing. Years after the liberation struggle however, it seems as if many poets see their dual role still standing even in post-Apartheid South Africa. The young poets stated that while on the one hand their "poetry did not throw stones on the police who are in a casspir, shooting people in the township, they still write about the present injustices." As one poet put it, "even in our house, where you have your siblings, we still need to criticise one another if we want to grow." There would always be the struggle for human rights for women's rights and son on. The societal struggle did not end in 1994." Many poets now see their fight more than that of fighting for freedom but they want to live within that freedom. They do not write more to gain human rights but how to share these with fellow human beings. It would, however, be fallacious to argue that problems found in the previous apartheid South Africa have gone. The poets believe that there are issues that still need to be addressed in the present, issues that were never resolved even when apartheid died. As a number of poets pointed out, there are still many people who live in squalor and even under a Black majority government the economy still rests in the minority White hands. These issues make the poets to be the fighters and writers that their predecessors were.

It then seems that People's Literature has never died even among the new generation of poets. They still see their role as the African poets who have to carry the light in Africa. People still need to relate their lives as they live it. People still need to draw their history as it happened. That life cannot be dictated by anybody. People's Literature is about the feelings of people as they experienced it. Below we focus on a few works by contemporary South African young poets.

### Some excerpts from new poets

Many of the poets above have not been published in many journals. However, a sizeable number has appeared in local journals that solicit material from budding writers. In this section I look at a few other contemporary poets who have published in South African journals. One of the eloquent new Black voices in South African, Bila writes in his poem "In the Name of Amandla":

In the name of Amandla!
Tell me what has changed in this village
There's no food in the kitchen
Bare children with chapped lips can't go to school
Another hungry child knocked down by a rich man's car...
(Throbbing Ink, 2003:113)

Bila's poem reminds us of the poem as a tool used to comment on societal issues as we have seen above. Such poems are not uncommon. They follow the tradition of the 1970s poets who also wrote about hunger. Here the poet says people are still hungry. Cars hit children dazed by emptiness of their stomachs as they wander in confusion.

Other poets, like some in the sample, also feel that the country became full of confusion after freedom because people who were oppressed did not know how to assume new roles. These poets argue that our freedom's magnitude is trivialised by people who refuse to believe that the new Black majority government is here to stay. Mogale writes in her poem, "The

#### Promised Land":

On and on
We argue 'bout
Who's right or wrong...
What if apartheid was still going on
If democracy had never won
If Nelson Mandela wasn't free

(So Much to Tell 2003:14)

There are still a number of poets who write about history as many in the sample of the study showed. These poets usually capture the themes of forgiveness and revenge. Sometimes they are just nostalgic when they portray a romanticised picture of Africa before the western ways of life overcame Africa. We saw above how a few of them write about the meeting of the West and Africa. We have seen how they long for the old ways of Africa. Mahola, the 2001 Olive Schreiner winner for poetry, tackles the theme of forgiveness in his poem, "How will I trust?"

I've been hurt
Physically and mentally
Seen things
Not meant for mortal eyes
My children saw me kicked
Like dirt thrown somewhere
But I bear no grudge
Only struggling to adjust
But how will I trust their tongues?

(It all begins, 2002: 23)

There are still a number of poets who believe that Black people's emotions still need to be examined. They maintain that Black people need to confront our emotions about the apartheid past if they are to be better able to live harmoniously within the "rainbow nation." Mzi Mahola above looks at how apartheid sometimes emasculated him and belittled him. However, he states that he harbours no grudge. In the sample poets felt that they should not avoid looking at their feelings as they live within the post apartheid society. Velile avers:

We should explore many themes of our past and present. Our forebearers struggled after the White conquest. We need to look into these as we relate our stories. There is nothing wrong with being emotional when we deal with these, but we need to be involved in our subjects.

As seen above, with the broad coverage and debates on an African Renaissance, many poets write about the African culture and the need for the African people to honour what is of African origins. Young poets usually show a nostalgic call to the pure, unpertubed, pristine Africa before the arrival of the Whites. This is the Africa that was frequently hailed by poets in the 1970s. Williams writes in "Bring Back My Calabash":

> No, no, no bring back my calabash Let me sit back and enjoy what is mine In peace, in tranquillity, in harmony. No more white lies! No more! Please bring back my calabash! (Timbila, 2002:97)

In our discussion we have also seen that there are also many poems that tackle contemporary issues. They also write widely on a topic like African humanism and how it affects the present day society in South Africa. Poets write about South Africa as well as the broader African continent. In the sample some poets have written about the war in Sudan and the genocide in Rwanda as well as the events in Zimbabwe. Many poets have taken it upon themselves to write about these. These young poets are aware that they have a role to play as social critics. They even state that as writers they are also pedagogues of their society. They have many roles as political activists and social commentators.

#### Conclusion

There are a number of new issues that need to rise on the writers' agenda in the post-apartheid era. This paper has shown that poets as social critics still look at the themes that were recurrent in the past. Aspects such as feminism still need to be explored in depth. Women's issues have too often been on the periphery in the past as the patriarchal society was fighting for freedom. It is now a challenge for poets to write about these issues. A number of South African women poets are capturing this theme in their works. Of prime importance here was that it is difficult for many South African people to forget the past anger and frustration. The poets generally reflect this in their works. On the latter issue Mbulelo Mzamane once stated:

I do see certain themes, certain styles, certain forms of

writing as likely to persist for at least a while longer. Indeed, I think you are going to have many more people trying to reflect upon the quality of their lives under apartheid, in much the same way as in Zimbabwe you have people who still write about the Chimurenga war and the quality of life under those circumstances. These are not going to die off.

Furthermore, Mzamane explained that even a great writer such as Ngugi was still preoccupied with the Mau Mau war, which had become the hallmark of his works (Mzamane 1992:46-47). Finally, the Black South African writers face another huge challenge. There was a time in our history where literature became a protest weapon. This was almost the sole weapon for the voiceless given the quandary that Black South Africans found themselves in. However, now as Kgotsitsile puts it:

We have to deal with literature as an art form, not as an excuse for making political statements, for anthropological or sociological or psychological studies. Those things will come into literature, they will come into the poem, into the play, into the short story, into the novel. But the preoccupation should be to produce a work of art, not a political tract.

In conclusion, it is appropriate to cite Ngugi who pointed out:

...literature cannot escape from the class power structures that shape our everyday life. Here a writer has no choice. Whether or not he is aware of it, his works reflect one or more aspects of the intense economic, political, cultural and ideological struggles in a society.

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## POETIC SCRIPT II

Botsotso Jesters

**IKE** I am skinny bowler wind skeleton touch

spoko mathambo by virtue of birth I can read the scareness in your eyes

ALLAN mps travel in 4x4 style

corporates build a massive bonus pile

in the ghetto, kids become suicide projectiles

**SIPHIWE** I have an urge like burning fire

> let me release this flood of desire on every woman I meet before I spit

IKE bully bull brand beef stalk in your face

prima facie redtape windhoek hushpuppy doll

check it rubber neck bell ringing moo more school in

ALLAN Affirmative Action with a touch of class

line up for directorships and down a full glass

sweet, my bra - and if there's trouble Uncle Sam will

cover my arse

**SIPHIWE** I am a hawker in a jozi street

cops stole the fish on my dish

but haai! I have not lost my jester speech

**IKE** to my health supervisor ringas before suffer gate

mummy blue skatie pass the dice

deal with the root of poor health poverty

ALLAN I am the man with the golden tan

don't pull at my skin or scratch

'cause underneath the gold is an umlungu whose met his

match

SIPHIWE I raise a Diepsloot fire because of rumour

from MaMgobhozi's bitter sense of humour

poking the government's brain tumour

ALL Botsotso Jesters!

## POETIC SCRIPT III

Botsotso Jesters

IKE Skhwakhwalala door chicken liver syndicate jika

daasydaaso mango ruler papayo iyo ignorance is a worse killer of the day

ALLAN I found an easy way to secure profits that treble

I became a dark horse and rode with a white devil now I eat straw in hell's stable with that late fake vetsak

- Comrade

Mephistopheles Medici Kebble

SIPHIWE I met a girl with a tattoo on her belly & spinal column

bountiful flesh in her "PLEASE CALL ME" skirt

but it does not mean she was ready to flirt

IKE Morning shower inspiration majiyane chawa malawi

vhusiku sala nduni munna ndi dzhasi

kofifi binge en puffing kwaito sound slogans vitjo

ALLAN I'm a canned lion and my name is Koos

when I don't run for the hunter, they call me a doos but they pay big bucks just to shoot a tame pussy and

keep my jaws red as a roos

SIPHIWE Thokoza! Siyavuma! Thokoza! Siyavuma!

your daughter will runaway from intwaso again ubungoma has become a money-making game

IKE Mr know it all ndangala spy vuvuzela jy ken baie

kwaito sound splash a sleepless night havoc

ndingavela guzuzu blues dimmer mjojo grend grend

moja

ALLAN I'm a caring man though some say I'm a funeral stalker

just because I sell African potato and vitamins doesn't

mean I'm a death-hawker

so pitch up for your plate of pap and vleis - flesh-to-flesh

is my son, denial's the name of my daughter

SIPHIWE Bafana Bafana have turned into Asibafuni Asibafuni

the rainbow nation dream vanished with Madiba Magic

2010 World Cup Soccer might turn out tragic

IKE I am scrawling slicing cutting en pasting mix masala

living word

hai khonalo fanaka mina fanaka wena fanakalo

shiyabuya

geenwataras momish bhari tone moegoese clever hierso

nie ek se . . .

ALLAN You larnies, with pozzies and wheels that need top

security

you put me in a uniform, let me face armed gangs then

offer me a gratuity

and when I cry for more, you lock me out, saying I'm ungrateful, an upstart who goes on strike with impunity

SIPHIWE "Umshini wami" song is not yet over

Msholozi has just crossed over umfolozi to battle against ofezela he must be ufeleba IKE Slegte kleva jy pla mense want mzansi is joune

muafurika ndi muafurika nga munwe muafurika Afrika is weeping who else you expect to side with you

ALLAN Heita, my chief, nights are long and days are short

I envy you your precious wives who were so dearly

bought

I hear they can cook all right – but when it comes to love,

all they offer

is a sneeze, a snore and a snort

SIPHIWE I am teenager hooked on person.dom & mixit

never wonder why I have turned into a mikzin

I prefer an educational exit

IKE Mainline ek is moeg van boys holiday

kyk jy bovaside van die rail tracks af

bomba mzion is never on time ek wil juleit toe gaan

ALLAN I'm a tiny nyana scorpion but I've got a vicious tail

when it comes to conviction – I'll take on a killer whale of course, now the Big Fish want to squash me – spew my

guts across their trail

SIPHIWE I'm dark as coal but they burn me at the stake

saying miteka babasati, miteka ntiro, miteka yinkwaso but thibo touch & uncle bob laugh all the way to the

bank

IKE Sledge hammer mpumalanga is business unusual

sunrise backyard lorry work load shedding oneside

the judge decision is final hier is my kruis

ALLAN Greetings, I'm an Escom manager, proud to offer you

warmth and light

how I hate the sabotage that's kept you shivering in the

dark all night!

indeed, you can rest assured, you have my sympathy – so long as my bonus is still shining bright

SIPHIWE I sigh as granny finger goes deep into my virgin eye

my body daubed in love charms to umhlanga dance

they scream uyintombi nto on Mzansi fo sho

IKE More ons gaan ou magriza kuier

fill up the table en kill the gazaat

come winter skullcap fit all size knows no colour race or

gender

ALLAN Come, check out a new game on prime tv – musical

chairs at the SABC

today I'm the general manager, tomorrow I don't have

the authority to even order tea

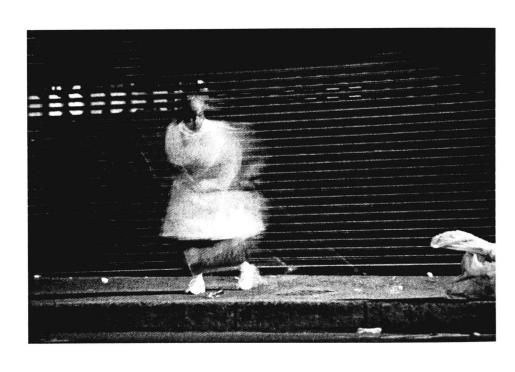
and once I've gone to court and forced a way back, the

directors finds a new way to 'disappear' me

SIPHIWE My mother MaMbongwa believes

that half a loaf is better than no bread

Tsvangirai can sleep at the foot end of Mugabe's bed



## THE MAHATMA THE TEXT AND THE CRITIC

Devarakshanam Govinden

#### Introduction

South African literary criticism has predictably reflected the different facets of our national life, history, culture and politics. Accordingly, there are many themes that characterise South African literature – the *plaas roman* or farm novel, writing on the apartheid city, the "Jim goes to Jo'burg" theme, protest and revolutionary writing and, recently, Truth and Reconciliation literature, to cite a few examples. These have been given wide critical consideration and have been part of an imagining and re-imagining of South Africa as a political entity.

Given this background, it is necessary to point out that literary critical writing on Gandhi, Satyagraha and Passive Resistance, has been grossly neglected in South African literary studies. Scholarship in South Africa on Gandhi has largely focused on historical, political and socio-cultural elements pertinent to Gandhi's life and philosophy. Fatima Meer's edited compendium, *The South African Gandhi* (Meer 1996), for example, albeit an important work, covers topics such as religion, education, labour, women, and family relations ("The Personal Gandhi"), but not literature.

Indisputably, in constructing the narrative of South Africa's political development the historical role that Passive Resistance played is an important and necessary one. Nelson Mandela, for one, refers to Passive Resistance in his autobiography, A Long Walk to Freedom (1994), as an important marker in the development of resistance to apartheid. Fatima Meer, who has consistently tried to challenge the various boundaries perpetuated by apartheid engineering, points out that we need to see Ahimsa and Satyagraha as being as indigenous to the political history of South Africa as Amandla and Mayibuye Afrika (see Meer 1995).

This essay attempts, then, to draw attention to a lacuna in South African literary studies. It begins by sketching the main historical aspects related to Gandhi's stay in South Africa and the development of Satyagraha. The history of Gandhi in South Africa is well-known; therefore only some of the key features of this narrative are presented here to provide a background to the literary writings. The essay gives a broad overview of the corpus of literary writings in South Africa that refers to Gandhi in one form or another, and includes the genres of autobiography, biography and memoir,

which are, arguably, also seen as literary sub-genres. It provides a close-up view of one early example of writing that refers to Gandhi – a poem by Olga Paruk – composed in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Since this is a new terrain for study, the essay concludes by pondering over some of the questions and issues that might be considered in the development of critical frameworks for the reading of these texts, and tacitly suggests ways in which the project might be further developed. Full scale and detailed, critical analyses of the different genres and sub-genres related to this topic are beyond the scope of this essay, but would provide useful quarries for further consideration.

## Gandhi and Satyagraha in South Africa: "The Making of the Mahatma"

Gandhi arrived in Natal in 1893 to work on a specific legal case but soon became involved in the wider politics of the colony. With Indians in Natal and the Transvaal being subjected to harsh working and living conditions and to legislation that was calculated to keep their economic progress in check, Gandhi was seen as "a beacon of hope" (Dhupelia-Mesthrie 2000:20). It was at this time –1894 – that the Natal Indian Congress (NIC) was formed, to provide a political platform for Indians; this endeavour was augmented by the formation of the Transvaal British Indian Association in 1903.

Gandhi was galvanized into action when the Transvaal Legislative Council passed a law in 1906 – The Transvaal Asiatic Ordinance – requiring registration and fingerprinting of all Indians, and their carrying of passes. This was when Satyagraha ("soul force") was conceived and born as a form of non-violent resistance to this law. After achieving a few concessions Gandhi led another Satyagraha in 1913, widening his base through the inclusion of women and miners who opposed the poll tax that was introduced; the protest was also against the general treatment of Indian indentured labourers. Provincial laws prohibited Indians in Natal from working in other provinces without a pass. Gandhi led a strike where coalminers from Newcastle crossed the Natal border and entered the Transvaal. He had gathered a huge contingent of 30,000 protesters and was arrested and imprisoned. It was at this time that Valliamah Moodley, a young satyagrahi, was martyred for the cause. When he returned to India, Gandhi continued with Satyagraha against various restrictive British laws, with the salt Satyagraha in 1930 being a significant event in this history of resistance against the British Crown. The impact of Gandhi's Passive Resistance was to be seen in different forms in South Africa. The NIC, radicalized by the 1940s, invoked Satyagraha to protest against the Asiatic Land Tenure and Representation Act (the Ghetto Act of 1946) which restricted ownership of land by Indians. The Joint Passive Resistance Council of Natal was formed and mass protests were held. It was at this time that efforts were made to join forces with the ANC to mount a more united front – the Defiance Campaign – against discriminatory legislation.

Gandhi returned to India in 1915, having spent 23 years in South Africa, years that had changed him dramatically. Judith Brown is unequivocal of the impact that the South African experience had on Gandhi: "Gandhi's fundamental spiritual vision was forged in Africa, and on this rested all his political, economic and African experience...The transforming effects of the South African years were very dramatic, if one compares the Gandhi of 1893 with the Gandhi who returned to India in 1915" (Brown 1993:4, 22). Vijay Mishra argues that the "girmit diaspora mimicked the homeland's own struggle for political determination," where "girmit" is derived from "agreement" or contract that marked the indentured system (2007:22). Yet, the development of Passive Resistance in South Africa shows a two-way process emerging, with the diaspora influencing and shaping the homeland.

Mishra also points out that to "grasp hold of a nation one has to lay claim to it, establish moments of heroism that are equally part of the nation's history" (Mishra 2007:37). In South Africa the Satyagraha events may be seen arguably as "moments of heroism," or "threshold moments", to use Gillian Whitlock's (2000) phrase to describe key moments in South African literary history. Other such "threshold moments" or watershed events are the Soweto uprising of the 1976 and the new democratic dispensation that was inaugurated in 1994. As the following survey shows, literary writing relating to Gandhi directly or indirectly occurred during the time when Gandhi was in South Africa and when the Passive Resistance Movements were at their height; in subsequent decades the writings were produced to mark anniversaries linked to Gandhi and Satyagraha. The sustained interest in Gandhi's political role in South Africa has seen a steady output of literary work related to Gandhi.

## Writings in South Africa with reference to Gandhi

There are several writers in India who have been influenced by Gandhian thought. Among them are major Indian writers – Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R K Narayan, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Arun Joshi, and Chaman Nahal – described by Rushdie as "midnight's parents" (Rushdie 1998:xvii) in that their writings hastened the birth of the independence of India. Rama Jha argues that the very rise of

the "Indo-Anglian" novel in the twentieth century may be attributed to the influence of Gandhi's philosophy and life (Jha 1983:5). These writers, influenced by Gandhi's call for freedom and independence for India, explored these themes in various ways in their literary writings.

References to Gandhi or writing on Gandhian themes are evident in the literature of South African writers, both male and female, though one may not call it a sustained 'tradition'. And here the term 'literature' includes the traditional literary genres such as drama, poetry, and fiction as well as biography, autobiography and memoir. There are a fair number of literary texts in South Africa that relate directly or indirectly to Gandhi or Satyagraha. Fatima Meer, in *Portrait of Indian South Africans* (1969), shows that a great deal of literary and artistic activity was generally evident in the early decades of Indian settlement in South Africa. She points out that art forms among indentured and Passenger Indians were brought over from India, and comprised the performing arts such as music, story-telling, dance and drama. This trend seemed to have continued during Gandhi's stay in South Africa, and was augmented by artistic and literary endeavours prompted by Gandhi's role in the politics of the time which focussed, among other things, on the oppressive laws pertaining to Indians.

During the early years of the Satyagraha Movement in South Africa it was common practice for committed individuals to sing and to read poems on political themes of the time at gatherings. Many of these poems were routinely published in the *Indian Opinion* (started by Gandhi in 1903) and the *African Chronicle* (started by PS Aiyar in 1908) as part of their news coverage. It is worth noting that much of this literary activity relating to Gandhi was taking place at the same time that other Black protest writing and performance was developing, though these two streams — both alternative to colonial and apartheid literary activity — were not seen in tandem. (This would prove to be an interesting quarry for comparative study.)

Oral poetry was a popular genre for performance. Between 1910 and 1912, Ambaran Mangalji Thaker (also known as Ambaram Maharaj) composed poems on a variety of topics, including events related to Gandhi. He seemed to be quite prolific, composing poems to mark different occasions and to honour personages in the Satyagraha struggle. These included a welcome for returning deportees at Point Road, Durban and a poem to honour Henry Polak and Mrs Sodha, who were both dedicated to Gandhi and the causes he espoused (Bhana and Vahed 2005:146).

During this period Sheik Mehtab also wrote many poems and songs, composing popular verses in praise of people in the Satyagraha movement. A

long ghazal was composed by him in Gujerati in which he pays tribute to many individuals in the movement. Bhana and Vahed note that "Indian Opinion kept up a steady stream of heroic poems and songs by people like Ambaram Maharaj and Sheik Mehtab" (103). Further research is necessary on the Gujerati and Urdu songs and poems that were composed during this period. It was during this time of ferment (1910) that the protest poem by Olga Paruk, "Appeal to the King" (discussed in the next section), was written and performed. Paruk's poem is principally an appeal to King Edward VII (who also bears the title of "Emperor of India") against the laws directed at Indians, and the abject conditions under which they lived. These literary activities took place during the various Satyagraha events that Gandhi mounted while he was in South Africa.

By the 1960s Ansuyah Singh, a Passive Resister herself, composed the poem, "To Mahatma Gandhi," to mark the centenary of Gandhi's birthday. Her poem invokes many images generally associated with representations of "the great soul":

#### To Mahatma Gandhi

I saw the stain of his blood on earth Tears filled not my eyes, but the girth Of my soul, for he was born more of God than of man, A spirit that cleaved an empire's span.

Humility was as natural as love to his heart, He strived to banish all earthly desires and impart Disobedience against the side that made laws Which destroyed the dignity of man, paled with flaws.

It could not have been easy to sever Ties of family and worship chastity forever, And draw upon her austere glory, That lights upon this century a wondrous story.

A woven cloth wound upon his body lithe, That no seasons, nor age did blight With a simple staff within his hand His song of freedom spread from land to land.

Among princes, emperors and men of learning His presence filled them with awe and yearning That the world would never come to an end But men with fortunes and riches should bend.

The rolling wheels of inventions and toil Would enrich the already fortunate few Millions still were bereft and poverty slew Them with a life of shameless squalor.

If men could throw the shades of subjugation And build a new world upon truth's intention The songs of summer would fill the sky Children and lovers in a new country would lie.

He suffered the darkness of prison cells Insults and punishments the scroll tells. Men, women and children followed him Like a pure star upon the earth's rim.

He a beggar was enthroned the master His teachings menaced the subduer faster Than any lethal weapon defouling the air The change of time in truth's name was fair.

Alas, the hearts of men change but little Inequality, poverty outbalances the might Of systems a few score years cannot falter And again the moon revolves upon disdain's altar.

Time shall not forget his unconquerable soul, Nor the clutch of his hand upon the staff For when the wound bled his heart With lowered head his dying lips uttered truth, truth.

Remember therefore men of all nations
The seasons, the cities, the world never stations
But like a glowing star is born in centuries but one
And leaves this mortal mire his spirit a sun.
(Singh 1970:53-54)

The poem recalls the style of Sarojini Naidu in her collection, *The Broken Wing* (published in 1917), where Gandhi is compared to the "mystic lotus, sacred and sublime." He is depicted as being inviolate, in spite of attempts

To devastate thy loveliness, to drain
The midmost rapture of thy glorious heart.
But who could win the secret, who attain
Thine ageless beauty, born of Brahma's breath,
Or pluck thine immortality...
(In Naravane 1980/1996:123)

More recently, G Mahalingam has composed a poem on Gandhi, which is included in his collection, *Poetic Whispers* (2005:55-57). The collection also includes, among others, poems on Steve Biko, Chief Buthelezi, Dr Goonam, I C Meer, Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo.

The novel as a genre has proved to be an important medium for the espousal of views related to Gandhi and his philosophy. Udayshanker (a pseudonym), wrote a short 21-part novel entitled *Introducing South Africa or Dialogue of Two Friends* (Bhana and Bhoola 2005) reproduced in *Indian Opinion* in 1911 and which reflected, among other matters, the controversies related to Gandhi's politics (Bhana and Vahed 2005:68). His views seem, at times, to be in response to those of Swami Shankeranand who was opposed to Gandhi's broad understanding of Hinduism (67); Bhana and Bhoola suggest that the likely author is Mr Pragji K Desai.

An important novel in this oeuvre is *Behold the Earth Mourns* by Ansuyah Singh, who also presents, through her characters, lively debates on the strategies of Passive Resistance. The novel was published in 1960 to mark the centenary of the arrival of Indian indentured labourers to South Africa. It is not surprising that Singh chose the theme of Passive Resistance as Gandhi and the legacy of Passive Resistance have been seen as defining motifs in Indian history in South Africa. As pointed out earlier, Singh herself was part of the Passive Resistance Campaign in the mid-1950's, participating with Dr Goonam and others (see Govinden 2001).

Then there are novels which make brief references to Gandhi. These are Aziz Hassim's novel, *The Lotus People* (2003), which has cameo appearances of historical figures, including that of Gandhi. In Hassim's novel Gandhi gives a long speech to an enrapt audience. Imraan Coovadia's novel, *The Wedding*, is set at the time when Gandhi was practising law in Durban. Interestingly, Gandhi is not a central character in Coovadia's novel, and is presented as someone in the background. It would seem that Coovadia is purposely demythologizing Gandhi by this approach, or is mindful of the fact that at the time when the novel is set Gandhi was not yet "the Mahatma" (see Govinden 2005). Farida Karodia describes the finger-printing episode (mentioned above) in her fictional autobiography, *Daughters of the Twilight* 

(1986), and Zuleikha Mayat refers to Gandhi in her memoir, A Treasure Trove of Memories: the Story of the People of Potchefstroom (1990).

Darryl Accone's All Under Heaven: The Story of a Chinese Family in South Africa also makes references to Gandhi and Passive Resistance. The Transvaal Chinese Association was formed in 1903 and came under the influence of Passive Resistance during this first decade of the 20th Century. Early in his novel Accone tells the real-life story of Chow Kwai For who committed suicide because he reneged on the proposed boycott of compulsory registration for Asiatics. Gandhi attended a memorial service for Chow Kwai For and described the event in graphic detail (Yap and Man 1996:149. In Itzkin 2000:47). Gandhi's ties with the Chinese community in Johannesburg and the overlapping Passive Resistance struggles between the two communities have generally been ignored in Gandhian historiography (see Harris 1996: 69) and need to be reclaimed in historical and literary studies.

Among short stories is Ahmed Essop's *The Betrayal*, depicting a conflict between a non-violent political and cultural organisation called the Orient Front, influenced by Gandhian principles, and a new, rival organisation. Then there is Deena Padayachee's short story entitled "The Visitor," published in his collection of short stories, *What's Love Got to Do with It* (1992), which tells the story of squatters who moved to Gandhi's ashram in Phoenix, Durban, and shared the spoils from this historic site.

In drama, Saira Essa's play entitled Gandhi Act Two, was an important contribution to keeping the history of Gandhi alive during the 1980s. Together with Rod Bolt, Essa wrote this play, which was described as "a collage of impressions which portray Gandhi's life and philosophy, during the time he spent in South Africa" (Programme Notes). Kantha Sunderjee (Soni) composed Gujerati songs for the play and these were translated by her into English. In 1990 the play, The Sacrifice, written by Mohamed Khan and Essop Alli, was produced to mark the 130th anniversary of the arrival of Indians in South Africa; it tells of the real-life story of Valliamah Moodley, who died in 1914 (her grave is close to Chow Kwai For in the Braamfontein Cemetery in Johannesburg). Valliamah was the first woman martyr of the Passive Resistance campaign initiated by Mahatma Gandhi. Her story is set in the context of the enforced carrying of passes, finger-printing, and the compulsory poll tax. An interesting historical dance drama was written, choreographed and produced by Fatima Meer, entitled Ahimsa/Ubuntu (1995), and combined elements from the Satyagraha Movement with African liberation history. Meer's aim was a laudable one - to construct a single liberation meta-narrative for South Africa.

Biographical writings on Gandhi are other important genres. One of the first biographies on Gandhi was written by Joseph J Doke (1861-1913) in 1909, entitled MK Gandhi: An Indian Patriot in South Africa. Doke was a good friend of Gandhi's and when Doke died in 1913 Gandhi wrote of his friend's calibre (see Nauriya 2006:47; Itzkin 2000:29-30). Fatima Meer's biography of Gandhi's life, entitled Apprenticeship of a Mahatma (1970/1994), provided a clear and concise overview of Gandhi's life. It was used as the basis of a film, The Making of the Mahatma, directed and produced by Shyam Benegal in 1996 in India. Dr Goonam, in her autobiography, Coolie Doctor (1990) emphasises the foundational role that Passive Resistance philosophy played in shaping the choices she made throughout her life. Ela Gandhi has written a biography on Gandhi, Mohandas Gandhi: The South African Years (1994) which appears in the series, "They Fought for Freedom" (the series deals with important heroes and heroines in the liberation struggle in South Africa]). Although the author, Ela Gandhi, is Manilal's Gandhi's daughter, she does not give any personal impressions. Sita: Memoirs of Sita Gandhi (2003) is a recent and important addition to this tradition of auto/biographical writing on Gandhi. This is the memoir of Manilal Gandhi's other daughter, Sita, and she gives vivid portrayals of her early life in the Gandhi household at Phoenix Settlement (see Govinden 2004). It would be a worthwhile exercise, as well, to consider Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie's valuable biography on Manilal Gandhi, Gandhi's Prisoner: The Life of Gandhi's Son, Manilal (2004) in this corpus of writing.

It would be interesting to speculate in which category Gandhi's own An Autobiography or The Story of my Experiments with Truth (1927) would fall – Indian or South African literature? Gandhi's sojourn in South Africa changed him into "the Mahatma." And while he wrote his autobiography when he returned to India, much of his thinking and strategy on Satyagraha was moulded in South Africa, with the autobiography showing him weaving in and out of his South Africa experiences. It should also be pointed out that Hind Swaraj (1909) and Sarvodaya (1908) were both written by Gandhi before he permanently left South Africa for India, and although Satyagraha in South Africa (1924) was written in India it is principally the narrative of the emergence and development, as the title suggests, of Satyagraha in South Africa.

More than these tangible examples of his writing, Gandhi's intellectual opposition to the rationality of modernity, his erudite but emotional engagement with matters both large and small, shows an intuitive appreciation of the poetic imagination, and of his understanding that Truth is Beauty, Beauty Truth. Ruskin, who inspired Gandhi dramatically with his treatise *Unto the Last*, was strongly convinced that "the supreme value of art lay in its

disclosure through aesthetic contemplation, of spiritual and ethical insights that one could not reach in any other kind of way" (Howe 2007:154). It is worth noting that Gandhi defended his fight for "cow protection" – suggesting that this signified a reverence for all creation (Hardiman 2003:163) – because he saw the cow as a defenceless "poem of pity" (in Brink 1969). We might well read into Gandhi's criticism of History, with its emphasis on the factual and scientific as limiting, as indicative of his preference for myth, which he saw as profound and spiritual and all-encompassing. Whether history or myth, Gandhi believed that ethics transcended both (Hardiman 2003:36). That Gandhi placed value on the role of the reader is evident in Hind Swaraj, written in Gujarati in 1909, takes the form of a debate between an 'editor' and a 'reader.'

While this survey considers literature in the main, it would be a worthwhile exercise to expand its scope to consider art and art objects in South Africa that depict Gandhi or Gandhian themes. An example of this is The Mughal Tapestry Project, described by Shano Suparasad in *Shakthi: Stories of Indian Women in South Africa* (Diesel 2007). Included in the tapestry, which gives a visual representation of the highlights of Indian history in South Africa, and which was prepared by a group of Pietermaritzburg women for a transnational cultural project of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, is the depiction of a spinning wheel which represents the Gandhian period in South Africa and the assertion, by such inclusion, of Gandhi is the South African narrative of nation. There are also many paintings and sculptures of Gandhi in South Africa, and it would be interesting to read these as texts.

## Olga Paruk - Appeal To The King

The poem written by Olga Paruk (included below), entitled "Appeal to the King," was published in *The African Chronicle*. The poem was sung to music (composed by Mr Sol Royeppen) at a Variety Concert in aid of the Transvaal Passive Resistance struggle. The concert was held in a theatre in Grey Street, Durban, and the date of the performance is given as 30 March 1910. Not much is known of Paruk, except that she was a theatrical personality, and that the poem was her own composition. She was a white woman, of Jewish background, married to an Indian Muslim. Certainly the poem and the article in the newspaper show a woman who was close to "the Indian cause," and one who was celebrated for identifying so closely with the problems that Indians faced at this time.

Paruk's poem is principally an appeal to King Edward VII (who also bears the title of "Emperor of India") against the laws directed at Indians, and the abject conditions under which they lived. These laws came into effect when the more affluent Passenger Indians, who arrived in the wake of the poorer indentured ones, began to develop an economic power base in the country. The Immigration Restriction Bill and the Dealers' Licences Bill were passed in 1897, and in 1906 the Transvaal Government passed the Asiatic Registration Law making it compulsory for Indians over the age of eight to carry a Pass bearing their thumb-print. Although Gandhi took the fight to London, the law was re-introduced in 1907 (Reader's Digest 1988:275). The issue of thumb-printing – referred to specifically in the poem – was a contentious one in these years, with 2,000 Asians being jailed in 1907, and 3,000 burning their registration certificates in 1908 in protest against this particular law. As pointed out already, it was during this time that Gandhi developed his strategy of Satyagraha (Parekh 1997:6).

Paruk's poem was composed during the period when there was a ground-swell of support for Gandhi's calls for protest in both the Transvaal and Natal against the Pass Laws for Asians (it is worth noting that in this he was supported by representatives from the Chinese community, who had also come to South Africa as indentured labourers). There is explicit reference in the poem to Gandhi as "A Barrister-at-law," who went "hawking from door to door" to test the application of the Asiatic Registration Law. It is interesting to note that this plea on behalf of Indians, who felt part of the British Empire, appeared a few weeks before the Union of South Africa would be declared. Paruk's poem was published in *The African Chronicle* of 9 April 1910.

## Appeal to the King

l King Edward! Ruler of our land, Of a Nation proud, and free. Mar not our Empire's greatness, By this petty tyranny.

2 Look o'er the land you conquered, Fought for with soldiers brave There see your British subjects, Treated worse than the lowest slave!

3
You Oh King! before so just,
Hear your subjects cry for right!

Must they always be oppressed? Because they are not white!

4
Hearken Oh Emperor of India
Help ere it is too late!
See not this great injustice;
And leave them to such fate!

5
Stop all this useless fighting
Show them Justice again,
Give us cause to remember,
Our good King Edward's reign.

6
Surely this cannot be English?
For a Barrister-at-law,
To go around with a basket,
Hawking from door to door!

7
A Gentleman refined and learned!
To have to fight or give,
Finger Prints! Degrading law,
Or else he may not live!

8
His fellow countrymen to help!
Their grievances to shew,
He works this noble-hearted one,
For your Majesty to know.

9 How your country's been blighted By a bitter feeling there, Show them a just and ruling power. And quell this dark despair.

10
Force them not to extremes!
For this t'will surely be;
Unless Oh King, your ruling Hand

# Is stretched across the Sea. (Paruk 1910)

Paruk's poem might be read from different vantage points. Of some interest are the questions the poem might raise in the light of identity politics: whether the poem reflects an 'authentic' 'Indian' voice; what the character of this 'voice' is; whether the poem is similar to traditional writing in India, or to colonised writing in India and South Africa; whether the poem exhibits mimicry or parody of the dominant colonial style; or whether Paruk is, ironically, simply speaking in her own colonial tones to voice the grievances of the colonised.

In sharing this poem during the workshop stages of the Feminist Press project, Women Writing Africa, I found that there were mixed reactions. One reader noted the influence of writers such as Kipling on Paruk's style; another drew attention to the "fascinating blend of colonised and independent attitudes which the poem deploys" (Daymond 1998). Some criticised the poem for being "poor" poetry, a judgement based, presumbably, on the regular rhyme scheme and the forced and stilted syntax. It is worth nothing that the poem was finally included in the collection, Women Writing Africa, Southern Region, Volume 1 (Daymond et al 2003). Possible comparisons with other formal appeals to the British Crown at the time the poem was written, for example those by Sol Plaatjie and Pixley Isaka Seme, would be interesting, as the "appeal" was an important strategy of resistance to colonial rule. Seme, for example, in 1912 spoke from a position of undisputed confidence in his identity and his cause: "I am an African, and I set my pride in my race over and against a hostile public opinion" (Ferris 1913:436).

While the poem shows unequivocation and resolutenessness for liberation from unjust laws, it is interesting that it is also read for its ambivalent and compromised location in relation to the colonialist style and discourses of the period. Drawing from another postcolonial context, one may read this text, with its interpellations at various levels, and others from other colonial sites, as already exhibiting the complex, "hybridised condition of the colonial society" (Griffiths 1994:81), and would highlight the need for suspicion towards deploying "an over-determined narrative of authenticity and indigeneity" (84) in such criticism. Conventional literary critical contentions, based on a certain understanding of the aesthetic, must be balanced, I believe, by the poem's historical importance, and the way historical facts are mediated in the text.

# Developing a critical approach to the reading of literary writings on Gandhi

Engaging in excavatory work of this kind expands the literary universe and has consequences for the development of literary criticism of this field. Broadly speaking, we are constrained to ponder on the link between instrumental politics (given the themes of passive resistance) and textual criticism Relevant here are the kinds of assertions Edward Said makes in the World, the Text and the Critic (1983) where the worldliness of texts is invoked and its material effects underlined. This opens up the debates between aesthetics and politics, aesthetics and ethics. Since Soweto 1976 (and before) the political and historical dimensions of literature against its artistic and aesthetic aspects have been considered from various viewpoints in South Africa (see, among others, Helgesson 2004; Chapman 2006). It is not surprising that Gandhi recommended Tolstoy's What is Art? where the separation of beauty and goodness, or aesthetics and ethics is criticised (Parel 1993:53). Gandhi himself was greatly inspired by literary writers – Ruskin, Tolstoy, among others – writers who wrote with an acute social conscience. He was an admirer of the well-known South African writer, Olive Schreiner, whose novel, The Story of an African Farm, was sold at the Phoenix Settlement during Gandhi's sojourn in South Africa (Nauriya 2006:45); Gandhi commended Schreiner for campaigns against racial prejudice (28-29), referring to her once as a "great poetess and philanthropist..." (60). As the following words of Gandhi suggest, no poet, however exalted, is above or outside action - and integrity of action:

The poet lives for the morrow, and would have us do likewise... 'Why should I, who have no need to work for food, spin?' may be the question asked. Because I am eating what does not belong to me. I am living on the spoilation of my countrymen. Trace the source of every coin that finds it way into your pocket, and you will realize the truth of what I write. Every one must spin. Let Tagore spin like the others. Let him burn his foreign clothes; that is the duty today. God will take care of the morrow.

(Gandhi, quoted in Sen 2005:100)

The following poem by K Satchidanandan (he is not a South African) captures this disposition of Gandhi well:

One day a lean poem reached Gandhi's ashram to have a glimpse of the man.

Gandhi spinning away
his thread towards Ram
took no notice of the poem
waiting at his door,
ashamed at not being a bhajan.
The poem now cleared his throat
And Gandhi glanced at him sideways
Through those glasses that had seen hell.
"Have you ever spun thread," he asked,
"Ever pulled a scavenger's cart?
Ever stood in the smoke of
An early morning kitchen?
Have you ever starved?"

The poem said: "I was born in the woods, in a hunter's mouth.

A fisherman brought me up in a cottage.

Yet I knew no work, I only sing.

First I sang in the courts:

Then I was plump and handsome but am on the streets now,

Half-starved."

"That's better," Gandhi said
With a sly smile. "But you must give up this habit
Of speaking in Sanskrit at times.
Go to the fields. Listen to peasants' speech."
The poem turned into a grain
And lay waiting in the fields
For the tiller to come and upturn the virgin soil
Moist with new rain.

A critique of literary texts which refer to Gandhi may be illuminated by pitting it against historiographical approaches to Gandhian history in particular and South African history in general. Liberal historiography has tended to mythologise Gandhi, as Rehana Ebrahim Vally points out (2001:95), making him one of the fathers of political struggle in South Africa. While some of the literary writings are clearly in an hagiographic mode this does not preclude a critical reading of them from various vantage points. Reading the texts from different perspectives and paradigms would enhance and deepen our thinking on many fronts. Contested historical readings of Gandhi are

deepened and complicated by the different approaches to literary writings on Gandhi. For example, Anil Nauriya's study of the "African Element in Gandhi" (Nauriya 2006) shows the inter-connections between Gandhi and his African counterparts, while Maureen Swan shows the situatedness of Gandhi in a narrow Indian context (Swan 1985). Claude Markovits (2004), for his part, argues that the later Gandhi in India was a reinvention, and should not be seen as an evolution of his earlier identity as expressed in South Africa. How do these different views compare with literary depictions in South Africa of Gandhi – this is a worthwhile question to pursue.

In the project of incorporating themes related to Gandhi into the literary tradition the tendency to flatten and homogenize difference should be resisted. Approaching these examples of writing as a coherent, self-contained entity would diminish their complex and contradictory elements. Excavatory work in this field, as this essay suggests, is necessary but it should not perpetuate a ghettoizing of the literature. How does literature that refers to Gandhi contribute to the general protest and radical tradition of writing that has characterised the South African literary tradition? Such questions would allow for comparative study in relation to time and space, with much more being achieved by mapping and re-mapping such intersections. The fluidity of group boundaries in terms of political responses to apartheid would be underlined rather than the divisiveness that is assumed was the sole characteristic of the past.

It is also necessary to see how such a project connects with postcolonial concerns generally. Mishra, delving into another example (a Creole play in Mauritius), asks the crucial question: "What is critical knowledge/pedagogy like when a minor text connects with other subaltern texts from postcolonial peripheries without the necessity of passing through the metropolitan centre?" He points out that "one shifts from matters of intertextual control, the power of the canon and hierarchy to a more lateral postcolonial reading where other minor literatures and their modes of cultural productions become decisive" (2007:61). Working on literature related to Gandhian themes not only connects subaltern literatures globally, but in the Southern African region as well.

Looking at the context in which many of the texts cited here have been composed, it is necessary to ask what the spaces were in which the texts were read or performed in the past, and how this compares with the present spaces of reception. We notice that many of the early examples cited above were produced in "alternative" venues or media. The poems by Olga Paruk, Sheik Mehtab and Ambaram Maharaj, for example, were performed live for audiences and then reproduced for readers of the popular newspapers,

Indian Opinion and The African Chronicle. We need to appreciate how "the popular" was being re-defined here, given that they were also other, more conventional forms of popular performance among the Indian settlers. Albeit, these strategies were still urban-based, while Gandhi, when he returned to India at any rate, locates his politics in the villages of India (see Radhakrishnan 2007:197).

Essa's production occurred during the height of apartheid repression in the 1980s and was also performed in "alternative" venues, while Meer's production, *Ahimsa/Ubuntu* was performed in the Playhouse in Durban which has been the regular venue for Western shows during the apartheid era. It was also performed at a time when South Africa was abuzz with its "nation-building" enterprise.

Rita Barnard in her germinal study, Apartheid and Beyond: South African Writers and the Politics of Place calls for a consideration of the place of the text (her emphasis), where "the situatedness of textual production and consumption – the way in which writing for or from a particular location makes a difference in the form and significance of a text" (2006:3). This, I believe, sidesteps the discussion on good or bad poetry conducted in narrow, one-dimensional terms, and focuses on the political effects of the text. Black Consciousness theatre personalities would explore this more fully in their productions in the decades after Paruk's performance, as we see in Saths Cooper's Antigone produced in the 1980s. In the main it is worth seeing Paruk's performance as part (albeit tentative) of the tradition of black resistance drama that was to develop during the rest of the 20th Century, where an attempt was made to create an oppositional public sphere (see Barnard for a discussion of Fugard on this theme).

In the same vein, we might ponder over how interpretive communities change over time and what is lost or gained in the process? The initial audience of Paruk's poem, for example, was a highly-wrought one, directly affected by discriminatory laws of the time, courting imprisonment for their defiance, and on the quest for various forms of activism. What subject positions were being asserted against the dominant discourses of the time in which they first appeared? Dorothy Driver's fine analysis of the Women Writing Africa project shows that contending views on voice and woman need to be continually interrogated (see Driver 2007). Rather than asserting that voice was claimed, she urges that we would do well to ask, rather, when and under what conditions was voice claimed. To this we might add: "and at what cost?" How was 'voice' claimed against the domination and control of the colonial and apartheid regimes? (These questions would sidestep the kind of critique offered during the Women Writing Africa workshop recorded

above, where the text was being detached from its immediate performative and political context.) These very vexed and competing interpretations become open to scrutiny and debate in the kind of project I am suggesting, and advance our understanding and practice of the complexities of living in the world, as Fanon urged.

Excavatory work of this kind, where 'hidden' texts are foregrounded, is necessary and laudable, but what are the new spaces that these texts might now occupy? How may "activist" texts from the past still speak to contemporary contexts with different political realities? What are the negative and positive effects of institutionalisation and co-option of such texts in the academy? Does academic reception of such texts broaden or diminish their ethical and moral value and dimension? My own work in literary criticism has continually reminded me of the role that literary critics play in reading the word/world. Given Gandhi's justifiable criticism of the features of consumption and production of modernity, literary critical work and production, and other activities, must be continually self-reflective and self-critical of its purposes and outcomes. An interesting "re-grounding" of literary texts is now taking place though the development of literature and tourism projects in South Africa. In this respect the proposed project, The Inanda Writers Trail of KwaZulu-Natal Literature and Tourism co-ordinated by Lindy Stiebel and Niall McNulty offers possibilities for comparative study of John Dube and the Ohlange Institute (founded in 1901), Isaiah Shembe and the Nazarite community (founded in 1911), and Gandhi and the Phoenix Settlement – and the literary works associated with all three.

Literary criticism also affords discursive spaces for an analysis of other issues raised directly or tangentially in the texts. One of these issues is a consideration of place and home from a post-colonial perspective and in the political imaginary of South Africa (Phoenix, for example, in Sita's *Memoirs*). Another is that of feminist understandings of literature related to Gandhi and satyagraha. Given that many Indian women writers were satyagrahis and participated in Gandhian politics (Olga Paruk, Ansuyah Singh, Dr Goonam, among others), how do we engage in a critique of the gender politics of Gandhi and of Satyagraha in the patriarchal economy of the colonized and colonial world (see Govinden 2001; Loomba 1994; Young 2003)? How does a consideration of these issues in turn have an impact on politics, interpretation, critique and action at the present time? Claiming the "reader as translator," as Benjamin and Spivak suggest, where the "original" is transformed and read against the grain of past as well as present contexts (see Coombes 2003:25) is an important dimension of the literary critical enterprise. Activist women like Paruk were claiming a space in the public arena – even if they were settling for an instrumentalist role - at a time when they were not included in the formal structures of Passive Resistance.

Further, how is nation and nationalism (and narration of these) understood at different periods in our history? What conceptualisations of nation and nationalism are evident overtly and covertly in the literary texts referring to Gandhi of the early decades of colonialism and of anti-colonial struggles in South Africa and that of Independence in India of the 20th century, and how are they now read against the light of 21st century developments and reconfigurations? We must see the way revolutionary fervour was developed and sustained in the attacks against Empire. Fanon and Gandhi were aware of the pitfalls of national consciousness (Loomba et al 2005:22), and Gandhi criticized the notion of nation as an enclosed space. "He was not interested in chauvinistic nationalism – he aspired to a universalism that soared above narrow political goals" (Hardiman 2008: 17). Further, while the nationalist movement, propelled by Satyagraha, was a modernist development, at the same time Gandhi resisted modernity's all encompassing claims and seductions. A critique of Gandhi's concept of nation is also relevant given the need to avoid its homogenizing tendencies (see Mishra: 2007:43).

We might also ask how references to Gandhi linked to the assertion of "Indianness" in a diasporic community as in South Africa? We notice that many of the poems and other writings were produced at times of historical anniversaries (for example, Ansuyah Singh's novel was written to mark the centenary of the arrival of indentured workers in South Africa); this gives the impression that Gandhi and references to Gandhi were seen as the defining motif or signature of Indian history. A rich, alternative history was clearly asserted in the face of apartheid's discriminatory and oppressive policies; but whether this horizon was limiting or enabling is open to debate. We need to be circumspect about our current emphases on identity politics. Terry Eagleton argues that this tendency has "helped to depoliticize the question of post-colonialism, and inflate the role of culture within it, in ways which chimed with the new, post-revolutionary climate in the West itself" (2004:12). This trend shifts the emphasis on nation and class, on solidarity across groups, in the fight against imperialism.

On the one hand, how do these South African constructions of "Indianness" deepen and broaden our debates on "Africanness" and "Black" identity? On the other hand, how is this different from an ethnocentric, "cultural," conservative and sectarian identification with Gandhi, and a possible retreat into former, apartheid racial categories as might be suggested in the slogan, "one-nation, many cultures"? (After all, Gandhi was evolving and espousing a different kind of Indianness, far from a narrow nationalism or ethnocen-

tricity.) Fatima Meer does try to combine different and diverse strands of the history of Indians in South Africa in her production, Ahimsa/Ubuntu, referred to already, and many of the autobiographies (e.g., I.C. Meer's A Fortunate Man) show the interconnectedness of different histories. Meer's desire for inclusivity is necessary not only at the level of historiography or symbolism but in the way assimilation may be struggled over and worked for in present-day South Africa.

Given the present engagement with Gandhi in new ways in our contemporary world (see Hardiman 2003) and the on-going celebration of anniversaries related to Gandhi (the present centenary commemorations of Satyagraha are a case in point), how does a reading and reclaiming of literature that refers to Gandhi expand and deepen South African literary-critical studies in particular, and transnational and cosmopolitan literary studies in general? Helgesson points out that "the multiplicity and transformation of 'black' resistance strategies throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is perhaps best understood in terms of post-colonial hybridity, as responses to colonisation within colonial time that bend the limits of the colonial" (2004:42). As we celebrate the centenary of Satyagraha, reading literary texts that refer to Gandhi and Satyagraha, I wish to argue, opens up other ways of reading resistance in South Africa and enhances our understanding of the different forms that "post-colonial hybridity" takes in this part of our world.

# **EPILOGUE** [These are Gandhi poems composed by myself.]

# Satyagraha

You stood tall and still, Clad in loincloth, Stripped bare of pomp And the garlands of adulation.

You took command and spoke in clear and simple words Believing in the force of your ideas Rather than of a gun.

Soul force – Is not the weapon of the weak But the weapon of the strong.

Soul force – When will and heart, And body and mind, Work in unison.

Soul force –
That alone could prevail
Against the gates of hell.
Fired not with hate for the Other
But with love
For wholeness and humanity.

With the strength to say, "Enough!
We will not be trampled on like dust.
We will be free!"

#### Phoenix

The early morning breaks over the cluster of small white homes shrouded in shadows.

A larger home of wood and iron, surrounded by a flower garden. quietly commands the allotment.

At the edges of the homestead are large mango trees.

In the centre a coconut palm and a Christmas tree.

The Printing Press with its machinery now still will whirl into motion soon.

The dogs are rousing while the calves edge closer to their mothers standing erect with glazed eyes.

Far from this sacred ground the city is stirring plotting machinations for the day. Here in this ashram
The rhythms of work and prayer
are experiments with truths...

### White Light

You began at the white city and Slowly trudged across the world

Covered in the cloak of Ahimsa Led by faith and not by fetish

Safe on a land of love and truth You built the Shilpa of freedom

For a beloved motherland And for the world transcendent

A loin cloth filtering out light From the darkness around you

# A heart of flesh

A heart that is the Pulse of progress Goes back to The very source Of a cosmic music To hear itself beat

#### Universal 1

From the ancient groves The spirit of ahimsa blows.

You catch the offering And breathe new life into it.

Through the sacrifice of love Home rule has no borders.

Blessed are the meek
Who will inherit the earth.

#### Universal 2

From your womb You longed for peace Among all peoples of faith.

To see hatred abate And earthly kingdoms cease You implored against zealots.

For truth and love You gave your body To be burned.

Out of the ashes Your spirit quickens, Refusing to die.

# Savodaya

Unto this last I give the same As unto the first.

He who worked from the first hour is equal to he who worked from the eleventh.

Both meet in the dignity of work and in the dignity of pay.

The gift of bread for all Is the bequest of Peace for the world.

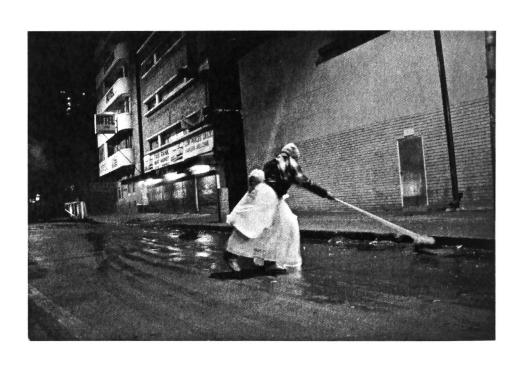
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# THE SOUTH AFRICAN NOVEL AFTER APARTHEID: MPHAHLELE MZAMANE AND OLIPHANT ON THE IDIOM OF TRANSITION

Osita Ezeliora

We remain a country in the grip of a complex transition. This means that we need to come to terms with the fact that the past is still with us in all its ugliness. This is so because, despite superficial appearances to the contrary, racism is still deep seated and difficult to eradicate.

—N. Chabani Manganyi, (2004: 48).

Nothing better dislodges the obituary announcement made four decades ago about the author, by French theorist Roland Barthes, than the plethoric presence of the South African novel after apartheid. The sheer out-put of the novelists, especially those writing in the English language, is so impressive that it is right to claim at the outset that the novel of the 'new' South Africa has since overwhelmed even the most committed literary commentators and hermeneutists. The diversity of the themes, the varying virtuosities of individual writers with respect to narrative experimentation and accomplishment, the persistent presence of urbanity and sexuality in the new fiction and, in particular, the zeal of translators in making a number of novels written in other South African languages readily available in English have combined to establish a vibrant novelistic culture in South Africa at the dawn of democratic non-racialism. In this respect, the continued relevance of established writers combined with their continued impressive contributions in defining paradigms of the emergent literary tradition is one that has made them immediate role-models for the teaming young minds who are eager to assert their voices in the new liberal order. To this end, Nadine Gordimer, Andre Brink, J.M. Coetzee, Zakes Mda, Mandla Langa, Lewis Nkosi and Njabulo Ndebele, Lauretta Nqcobo, and Sindiwe Magona, among others, readily come to mind as writers who, in more ways than could be outlined here, have nurtured the novelistic form to such an admirable level that it is possible to think of the new energy in the superlative.

It is little or no wonder, then, that within barely a decade of what has come to be defined as 'the Mandela Republic,' many previously 'exiled' writers have since come to be recognized at home<sup>1</sup>; established writers have continued to produce more novels; emergent writers are on the rise; women writers are gradually increasing; and even publishing firms have taken on

the challenge of encouraging emergent writers across racial divide. Evidence of this vibrancy is perceivable in the efforts of novelists as diverse as Zoë Wicomb, Pamela Jooste, Jo-Anne Richards, Rayda Jacobs, Mark Behr, Ivan Vladislavic, Christopher Hope, the late Phaswane Mpe and K. Sello Duiker and, quite recently, the arrival in the scene of Fred Khumalo, Gerald Kraak and Mary Watson, among others. The immediate dilemma arising from a study of the post-apartheid novel of English expression, however, is how to group white and black writers into a single box, given that previous scholarship has often distinguished South Africa fiction on the black/white binaries or the so-called realist/modernist novels (Smith. 1990:98, 128; Attwell, 2005: 169-204). In addition, the many debates that had anticipated the post-apartheid liberal order had attempted to highlight areas to be privileged without addressing equal regard to the reality of pain inflicted on the population through the course of history. It is probably for this reason that a number of white academics had insistently called for an effacement of history and discourse or fantasy and realism in the discourse of the new novels (Boehmer, 1998: 43-56; Wade, 1996:1-9, 236-246)<sup>2</sup>. Yet, some other perceptive scholars have retained the persuasion that literary scholarship should remain a search for 'social justice'. Michael Chapman, for instance, has consistently appealed for a "humanism of reconstruction" and "a hermeneutics of suspicion" (Chapman 1996; 2003:1-13), and his positions seem to find support in the scholarship of a number of black scholars that range from Es'kia Mphahlele, Mbulelo Vizikhungo Mzamane, Andries Walter Oliphant, Njabulo Ndebele etc. This essay investigates the views of Mphahlele, Mzamane and Oliphant with respect to the emerging tradition of writing in South Africa after apartheid. It takes into account the fact that post-apartheid South Africa is still 'a transitional state'—a 'nation' undergoing immense transformation not only in the political arena, but also in practically every facet of its social imaginary.

'The transitional,' derived in this case from the Websterian notion as "a movement, development, or evolution from one stage, form, or style to another usually of a later time or period" (Webster, 1961: 2428), occupies a special relevance in the discourse of the 'new' South Africa. In his interesting decoding of the subject following a decade of the nation's embrace of non-racial democracy, N. Chabani Manganyi observes: "(m)uch of the first decade of democratic rule has been concerned with bridge building and laying newer foundations. The bridge building started with the country's constitution in 1996; the transformation of the arms of government; the restructuring of the economy and the adopting of a broad spectrum of new policy frameworks supported by public institutions of various kinds. To crown it all, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established by legislation in 1995 to work on the country's collective memory as a gateway

to a better future" (Manganyi 2004: 8). If transition is so relevant in the discourse of the 'new' nation, then, it needs be understood that whether we return to history purely as a reminder of the tragic consequences of colonialism, of Boer-settler-ship in the region, of the institutionalisation of apartheid and its draconian laws, etc, it is precisely necessary due to the enduring impact of racial dilemma in South Africa, and the more noble belief that it is possible to look forward to a more harmonious future, in spite of the traumas of the past.

It does seem, that 'Race' will always be an issue in discussions about South Africa. Attempts by the new government to embark on projects or policies that will heal injuries of the past are often ridiculed. Vincent Maphai has explored this issue in terms of what he perceives as a confusion in the choice made between political imperatives with moral rights. Maphai suggests in what he calls a moral unease that often arise when "certain policies and strategies may engender new forms of injustice," but observes a kind of National schizophrenia and hypocrisy that often manifests "in the way race is dealt with in popular, political and scholarly discourse" (Maphai 2004:12). But the process of transition is not without its problems. The visible changes across social, political, economic and educational life of the 'nation' indicate a transformation process attuned to the task of a liberal, accommodative, society that struggles to muffle the challenges of racism and racial politics that define the spectacular legacies of apartheid. One observes, here, that contrary to speculations that black leadership could spell doom for the white minority population, evidences abound that the minority white population has continued to dominate the economic sectors of the country.

The educational institutions, especially the tertiary units, are largely dominated by white academics. And even where there are occasional tokenisms of these institutions being headed by black scholars, the many sites of power-the headship of departments, heads of schools, deans of faculties, editors of the available journals, the judicial system etc.-are largely run by whites. The transitional, it is then right to claim, is still a process in the process of becoming. This process is one that has within the first decade of black political leadership delineated some faultlines. David Goodman, leaning on Antonio Gramsci, captures the dilemma quite succinctly: "South Africa is in the throes of reinventing itself. Out of a society based on division, greed, and bigotry, a new "rainbow nation" is struggling to be born. But years of apartheid have left the architects of this nonracial societyto-be bereft of navigational aids. The tension between an old order that refuses to die and a new order that has not yet taken root is excruciating. It is a transitional period that is at once baffling, frightening, exhilarating, and depressing" (Goodman 1999: 7). How do these issues manifest in the post-apartheid novel of English expression? Is there any basis to celebrate the literature of the 'new' South Africa? How do the efforts of the writers help in defining paradigms for the apprehension of the emergent narratives of the 'nation'?

Three black scholars whose essays I examine here—Es'kia Mphahlele (1919), Mbulelo Mzamane (1948-), and Andries Walter Oliphant (1955)—have made some interesting observations on the direction of South African literatures after apartheid. Easily among the most vocal voices in South African letters, the three scholars have contributed immensely in the growth and development of African literary scholarship. Es'kia Mphahlele is by no means a contemporary of the later scholars. If anything, he is more a mentor to Mzamane and Oliphant as he is to the several hundred African scholars and writers that he helped develop in nearly half-a-century in places like Nigeria, Kenya, Zambia, and the United States of America, before his 'retirement' in 1984 from the University of the Witwatersrand where he still retains his office as Emeritus Professor. Mphahlele's career and sojourn across the planet during and after the apartheid years are the subjects of several volumes of auto/biographies. His scholarship remains vibrant, and the initial impact of publications such as *The African Image* (1962, 1974), etc help in the earlier attempts by African scholars and Africanists to develop theories of the African identity. As creative artist and scholar, too, Mphahlele's output spans such publications as African Literature and the Social Experience (1983), Chirundu (1979), The Crisis in Black Leadership (1984), Down Second Avenue (1959, 1990), Bury Me at the Marketplace (1984), Afrika My Music (1984), The Wanderer (1972), Renewal Time (1988) etc.

Long before the dawn of democratic non-racialism, Mphahlele had written powerfully on the dilemma of black writers in the claustrophobic universe of apartheid in numerous essays. In "The Tyranny of Place" for instance, he notes the impact 'place' has on writers. In spite of his 20 years of sojourn outside the shores of South Africa during the turbulent years of racial separatism, his urban imagination does not be cloud his sense of the African rural sensibility. In his peculiar case, he still yearned for a return to the pastoral villages of South Africa where he had grown up. Mphahlele's appeal for a re-awakening for the 'emergent' African should, therefore, be seen to transcend mere romanticization of the bucolic to a genuine request that we remember our origins, whatever their limitations. This way, it will be possible for young Africans "to contribute substantially" to the aspirations of their people—an engagement, he suggests, that requires that "one has to feel a people's history in one's blood and marrow, down to one's genitals" (Mphahlele 2002: 283). As a writer, he considers himself "a historian of feelings." But to feel properly, one must necessarily be comfortable in one's environment. The best of that environment—that sense of place, with its blend of comfort and tyranny—for Mphahlele, is Africa, South Africa and, in particular, Lebowa and the place of his birth.

Mbulelo Vizikhungo Mzamane on the other hand, has contributed not only along the line of literary scholarship, but also in creative writing, especially in poetry and the short story. His outputs are equally impressive, and include such well-received work as The Children of Soweto: A Trilogy (1982), Hungry Flames and Other Black South African Short Stories (1986), Mzala (1995), Selected Poems of Sydney Sipho Sepamla (1984), Selected Poems of Mongane Wally Serote (1982), My Cousin Comes to Jo'burg and Other Stories (1981), etc. Recently he edited Words Gone Two Soon: Tributes in Honour of Phaswane Mpe and K. Sello Duiker (2005), where he observes, among other things, that 'the world of letters, like culture, is self-asserting and defies xenophobia'.

Andries Walter Oliphant, too, has contributed immensely to the growth and development of African literary scholarship. Although younger, he is more a contemporary of Mzamane and, therefore, even far younger than Mphahlele. Oliphant's efforts span the genres of poetry, the short story, but in particular, literary scholarship. He has edited a number of influential literary magazines, and was a founding editor of Staffrider, a journal that was originally published by the Johannesburg-based Ravan Press, but later taken over by the Congress of South African Writers (COSAW). Staffrider is reputed to have promoted a number of emerging writers during the dying days of apartheid. As editor of this magazine, Oliphant also established a very optimistic presence in his attitude to South Africa's post-apartheid literary landscape. His major contributions are in the field of poetry, short stories and a number of edited scholarly volumes, some of which include At the End of the Day (1988), At the Rendevous of Victory and Other Stories (1999), Culture and Empowerment: Debates, Workshops, Art and Photography from the Zabalaza Festival (1993), Essential Things: An Anthology of New South African Poetry (1992), The Finishing Touch: Stories from the 1991 Nadine Gordiner Short Story Award (1992), Kagiso Pat Mautloa (2001), and Ten Years of Staffrider (co-edited with Ivan Vlasdislavic, 1988).

I.

One uniting element in the discussions of these scholars is their fascination with history and historicity. Where Jean-Phillippe Wade, Elleke Boehmer, and Graham Pechey (1994: 151-171) are not comfortable with the reliance on history and discourse in South Africa's literary scholarship after apartheid, for the three writer-scholars under investigation, it is precisely history

and historicity that should attract any serious writer and critic in the liberal order. History and historicity take into cognisance not only the referential basis of any narrative, but also constitute a fundamental part of any people's cultural sensibility. Mphahlele, in particular, is worried about the apologetic stance often taken by some black South African writers. Writers of whatever racial or political orientation, he argues, "must try harder to tell it right." For Mphahlele, "Art must refine history, which includes reality" (Mphahlele 2005: 204). At every point in time, he argues, we should be prepared to demonstrate awareness of "the awesome concourse of human mobility and activity that contains us" and "the yet larger universe of tongues surrounding us, controlled by its own kind of intelligence" (Mphahlele 205). It is remarkable that even at retirement, Mphahlele has continued to address interest to the developments in South African letters after apartheid. At a writers' conference in Pretoria in 2002, he had delivered one of his ever firebrand lectures in a paper he titled "The Role of the Writer in African Renaissance." Published three years later, Mphahlele has upheld his eternal belief in the African humanity and the need to resuscitate a vibrant cultural sensibility denigrated over the years by the combined conspiracies of European and Arab incursions into Africa; the concomitant slavery and the slave trade; the missionary intervention and its associated hypocrisy and the inhumanity of apartheid in South Africa.

But Mphahlele is not only concerned with the history of Africa's dispossession. The 'now' is relevant, and must be embraced quite positively if a meaningful future is the collective aspiration of Africans. Where he had itemised thematic blocs in African literature along the lines of culture contact and conflict, post-independent disillusionment, alienation and exile, prison writing, apartheid, land dispossession, among others, the post-apartheid addition to the literary identity of Africa is quite salutary as we could conveniently speak of "Themes of South Africa's Transition" to subsume the major preoccupations that now "supplant old protest themes." For Mphahlele, the new letters of post-Apartheid South Africa should involve a need for the recognition of artistic responsibility. "Art must refine history," he insists, but the recreation of history for its own sake is certainly not enough in the new era. Writers should extract historical facts "in order to transcend reality" (Mphahlele 204). What emerges here is the need for writers to recognize the implications of 'modernity' on the individual and the society. For, after all, he suggests, it simply means that there are shifting catchments that enable continuity, or, as he describes it, of "periods flowing into period" (Mphahlele 205). The new novelist must then be concerned with how to engage with "the pressing demands for change to new forms of expression that will best contain and define the 'content of our character' as a nation" (Mphahlele 205). If we are not able to find these developments in the 'new' South Africa, it could be reasoned that what is being witnessed is "mere meaningless convolutions."

Mphahlele, it is important to reiterate here, remains one of the most influential writer-scholars to emerge from South Africa. His enormous contributions over the years toward the global apprehension of the African humanity not only took him to classrooms in many parts of Africa and beyond, but also led him to militant writing that give uniqueness to the claims of racial oppression of the African on the one hand, and the peculiar problematics of engaging in creative writing under such circumstances. Notwithstanding his admirable efforts at beating the odds at the time, Mphahlele humbly admits a fundamental omission to the pattern of writing that engaged the emergent African writers in the mid-20th century. "We did not apply our minds at all to theoretical questions of cultural identity" (Mphahlele 207; my emphasis), he writes, and considers such a mission a fundamental area to be embraced in the collective search for African renaissance, especially given "the changing imperatives from one social-literary consciousness to another." He adds: "The overarching concern today is nationhood" (Mphahlele 210; my emphasis). If the thematic fascinations of most black and white writers alike are attuned to the socio-political, how does one insist on the binary perceptions of letters from South Africa along racial lines?

It does seem that 'nationhood' as a fundamental paradigm in the liberal order should be blind to the politics of eugenics and the diverse historical realities of the writers. But again, Mphahlele suggests: "There is a general profile in the consciousness running through most of (these) that tells us there is a decidedly new way of perceiving, even a new moral sensibility, in comparison with the earlier literary figures. One can say this without ignoring the particularities of each one's social reality" (Mphahlele 210; my emphasis). His appeal calls for a more imaginative expansiveness for the South African writer. The emergent or established novelist could, therefore, transcend ethnic or tribal parochialism and should get him-/herself educated on the broader history and social reality of Africa. As he puts it: "The coming into (this) new consciousness with the arrival of democratic rule in 1994, beckons especially us writers to abandon our horizons, grow bigger, contain in our heads bigger territory, even while we grapple with our national concerns" (Mphahlele 211). The continentalist position of Mphahlele highlights a number of debilitating issues in post-racialist South Africa: until South Africans understand their humanity through a systematic apprehension of the African humanity, the citizenry will continue to lead an alienated life devoid of a cultural belonging. He argues: "It is a matter of urgency that in our educational system, beginning with high school, African history and geography should take a prominent place. Economics, including homelessness, buttressed by ignorance about our

continent, fuel xenophobia" (Mphahlele 211; my emphasis).

But Mphahlele does not confine his postulations on thematic concerns for the new narratives alone. The aesthetic is equally important, if the 'new' writers wish to be taken seriously by the global audience. To this end, he suggests: "We have to find a new idiom, images, symbols, discover ways, re-educate the imagination, see ourselves no longer as victims but as builders, planners, creators" (Mphahlele 211). The question then arises: what are the implications of Mphahlele's Africanist theorising on contemporary narratology particularly with respect to such germane concerns as the place of African identity, and the issue of form and originality in the modern African novel? I shall return to this question at the end of my discussion. But first, I would like to address in the next segments the postulations of Mbulelo Mzamane and Andries Walter Oliphant on the idioms of cultural transition in the South African novel of English expression after Apartheid.

II.

Mzamane's reading of the post-apartheid imaginary is particularly fascinating. A concern for the direction of the new literatures is seen within the frames of continuities and discontinuities. Yet, an understanding of the essential nature of such polarities will rest in a conscious will to apprehend the genesis of the stories that define the 'new' South Africa. A clue to his persuasion was provided quite early following the collapse of official apartheid. In a 1991 seminal essay, "Cultivating a People's Voice in the Criticism of South African Literature," Mzamane takes a swipe at the less than authoritative statements that often present monolithic definitions of black South African writing as 'Protest' literature. Specifically articulated as a corrective proclamation to the audacious 'assumptions' of Piniel Viriri Shava<sup>3</sup>, Mzamane had argued that there is more to the immense creative engagements of the black South African than the stereotypes of resistance. To quote him:

Now more than ever, it has become reductionist to categorise all African literature in South Africa as protest. Protest literature is writing by the racially oppressed addressed to readers from the ruling class in an attempt to solicit their sympathy and support against discriminatory laws and practices; while in the context of South Africa, the 'liberal tradition' refers to literature written by whites appealing to Christian liberal, humanistic ideals in race relations. However, such a distinction based on race blurs similari-

ties between black and white writers who share the same ideological outlook, whether it is conservative, liberal, or progressive. ... The internal audience of protest literature is predominantly white, so that in describing African literature from South Africa as protest the unspoken assumption is that each time an African writes the envisaged audience is non-white. As a concept, protest also gives the white minority, racist regime legitimacy which it does not possess (Mzamane 1991: 60).

While dismissing Piniel Shava's A People's Voice as "a work of apprenticeship" (Mzamane 61), Mzamane proceeds to highlight the many inadequacies of Shava's careless assumptions. What emerges as Mzamane's statement points to the need for writers and critics to show more sensitivity to issues as diverse as rural concern, land dispossession, linguistic familiarity/limitations, and the need for originality both for the writer and the critic since "imitation of thought is not thought" (Mzamane 65). Implicit in Mzamane's call for 'a People's Voice' in the scholarship of South African literature, also, is the need for writers to show more concern "with conveying the totality of human experience which includes the creativity of the people, how they survive deprivation, severance, and loss; and how they transcend their oppressive situation" (Mzamane 70). The critic should, however, look out for narratives that go "beyond the vicious cycle of oppression and protest in order to celebrate enduring human qualities." This way, it will be possible to locate the "transformational" in the work of any writer. Finally, Mzamane calls for a more serious recognition of women writers, given the "impressive, most substantial body of literature" written by black women writers.

A decade and a half later, Mzamane's identification of developments in post-Apartheid literatures would reiterate a number of the issues he highlighted in 1991. Where Mphahlele expresses the need for a historicity that refines reality, Mzamane is worried that South African writers have remained largely blind to the rich historical trajectories of the many ethnic communities of South Africa. He complains bitterly that "South Africans in general share a common culture of amnesia," a development inspired by the apparent diffidence on the part of the citizenry to celebrate its past. For Mzamane: "There is very little new work that deploys history for literary purposes. We are not exploring our heritage very creatively or extensively. Detribalised or urbanised in the main and Western-educated, African writers in South Africa see their customs, traditions and heritage as synonymous with the past, from which they wish to distance themselves" (Mzamane 2005: 217, 216). He argues further: "History remains the least explored subject in African literature from South Africa, whose strength lies in examining more

contemporary issues" (Mzamane 218). Mzamane's attitude to the new novel of South Africa after apartheid is, therefore, implicit in the challenges he notes for the established and emergent writers:

South African writers and scholars, then, face the challenge of developing a national consciousness through cultivating a historical consciousness in order to restore the dignity and humanity of Africans that were undermined by centuries of colonialism, segregation and Apartheid. They also face the challenge of reclamation and restoration that remains at the heart of literary, cultural, political, and economic projects for African renewal. These various projects for the total emancipation of African people also characterise literature from 1960 to the present which, nonetheless, developed its own peculiarities that are worth examining on their own terms. (Mzamane 218-219)

The paramount role of the historical finds eloquence in Mzamane's categorisation of the post-apartheid imaginary within the poles of continuities and discontinuities. On what to anticipate in post-apartheid literatures, therefore, Mzamane bluntly asserts that 'there can be no immediate rupture with the past' (Mzamane 222). The transitional, then, is manifest in the psychological spaces created at the dawn of the liberal order. Where the apartheid imaginary had consisted in anger, frustration, exile, imprisonment, torture, death and injustice of all forms, the psychological condition of the writer, given the liberal order, presents possibilities for the exploration of the triumph of the human spirit. Again, as he writes, where during apartheid, "The significant novel, drama, poem or story was not written in ink but was written literally with the blood, sweat, and tears of a mutilated people who were, nonetheless, schooled in the art of sacrifice and struggle," the post-apartheid imaginary looks back into the sordid past. History is thus resonated, since with transition, "Many of those harrowing and sometimes triumphant tales of the human spirit will now be told in print, on canvass, and on the screen and stage" (Mzamane 222). It is interesting that Mzamane recognises a number of South African 'black' novelists such as Mandla Langa, Zakes Mda, Sindiwe Magona, Lesego Malepe, and Mongane Wally Serote, who have succeeded in writing just such stories that highlight the nature of creativity and cultural transformation after the apocalypse. The transitional in post-apartheid narratives should equally be gleaned from how the novelist addresses his imagination to some significant statements attuned towards healing the wounds of the past. If the politician is then satisfied with the task of establishing a truth and reconciliation commission (TRC), as a way of forging forward, the novelist should go beyond such popularity

proclamations. For Mzamane, then, "The TRC may have started the healing process, however it will take the liberated writer to complete the therapy, over several generations" (Mzamane 222).

Mzamane equally recognizes aspects of the transition, which is not necessarily thematically concerned, but gender-focussed. To this end, the emergence of women writers into the scene constitutes a significant development in the discourse of the post-apartheid imaginary. The transitional, especially among black novelists he suggests, should subsume a systematic attempt at problematizing the notions of reconciliation and reconstruction that have come to supplant old protest themes. Such an engagement will ultimately lead to a progressive historicity—an effort at attaining healing followed by a similar interest in collective renewal or reconstruction. This should naturally recognize narratives of "exile and return," and the "impacts of the past on the present" (Mzamane 225). An interesting angle to Mzamane's view of the new cultural imaginary is what he calls "the second generation of struggles"—an awareness that the liberalism of the new order must not be allowed to derail into an unholy alliance between the old racists and the emergent black elite.

To this end, the democratic order presents an entire new range of challenges that authorise that the novelists should problematize the new social dilemma. This sense of struggle should fascinate the 'emergent' novelists and critic alike since it could map "the contours of post-apartheid literature and society" (Mzamane 226). In other words, the new struggle calls for "the search for solutions," whether or not such inquest is attuned to health (HIV/AIDS)<sup>4</sup> a revaluation of the moral sensibility of the new political elite, and the interrogation of professional bodies and individuals concerned with the nation's collective destiny.

#### III.

The search for paradigms in the literature of the 'new' South Africa, it needs be observed, took a forceful stride by the late 1980s and early 1990s. Speculative statements on the possible direction of cultural productions in democratic South Africa were made in the many conferences that anticipated South African writing following the effacement of racial capitalism. Of relevance, here, is the 12-point agenda proposed by Andries Walter Oliphant (Oliphant 1991: 29-35) in "The Renewal of South African Literature." This interesting essay underscores the urgency at the time to integrate South African letters, if not with the literature of the rest of the world, at least to locate it strongly within the confines of the flamboyant

literature of the rest of the continent. Oliphant notes that for a "renewal of South African literature," there is need for a radical displacement of old orthodoxies instituted to perpetuate white supremacy. Thus, he suggests, language in South Africa "has been instrumental in the stabilization of apartheid." While English and Afrikaans were imposed on all South Africans, the political implication of such language policy became evident since it produced a culture of arrogance, ignorance, chauvinism and violence (Oliphant 31). Oliphant's speculative statement is particularly relevant for the obvious reason that it itemises specific thematological issues central to cultural productions in the context of a 'nation' desperate for cultural harmony in a post-apocalyptic context.

Amongst other things, Oliphant had pleaded for open-mindedness among producers and consumers of culture, given particularly, that "Only a perspective capable of dealing with the multiple confluences and interaction of the subjective and objective forces and their crystallization in literature, is capable of coming to terms with the infinite variety in the modes and forms of cultural expression" (Oliphant 32). While noting the difficulty in itemising the thematic directions that could be explored, however, he suggests a twelve-point agenda that include, among other things, ecological spaces in the life of mankind; exploration of a more psychologically-realized narratives or what he calls "the imperatives of self-isolation"; a focalisation on gender and the politics of sex; a parodic revaluation of the elites and their relationship with the ordinary people as obtained in the post-colonial narratives of Achebe, Ngugi, and Soyinka; a focalisation on the cultural relevance of sports and other integrative social activities; the exploitation of humour or the seemingly unserious; the construction and recognition of children and youth literature; the re-invigoration of the oral narrative mode; the inclusion of exile writing into mainstream South African literature; experimentations at the level of the fantastic, as well as science fiction; the avoidance of rigidity and prescriptivism in the creative and critical enterprise; and, finally, the promotion of a literature that stresses unity in diversity.

Taking Oliphant's suggestions one in turn, it is possible to embrace some of his fine suggestions, while others could further be interrogated on their near-extreme intent to merely sound politically correct. First, he calls for the development of an aesthetic theory on the basis of man's relationship with the environment, not "necessarily for the idealization of rural life and culture" but 'a theory defined by ecological sensitivity." In this regard, Oliphant is all for an episteme that should enable the critic and writers focus on the exploration of the interconnectedness of both rural and urban spaces, rather than searching for dichotomies between the two spatial spaces. This sounds quite plausible. He goes on to suggest the need to explore man's

psychological being that will transcend the previously dominant paradigm of resistance narrative, and in doing so, the historical should remain relevant. Thirdly, he calls for the development of a more gender-sensitive narrative that could help in the psychological liberation of women and, consequently, the society. Other issues raised by Oliphant are that there is need for the construction of narratives defined more by the human crisis of class and economic imbalance rather than the often simplistic recasting of South Africa's social dilemma as purely racial. This will ultimately lead to a parodic revaluation of individuals within all racial categories who could be tempted to adopt impunity and corruption as primary human values.

Oliphant gives a fifth item to involve the extension of 'our' imaginative horizons to subsume the cultural territories of sports or games as basis for the exploration of human relations. The sixth issue raised by Oliphant is his call for a literature embellished with "spontaneous humour and playfulness" (Oliphant 33). This is followed by a seventh—the request for the creation of children and youth literature. Strangely, though, he calls for a children's literature devoid of, among other things, "moralisation." In a nation where brutality and violence of all forms is a daily companion; where pupils stab and kill one another with reckless abandon in schools and colleges; where teenagers rape toddlers as well as the aged, there is something quite unsettling about such propositions. Writers who are fascinated with training the young need always be reminded of the immense presence of the oral literary form in its vastness all over the African continent. Such stories teach and delight by their very nature, and have sustained the people of the continent since human civilization. To erase the basic humanistic issues of good and evil to young minds is a dangerous proposition that must be shunned with vigour among scholars, writers, educators, and political leaders entrusted with the task of providing education and care for the young peoples of the continent. For, indeed, moralisation is one of the cardinal elements of children's literature, especially in the oral genre.

Surprisingly, Oliphant arrives at his point number eight with a suggestion that the oral narrative modes be recognized and resuscitated in post-apartheid South Africa. Certainly, this sounds like a piece of contradiction. Oliphant's ninth request is for the recognition of exile narratives, including prison stories and other militant narratives written during the struggle within and outside South Africa. He calls further for the encouragement of writers to venture into science and fantasy writing/narratives; the need for openness in new aesthetic forms, and that experimentalism should be encouraged; and, finally, that writers and critics should embrace cultural diversity and, by so doing, feel free to draw their creative inspiration from the legends and mythologies of any of the cultural groups that constitute

the 'new' South Africa. But again, Oliphant creates another confusion at this point. For instance, he dismisses the distinctions often made between African and Western modes of perception as "simplistic and parochial". To cite him: "The simplistic and parochial opposition between Western and African culture must be avoided. All knowledge which liberates and enriches must find its way into our culture. Here, a critical open-mindedness, rather than prejudice, is required" (Oliphant 35).

#### IV.

But where suggestions for the place of literature in a non-racial South Africa were fundamentally *speculative* at the dawn of the liberal order, actual readings of the literature a decade after apartheid have tended toward the panoramical. Most studies that attempt to explore the new literature have hardly gone beyond a journal paper or book chapter that presents one-paragraph summaries of the thematic slants of some of the novels published after 1994. Such 'survey' works—in spite of their relevance—have occasionally erred in their generalising categorizations of novels that sometime do not fall within the same generic field. Where Es'kia Mphahlele (2005) notes the danger in carelessly grouping writers within specific thematic persuasions, and Mzamane (2005) carefully underlines the many continuities and discontinuities in the new writing, Andries Walter Oliphant's (2005) equally fascinating essay misses the mark as he tries to find evidence of his earlier speculations in the emergent narratives. His inclusion of Andre Brink's postcolonial narrative, The Other Side of Silence as a 'crime narrative' in the family of Coetzee's Disgrace, Gordimer's The House Gun, Nicol's The Ibis Tapestry, clearly misses the point. Disgrace and The House Gun certainly do not belong to the same thematic category; The Other Side of Silence is totally out of this zone; so also is Mike Nicol's *The Ibis Tapestry*.

Like Mphahlele and Mzamane, though, Andries Walter Oliphant (2005: 230-250) in "A Changing Topography," traces "some recent developments in South African writing after apartheid." His classification of his panoramic statement as "merely a map of the main topographical changes in the literary landscape of South Africa and not a study of details" (Oliphant 231) is in line with similar positions that, nevertheless, highlight some fascinating manifestations in the new writing. Where the essentialist urge to embrace the socio-political preponderances of historical emergences had sustained and animated fiction in the past, then, in the new writing, it is possible to identify, among others, narratives with "a finer texture with greater sensitivity to states of being and the nuances of human existence" (Oliphant: 239). This

new discovery of the inner life of writers with respect to their acquaintances and relationship with the South African environment is partly contributory to the fascination with memory and nostalgia—a concern with the meaning of the past—an interest that created a number of Childhood narratives.

There is also the interest in the representation of crime and violence, as well as in redressing the forcible expropriation of land. The land question, it is worthy of note, here, seems quite resonant as we find it in novel after novel from writers across racial divide. Coetzee's Disgrace, Mda's The Heart of Redness and She Plays with the Darkness, Wicomb's David's Story, etc, all address the land question in a manner that readily evokes memories of Sol Plaatje's Native Life in South Africa (1916).

The representation of religion, especially the relationship between Islam and Christianity (Rayda Jacobs & Achmat Dangor); the focus on the purely parodic, or the humour narratives explore the liberating energies of laughter (Oliphant, 244)—Oliphant's 'mapping' is quite relevant for the obvious reasons that it enables the researcher to venture into the new writing without the trepidation associated with the unknown. There are also, he suggests, narratives that tend to draw attention to the demise of white superiority, by revaluing the supremacy myths. Niekerk's *Triomf* and Brink's *Devil's Valley* fit most perfectly into this mould of the new narratives. In addition, the privileging of 'Other' minorities such as women and the sexual 'other' resonate in works as varying as Andre Brink's *Imaginings of Sand, Devil's Valley*, and *The Other Side of Silence*. Zakes Mda's *The Madonna of Excelsior* as well as K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* and *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* are very significant contributions in this line from among black South African writers after apartheid.

But there is an ambivalent position emanating from Oliphant's 'mapping.' Where at one stage of his assessment he is persuaded that "sustainable strategies require the fostering of local literary and artistic creativity utilizing new technologies and the development of critical tools which will enable less powerful societies exposed to domination to maintain and deepen alternative visions in which linguistic and cultural diversity is celebrated and promoted under the principle of quality" (Oliphant 248), at the next level, he suggests that "the central challenges now facing South African writing (then) is to quantitatively and qualitatively enhance literary outputs in the languages and to accelerate the full participation in all sections of the South African population in the literary culture of a democratic society" (Oliphant 249). Oliphant does not elaborate on the nature of the strategies, the form of the new technologies and critical tools to be developed in the reading of the new literature. If writing in the metropolitan tongue of English must

be guarded against scholars who might be tempted to rate such writing on the criteria of quality, why should qualitative and quantitative cultural production in indigenous African languages constitute "the central challenges" now facing South African writing? It does seem, here, that literary scholarship might sink into the abyss of solidarity proclamations. Beyond these, however, there is the contradiction associated with Oliphant's earlier call for the obliteration of the distinction often made between African and Western modes of perception (Oliphant 1991:35). Such cultural levelling will ultimately eventuate in scholars from the more "powerful societies" deploying their critical tools in reading cultural production from "less powerful societies" and, thereby sustaining their dominance of the previously disadvantaged culture producers.

#### V.

The codes of greatness in fiction, it is at least reasonable to risk at this point, could be determined by a number of factors that, sometimes, might result from a treatment of an unexpected subject to such an elevated plank that it authorises its own respect as an autonomous entity. In our specific instance, here, the transitional must of necessity project aspects of the changing idiom of the perceptual and the imagined; the real and the possible—the physical and mental questing that enable the understanding of our interior humanities across racial divides. Nadine Gordimer's 'transitional' narrative, The House Gun, provides a most handy illustration of a post-apartheid novel that interrogates the behavioural changing pattern of mankind in certain claustrophobic personal/family spaces. The House Gun presents aspects of life in a democratic South Africa's urban space. With a plot pattern that revolves round the privileged family of the Lindgards, Gordiner draws attention to a possibility of life in a nation in transition to an egalitarian, non-racist society. Harald Lindgard, an accomplished white business magnate and Insurance executive, and his medical doctor wife, Claudia, find themselves in a very helpless situation. Their son, Duncan, shoots and kills his friend and former homosexual lover, Carl Jasperson, whom he caught cheating with his fiancée, Natalie James. The services of a brilliant and confident attorney is required not only to save their son from an imminent death penalty, but also to present a solid defence that could highlight the angelic morality of the Lindgards to the media, if need be. "The Lindgards," we learn, "were not racist, if racist means having revulsion against skin of a different colour, believing or wanting to believe that anyone who is not your own colour or religion or nationality is intellectually and morally inferior." In spite of the Lindgards' persuasion on the capabilities of humankind anywhere in the world, however, they've never "joined movements, protested, marched in open display, spoken out in defence of these convictions" (House Gun 86).

Incidentally, Hamilton Motsamai, a black African lawyer is suggested as the best candidate that could handle their son's murder case. The bitter reality of the apartheid days is resurrected, here, as the Lindgards, with neither pretensions nor inhibitions, doubt the intellectual capability of a black man. They were especially terrified of entrusting such a sensitive case to him. The narrator, of course, points out that such doubt was not fundamentally racial. This should naturally be anticipated since success in legal practice is often very much determined by the degree of the practitioner's professional experience, and "because it is a fact, incontrovertible fact, that due to racial prejudice in the old regimes, black lawyers have had far less experience than white lawyers, and experience is what counts" (*House Gun* 38). The collapse of the old system presents several challenges which include new modes of reasoning, new perceptions, and new possibilities. With a democratic institution on ground, "the new laws were addressing many of the factors that had made poverty black people's condition as the colour of their skin had been their condition" (House Gun 88). Duncan's murder-trial presents that possibility in the poetic metaphor of justice. Placed within the matrix of this mental and social impotence, the Linggards sail through a spiritual and physical pilgrimage that unveils their incredible lack of knowledge of the lives of the ordinary in the society. Their gradual manipulation by the narrator from the period they dictate to Lawyer Motsamai to a moment they are utterly dependent upon him signals a symbolic transition to which everyone, black or white, could be subjected if confined within a similar circum-ambient universe. The trial of Duncan—and by extension the Lindgards—becomes a trial of the conscience of all privileged South Africans whose pious liberalism at a moment of moral degeneration did not go beyond the security of their private bourgeois inheritance.

This brings me, finally, to the questions raised earlier on the place of African identity and the issue of form and originality in the modern African novel. While scholarship on the issue of Africanity in modern African literature is vast, it is important to recognize the immense contributions of these scholars in the project of understanding the concept and precepts of African humanism. Es'kia Mphahlele's decades of creative output and philosophical ruminations seem attuned to this mission. This has recently been celebrated in Lesibana Jacobus Rafapa's *The Representation of African Humanism in the Narrative Writings of Es'kia Mphahlele* (2006). Mbulelo Vizikhungo Mzamane and Andries Walter Oliphant have continued with this tradition in a number of provocative essays even if at varying degree and conviction. The challenge, though, is how to approach readings of African humanism in a manner that transcends mere scholarship of paraphrase

to more rigorous forms of decoding the post-apartheid novels within the frames of postcolonial narratology. It is in this respect that an engagement with form, originality and African identity could positively catalyse our mission of comprehending the precepts of African humanism as projected in South Africa's narratives of transition.

Mphahlele's statements on the place of the writer in the business of forging an African re-awakening should be understood here, however, as slightly differing from the preoccupations of Mzamane and Oliphant who attempt to survey actual developments in the narratives of the 'new' South Africa. But there seems to exist some uniting elements in their essays, especially with their recognitions of some fundamental issues that are gradually marking the nature of letters in South Africa since the collapse of official apartheid. This is implicit in their recognition of the new writing in its preoccupation with the actualities of change, the meaning of the past, memory and nostalgia, exile and return, the land question, an upsurge in crime and violence of all forms, xenophobia and homophobia, the new interest in the exploration of religious relationships, the interest in humour, and a return to oral tradition. How individual writers accomplish their specific visions vary from the reportorial to the experimental. But the manners in which these thematic interests help articulate the African experience should be located in a more rigorous inquest into the nature of the African humanity and, at the level of novelistic compositions, should subsume such fundamental paradigms as the issues of form and originality. F.B.O. Akporobaro (1986: 166-184) has drawn attention to the many debates on this subject, but departs fundamentally in his examination of the notions of African identity within the confines of form and originality in the modern African novel. He clarifies aspects of this humanism at the levels of visions and style in the modern African novel:

First they require a consideration of the quality of the experiences delineated—how far these are treated as essentially local issues of unique and autogenous nature, and how far they are treated in terms of literary patterns of universal human experiences. Second, they require the analysis of the given writer's response to the English language as a basis for the development of a national English reflective of local speech patterns and cultural assumptions. Third, the issues concern also the problem of narrative organization, requiring a study of the narrative patterns, especially, the relationship established between culture, local experience and the logic of plot development in the novels.

If anything, then, contemporary narratology of the post-colonialist persuasion is gradually proving that a focus on the literarity of a fictional narrative does not necessarily frown against the novelist's ethical persuasion, just as the fascination with the social must not impede the symbolic codes, narrational fluidity, and innovative presence of the writer. The traditional codes of spatio-temporal spaces, focalisations at the levels of events, narrative actants or the 'peopling' of the text; linguistic vibrancy or austerity, narrative dislocations, integrations and all that inhere literary identity on the fictional would always be brought into action in the hermeneutic engagement of the critic. The challenge, to this end, is as much for writers of indigenous African languages as it is for those adopting the metropolitan idioms of the West to venture deeper into the core meaning of African identity with respect to apprehending the metaphysical, fantastical, and quotidian realities of the 'new nation' and, by so doing, present future readership with specific idiom(s) on Africa's socio-psychological modes of response. More importantly, however, the challenge for South African writing in its current stage of the liberal order tends to suggest that the critic needs to rise to a certain occasion: if the author got assassinated to pave way for the hegemonic enthronement of French cultural theorising in the 1960s, developments at the level of novelistic composition in post-apartheid South Africa indicate that the author has since resurrected. The critic is at task to respond appropriately to the plethora of the new writing.

#### **Footnotes**

- <sup>1</sup> It is a sad commentary on the liberal order, however, that as at the time of writing this piece, not a single national honour has been awarded Peter Abrahams, one of the prodigious writers whose immense contributions in the genre of the novel and social commentaries enabled the comity of nations, especially within Africa itself, to understand the stinking oddity of the apartheid establishment.
- <sup>2</sup> Wade and Smith are however particularly interested in the project of constructing South Africa's literary history. What is significant, though, is the attitude to such projects. In line with his earlier anger on what he calls "the dubious political ambition" implicit in the earlier attempts to write South Africa's literary history, Wade writes, for instance: "In the language of Russian Formalism, we similarly need to 'defamiliarize' traditional automated perceptions of our literary past to construct a 'shocking', renewed, unrecognizable cultural history" (2, 3)—a proposal to which Michael Chapman reminds all that in South Africa, "the literary history is not easily disentangled from the political history." In focalising on Southern Africa as a whole, Chapman admits: "it is difficult to separate literary discussion from a social referent when political events have attained the dimension of compelling public narratives." To this end, he proposes a "social theory in which forms of literature are tied firmly to the event" (1996:42).
- <sup>3</sup> Piniel Viriri Shava, A People's Voice: Black South African Writing in the Twentieth Century, (London: Zed Press (Zed Cultural Studies) and Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1989).
- <sup>4</sup> Mzamane notes: "HIV/AIDS and the acrimonious debate it has sparked is too important to be left to pharmaceuticals, on the one hand, and government, on the other hand" (226). In this respect, he is at one with Njabulo Ndebele who, in a more elaborate discussion on the subject, objects to the uncritical embrace of propaganda emanating from multinational capitalists whose profiteering greed knows no boundary. See Njabulo Ndebele, "The dilemmas of leadership: HIV/AIDS and state consolidation in South Africa," in N. Chabani Manganyi (ed), On Becoming a Democracy: Transition and Transformation in South African Society (Pretoria: University of South Africa Press, & Leiden: Koninklijike Brill NV, 2004: 71-85).
- <sup>5</sup> See Bernard Bergonzi, Exploding English: Criticism, Theory, Culture (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990). See in particular the essay, "Cultural studies, Poetic Arts," pp.181-204. See also Grant Farred's chapter on Sports in his Midfielders' Moment: Coloured Literature and Culture in Contemporary South Africa (Oxford: Westview Press, 2000). morality and ethics than the Post-Apartheid government?

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# **PUSHING OUT FROM THE CENTRE**:

(BLACK) FEMINIST IMAGINATION, REDEFINED POLITICS AND EMERGENT TRENDS IN SOUTH AFRICAN POETRY Pumla Dineo Ggola

This is a particular moment that has allowed us to inhabit the spaces of our humanity more fully, I think. Some people whom I encounter overseas find me a little outside the arena they know as South African poetry. In South Africa I never find that. Here, we have actually entered a time when the political is known to include the full humanity of people, so that in addition to resistance, we can explore our madness and failures and doubts and loves. And at the same time, to draw a solid line under apartheid is deluded and dangerous (Baderoon, 2006c: 3).

The most dramatic shift in the South African English literary scene has occurred in relation to women's place within written and performed poetry in the second decade of democracy. Although there were always women poets writing and/or performing in English even under apartheid, these were rarely well-known; prior to this recent shift women writing in English did not fill the ranks of later canonized writers. Although some younger women poets, like Bernedette Muthien, retained a presence in South African poetry anthologies in the 80s and 90s, they remained marginal in the academy. Alternatively, when women poets were widely recognized as such, they were better known for their writing in other genres. Women poet Gcina Mhlope, for example, continues to be better known as a storyteller and children's book writer, than as poet.

As the national public cultural motif moved from "rainbow nation" to "unity in diversity," circa 2003, South Africa seemed to be experiencing a creative explosion (Gqola, 2004b). Poetry was at the forefront of this creative flourishing. Poetry readings and performances were in vogue and plentiful in South African cities, campuses and other small venues. In an interview, Lebogang Mashile (2008b), recalls how an "amazing burgeoning spoken word movement that was taking place." Although it did not start out so in the early 2000s this "spoken word movement" and the larger poetry scene would be dominated by women's voices a few years later. This prominence of women poets marks the success of women poetry collectives, like WEAVE in Cape Town and Feela Sistah! in Johannesburg, to assert their presence within the poetry scene. However, these poetry collectives also

had a ripple effect throughout the written and spoken word scene, so that even those poets who were never part of such collectives have nonetheless also risen to prominence. Currently, among the most recognizable 'new' poets identify as Black and feminist, and such politicized self-identification may also account for the specific forms of agency exercised by these poets in shaping their writing careers and public self-representation. The Black feminist imagination is not a "forced construction of a monolithic category imposed externally" (Boyce Davies, 1995: 1), but takes its cue from both the claimed political location of the poets and the explicitly feminist registers fine-tuned in their work, as demonstrated below.

'Recognizable' is used here to refer a combination of the factors of high visibility in institutional and informal forums, popularity evident either in book sales or performance attendance, celebration of poetic significance through awards and invitations to read/perform at Literature/Arts festivals. It does not necessarily mean academic recognition through literary criticism. Poetry readings and performances are so strong a feature of the South African landscape that they are arguably the most prominent part of the creative explosion we continue to witness in the second decade of South Africa's democracy. What still remains unclear, however, is the popularity of women poets in a literary and cultural scene that many feminists understand as hostile to women.

This essay analyses the works of four leading poets in South Africa: Gabeba Baderoon, Myesha Jenkins, Lebogang Mashile and Makhosazana Xaba. Biographically and stylistically varied, their work nonetheless contains a shared idiom, what I call here the (Black) feminist imagination. This Black feminist imagination "demand[s] a more expansive set of interactions at the level of the critical voice" (Boyce Davies 1995: 1). I read them comparatively here, not to suggest that they form a coherent "school" of thought which is prescriptive and allows us to navigate the poetic terrain in South Africa conclusively. Rather, I analyze them because their work illustrates something about the place of the cultural in contemporary South Africa, and the specific ways in which a Black feminist imagination is responsible for a widening of the literary landscape.

It seems paradoxical that among South Africa's leading literary voices are four women, all of whom self-identify as (Black) feminist, given the highly circulated status of South Africa's gender based violence and other public hostilities to women, pro-feminist legislation notwithstanding. Given that feminist commentators speak to the multiple ways in which public culture is dominated by globalized violent masculinities, how do we account for the popularity of poets espousing explicit feminist politics in this manner?

What does this receptiveness tell us about the textures of South Africa's literary and public cultural landscapes? It may well be that these specific poets understand how to negotiate entry into public spaces that are occluded otherwise.

Such questions and occupations will shape the findings of this essay. However, focusing on selected poems by each of the poets will be the primary aim. The questions above may therefore be illuminated or approached tangentially, rather than directly. Structurally, I will turn to one poet at a time in alphabetic order, although connections between the poets will be made in the individual analysis. The paper will then conclude with a teasing out of the collective project which Baderoon, Jenkins, Mashile and Xaba continue to shape.

#### politically personal: Gabeba Baderoon

Gabeba Baderoon was born in 1969 in Port Elizabeth, although she grew up in Cape Town. She graduated with a PhD in literary and film studies from the University of Cape Town. As an academic, she has published extensively on representations of Islam/Muslims, television, film and gender studies. Baderoon's turn to poetry has been more recent, initially pursued during graduate fellowships at the Universities of Sheffield Hallam, UK and Pennsylvania State, USA. She is the author of three volumes of poetry, The dream in the next body (Kwela, 2005), for which she was awarded the DaimlerChrysler Award for South African Poetry in 2005, The museum of ordinary life (DaimlerChrysler, 2005) and A hundred silences (Kwela 2006). The silence before speaking is a Swedish translation of her poems, published by Tranan publishers. She was also winner of the Philadelphia City Paper Writing Contest in 1999, held the second Guest Writer Fellowship at the Nordic Africa Institute in 2005, a Civitella Ravieri Fellowship as well the inaugural Trust Africa Writers Residency at the University of the Witwatersrand in 2008. Her debut collection sold out and went into reprint within the first six weeks, and had gone into a third reprint a year later, twice making South African literary history.

In an interview with me, Gabeba Baderoon (2006b), remarked,

A few weeks ago, someone introduced me at a reading by saying I was a South African poet who puzzled her because I didn't write poetry about South African topics. That caught my attention. I think I am a South African poet who writes about South African topics, but maybe I'm redefining what

that means to me. Maybe it means that a South African who writes about Iraq is a very normal South African who, like most of us, thinks about the whole world.

The response Baderoon references in the extract above may be the result of limited readings of the political, but it is also understandable. For decades, debates in and on South African literature were prescriptive about the meanings and place of politics. One strand insisted that "art for art's sake" was decadent and irresponsible since all fields of human endeavor should contribute to the toppling of apartheid. Another strand dismissed this political preoccupation as dangerous for the imagination. The academy responded with classifications of "protest art," "committed art," "Soweto art," and the like as umbrella terms for all creative work by Black artists. Such categories paid no attention to the nuanced shifts, and varying quality, that the creative forms themselves suggested (Ndebele, 1991). For example, Oswald Joseph Mtshali's Sounds of a cowhide drum (1971), written in a style that appealed to wide audiences, (assumed white protest) as well as poetry targeting Black audiences (in the Black Consciousness tradition), were lumped under the same misnomer. Whereas there were varying creative registers among poets writing at the same time, even for the same literary magazine, South African literature nonetheless returned to a preoccupation with the political. The political was apartheid and responses to it.

Baderoon insists that her work is very political, but suggests broadening the meanings carried by such recognition. She enters the political through the intimate in a style that uses the "ordinary" as a site worthy of exploration, rather than a focus on the "spectacular." Njabulo Ndebele (1991) had earlier critiqued the limitations of South African literature obsessed with the spectacular political sphere, and suggested that more nuanced writing was attentive to the micro levels of people's lives. Baderoon's focus is on interiority that invites her readers to rethink the political and personal.

In the poem "Point of view" from her debut collection, the speaker is cooking in a second home, away from a more familiar one:

In the kitchen she reaches for the nutmeg grater and remembers it is in another cupboard another place (l. 1-3)

Cooking is affected by the kind of kitchen she is in: her location determines the process and utensils available to her. The kitchen and cooking, traditionally considered private feminine terrain in many cultures, offer a space to speak from as well as a language for speaking about displacement. Later in the same poem, writing functions in similar vein:

In the post office she fills in the address she has left behind. She tears up the form and starts again. Her mail follows her like outstretched hands. (ll. 4-9)

In the study of literature, letters have functioned in similar ways to cooking, as a language of the intimate. Here, again Baderoon returns to 'feminine' metaphors to evoke longing for home. The body and mind's knowledge are articulated through the language of the intimate. Yet, the larger issues evoked are homesickness, displacement, and possibly exile. Home is not in this new place, even though there is familiarity of sorts and ease of movement. The "outstretched hands," the automatic associations and the confidence of place are comforts of the unnamed place she calls home. Baderoon's evocative language issues from women's spaces, asserting such settings as valid vantage point from which to speak about larger human and political experiences.

Food, language and longing mesh again; all require great care, as is also evident in her poem "My tongue softens on the other name," also from her debut collection. Here, home is a physical space as much as it is a state of mind in language. The herbs, "kapokbos" (wild rosemary), and trees, "witolyf" (white olive) in her yard mark a place of psychic safety. These plants invite gentle recognition because they symbolize and are from home.

As has emerged from the above, cooking is very important in how Bader-oon speaks about home and place. The prominence of food, spice, home and language also gesture at time. Baderoon wrote the poems in her debut collection at the same time that she was writing her doctoral thesis, on transhistoric representations of Islam and Capetonian Muslims in literature, art and media. In that dissertation (2004), as well as in some published essays (Baderoon, 2002; Baderoon 2007), she uncovers how food has symbolic presence for Black Capetonians descended from Muslim slaves. Understanding these codified, personally handed down and closely guarded recipes is key to understanding how memory, gender and slavery intertwine(d) in the South African case (Gqola, 2007).

Memory, signs and objects carry so much about community that Baderoon declares that "I forget to look" at the picture of her mother, then the only Black woman in her medical school class at the University of Cape Town

(UCT), the same university Baderoon would later graduate four times from. She has explicitly identified the speaker in this poem as herself in public readings. Again, Baderoon crafts a poem layered with memory, gender and other politics through her speaker's reflection on an object, the photograph she has carried in her purse for two decades.

She was the first in her family to take the bus from Claremont up the hill to the university.

At one point during the lectures at medical school, black students had to pack their notes, get up and walk [...]
Behind the closed door, in an autopsy black students were not meant to see, the uncovering and cutting of white skin (ll. 8-16)

In the extracts above, her mother's medical education is an achievement and a reminder that even at the most prestigious medical school in the country, her mother was not allowed forget that she is Black; that apartheid was in the daily details. Yet, in the photograph, her medical student mother, "poise unmarred" (l. 21), offers hope whilst inviting questions about why the speaker carried this photograph.

In the poem, "Today she is not here," Baderoon turns her attention to the scourge of gender based violence. At a family engagement party, this joyful event leads to reflection on the complexities of heterosexual marriage. An earlier union haunts the looming marriage and an abused absent sister. The missing sister previously refused help offered to get her out the abusive relationship. Baderoon's speaker lingers on these details as part of the meanings and difficulties of family portraiture. Here, Baderoon uses questions and suggestion rather than assertion. It cannot be clear why the missing sister continues to stay, but she will be at the wedding, bruises healed.

## of women's universes: Myesha Jenkins

Myesha Jenkins was born in 1948 in Washington, DC but grew up in Pasadena, California. She has a BA in Black Studies from the University of California, Riverside. Jenkins was active in the women's and anti-apartheid movements in the San Francisco Bay Area for many years prior to 1993, the year of her immigration to South Africa. Jenkins was co-founder of the immensely popular Feela Sistah! Spoken Word Collective (with Lebogang

Mashile, Napo Masheane and Ntsiki Mazwai), and works with Jozi House of Poetry, a monthly poetry event for upcoming poets. Her performances at the Grahamstown National Arts Festival, Poetry Africa 2004 and the Macufe Festical won her further critical acclaim. Widely published in literary journals and often anthologized, Jenkins is the author of *Breaking the surface* (Timbila, 2005). Her second collection and a self-produced CD are in preparation at the time of writing this article.

Aptly titled, Jenkins debut collection *Breaking the surface* (2005) is an unapologetic tapestry of discovery, love, adventure and community. Her speakers reflect on, embrace and question various communities available to them from familial to political to historic. Her opening poems frame this collection as one which prioritizes not only women's lives and connections, but also one which decidedly privileges thinking and feeling by such women. The opening poem, which is also one of Jenkins most famous poems, "Birthright" introduces a theme of women's communities that will be returned to in different ways and tones throughout not only this collection, but also beyond. This opening poem is short enough to quote here in its entirety:

I am because of women I come from women I know because of women I pray to the spirits of women I fight for women I am inspired by women I stand with women I am loved by women I too love women

I am a woman.

A birthright is inherited rather than chosen. However, in Jenkins' poem, such inheritance is crafted into that which gives the speaker identity as well as legitimacy. Her speaker claims and embraces the varying levels at which

women matter to her, and make her matter. Women are both at the centre of her universe and her entire universe: her point of origin and reference point.

"Birthright" is more than just a list of ways in which the speaker relates to women. Rhythmically like a chant, the "I" repeats connection to a world of women. Lines 1-4 build on the biological origin of babies from women, linking the literal fact to the many other ways in which women give the speaker meaning. The following lines establish a link between women, knowledge and faith/religion. Claiming women's knowledge contradicts patriarchal understanding of enlightenment (science) as masculine, just as embracing women's spiritual realms goes against validated faith (religion). Women are further worth fighting for as feminist and the source of her creative energy. Finally, women are her community of reciprocity.

Having covered all of the major areas of human endeavor—intellect, spirituality, companionship, family, justification, politics, culture and history—her world is complete. The "I," capitalized in the usual grammatical convention, stands out here because of repetition along with "women." The poem is consistent at the levels of meaning, structure and rhythm in communicating a reinforced bond between "I" and "women". This centrality of women is sustained throughout the poem. Later poems such as "Smell she" and "Revolutionary woman" build on what it means to reflect on this community of women.

In "Smell she," the woman's smells are not those conventionally mythologized in patriarchal femininities. She is neither perfumed nor deviant. Instead, Jenkins uses the world of smells to give her reader entry into nonphysical details of this woman's life. Titled "Smell she" rather than "Smell her," makes the discussed woman grammatical subject rather than the object of the sentence. The slight jarring caused by use of non-standard grammar in the naming serves the jarring caused at the conceptual level; this is not the usual access we have to such a woman in documentary and anthropological discourse. In Jenkins' poem, she is who matters and not the passive object of the poet's gaze. This is particularly important because of who "she" is: a woman who works with the soil or lives in a rural area because she smells of "mud and grass" (1.3). In other words, the subject of Jenkins' poem is the much mythologized and overwritten rural African woman, appearing elsewhere earth mother, victim, and usually helpless. "Smell she" invites a different kind of engagement with her, an awareness of her agency and the ways in which, like all human beings she is not fully knowable. Smell is an elusive sense, the terrain of the trace rather than the concrete. Through her smells, we catch hints of her agency, know that she

cooks because she smells of "smoke and paraffin" (l. 6), engages in other physical activity because of her "glistening beads of sweat" (l. 7). Jenkins' is a working, moving woman whose smells blend in "Sunlight soap/and the pungent tobacco/in her pocket" (l. 11-2).

"Smell she" offers its readers layers of scents rather than a body of evidence. Her odors hint at who she is, at her location, her choices and her agency. The tobacco in her pocket staining her tissue point to this, as does the brand of soap. Jenkins retains some questions and ambiguity on the assertion of this woman's agency, and the reader may well ask about the Sunlight soap: the body soap or the laundry one, given the high circulation of both. Through the layers of her smells, we imagine something about this woman's life, but are not able to come to certainty. In other words, although she is represented, she is not defined, as Jenkins chooses open-endedness rather than prescription.

The poem "Revolutionary woman," like "Smell she," addresses the ways in which women are languaged and recognized across different traditions. "Revolutionary woman" deals with the difficulty of relating to women who defy patriarchal categorization. The speaker declares:

Don't admire a revolutionary woman No one will encourage that

To want to be A relentless killer woman

> A militant organising mother woman An earth strong rooted woman An intelligent courageous leader woman A blood witch warrior woman An unassuming worker-bee spy woman (l. 1-9).

While such women are difficult to handle for patriarchy, they nonetheless are not rare. In the poem, Jenkins creates a community of renegade women. Naming women who fit the categories of women described in the excerpted lines above, Jenkins asserts that women like this exist all over the world. They are activists whose names are recognizable from movements in South Africa, the Americas, Palestine and Vietnam. Their apparent contradictions do not seem to hamper them from living lives hard to make sense of in patriarchal vocabulary. The quandary Jenkins addresses is that women like this are not supposed to exist; they are unnatural/abnormal and yet they are abundantly recognizable. The refrain "kind of woman" after a line describing or naming women, gestures at many other women

just like these ones whose names line the page, all over the world. We know some of their names, but women globally carry complex identities because there are infinite possible ways of inhabiting femininity.

In the poems above, as well as in many others besides, Jenkins offers a liberating vision of women's community. Community is envisioned as a space built on the recognition of difference, but where such differences are not arranged as hierarchy. Communities are sites of diversity, as an inescapable fact as well as a necessity in Jenkins' vision.

Jenkins' reflection on the lives of women is not limited to community. In "Dream girl," her speaker is irritated by how little girls have to project a hard exterior in order to live their dreams without persecution. What the speaker offers is a critique that invites us to re-examine the exteriors women and girls put up as well as the conditions that push them into such roles as part of widening possibilities for inhabiting femininity. Patriarchy places pressure on women to pretend to be tough and fearless, to modulate behavior as a condition for safety. However, this is a false promise, as explored in a later poem, "Another woman is dead." All of the ways in which "another woman" dies suggest that she is different women. Each time she dies from gender based violence. In all the stanzas, she knows the man who kills her. These women are in a radically different state than Jenkins' other women who encounter men in playful, sexual, intimate, political and loving settings. In other words, the strength of women's chosen communities does not exclude rewarding participation in relationships across gender. At the same time, gender based violence is a constant haunting for women in South Africa.

In all of Jenkins poems, the speaking "I" is very strong, and her personas have a clear sense of belonging. She has a community that she returns to, made up primarily of women. She returns again to the textures of women's lives, exploring the meanings, gaps, dangers and joys in their lives. She dwells on who they might be, how they live, what they chose and who they love. However, such a characterization of this poet's body of work also simplifies a layered text in order to better discuss it comparatively. Her treatment of community as difference is one of the many strands that exist in Jenkins' representations and theorization of women beyond the obvious.

While presenting diversity as a fact of life and imagination, Jenkins charts a textured, layered universe which highlights the meanings of women's lives. Here, difference is not deified and a woman-centered universe is complex in its juxtaposition of apparent opposites. Nonetheless conviction enables open exploration of the possibilities opened up by this engagement with difference. While many of her poems are joyful and gentle, hers is not an

easy kinship. Jenkins plays around with structure and packs much into her poems even as she has a particular preference for short poems.

In many respects, Jenkins' poetry offers a vision of self-reflective feminism in her preferred terms of engagement and the space they clear. Consequently, her poetry values intertextuality as part of inviting questions such as what are we creating? And what is the relationship between recognition and creation/creativity?

#### everywhere inside of me: Lebogang Mashile

Lebogang Mashile was born in 1979 in Providence, Rhode Island to exiled South African parents. Returning to South Africa on the eve of the first democratic elections, she later graduated with a BA in International Relations and Law from the University of the Witwatersrand. The most prominent South African poet, she conceived of, executive produced and presented L'atitude (2004-7), a prime time television series which fused a travel show with poetic reflection. Mashile was co-founder of the immensely popular Feela Sistah! Spoken Word Collective (with Myesha Jenkins, Napo Masheane and Ntsiki Mazwai). An actor, who has had significant theatre and film roles in productions including Hotel Rwanda (2004), and released a self-produced 19-track CD, Lebo Mashile Live (2005), she is the author of In a ribbon of rhythm (Oshun, 2005) and Flying above the sky (self-published, 2008). Mashile has performed at numerous poetry and literature festivals internationally, and at President Mbeki's inauguration 2004. Mashile was awarded the NOMA Award for Publishing in Africa in 2006.

In her debut collection, Mashile brought together a range of poems some of which had been so familiar to the South African public, that they had become refrains. These included the title poem of *In a ribbon of rhythm* as well as the signature poem for her television show, "What is L'atitude." Others found echoes, emulation and clear imitation in a range of televised poetry events. Such proceedings included the specific poems and delivery style written by poet characters in advertisements and drama series alike. In an oft-quoted article, feminist essayist, Gail Smith (2005: 6) noted of Mashile:

Lebo Mashile is a wordsmith extraordinaire whose poetry has tapped into the zeitgeist of the new urban underground, and speaks of love and 'liking it deep sometimes,' identity, abuse, 'smoking spliffs with Jesus Christ' and the travails of being a black girl negotiating the streets of Jozi. Smith points here as much to Mashile's place in the South African literary scene as she does of the poet's thematic range. Mashile is widely celebrated for her performed poetry as much as she is recognized for her words on the page. Some of Mashile's regular themes are the lives of women, cultures of music and diaspora. Rhetorically, her personas linger over embraced and admired traits and soften empathetically when faced with the wounded.

In "Tomorrow's daughters," she begins,

I want to write a poem
About pretty black girls
Who don't relax and lie their dreams away
Voices that curl
The straight edges of history
Hair thin slices of movement
Turning the world kinky (ll. 1-7)

This poem draws on the world of Black women's/girl's global hair culture to speak about creating a necessary and affirming space. The desired action is already enacted through declaration since Mashile writes the poem her speaker desires. At the same time, the poem gestures to a large project of creating poetry that validates Black girls' lives as a part of the human experience. In the curling voice is the echo of chemically unaltered hair. Mining the conflicted world of Black women's hair processing, Mashile offers a vision of creative space that requires no further work on the body as condition for acceptance and worth. Instead, here history's linearity will be adapted to make room for more creative, circular narratives and realities than the dominant straight edges. Mashile's poem critiques more than the mere elision of "pretty black girls" from linear histories. In using "straight edges" to delineate this linearity, the poet also hints as the effects of such boundaries: clear ends that leave no room for flexibility and ambiguity.

Instead, the curling voice in the poems will be like the curling hair unaltered and un-weakened by chemical straighteners (hair relaxers) and corrosive ingredients (lye). The curling voice also echoes the "curling iron" so that the former describes both a curly voice but also a voice that effectively curls history. Mashile uses 'lie' to hint at 'lye' since her poetry will neither erase nor modify the dreams of these "pretty black girls." In Mashile's series of puns, the language and proposed content remain entangled.

Using a familiar idiom, she inverts the conventional expectations of beauty to make the "pretty" curly haired, rather than straight. In this manner, Mashile crafts a language that places these girls at the centre without pre-

conditions; it is also a world that adapts to better reflect these girls' realities and experiences. In this equally desired and realized poem, such girls will neither be Other nor need to alter themselves in order to fit in.

Recognizing that this is a difficult project, Mashile's persona conjures up Emily Dickinson, the talented US poet whose contribution was only appreciated after her death. Mashile's speaker, like Dickinson, is prepared to produce poetry that goes against the conventions of her time, emerging with poems which craft their own idiom. However, she hopes that the price to pay is not equivalent to the madness that Dickinson suffered as her poems were "standardized" to fit into the norms of the time, or hidden in drawers as Dickinson would not leave her room in later life.

The "pretty black girls" will be taught

How to look at their hearts
With eyes blarring at full blast
The way you did
Together we can build a bridge
To the promise in their faces
And pull them towards poems
By pretty black girls
Wearing crowns of change (ll. 19-26)

The project that Mashile's speaker fantasizes about will yield change. It will uncover community and collective affirmation, rather than reclusive mental torment in its poet, as Dickinson's abundant but unappreciated poetry was during her lifetime. The aspiration finds resonance with Mashile's experiences of studying, and reading poetry, as related to Barbara Boswell:

As a woman, you get used to the challenge of finding your voice where it isn't obvious. I think men have to get used to that too. I think they should. I mean, you go to school and you find yourself in Shakespeare, you've got to find yourself in Othello and Njabulo Ndebele, you have to find yourself in Chinua Achebe, you have to find yourself in Keorapetse Kgotsitsile and you do. Nobody apologises and says, "Oh sorry little black girl, this isn't a voice which speaks to you." I mean, you're happy if they're black, never mind a woman. You kiss the ground the day you read Toni Morrison for the first time. (Mashile 2002: np)

Whereas Mashile has had to "find herself" in literature deemed univer-

sally human, she nonetheless also recognizes the need for poetry that is specific and direct. The "pretty black girls" in her poem need not *only* find themselves in places where their voices are not obvious. On offer will be a vision of the world that reflects and affirms them too. This is part of creating a vision of tomorrow that varies from the inheritance of yesterday and today's daughters.

Like Mashile encountering Morrison, the "pretty black girls" will experience joyful recognition when they read her poem. Although spoken of in the singular, Mashile's poems carry traces of this project. Indeed, in several of the poems, she focuses on the highly varied textures of Black girls' and women's lives.

Anti-essentialist, Mashile's repertoire also contains criticism of the kinds of people who cannot be incorporated into this vision of change and affirmation. Both collections contain speakers whose rebuke require little physical space on the page.

In the poem, "The most powerful (black) woman in the world," from *In a ribbon of rhythm*, the speaker denounces this powerful woman who "salivates for the feel of human bones" (l. 3). Mashile writes:

She will be remembered as the one Who gave us permission to climb To the highest echelons of evil And show that we are not the same (l. 5-8)

The above lines offer a critique of achievement if it is only to pursue power for destructive ends. Distancing herself from this woman whose power is violent, the speaker also draws attention to the limits of sisterhood. Indeed, it is not every woman who can be embraced, celebrated and treated with gentle attention. The poem also shows that there are times when differences are politically intolerable. Therefore even as diversity is inevitable, the specific ways in which women exercise agency in the world matters. The responses these (Black) women elicit, then, is directly informed by the textures and consequences of their actions.

In her second collection, *Flying above the sky* (2008), Mashile returns to the heterogeneity of women's lives. Interested in understanding those differences and humanizing them, in "What kind of woman," she asks

What kind of woman leaves? What kind of woman stays?

# What kind of woman kills? What kind of woman prays? (l. 1-4)

But the momentum builds up so that by line 30, her speaker is asking:

What kind of woman dreams
What kind of woman sleeps?
What kind of woman practices the art of living
what she preaches?
What kind of woman believes that her highest desire
is within the scope of her reach?
What kind of woman knows that what she needs
to learn is exactly what she teaches?
What kind of woman conforms to her own norms
as society chastises her for the codes she breaches?
(1. 30-39)

The poem has 48 lines over which the tempo and entanglements increase. Inversely, Mashile's poem grows gentler and slower with each stanza. From the crisp sentences of the first stanza which probe categories in straightforward ways, the speaker goes on to consider human complexity through questions that already hint at possible answers, and sometimes those that border on the rhetorical. With each development, the questions and answers prove more rewarding for the speaker (and reader), hinting at play and joyful possibility. By line 30, the women are self-defined, freer and better able to embrace both calm ("sleep") and possibility ("dream"). They are no longer reactive women who can be understood only through isolated behavior.

In lines 32-3, the woman is able to choose consistency. What she proposes is in line with how she lives her life. In these lines, such existence is neither easy nor pervasive; women are usually pressured to exist as expected, rather than as desired. The woman in lines 32-3 has moved through this coercion and can offer insights for living her convictions. The same applies to the woman in lines 38-39. Lines 34-7 offer a vision of a woman so empowered and convinced of her own worth that she spends time and energy on what matters to her. Confident, she believes in her capacity to live out her desires. Assured, she circulates what is of value, understanding that what she "needs" is available for co-creation and circulation in the world. As the poem develops, the questions offer more insight as questions illuminate multiple realities.

Although different in specific focus, the poem "Womanchild" also broaches the continuities of violence in women's lives. For Mashile, the patriarchal violence continuum begins with child abuse whether directly sexual or in the practice of child brides. In this poem, she traces the difficulties of surviving such violence, given the pervasiveness of such problems. Her global examples emphasize the large patterns of misogyny and therefore the magnitude of the efforts needed to overcome them. The poem can be read as a reflection and tribute to those who attempt the painful work of survival. "Womanchild" links directly to another poem in Mashile's second collection, "A daughter's wish." The stories and techniques of survival are valuable because they chart new ways to healing and possibility. They also enable freer lives for future women. In an imaginary conversation with enabling foremothers, Mashile's speaker notes:

When they ask of you tomorrow
I will tell them that you are alive
everywhere inside of me
especially where I love myself
more than you did
where I love myself
almost as much as you did (ll. 25-31)

Where "Womanchild" focused on the scale of patriarchal inscription, "A daughter's wish" locates Mashile's speaker in a place here she has access to varied women's heritage. Here it is the patterns of solidarity and the gains towards more women-friendly realities that are indexed. The daughter benefits directly from the struggles of women before her; her experience of freedom is mindful of this. The continuities in relationships to self suggest that the daughter is also part of building on the heritage left for her so that she, too, may be an enabling foremother.

## Finding a way to define the line: Makhosazana Xaba

Makhosazana Xaba was born in 1957 in Greytown, and grew up in Ndaleni. Xaba is a midwife, biographer, activist, and development worker. She holds an MA in Creative Writing from the University of the Witwatersrand. Her poetry is widely anthologized, and she is a regular reader at Poetry and Literature Festivals in South Africa. Xaba was awarded the Deon Hofmeyr Award for Creative Writing in 2005 and a Writing Fellowship at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER) in 2006-7. She is the author of *These hands* (Timbila, 2005) and *Tongues of their mothers* (University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2008).

In "The language of knowing" from *These hands*, Makhosazana Xaba's speaker notes of the 'new language' learnt without recourse to the usual

#### ways and avenues:

It's the language of looking, of looking and seeing, seeing then knowing, knowing without evidence beyond the looking
[...]
The language of recognising community through seeing and knowing. (ll. 12-25)

The poem details ways of creating knowledge and meaning. The ones focused on exist outside of the conventional and elevated. Nonetheless, this language which is attentive to these nuances already exists in the world because the speaker points out that "It's a universal language" (l. 9). In this language, connection and specificity are possible in equal parts. Therefore this universal language is nonetheless a space where the specific things she wants to say are her own. The entry of this new language offers a whole new set of rules for learning. It offers no "tutor" or "mother-tongue speaker" (l. 2/7), no intention to acquire an additional language (l.3). It simply arrives, takes her by surprise but proves to be such joyful discovery that she embraces it. Clearly, to encounter and imbibe such knowledge, be part of this new linguistic space offers poetry.

The title poem of her debut collection, placed immediately after the poem above (on the opposite page) expands on this new language. In "These hands", Xaba builds on the new forms of knowing. The opening lines of the first four stanzas repeatedly draw attention to the knowing hands before they are revealed to be hands that "remember/recall" (stanzas 5, 6, 7).

"These hands" is a poem that juxtaposes apparent contradictions through the revelation of an entire life. These hands are not simply channel or limb. They exist as body, spirit and mind in Xaba's poem; the hands fuse together what this means by becoming the terrain of experience and reflection. The hands define the speaker.

These same hands felt "putrid puss/from oozing wounds" (l. 2-3) and "warmth/of gushing blood from gaping bodily spaces" (l. 9-11) and "mucus, sliding/ out of orifices" (l. 13-14). These graphic details relate hands that have encountered infected wounds and tried to heal these. The owner of the hands has not run or turned away from the site of wounding and possible death in others. The hands have touched other bodies in disrepair. At other times, these hands are familiar with the "varying forms/of feacal

formations" (l. 6-7). It matters little whether these were encountered as either healer or in the process of changing baby nappies. Both experiences would be interventions, offering assistance to those rendered helpless, unable to change themselves.

The poem constantly blurs whether the hands are healing a broken body or childcare, these are the unclear boundaries of the body. The details of bodily emissions are listed matter-of-factly, in the ways people in the medical profession are wont to do. Each of these encounters are ordinary for medical professionals, suggesting that the hands belong to one so placed, or previously so engaged, as indeed the poet. All these encounters are about intimately touching the body of another, encountering it in quite a direct way.

It is against this backdrop that the shift in stanza four startles. From being life saving and affirming, the hands now become a soldier's hands. These same hands are equally familiar with the above as they are with "the metallic feel/ of numerous guns/when the telling click was heard" (l. 16-19), "grenades/ready for the release of destruction" (l. 22-24).

These hands belong to a healing, killing, midwife:

These hands have felt pulsating hearts over extended abdomens, the opening mouths of wombs, they know the grasp of minute, minute-old clenched fists. (l. 35-41)

These hands have additional dimensions in their previous lives because they have also been responsible for "producing vibrations/from receiving lovers" (l. 49-50). Much detail is provided over eleven stanzas of their experiences. Suddenly, the mundane is squashed together in stanza 12. These activities include driving, fixing households, holding various tools and implements, and turning switches on and off. Then, in the final stanza, the hands are in love with the written word:

These hands now caress the keyboard, fondle pens that massage papers, weaning fear, weaving words, wishing with every finger print that this relationship would last forever. (l. 63-71)

I have spent considerable time on this poem because it evinces Xaba signature aesthetic: juxtaposing vastly different lives and systems of logic to great success. As she remarked elsewhere:

What is important to acknowledge and speak about, to be public and unapologetic about is that as women we have multiple selves, we have multiple lives, multiple identities and we need to honour them all. *That* to me is important (Xaba 2008a: 4).

Consequently, the hands are the embodiment of lived contradiction and multiplicity. Such hands capture the untidiness of women's lives and it is fitting that they should be writing hands, since they are better able to represent variety and discomfit than would more unchanging hands.

Coming at the layered lives of women from a different angle in the poem "In the silence of a lifetime," Xaba comments on the cumulative rapes of a single woman. Much South African public discourse relies on the pressure for women to "break the silence" around gender-based violence. However, there is little regard for the many ways in which such silences cannot be broken, or the ways in which breakers of the silence receive inadequate support. The poem is equally open to readings of this as one woman as it is of these stanzas as describing different woman. Nonetheless, the picture of the many forms and sources of rape is cumulative. In each rape case, she knows the men involved intimately, and they include "her uncle" (1. 2), a gang rape by school mates, a date-rape, rape by her husband, then her work colleagues and, finally, in old age by a neighbor. These poems were published around the time of former national vice president Jacob Zuma's trial which highlighted the many ways in which the South African legal system refuses to deal with the fact of women's multiple rapes. Public discourse often mocked the complaintant's characterization of the accused as her uncle, even though she had addressed him in this manner for most of her life. She was also dismissed as disturbed when she revealed that she had been raped more than once prior to this case. This poem is direct about the varied and extensive experiences of rape by girls and women of all ages, reinforcing the findings of feminist researchers and activists that multiple rapes are not unheard of.

The speaker in "Suggestions please" is exasperated for slightly different reasons. She is a Black woman who feels routinely harassed in the daily course of going about her business in public places. The numerous swear words encountered by her constantly pierce through whatever else she may be trying to focus on. The italicized dialogue, swear words and put downs contrast with her thoughts rendered in regular font format. The question she returns to is about appropriate response, hence the title of the poem.

What overwhelms her are the deafening public readings that harm her. These range from swear words using women's vaginas from men she will not respond to in the street to white women who assume she must be the hired help. These women constantly ask if she works at the shops she frequents even though she wears no uniform, unlike all other staff. Her own name, presented in the shortened version as Khosi, is inserted in the dialogue but seems unnoticed. This adds to the experienced frustration since all of this happens "nine years of democracy" later.

She adopts a radically different speaker in "For Fanny Ann Eddy," a short poem about the speaker's poetic difficulty linked to the murdered Sierra Leonean lesbian activist. Xaba's speaker looks both for a poem about Ms. Eddy and for the words to write such a poem herself. This process lasts several months, and finally exhausted from the effort, the speaker allows this short poem to form.

In its closing, Xaba's speaker fails to account for this absence, deciding "Maybe women like you still bewilder some, even poets/This way I salute you and your legacy" (l. 6-8). The last line echoes and connects with the South African poet laureate Keorapetse Kgositsile's work. This way I salute you is the title of a collection of tribute poems to writers, poets, musicians and activists. The dedications are drawn from the African continent and diaspora, with one Filipino and Mongolian poet-activist each. The actual line is drawn from the third stanza of Kgositsile's "Song for Ilva Mackay and Mongane":

Here I meet you and this way I salute you with bloodstains on my tongue (l. 25-27)

Xaba brings to mind Kgositsile's poetic embrace of artists who were/are also activists, affirming the fusion of art and politics. The evoked community created in the original collection share battle scars and joys, and this reading is echoed in Xaba's poem to Eddy.

#### Conclusion

In her pioneering work on Black women's writing post-apartheid, Barbara Boswell reminds us of the importance of attention to detail in individual writers' lives at the same time as tracking and understanding the role of shared Black women's creative energies at this time. Writing on WEAVE, a Black women writers' collective, she takes their words seriously across different formats. Against this backdrop, Boswell observes that "[i]n order for black women to develop into writers, reimagining and reinventing the self is necessary" (Boswell 2003: 583).

Boswell's observation resonates with my analysis of the poets I have turned my attention to in this paper. Although Baderoon, Jenkins, Mashile and Xaba have very individual styles, preferences and ranges, each returns to a reinvention of the self through her diverse speakers.

Above, I have selected poems from each poet to demonstrate how they differently craft a space from which to explore a Black feminist imagination. Each poet offers us a vision that widens what is conventionally understood as political through their treatment of the heterogeneity in women's lives.

Reading them against one another also allows for the emergence of similarities across the poets' work. Among the most obvious traits are how each poet chooses gentleness, sometimes called a 'softening' or 'embrace' in my analysis above, when speaking about women's suffering and lives. Each poet also chooses a questioning mode, sometimes tinged with anger, at other times with pathos, when encountering broken women's bodies and spirits. This empathy takes women's agency seriously at the same time that it pauses in the face of abuse. In Xaba's "In the silence of a lifetime," "Baderoon's "Today she is not here," Mashile's "Womanchild" and Jenkins' "Another woman is dead," there is no wavering over how endemic gender based violence is: in all of these poems, it is deadly, haunting, personal and political.

Community is longed for in Baderoon, crafted and revisited in Jenkins and Xaba, and defended in Mashile. For these poets claiming women and women's spaces does not just mean recognition, but also living with difficulty. Jenkins and Xaba suggest that women encounter each other differently, but with chosen tenderness, akin to Baderoon's "softening" and Mashile's protectiveness for achieved affinity.

Notice, for example, how similar in focus Mashile's "Tomorrow's daughters" is to Jenkins' "Dream girl," even though they are vastly different poems stylistically. Both poets feel a responsible connection to Black girls and young

women. Mashile's girls will also not have to "toughen up"; she will write a poem that affirms them and permits them to be.

Similarly, the woman to whom "these hands" belong could be Jenkins' "Revolutionary woman" and she who sits with her daily contradictions in her body as per Baderoon's "I forget to look." She is part of the answer to Mashile's "What kind of woman."

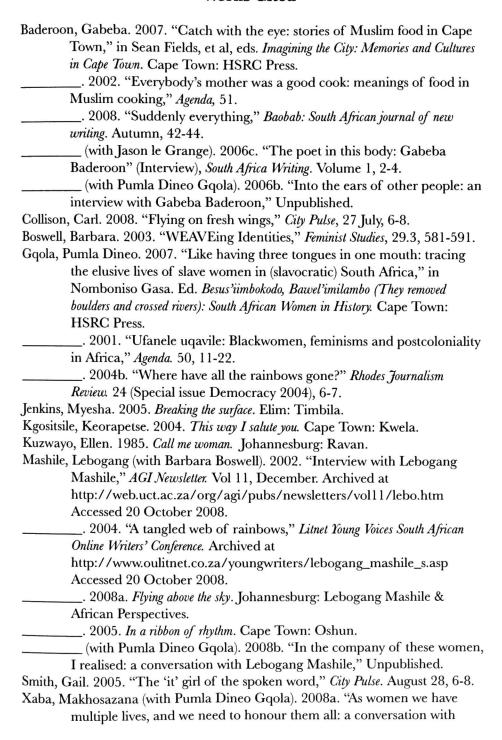
The project of writing and being written is revisited in various poems analyzed above, from Xaba's "The language of knowing" and her final stanza to "These hands," Mashile's poem to "pretty black girls" to Jenkins' "Smell she." Baderoon approaches the same obliquely through the mis-written address in "Point of view." Words matter both for historical reasons and as a critical tool for creating more enabling possibilities.

As feminists, all of these poets consciously place women's and girl's lives at the center of their writing, returning to varied experiences, locations and textures. Baderoon uses the intimate and domestic as entry to larger political openings. These women's spaces are chosen as perspectives from which to theorize and craft a specific Black feminist aesthetic. Jenkins' concentrated tenderness and recognition of diversity as a fact of community stand out as central to her universes of women. Indeed, she invites the recognition that all of us have to share this planet, inspiring appreciation for variety. Xaba's attentiveness to texture and finesse at letting the apparently mutually exclusive rub against each other foregrounds the complexities that are women's lives. For Mashile, the world contains edges that need to be curled in her own image, because if community matters, then it must be built and defended as she creates a heritage and literary worlds worth leaving behind.

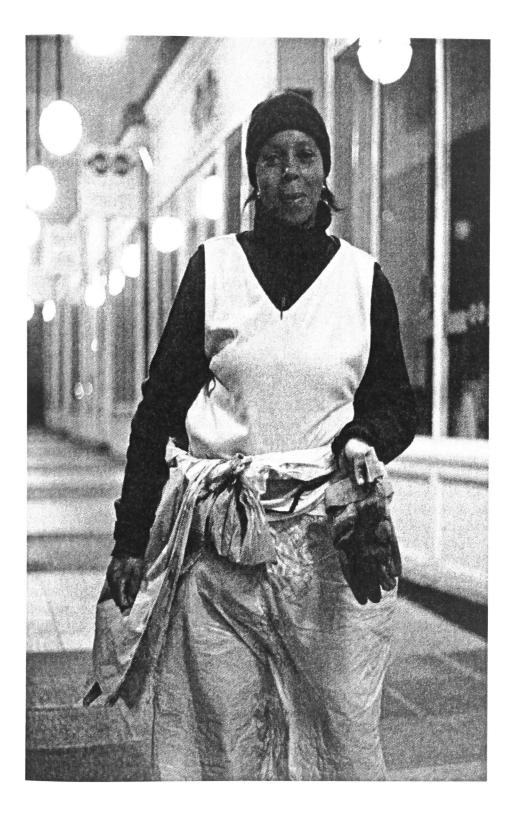
Not only do the works of the poets analyzed here question received notions of the political in relation to South African literature, they suggest different idioms altogether. These are not marginal poets, reacting, resisting and asserting that they too matter. Rather, they are at the vanguard of imagining possibility into being, attentive to various pasts, with a clear eye on a future that must still be realized. They show the limitations of much of our current literary critical vocabulary within South African studies. The engaged Black feminist idiom in the words of these writers "allows the reader/spectator to move to a different level of aesthetic response, one that is informed by a sense of possibility and opening rather than closure" (Boyce Davies 1995: 6). Their work, as well as the work of some others not analyzed here, offers exciting possibilities for literary scholars given that "the academy generally operates on the basis of the production of new knowledges and redefinitions of existing models" (Boyce Davies 1995: 6).

As we embark on the work of under of Black women in South African processed about creative and institutional locations.	poetry, these po	ets also necessit	ate a wider
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# "I HAVE LEARNED TO HEAR MORE ACUTELY": AESTHETICS, AGENCY AND THE READER IN CONTEMPORARY SOUTH AFRICAN POETRY

Kelwyn Sole

There can be no doubt that South Africa's liberation motivated an explosion of social energy and turmoil among its people, the aftershocks of which are still discernible, publicly and privately, physically and psychically. In poetry, as in many other spheres of human expression, it is clear that this is the case. It may be true, as both editor/poet Robert Berold and poet/politician Jeremy Cronin have observed, that poetry is the most marginalised of all literary forms. Nevertheless, the decade and a half since liberation has seen a plethora of venues and institutions emerge that are prepared to publish, or stage, poetic output. This enthusiasm sometime emerges from the most unlikely of quarters. In the 1990s, for instance, Bobby Skinstad ascribed an unexpected win over a top New Zealand side to his recitation of W.E. Henley's *Invictus* to the Western Stormers before the match; while right-wing politician Eugene Terra'blanche – confessing that he often jotted down scraps of poems on his Lexington packet – released a CD of nature poems, noting that "If the muse inspires me, I will write. In the meantime the political demons won't let me be." This is only the tip of the iceberg: to select only a few incidents from the same decade at random, an anthology of poetry was brought out to commemorate the inauguration of Thabo Mbeki's presidency; poetry workshops were taken to Gauteng prisons; poets appeared in magazine fashion shoots, and became involved in political debate and legislation: for instance, the poet Antije Krog was invited to write a preamble to a white paper of the Department of Water Affairs.<sup>2</sup>

Even so, poetry is regarded by a majority of people as a rather unimportant activity. Nevertheless, it can be argued that the choices, and disagreements, that have taken place in South African poetry since liberation rehearse and retrace – in highly mediated forms – the shifts, debates and conflicts that have occurred elsewhere in the country as regards many and diverse issues. These include questions of political priorities and goals, apperceptions of beauty, fitness and order, questions of identity and self-worth, and the very nature and direction – both real and desired – of the nation's consciousness and imagination. At the same time, the symbolic weight of the figure of 'the poet' has taken on extraordinary dimensions, traceable back to (while not understandable reductively in terms of) the figure of poet-as-prophet-and- soothsayer familiar both from the legacy of European Romanticism

and from that pertaining to the traditional social role of the African praise poet.

Of course, all this cannot be understood in isolation from the imprint, on poetry, of a society riven by divisions of class, gender, and locality, as well as the seemingly huge, immediately visible fissures of race and ethnicity. Nevertheless, the figure of the poet seems to pop up in extremely unlikely areas these days: on television, as an endorser of motor cars, banks, and other commodities: as a guest on sitcoms and lifestyle programmes, and as a model for emulation in other fields as well.

#### TV advertisement: First National Bank (FNB)

The sun is rising
A new day is dawning
And together we are going forward
Here's to those who rise up
And seize the day with both hands
To those who love their children
And enlighten them
To the beauty of their origins
May fortune flow like a river
To those who love South Africa
And have their roots in her earth
Like this tree
May we all share
In the bounty
That will hang from the branches

Zolani Mkhiva

(silhouette of a praise-poet; followed by the FNB logo:

a silhouette of a tree in front of a rising sun)

This modelling may take bizarre forms: as the winner of the 2004 Free Market Award, Herman Mashaba, reminds us in a newspaper article, "In some ways I would argue that the entrepreneur is the *poet* of the private sector, the one who is brave enough to take risks, to ignore the pessimists in our midst."<sup>3</sup>

More to the point, poets themselves have been drawn into debates about their possible roles in a future society. The debates around such roles pivot around contrasting notions of self-definition, purpose, and targeted audience. The differing, sometimes wildly contradictory, viewpoints in these debates are instructive of the pressures of a society where, a decade and a half after formal liberation, it is clear that there is (in Cronin's term) a "shortfall" between many people's idealistic aspirations for their lives after apartheid and current realities on the ground.

It is easy enough to note that, on the simplest level, poetry is one of the media available for what David Simpson (in another context) calls "the domestic human project of encouraging sympathy for others by way of shared feelings." In a society with a past of deep social discord, this can come to seem the most radical of projects. So, in a national arena now available for wider cultural and social intermingling, all its commentators perceive a less narrowly conceived scope for poetry than in the apartheid years. Most cited of these is a renewed interest in examining the nuanced, ambiguous or contradictory realities of everyday human existence, both in township and in suburb — an impulse inspired by the influential work of Njabulo Ndebele.

In some circles, what the new political dispensation has allowed poets is a freedom from all compulsions towards politically or socially motivated verse: poetry, it is thought, should concentrate on its traditional concerns with the life of the individual, and scorn the public or political arena. On the other hand, others insisted that poetry should continue to have a social purpose and targets. A number of such motivations came from obvious sources: those poets with public or political profiles, or those close to governmental circles. Thus, in a 1993 interview, Mongane Serote asks, "What is it that we should do that all South Africans begin to feel that this is their country?"6 Such a question may not seem immediately political, but it is: highlighting questions pertaining to the socialisation of individuals towards a new goal, that of nation-building. Here, writers and poets can, in the words of the first national laureate Mazisi Kunene in an interview in Southern African Review of Books, help "establish a direction and ... create a vision" around matters of "how to build a society; how to build a different ethical order." These kinds of formulation seem to have a strong appeal for politicians. In statements such as these, citizenship is assumed to be a necessary conjunction and reciprocal relationship between society, cultural group and individual, all viewed in congruent terms: notions familiar from run-of-the-mill bourgeois social science. Poetry stemming from such a viewpoint continues to be written and performed, at the moment with increasing intensity: among its themes alia are the exploration of identity, especially African identity; the advocacy of equal status for previously marginalised groups, and the charting of the passage of the individual in his or her journey towards a

putatively more authentic state of being.

However, stemming from such concerns are sharp conflicts among poets as to their relationship to the changes, not only in socio-political life, but also in the economics of South African culture. A number of poets, such as Mzwakhe and Lebo Mashile, see themselves these days first and foremost as 'performers.' This brings a different mindset and set of priorities to poets' activities and sense of responsibility: voiced succinctly in a presenter's question to Mzwakhe on the television programme 'Curious Culture' in June 2006: "There is no way you could have let June 16 pass you by. What have you packaged?"

On the other hand, the 1990s also saw the rise of a significant group of poets, writing in English, who did not seem to stick to either the guidelines of nation-building nor submit to economic pressures. While they tended to accept a social role, they raised their voices very specifically against writing a poetry merely functional to immediate political ends: dismissing, to cite Rampolokeng, the "bring-on-the-poet-to-lick-the-stage-clean-for-the-politicians thing."9 Such a viewpoint clearly sets itself against those who are content to seek patrons in power, or praise power. In a recent short piece Vonani Bila, for one, has inveighed against poets performing on demand at corporate and government functions, remarking that "you can call these clowns anything, but certainly not poets."10 Some poets have extended questions about social priorities and the use or misuse of power to a wider terrain: Tatamkhulu Afrika, for instance, suggests in a 1992 interview that poets should raise their voices against the continuing disparities of wealth and privilege in the country.11 Others, such as Rustum Kozain and Ari Sitas, voice less than empathetic views about the national obsession with identity politics and individual self-advancement. In a 1995 statement, Sitas observes that "We are in a time when new kinds of tribalisms are being remembered and reinvented. ... My struggle is against these new tribalisms - they're false."12

Yet this is only one aspect. In a country where, by the time negotiations were underway, a virtual state of civil war existed, and where social dislocation and individual confusion and trauma were rife, poetry has been perceived in some quarters as bearing a healing potential. In particular, use of the elegy and lyric were mentioned in this regard – as the latter (especially) is by nature imbued with possibilities for self-expression, -exploration and revelation. Viewpoints put forward for poetry's role here extend all the way from the public to the private. At one end of the scale, Berold, in the poetry journal *New Coin*, suggests that, in the turbulent early years of freedom, poets "who can bring the differing fragments of reality together will have

an important healing function"; at the other, the young unpublished poet Kabomo, a participant at the Urban Voices Festival in 2004, notes that he started to write poetry because he could not afford therapy.<sup>13</sup>

A noteworthy amount of the poetic utterance forthcoming in the first decade of freedom was emotional and angry. The depth and extent of this is worthy of note. Potentially at odds with the 'nation-building' appeals quoted above, a belief emerged from poets of varying social positions and with differing political beliefs that poetry should be by nature antagonistic to the rhetoric and goals of politicians, as well as to any rhetorical uses of language. Chris Mann thus perceives poets as needing to "grab and shake by the scruff of the neck all jargon, cant and doublespeak ... the partisan, sectarian and doctrinaire voice, the lie private, commercial and political"; while Cronin – with a political position far removed from Mann – suggests that poetry "tends to be disruptive of received meanings." <sup>14</sup> Such suggestions are more memorable when they happen in poems. Peter Horn warns against the fact that, in all eras, words rendered by and to the powerful become "frozen speech" ('Exchange control'); Mbongeni Khumalo tells his audience 'You / Ad-mire the content of my poetry, but you / Don't listen to the content ... / Your minds / Are full of foolstops!' ('You'); Seitlhamo Motsapi puns in the poems on the world of what he calls 'politricks' and 'politishams,' and so on.

These disagreements about poets' role speak powerfully to a seemingly distinct area, that of aesthetics. The explosion of energy immediately postliberation has gone hand in hand with a willingness to explore new states of consciousness, modes of being and senses of self. Poetry, perhaps due to the very fact that it is a marginal creative activity that does not necessarily require more than a minimum of resources or institutional support, has been a fruitful basis from which individuals may quickly and easily explore and express the nuances of a changing world, and their own individual transmogrifications within it. New socio-economic, political and cultural promises and challenges during the 1990s have directed a great deal of poetry produced to explore new directions and paths, both in terms of form and content. And – as form and content are inextricably linked – it has been the case that, often, new thematic directions have demanded a fresh look at form. This in turn requires aesthetic assumptions to be re-examined and interrogated, and a critical scrutiny of the canon of South African poetry and, indeed, literature, to be undertaken.

There was overt debate during the 1990s about these questions, which gives some sense of the multiplicity of new poetic strata being assayed. Ingrid de Kok, for instance, notes that elegaic verse may come into its own, especially

in the ambience of loss, grieving and memory associated with the period of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and beyond.<sup>15</sup> In his poem "Even the Dead," Cronin defines the 'aesthetic' in opposition to what he terms the 'anaesthetic.' Memorably in one poem, *via* a reference to Seamus Heaney, he notes:

Our contemporary, the great Northern Ireland poet,

Writes from within and for A culture that assumes Homer, Spenser, Yeats.

I live in a country with eleven official languages, Mass illiteracy, and a shaky memory.

Here it is safe to assume Nothing at all...

('Three Reasons for a Mixed, Umrabulo, Round-the-Corner Poetry')

It cannot be gainsaid that any scrutiny of the reforging of consciousness in our time has to perceive the individual in conjunction with shifts in wider social and cultural forces. Given its colonial past, South Africa is the bearer of a number of historically derived, changed and changing literary genres and nodes of aesthetic appreciation. In terms of what I will sweepingly call the poetics of the coloniser, this has occurred largely from the nexus of literary forms, genres and assumptions originally imported from metropolitan centres and localised: in the case of the colonised, those traditional indigenous forms existent before colonialism need to be examined, as does (in particular) the literary education, or not, that occurred until 1955 in the mission schools and in so-called 'bantu education' later. Unevenly deployed and of uneven influence, nationally-speaking, it should be noted that both poetic matrixes have been altered – to cut a very long story extremely short - by changes occasioned by the massive forces of modernity and postmodernity as these have saturated, and continue to saturate, the country; and curtailed (as far as poetry is concerned) by powerful, often demoralising, habits of teaching. Modernity and, consequently, modernism (as a system of thought and technique about art and culture) have both been imported and emerged in South Africa in partial, conflicted ways, and have differently impacted on different cultural and language groups and regions of the country. However, even where South African poetry has in the past been influenced by modernism, the inclination has tended towards a more British, conservative, orientation: poets such as Yeats, Eliot, Auden and Larkin still crop up on university syllabi more often than not.

It can in addition be seen that what are still regarded as traditional, African forms have undergone change over the last century. Forty years ago, Archie Mafeje published an article that delineated the alterations in the Eastern Cape of the praise poem as a form under the political pressures of apartheid's 'homeland' policy;<sup>16</sup> but the usage of traditional forms like the praise poem in modernising contexts goes back a lot further. At the moment, even those poets who advocate a return-to-the-roots Africanism seem to be arguing for a synthesis of styles and of stances. Oral and traditional forms are clearly also expanding and transforming themselves, in response to cultural change and consumer culture, as well as in relation to various writer's self-fashioning – it is a quarter of a century since novelist and academic Mbulelo Mzamane proclaimed himself a "traditional griot," and such practices of self-authentification through a putative tradition are still prevalent.<sup>17</sup>

The post-apartheid period reveals a hugely accelerated degree of borrowing and interaction between poets who bear different experiences of life and who deploy different cultural and poetic models, even if such mutual influence exists before this period (this is a discussion all of its own). Here, as elsewhere, there is disagreement as to what this means for the poet. There are those who wish to remain within established cultural parameters: Lionel Abrahams asserts in a 1995 lecture that "The opening of our society lends a new urgency to the maintenance of our standards as individuals and as bearers of our inherited culture"18 and this urge is mirrored among not only white but also some black poets, and from a variety of political angles. A younger black poet like Ike Mboneni Muila suggests, for example, that if the black poet distances himself arrogantly from his own cultural roots, it will be "like shit across the street, which is never nice." On the other hand, there are those such as Goodenough Mashego, who believes that the challenge for South African poets is "to position themselves to a point where they cannot be black / white / coloured or Indian, but poets."<sup>20</sup> Many follow suit: in a 1995 interview, Horn suggests that one of the greatest problems for any South African writer in the future could well be "to be locked up in his own section," when exciting "hybrids" are now emergent between European and African ways of thinking and experiencing.<sup>21</sup>

It is in debates about that most individually-focused of forms, the lyric, that more detailed parameters of the potential of individual sensibility vis-a-vis more public, social forces most noticeably occur; for the lyric is the genre of poetry most obviously concerned with the individual psyche trying to make sense of its entanglement with social experience, interaction and change. But the degree to which this form encodes the individual consciousness' relationship to the public and social is a moot point; which is precisely at issue in a

number of recent debates (such as that in 1998 between Cronin and Breyten Breytenbach in the pages of the *Sunday Independent* newspaper).<sup>22</sup>

In poetry, post-1990 explorations of experience and consciousness using the lyric have been riveting. While some poets (of course) remain with tried and tested notions of poetic form and assumptions as to what constitutes individual consciousness and what constitutes aesthetic value - two terms not as distinct as they initially may seem – I wish to focus on a few examples where forms are borrowed and changed, so that fresh explorations of the self occur. If we look at what follows, it becomes easy to see how much remains unexplained if one merely tries to slot a poet's explorations into his or her cultural or racial background, even as this aspect remains important. Such facile and glib ascription tends to be done to death in our literary criticism, if for no other reason than that it too often takes cultural difference as enough explanation for formal variation. I would suggest that, even in a colonial or postcolonial situation, poets merely imitate such borrowed forms extremely rarely; rather, they reformulate and revitalise them within temporally and spatially different material circumstances. It must be emphasised that this is an active process, not one of a passive duplication of existing metropolitan forms. In this regard, a number of South African poets, while lamenting the 'inferiority complex' whereby South African artists have in the past been appreciated in their own country only once they are recognised overseas, have pointed out that what the globalisation of information and experience has done is (in Allan Kolski Horwitz's words) "realigned" centres of influence, so that the metropolitan 'centre' is often no longer the foundational model from which experiment elsewhere is derived. The contemporary French poet Anne-Marie Albiach conceptualises this very well when she notes that, as far as she is concerned, she does not write 'after' anyone else's work, but rather "after the mark they have left in me."23

One of the less immediately explicable 'marks' on our poets in the 1990s has been that of Spanish-language poetry in translation. During the struggle years, Pablo Neruda had been an influence, especially in the Western Cape; but his metaphorically beautiful, politically committed poetry is much more accessible to, and absorbable within, a poetics and discourse that makes more limited demands on the reader than the densely textured, conceptually complex and surrealistically-tinged set of influences now afoot in the traces of poets such as Lorca and Vallejo. The influence of these two is more immediately apparent in the use of language and phrasing, as well as the surrealism of the image itself:

And, unfortunately, pain grows in the world every moment, grows thirty minutes a second, step by step, and the nature of the pain is, the pain twice and the condition of the martyrdom, carnivorous, voracious, is the pain, twice and the function of the purest grass, the pain twice and the good of being, to hurt us doubly...

César Vallejo (1937) (Excerpt from 'The nine monsters (los nueve monstruous')

it is clear
this outline of the sea
this world in my soul
is the forbidden city, my native land.
this flower in the sun
like a painful sore is festering
it is what is sick, growing weak in the brain
in the place of suffering.
it is what is cold and dying, what i'm soon to know
and what every shooting star knows
and what every child knows ...

Mxolisi Nyezwa (2000) (Excerpt from 'songs of rage and contentment')

What is crucial here is not only that Vallejo's formal idiosyncracies resonate with what is culturally or aesthetically similar within local culture, but also that his poems make affective and social sense within some aspects of South African life as it is synchrorically experienced. Nyezwa's usage, and acknowledgement of, Vallejo should be seen in these terms. The South American's poetry characteristically bears stylistic markers that anyone from the Eastern Cape (Nyezwa is from Motherwell), with a knowledge of oral culture and poetics, would recognise – especially the use of initial linking and various kinds of parallelism and repetition. At the same time, while he makes clear Vallejo's influence, Nyezwa's swift associative oscillations between macrocosm and microcosm, the local and the universal, the familiar and the surreal, not only bring something new to the form Vallejo mastered, but are also a fit style for the new human subject tossed about by rapid political change and the sudden impingement of a demanding and confusing global world, something felt by many South Africans after liberation – and certainly felt by a left-leaning poet from Peru living in Paris during the crisis years of the 1930s.

The testimony of another poet from a different area of South Africa, Ari Sitas, fleshes out what I am suggesting here. In his poetry of the late 1980s

and early 1990s, Sitas makes occasional but obvious usage of the techniques of European surrealism. In a poem such as "Ethekwini" Sitas describes his home town as a place where "mechanical bullfrogs grind away / and sometimes wounded cars cough by pierced by assegais / and sometimes surfers emerge from the mouths / of microwave ovens / and always / life continues like the sound of splintering glass / ... as near the docks / the boss drives by in his Shepstone Benz / as his 'boys' load Cetshwayo's skull as cargo ... ". However, while Sitas is clearly aware of Surrealism and its techniques, he talks in an interview of his movement, as Durban trade union cultural activist and academic, between different places in a town which - while seemingly in close proximity - are so incredibly different socially as to make him feel he is experiencing different planets. Trying to assimilate and cope with these disjunctive social spaces result in what he calls "debates in (my) head" as he attempts to emotionally understand, and remain open to them. Hence his poetry. This is reminiscent, in its psychological effects, of the social ambience of crisis, incomprehensibility and loss of meaning out of which Dada and the Surrealists sprung in Europe after World War I. "So the poetry was never affirmative," Sitas says, "but very reflexive, surrealist - surreal I suppose because I had to move through so many emotions in a week, in a day, rather than a learned surrealism steeped in Breton, Cesaire and others...."24 This is, then, not merely a formally derived surrealism: it is based on material circumstances, as they resonate personally and psychologically on the poet, and can only be more fully understood by analysis that also takes the material world into account.

In the world in which we live, one must then expect poetic influences to interweave and echo among divergent global modernities. Techniques appear, disappear, reassert themselves in surprising contexts. Sometimes, of course, formal devices emerge carrying similar stylistic markers, where no influence can be assumed – the use of internal rhyme, end-stopped lines and rhyming couplets in hip-hop poetry may remind one somewhat of Augustan verse, but no one could seriously suggest influence in such a case. Nevertheless, it is striking that formal techniques are continuously emerging in South Africa when local poets seem to be asking similar questions to, and stylistically and conceptually trying to solve congruent problems of assimilation and expressivity, as those that assail their models elsewhere. Such formal resonances can go far beyond the conscious.

As another example, one can see a briefly-held focus in some poems by poets as otherwise dissimilar as Karen Press and Angifi Dladla, that is reminiscent of the short-lived Imagist movement of early modernism in Europe – even though at least one of these two poets shows no evidence of being aware of the prior example of Imagism. The issues someone like Dladla attempts

to master in poems such as 'Impression' and 'Bonus' appear to be similar to those exercising the minds of Pound, Aldington and H.D. in London and Paris decades earlier: that is, how to express concisely an emotional truth in a manner that will bypass the filtering mechanisms of the reader's rational intellect.

The apparition of these faces in the crowd; Petals on a wet black bough.

Ezra Pound (1916)
('In a Station of the Metro')

off i flinched, drained dizzy and dazed. behind: outsize black wound in the earth where the tyre has nailed him. human gravy in the sun ...

Angifi Proctor Dladla (2001) ('impression')

If anything, what alters in Dladla's case – or in the case of Karen Press' incomparable poem "Heart's Hunger," too long to be quoted here – is the more urgent social imperative of his usage: witness the horrifying image of "human gravy in the sun" in his poem, a reference to the curiously liquid appearance burnt, deliquescing human flesh may assume: in this case, of a human being executed by the "necklace." He incidentally thereby negotiates one of the chief limitations of Imagism in its European precursor: that of its tendency to become increasingly entrapped in meanings so psychologically personal as to be indecipherable, and to strip the image of any contextualisation at all.

Most importantly, one of the major shifts in assumption in poetry during the 1990s has been a shift in the demands it places on author and reader. There has been an urge – widespread among many of the more experimental South African poets, but not necessarily confined to them – to find stylistic and linguistic modes which compel readers and audiences to participate more in the completion of meaning in the poem – a democratic urge, if you like. This can operate through a conscious incompleteness, which requires the reader to puzzle out and resolve meaning:

A man followed a madam Into a house ... When he went home She was at the window Listening to his footsteps Gazing at the township.

When her husband returned He helped her into a chair.

Mzi Mahola (1994) ('Strange Things')

There is an uncertainty, for the reader in the power relationships implied between the three characters in the poem, especially the 'man' and the 'madam.' There is moreover uncertainty about how these relationships are being enacted. Are we looking at a madam-servant scenario? Why does the woman 'gaze' at the township? Is it a scenario of an illicit love relationship? Why does she need to be helped into a chair? Are we looking at violence, perhaps rape? Mahola simply refuses to tell us. The assumption built into a poem such as this that different readers will not necessarily come to the same conclusion about meaning, nor is such resolution deemed necessary.

In some cases, a technique is pursued whereby the poet tries to approach meaning through the act of writing the poem itself. It is in such a spirit that Cape Town poet Karen Press spoke in 1993 of her poems as "research findings."25 Someone such as Joan Metelerkamp takes this further. In her ouevre, she partly draws from metropolitan postmodernist models, but intermingles these with an advocacy of what she calls "voice" in poetry: an advocacy which, she says, depends to a degree on the influence of black performance poetry on her thinking. Her poems typically show a poetic persona striving for understanding of self in relation to others through the *movement* of words and situations in the poem itself. In "A new language," she asks "words to take me / somewhere new - // how the words / like a tedious tractor, / how the rhythms, lines, even now, / how they drag me like a plough, / how I've been here before - // make me new / words / make me new // here, under the lee of the mountains, / where the clay is so hard in the dry / you can hardly get your spade in, / at the end of the field, // at the end of the road / you take beyond / where the saw-mill drones, // where the people are as poor as their language, / where everything is a ding or an iets, // did I hope I might imagine / a new way of speaking, / way of being ..." Here, the self is being created in the act of composition. Writing, as in the explanation of North American poet Louis Zukofsky,26 is conceived of as "the detail, not mirage, of seeing, of thinking with things as they exist." Another attempt

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to craft a poetics suggestively similar to what Zukofsky gestures towards comes from Khulile Nxumalo, who speaks of his technique as "... like I'm narrating myself as a psychology ... it's more about being less certain of the 'I' persona speaking ... (this) loosened a lot of music in the poetry, bringing it closer to conversational rhythms. This form was particularly interesting to me as it was so useful in expressing moments of intense entanglement of one's subjectivity with social and symbolic realities."<sup>27</sup>

Again, such explorations of poetics – and the challenges to aesthetic criteria to which they ineluctably lead – can *inter alia* be understood in terms of shifts in the nature and deployment of the individual psyche in changed circumstances. These explorations allow poets to explore a new set of potential positions and expressive modes for themselves, which are assumed to have the potential for being models towards moulding changes in human consciousness wider than the page or stage. Reader participation and the (so to say) de-authorising of the author's omnipotent role requires greater mutual – perhaps even communal – participation, a more contingent sense of self and circumstance, and an understanding of the shared nature of all meaning. Dipesh Chakrabarty asserts: "The bourgeois individual is not born until one discovers the pleasures of privacy. But this is a very special kind of private self – it is, in fact, a deferred "public," for this "bourgeois private" ... is "always already oriented towards an audience."<sup>28</sup>

It is clear, in South Africa, that the literary elite believes that the required individual human subject of the future is one whose understanding and sense of self-recognition apes their own. This is clearly and conveniently articulated by Lionel Abrahams, who maintains: "I place the greatest emphasis on individuality, selfhood, personal identity. Nevertheless, the recognition of the other inside the self is crucial, one of the very sparks that makes literature possible ... (But I will not) dissolve my culture in the melting-pot of diversity. I will not withhold criticism when cultural affirmative action results in the publishing and broadcasting of puerile rubbish. I will not pretend that my black students' writing defects are features of African style ... ."<sup>29</sup>

However, if Charkrabarty is correct, then we are looking at a much less simple issue than Abrahams understands: an issue that is highly inflected with social differences and concerns. What is noticeable in South Africa at present is, in reality, various enactments of subjectivity that resonate with the struggles taking place as to what the 'way forward' may be in individual, and hence social, senses of self: both as national citizens and participants in wider global change and exchange. These enactments from individual poets are not necessarily in congruence, and are sometimes in sharp conflict – and aesthetics is one area where these differences ramify. This is the

considerable challenge faced by anyone looking at poetics and aesthetics in such a milieu.

Moreover, such challenges are not only discernible in terms of poetics or style: they are also discernible in experiments that have been ventured in terms of language. As exhibited in contemporary poetry, these seek to challenge assumptions regarding fit deportment for the poet, and widen the range of register for acceptable language usage. They are especially noticeable as regards black poets using English. Given the colonial, imposed beginnings to English usage in black literature, challenges to the aptness of 'Queen's English' as a means of poetic expression in South African black literature stretch back at least as far as the Black Consciousness Movement of the 1970s, whose poets advocated various types of Africanised English - which poets such as Gwala and Sepamla designated as a use of "broken" or "murdered" English. Such promotion of language alternatives can be seen again, more contemporaneously, in Ike Muila's suggestions about the use of *isicantho* in poetry; or elsewhere in the deployment of *gamtaal* in Western Cape hip-hop poetry. It is surely relevant to say that such shifts reverberate, in poetry, with shifts in black subjectivity, albeit in stylised, self-conscious configurations. To its supporters, *isicantho* is a form of self-expression which can unify people – especially young people – in forms of expression which they can manipulate with more facility, and which consequently allow them more agency:

In terms of language being food for the heart and soul ... we need all the ingredients and necessary spices to make it meaty, juicy and tasty. (I use) a kind of transparent combination of all the different languages that kept the people of SA separate for quite too long. I write *Isicamtho* Iringasi which is a township communication fireworks lingo which differs from one place to another.

Examples of experimentation with language in poetry stretch all the way from the use of 'street' varieties of English – such as *isicamtho*, advocated by Muila above – to more unique and individualised styles. In the latter case, the spread of references to the black diaspora in Motsapi, the constant punning and scatology, plus the coinage of neologisms, in the poetry of, for example, Rampolokeng, Khumalo and Kgafela or Magogodi, indicate a desire by these 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> language speakers to make English more malleable to their concerns and viewpoints; it signifies an awareness – an "unmasking" as Phaswane Mpe notes in his 'Introduction' to Magogodi's collection *Thy Condom Come*, whereby black poets invert the traditional connotations of English words, thereby exposing these words' historically loaded bias and the

political issues which accompanied the language's spread as a handmaiden of colonial power. In such a process, vulgarity of expression is common, and serves a purpose.<sup>30</sup> In a situation such as the one I am describing, such devices serve a consciously *disruptive* purpose – whereby English is exhibited as a language, like any other, bearing its weight of politics and history:

## Seitlhamo Motsapi:

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the purple nikon pose of tourorist disca-dence
(tourist +terrorist; disco-dance + cadence + decadence)
the rampant kwashiokored epidemeek of my histri books
(epidemic + eek! + meek)
feelanthropists
(feel + philanthropists + 'feel-up'?)
chartered freedoms (Freedom Charter + mapped/limited freedoms)
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## Lesego Rampolokeng:

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toyi-toyi boys (toyi-toyi + toy-boys)
comtsotsis
(comrades + tsotsis)
pulpitbull
(pulpit + pit + pit-bull + bullshit?)
coproreality
(cop + reality + corporate reality? + coprophilia?)
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Given all I have said above, it is clear that any beginning to a study of aesthetics in South African poetry on a national scale requires a concomitant study of the assumptions and subjectivities of authors and readers. Francis Mulhern remarks:

What should we read, how should we read it, and why? Such questions are staple elements of any politics of reading. But they remain less than critical if they are put without consciousness of the unavowed answer they already insinuate. Issues of selection, procedure and purpose are often settled in advance by the meanings assigned to the collective pronoun. So there is a further question: as whom, as what do 'we' read? <sup>31.</sup>

These are crucial questions any South African critic trying to make sense of our current poetry output needs to confront; and any meaningful answer would moreover require a movement beyond a focus merely on the literary and cultural, into related areas of political, sociological and economic

study. In the postmodern world, we would also have to think long and hard about new forms of technology and the new technologies of poetry: as the remodelling of human consciousness in interaction with computer technology is, as Joseph Tabbi argues in *The Postmodern Sublime*, perhaps the principal marker of postmodern sensibility.<sup>32</sup> The burgeoning of hip-hop and performance poetry at present among young South Africans makes such a focus inescapable.

No literary critic has as yet made anything but the most basic of steps towards examining the kind of interlinkages I have tentatively tried to bring into purview here: and few have intensively or extensively examined the manner in which the country in which we now live demands a careful scrutiny and rethink of our existing formulations and judgements about aesthetics. Without venturing into the minefield of debate over what exactly constitutes postmodernist style, and what precisely differentiates the modernist from the postmodernist, it can be said that, on first glance, many of the phenomena mentioned here appear to suggest that a branch of South African poetry has taken on a distinctly postmodern patina, stylistically speaking at least. Crucially, theorists of postmodern knowledge claim that the value and significance of any piece of artistic work are not inherent in that work, but - in a world where information has proliferated - are strongly and variously shaped by social groups and individuals prepared to use differing beliefs and notions of truth and appropriateness to gain power and knowledge. Thus, 'truth' is dialogic, requiring constant negotiation between different, sometimes apparently incommensurate knowledge-systems and models. To the postmodernist, the structural coherence of a work is not only an impossibility, but not especially important. Meanings should remain open and fluid; closure should be avoided; the status of art work as commodity form should be embraced; and different registers of language and different voices within the same poem are perfectly acceptable. In addition, poets may work with a mixture of formal influences, which may be variously deployed in different contexts. In such situations, the poet may end up working with different situational personae and discursive regimens, as well as along different literary and poetic axes. Cronin describes this process as "part of aesthetics for me – for these things to be feeding each other, to be trying out different audiences, trying to connect different discursive practices." 33

Nothing could be conceptually further from the traditional notion of the well-wrought organic poem beloved by Leavisite and New Criticism, those two critical schools still so influential in South African schools, which require that meaning and themes be resolved by the end of the poem, and that all formal devices used should assist in such resolution. Postmodern conceptualisations are still clearly resisted by the large rump of conserva-

tive critics and teachers in this country, who prefer a poetry that, in some cases, can only be described as pre-modern in technique and resolution. A postmodern poetics of open forms, a poetry that escapes familiarity or immediate understanding; a poetry that performs acts of semantic instability; an acceptance of dialogism and difference; a juxtaposition of worlds and rhetorical discourses; a poetry of process and becoming rather than completion – in Lyotard's famous definition, postmodernism as that which denies itself the "solace of good forms" – is certainly not widely permitted by South African poetry criticism.

However, even though some of the poetry I have described seems to suggest that a new wave of postmodernism has appeared in South Africa, I think one needs to be careful, as this is only partly true. There are only a few instances – such as, say, the work of Nadine Botha or Khulile Nxumalo – where we can accurately talk about contemporary South African Englishlanguage poets as being consciously 'postmodern' in most aspects. While it is accurate to say that the examples I have given show assumptions among poets congruent with the shifts in perception and supposition discernible in metropolitan postmodern poetry, I would wish to read these locally and contingently first, rather than just suggesting poetic influence in the abstract. Long before we understand the adaptation of metropolitan modernist and postmodernist poetics into South Africa, we need to examine the specifics and nature of the tides of modernity and postmodernity which have swept across this country since the first colonial intrusions.

Arjun Apparadurai notes that flows of capital strengthened and, in some cases, initiated by colonialism have produced a 'disjunctive' global landscape that produces and reproduces itself in radically uneven ways, especially as regards thought and culture.<sup>34</sup> In the effects this has had on Africa, three major assumptions are now under correction: firstly, we need to finally come to terms with the fact that any faith in the teleological, developmental nature of metropolitan modernity has vanished: indeed, James Ferguson has recently argued that, in some African states at least, modernity is at present experienced by its citizens as a process in *decomposition*.<sup>35</sup> Secondly, one should perceive modernity as a process experienced and forged in divergent ways in different national and regional arenas,36 although I would wish to add Ferguson's *caveat* that such an analysis, if focused entirely on cultural phenomena, bids fair to ignore powerful global institutions of power and control - for, as Harry Harootunian warns us, "that which celebrates cultural difference enthusiastically ... yet fails to recognise that the production of plural identities is consistent with the propensity of global capitalism to undermine all fixed positions for a fethisized 'narcissism of small differences'."37 Thirdly, in Africa what is designated the 'traditional' does not lose power and disappear in the face of modernity, but often adapts and co-exists with it, implicitly changing itself in the process – as commentators such as Kwame Appiah have argued cogently in his In My Father's House. 38 The last two points require one to discern what I have discussed here as forms of African modernity and postmodernity; and to realise that, despite the imposed nature of colonial modernity, these show how people in Africa have dealt creatively with such imposition to create new experiential, ontological and artistic models of, and with, meaning for themselves. If one approaches contemporary poetry with these questions in mind, rather than remaining content with a surface examination of texts, we will see that South African poets, placed in a contradictory, unevenly developed and disjointedly articulated society, are using influences and models from a vast range of resources and from spatially and temporally different historical moments, in diverse ways, in order to make sense of, and create anew, the world in which they live.

In conclusion, there are a number of points about the contemporary reception of poetry in South Africa that require stressing. A frequent observation from South African poets in interviews over the last few years has been a frustration with local academia, in that they feel themselves far ahead of their critics and commentators in their knowledge of contemporary trends in form and debates about aesthetic value. Frequently, they felt met with resistance, incomprehension and facile judgements. Witness the reviewer of Nyezwa's *song trials* 2000, who dismissed the book on the sole basis of it being "too difficult", or the reviewer who, whilst reviewing a Cronin collection, noted with palpable relief that "to enjoy this, all you need is the ability to read simple words, placed one after the other across the page, with carriage returns for emphasis."<sup>39</sup>

It is obvious that South Africa has been inundated increasingly over the last few years with romanticised pronouncements about the 'rainbow nation' as well as media and political exhortations regarding the need for patriotism and nation-building. In other words, in many areas of creativity and expression there has been a struggle ongoing over the nature and form of subjectivity, ethics, individual deportment and social futures in South Africa since liberation. Disguised though they might be, these have left their traces in literature and its criticism: and any discussion of aesthetic issues would be remiss if it did not examine the forms of expression whereby those in power—whether part of the old or new elite—seek to marginalise and dismiss what does not conform to the present hegemony (as these dismissals of certain kinds of utterance, literary or otherwise, carry with them, in highly mediated form, the topography of those struggles). In this regard, no one poet exhibits these struggles so immediately in his reception as Rampolokeng.

Revered, copied and admired in some circles (it is clear, for example, that both Magogodi and Khumalo have modelled themselves on him), in other circles the dismissal has been extreme.

No contemporary South African poet – indeed, no writer – has occasioned more approval or disapproval, partly no doubt due to the confrontational nature of Rampolokeng's poetic persona and style, and the scatological, irreverent content of much of his work. Eclectic and wide-ranging in his influences (these stretch all the way from the figure of the traditional praise poet to Sotho song forms, from rap to the Beats, from Lautreamont and Artaud to Cesaire and Mutabaruka), provocative – some would say apocalyptic – in his performance style and public pronouncements, unique in his varied usage of acoustic regimes and breath-phrasing, unusual in his line structures and his blurring of conventional syntax, his brand of rapped verse has got him, on occasion, into trouble: for instance, his performance at an A.N.C. 80th Birthday Party for Walter Sisulu resulted in a directive being sent to the Congress of South African Writers that he be "put .. on a leash" because he had conducted himself "like a mad dog" making "Trotskyite statements disguised as poetry." <sup>140</sup>

The revulsion to a poet such as Rampolokeng in some quarters clearly goes far further in its implications than the merely literary. Although, very occasionally, reviewers who are less than enthusiastic recognise the amount of thought behind his work ("That Rampolokeng knows exactly what he's doing ... doesn't necessarily rescue the poetry," suggests one reviewer, 2 mostly attempts are made to dismiss both the aesthetic and intellectual qualities, and the seriousness, of his poetry in terms of his unintelligibility and general moral nastiness. Thus, one reviewer slates him as "that foul-mouthed Dr. Seuss whose work is neither clever nor particularly interesting"; the arts editor of a newspaper believes that his "anger ... vented in all directions ... makes me wonder, does Rampolokeng know what he's trying to say?"; his play Fanon's Children is excoriated as "political potty training on the stage," and so on. 43 The tenor of this is visible in creative work as well: Lionel Abrahams, doyen of conservative aestheticians in the country, goes so far as to question his ability with arithmetic:

Inventor of a loudness meaning this rousing roll of your syllables you address me you proclaim x = x = x = y or what or O your sum drum drum interrogates do you know is it you to beat your answers out of me you have your ways club-word club-word club-word club-word you count very well to four but I know nothing have been told nothing except your rap rap meaning blow the mind blow down cancel rap blow up the States and all old orders order rap the written rap and every manner of manners no know nothing no except your announceable name your rapid rap rap rap for outrage ...

Lionel Abrahams
('To the Writer of "For the Oral")

The evident and compelling care that goes into Rampolokeng's work, and the fact that the poet himself - in poetry, interviews and statements - continuously reflects on his craft and his role, does little to deflect such stereotyping and criticism. Commentators such as Abrahams may be surprised to learn that Rampolokeng himself has made critical statements about the facile and underworked nature of too much of South Africa's poetic production and reception at present.44 The aesthetic with which he himself works clearly operates at a tangent to conforming norms about both poetry and cultural profile: he believes that his use of "alley-cat tactics" ('this is for the critic') in a milieu where "truth is treason now liars rule the world" ('end beginnings') justifies a poetics aimed at breathing "the art of life beyond existence / not escapist transcendence but sense out of dissonance" ('Jazz for Dyani'). He is also canny enough to see that the role and poetics of non-conformism can, in a world where dissidence and anger are recycled as commodities, become immured in notions of fashionability along with a formulaic rhetoric and posture of marginality. Unlike Mzwakhe, Mashile and others, he has always been wary of the label of 'performer' and the ghetto of typecasting into which audiences' expectation of orality and bodily display may trap black poets. 45 Thus, the terms in which Rampolokeng replies – in passing - to Abrahams in a poem are themselves of interest:

(high art low fart you blow me apart
wiley crows abrahams' sons of sam
you pork me ham why're you eating me
it's not about melody ill-rhythm
these maladies diss-harmony
'cos masta utopia is never rasta ityopia-i)

# Lesego Rampolokeng ('Dread-Word/H.A.L.F.')

The democratic 'miracle' that was South Africa has now soured more than somewhat in reality. It is a country which still favours the rich; where the gap between rich and poor is, if anything, widening, where unemployment is rife; and where social instability, corruption and increasing frustration are the order of the day. Poets like Rampolokeng remind us of the starkly dissociated and Manichaean nature of the 'miracle' that has occurred over the last decade. South Africa, he suggests, is a country where the likelihood of a 'utopia of masters' being to the benefit of the marginalised and poor is receding and can only be answered with an aesthetics that does not seek to come into tune with the euphonic (but false) harmonies of the rich and powerful.

It is noticeable that the radical, critical poetry in the country in the 1990s is being replaced in public purview by increasing volumes of poetry that claim to assist nation-building, as this is extrapolated by the present ruling elites; a poetry that remains, in the long run, determinedly optimistic in the face of the growing number of socio-political schisms. As far as the theme of black identity goes, some noted poets appear to be tending towards a sentimental, Oprah-inflected notion of identity:

...And when we move to any groove we shake the earth around the sun

Ask for the tricks that dip our hips we'll tell you rhythm makes blood

Back to the source African booties know the answers and when I'm done

I'll tell you style is in the movements of my people ...

Lebo Mashile (Style)

Nothing could be further from Rampolokeng's attempts at commentary about what he calls the "turd world – the part that the rest of the world shits on". 46

trackful of no foundation bellyful of radiation no enemy no friend we follow the global trend blade cutting mendicant hand socialism's said to fail we attach to capital's tail smell of hell when that tail is raised a taste of nuclear waste radioactivity does not sate a health-thirst it pumps full of eternal rest in the mouth the perennial tale of the south

(the fela sermon)

It is obvious to see that South African public discourse is at present swamped by tides of ultra-nationalism and easily contrived racial identities. For these to succeed, their proponents no doubt realise that it is necessary that they be directed at reshaping and moulding individual consciousness and deportment. In South Africa, the notion that literature can serve and act as a means of 'modelling' the subjectivity of readers is still very much in play – Ndebele's influential essays about literature certainly can be placed within such a notion, as can the earlier precepts of both white liberalism and Black Consciousness from the 1960s and 1970s. Even today, the present poet laureate can urge patrons at a book launch to "buy this book if you want to become a better person." While Rampolokeng – and some of the others have quoted here – can clearly be seen to relate themselves to such concerns, they appear to take on the moralising, prophetic stance usually attributed to pre-colonial praise poets: theirs is not a modelling based on polite, unquestioning subjectivity and, hence, citizenship.

In an interview, Cronin has noted the lack of discussion about aesthetics in South African literature, which he believes powerfully reflects the "terrible reductionism of a kind of market orientation with regard to culture that is general at present." In the face of this, some (especially more hidebound) critics have retreated back to what they believe are tried and tested values — a stance clearly inadequate to deal with the South African reality. Critics and academics have unfortunately always been all too ready to police the boundaries of the acceptable in South Africa literature, aesthetically-speaking. The history of this would require its own book, or series of books. In the current scenario, aesthetic effects unfamiliar to critics are too often dismissed as occurring by chance; poets who spend many hours crafting their work are accused of writing "throw-away lines" or find they are regarded as valuable only anthropologically — that is, within their context. Such judgements have, in particular, especially been made, although certainly not only, by white critics dealing with black poetry.

After one of the interminable battles between poets had been enacted on

the letter pages of the poetry journal New Coin in 1997-8, editor Rob Berold spoke with some awe of the diversity of poems that had been submitted during his stint as editor, remarking: "When I started out editing New Coin I had narrower tastes. The poems have educated me. I've learned to hear more acutely." In my view, an open-minded stance is essential for any academic, critic, or indeed reader, trying to make sense of, and enjoy, the range of South African poetry at the moment.

#### **Endnotes**

- <sup>1</sup> 'Terreblanche inspired, perchance, by soul of white ant' Sunday Independent 8 November 1998.
- <sup>2</sup> See Heather Robertson (ed.) a gift of african thoughts: celebrating the inauguration of President Thabo Mbeki with words & images (Pretoria: Government Communication and Information System, 1998); Hugh Lewin 'LKJ takes the rap for bandiete' Weekly Mail & Guardian 29 September 5 October 1995; Maureen Isaacson 'Goodbye Allen Ginsberg, hello ministry of water affairs' Sunday Independent 13 April 1997. For the fashion shoot of poets such as Rudeboy Paul and Righteous the Common Man, see Y Mag 44, April/May 2003.
- <sup>3</sup> Herman Mashaba 'Entrepreneurs, poets of the private sector, can flesh out freedom' *Cape Times* 19 July 2004.
- <sup>4</sup> Robert Berold "Interview: Jeremy Cronin' in Berold (ed.) South African Poets on Poetry: Interviews from New Coin 1992-2001 (Pietermaritzburg: Gecko, 2003) p. 133.
- <sup>5</sup> David Simpson *9/11: The Culture of Commemoration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) p. 7.
- <sup>6</sup> Jean-Philippe Wade 'Interview with Wally Serote' *English in Africa* 20, 1 1993 p. 51.
- <sup>7</sup> Zoë Wicomb 'Writers at work: Mazisi Kunene' Southern African Review of Books 5, 5 1993 p. 15. Statements of approval from politicians as regards this type of role for the poet are numerous. Very recently, for instance, the Premier of the Western Cape named poetry as a principal means whereby unity between Coloureds and Africans in the province could be brought about. 'Era of poets needed Rassool' Cape Times 25 September 2007.
- <sup>8</sup> 16 June 1976 was the initial date of the 'Soweto' Uprising. Jerry Mofokeng, interviewing Mzwakhe on 'Curious Culture', SABC2, 12 June 2006.
- <sup>9</sup> Berold 'Interview: Lesego Rampolokeng & Ike Mboneni Muila' in . Berold *op. cit.* p. 138.
- <sup>10</sup> Bila "The irrelevance of prizes to poetry" New Coin 41, 2 2005 p. 8.
- <sup>11</sup> Berold 'Interview: Tatamkhulu Afrika' in Berold op. cit. p. 6.
- <sup>12</sup> Berold 'Interview: Ari Sitas' in *ibid*. p. 70. See also Kozain "Fuck Colouredness and the Coloured Voice' *Chimurenga* 1, 2002.
- <sup>13</sup> Berold's statement is in Berold 'Interview: Karen Press' in Berold op.cit. p. 21. For Kabomo, see Nadine Botha 'In a word' Mail & Guardian 30 July 5 August 2004.
- <sup>14</sup> Mann 'Towards a Universal Declaration of Poets' Rights' *English Academy Review* 12, 1995 p. 113; Berold 'Interview: Jeremy Cronin' *op. cit.* p. 129.
- <sup>15</sup> See de Kok 'Cracked Heirlooms: memory on exhibition' in Sarah Nuttall / Carli Coetzee (eds.) *Negotiating the Past* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1998).
- <sup>16</sup> See Mafeje "The Role of the Bard in a Contemporary African Community" *Journal of African Languages* 6, 3 1967.

- <sup>17</sup> Mzamane 'Mbulelo Mzamane' in Margaret Daymond *et al* (eds.) *Momentum:* On Recent South African Writing (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1984) p. 304.
- <sup>18</sup> Lionel Abrahams *The Democratic Chorus and Individual Choice* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1996) p. 26.
- <sup>19</sup> Berold "Interview: Lesego Rampolokeng & Ike Mboneni Muila' in Berold op. cit. p. 137.
- <sup>20</sup> 'About Goodenough Mashego' Timbila 4, 2003 p. 76.
- <sup>21</sup> Berold 'Interview: Peter Horn' in Berold op. cit. pp. 59 60.
- <sup>22</sup> See the interchange between Cronin, Breytenbach and Sole, *Sunday Independent* 9 August, 23 August and 13 September 1998
- <sup>23</sup> See Horwitz 'The Province Writes Back' in Botsotsos Jesters (eds.) We Jive Like This (Johannesburg: Botsotso, 1996) p. 2, as well as Bila's comments in Horwitz 'Globalisation / Domination and South Africa: An interview with Vonani Bila' Botsotso 12, 2002 p. 39. Albiach quote from Mary Ann Caws The Yale Anthology of Twentieth-Century French Poetry (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) p. 444. See also Sitas' remarks about his relationship to Surrealism below.
- <sup>24</sup> Berold 'Interview: Ari Sitas' in Berold op.cit. p. 64.
- <sup>25</sup> Berold 'Interview: Karen Press' in Berold op.cit. p. 18.
- <sup>26</sup> Zukofsky *Prepositions: Collected Critical Essays* (London: Rapp & Carroll, 1967) p. 20.
- <sup>27</sup> Quotes taken from Alan Finlay 'Interview: Khulile Nxumalo' New Coin 41, 2 2005 p.52, and 'Khulile Nxumalo' West Coast Line 30, 2 1996 p. 99.
- <sup>28</sup> Chakrabarty Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000) p. 35.
- <sup>29</sup> Abrahams *op.cit.* pp. 25 27. Abrahams exposes the extremely conservative nature of his own formal preferences in a letter to the editor of *New Coin* in 1998: "You have put together an issue that declares: RELATIVISM! POSTMODERNISM! REVOLUTION! OPENNESS! Nothing needs to add up, make sense, appeal, connect, conform. Nothing is definably better or worse than anything else. There are no distinctions, no discriminations. Beauty, excellence and wisdom are irrelevant illusions Poetry is syllables. Poetry is permission. PERMISSIVENESS!" 'Letters' *New Coin* 34, 1 1998 p. 86.

  <sup>30</sup> The Muila quote is from 'Ike Mboneni Mula: Soul Food Binder' in Botsotso
- Jesters op. cit. p. 3. For gamtaal, see Jane Battersby "Sometimes it feels like I'm not Black enough": Recast(e)ing Coloured through South African Hip-hop as a Postcolonial Text' in Herman Wasserman / Sean Jacobs (eds.) Shifting Selves: Post-apartheid Essays on Mass Media, Culture and Identity (Cape Town: Kwela, 2003). For Magogodi, see Mpe 'Introduction' in Magogodi Thy Condom Come (Amsterdam: New Leaf, 2000) p. 7.
- <sup>31.</sup> Mulhern 'English reading' in Homi Bhabha (ed.) *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990) p. 250.
- 32 Tabbi The Postmodern Sublime: Technology and American Writing from Mailer to

- Cyberpunk (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).
- <sup>33</sup> Berold 'Interview: Jeremy Cronin' op. cit. p. 29. For two different conceptualisations of postmodernism and its relationship to knowledge-systems, see Jean-François Lyotard *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1984) pp. 65 ff., and Slavoj Zizek *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan Through Popular Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991) pp. 141 ff.
- <sup>34</sup> See Apparadurai 'Disjuncture and difference in the global culture economy' *Public Culture* 2, 2 1990.
- <sup>35</sup> Ferguson *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006) especially pp. 176 193.
- <sup>36</sup> See especially Dilip Gaonkar's essay in Gaonkar (ed.) *Alternative Modernities* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001) pp. 13 23.
- <sup>37</sup> Harootunian History's Disquiet: Modernity, Cultural Practice, and the Question of Everyday Life (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000) p. 47.
- <sup>38</sup> Kwame Appiiah In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture (London: Methuen, 1992) especially pp. 221 254.
- <sup>39</sup> Console Tleane 'profound poetry digs too deep' *Sunday World* 3 December 2000; Evelyn Holtzhausen 'Cronin captures us perfectly' *Cape Times* 11 August 2006.
- <sup>40</sup> Berold 'Interview: Lesego Rampolokeng' in Berold op. cit. p. 29.
- <sup>42</sup> Dan Wylie 'A paper field full of poetry' *Mail & Guardian* 25 February 2 March 2000.
- <sup>43</sup> Sarah Johnson 'It All Begins' *New Contrast* 31, 3 2003 p. 69; Matthew Krouse 'Stop making sense' *Mail & Guardian* 20 26 August 1999; Wilhelm Snyman 'Political potty training on stage' *Cape Times* 5 November 2002.
- <sup>44</sup> See the interview conducted by Kgafela oa Magogodi, 'high art low fart' *Chimurenga* 3, 2002 p. 50, and Berold 'Interview: Lesego Rampolokeng' op. cit. p. 26.
- <sup>45</sup> Berold 'Interview: Lesego Rampolokeng & Ike Mboneni Muila' op. cit. p. 139 <sup>46</sup> 'Interview' on Rampolokeng's CD the h.a.l.f. ranthology (ambush street-corner mixes, mehlo-maya 2002).
- <sup>47</sup> Statement made by Keorapetse Kgositsile at the launch of Gabeba Baderoon's *The Dream in the Next Body* at The Boekehuis, Johannesburg, 20 April 2005.
- <sup>48</sup> Ulrike Ernst 'The Cinderella Department' in Ernst From Anti-Apartheid to African Renaissance: Interviews with South African Writers and Critics on Cultural Politics Beyond the Cultural Struggle (Hamburg: Lit Verlag, 2002) p. 172. See also Garvey Ite 'Talk About It' Sunday Times 20 July 2003.
- <sup>49</sup> Michael Chapman believes that, after liberation, there emerged a "less guiltridden, less selfconscious response to the arts/politics dilemma on the part of several younger writers. ... There is the African-English 'throwaway' poetry of Seitlhamo Motsapi, Kgafela oa Magogodi and Lesego Rampolokeng..." Chapman *Southern African Literatures* (London: Routledge, 2003) p. xii.

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# SEQUENCE FOR MUMIA ABU-JAMAL

**Dennis Brutus** 

I:

Some voices must be silenced they threaten the structures of seemingly safe respectable lives their clear vibrations may shatter the crystalline shelters that encase us from reality shielding us from unbearable truths

but some may choose not to be deaf they beat with broken palms against the smooth impenetrable glass of lies and comfort and power and beg to hear the piteous cries rising from the smoke and fire.

#### II:

The smooth impenetrable glass of indifference and uncaring is cool and pleasant to the touch like the stone heart of power that conceals the rottenness within.

#### III:

In the night anger burns like fire along the veins in the brain and at the core of the anguished unavailing heart.

IV:

Red and orange and saffron

the fiery ghosts rise in the night to sear the dreaming brain and blast the wakeful eyeballs staring into the dark: images of terror.

#### V:

Red, bright red as blood luminous with life anger runs through the brain anger against injustice anger against pain anger against impotence

And red, red as a rose red as soft red velvet red as a deep red rose with shadows dark to black red as poppies in sunlight red as the blood of children in the dust of Soweto (come see the blood of children in the streets of Soweto) red as poppies in sunlight with their fragile beauty with their indestructible beauty steadfast under battering rain so strong, so red our courage: we will not bow down we will not submit to defeat our courage will endure our truth will survive.

# VI: Postscript

When the blight of stillness advances when songs and speech are silenced when a light of life and laughter is gone, the spirit still speaks and endures like sparks that flash from silica tough stardust, common dust of the world.

# I SALUTE THE JACARANDAS ANYWAY

**Dennis Brutus** 

in memory of Mahmoud Darwish

I salute the Jacarandas anyway
Whatever else the world may offer
Offer for our praise
Or our opprobrium
I salute the Jacarandas anyway

"It will be as if I never lived
There will be no trace of me
There will be no sign of me remembered
It will be as if I never lived
No trace of me will remain
All will be as if nothing had been"

What will it matter if nothing remains?

You will have breathed the fresh morning air And walked the dewy morning grass And will have asserted for once your being

And I will salute the Jacarandas once more

# REVIEWS

# TAMING THE DISORDERLY CITY: THE SPATIAL LANDSCAPE OF JOHANNESBURG AFTER APARTHEID

Martin J. Murray Cornell University Press, 2008

Martin Murray's book is a timely and important contribution to the debate on the present state and future of Johannesburg. Although focused on South Africa's premier city, many of the arguments articulated in the book are applicable to cities across the world, especially the rapidly expanding urban conurbations of the South or 'developing countries' where, as Davis has argued, hundreds of millions of the planets poor are being squeezed into insalubrious slums. Murray's multi-dimensional analysis is exemplary in many ways, but perhaps most striking in its systematic and radical critique of the dominant neoliberal policies that have characterised the political economy of Johannesburg since the advent of democracy in South Africa. The theoretical depth and nuance of Murray's book, following in the rich lineage of radical urban scholars such as Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey, brilliantly lays bare some of the most important underlying political and economic processes, as well as ideology, that underpin the market-driven development agenda of Johannesburg, and the consequent deleterious effects on the majority of its citizens. Contestations between rich and poor, privileged and marginalised are placed at the centre of the analysis. One manifestation of this struggle, and a primary concern of this book, centres on the efforts of those who hold economic and political power constantly to 'tame' what they perceive to be a 'disorderly' place in order to create a city in their own image and to serve their class interests.

Taming the Disorderly City offers a convincing analysis of the evolution of Johannesburg's 'spatial politics' from the city's racially divided or apartheid past to the new democratic dispensation and is embedded in a critical analysis of the global processes of neoliberal globalization and rapid urbanization. It examines the 'fragmentary and unsettled qualities of fractured urbanism in Johannesburg after apartheid, where the production of urban space is the outcome of an unstable mixture of opposing fields of force'. Murray's insightful explanations of the connections and articulations of such contradictory processes and the tensions that emanate from them constitute one of the salient threads that run through the book. Critically, he asserts that these uneven and fragmentary processes are best comprehended in relation to one another and as products of the same underlying economic processes. Foremost among these is the connectedness between regeneration and ruination, inclusion and exclusion, privilege and marginalisation.

Whereas analyses of the fragmented nature of South Africa's urban centres have typically occurred within an explanatory framework of racial segregation, Murray locates his analysis in a critique of the vagaries of real estate capitalism, but without losing sight of the persistence of the racial configuration of the city.

He also persuasively argues that 'reliance on market competition' unleashes processes of exclusion and inclusion, which, in the post-apartheid city have largely reproduced the class, gender and racial registers of the pre-1994 era. Post-apartheid Johannesburg, contrary to expectations and official promises, has "metamorphosed," argues Murray, "into a city where socio-spatial stratification, racial inequality and marginalization have become entrenched." The inequalities of the apartheid city have persisted and deepened, and in certain respects new forms of discrimination and marginalization have also arisen. The tens of thousands of new immigrants who have streamed into Johannesburg over the past couple of decades have been especially vulnerable to the exclusion: often poorly skilled they find the labour market virtually impenetrable and have similar difficulty accessing public housing.

Johannesburg is perennially proclaimed by those in power as a 'world class African city,' which designation in fact embodies the contradictory aspirations of both poor and rich inhabitants of the city. For the affluent who, as Murray explains, are increasingly retreating into sequestered suburban enclaves, the city is a place of privilege and power. For the poor majority, drawn from different corners of South Africa and across the African continent, Johannesburg holds the promise of a better life. But, since its founding at the end of the 19th century as a gold mining town Johannesburg has been unkind to the working class, particularly the poor black population. Charles Van Onselen wrote eloquently of how the mining bosses built the city in their own image, forcing various sections of the incipient working class – both black and white – to the margins of society. The outcome of the struggle between the emerging dominant class, the Randlords, and the working class, comprising diggers, miners, washermen, cab drivers, low-paid youth, English trade unionists, among others, prompted an early 20th century journalist to describe Johannesburg as "a city of unbridled squander and unfathomable squalor."3 This 'schizophrenic identity' is for Murray emblematic of the city, which "Throughout its turbulent history... has always been torn between the extremes of utopian dreamworld and dystopian nightmare."4 And, explains Murray, "Like other cities that originated on the margins of modernity, Johannesburg has always exhibited the contradictory impulses of cosmopolitan elitism coupled with everyday marginalisation of the poor and dispossessed."

Fifteen years into democracy, poverty in South Africa's cities has become more entrenched and is especially pronounced in Johannesburg. According to a survey conducted in 2007 approximately 51% of Johannesburg's residents earned below R2,500 a month, and about 20% had no income at all.5 Since 1994 Johannesburg has experienced substantial population growth: between 1996 and 2004 the population of the greater Johannesburg metropolitan region grew by a phenomenal 25% and it is expected that the number of households in the city will double between 2005 and 2017. Despite the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) housing scheme, which the government claims has provided more than 2 million new houses nationally, there remains a dire shortage of accommodation for the poor. In 2004 nearly one quarter of households lacked formal dwellings and two years later there was still a housing backlog of about 300,000 units in the city. It is this chronic shortage of affordable housing that has caused the proliferation of informal settlements on the periphery of the country's cities. From 1996 to 2007 the number of households living in informal dwelling nationally rose by approximately 24% from 1.45 million to 1,8 million. Over the same period the number of households living in shacks in backyards jumped from 403,000 to 590,000, an increase of 46%.6 Murray's brief study of the case of Bredell (a peri-urban site in Ekurhuleni, the metropolitan area on Johannesburg's eastern border) shows how poor people occupied unused land in a desperate attempt to establish a foothold in the city in order better to access rights in the city. The marginalized and excluded are generally denied a 'rightful place in the city.' For Murray exclusion denotes not only the physical segregation of the poor on the margins of the city but, importantly, also their precarious existence. Thus the excluded and marginalized continuously struggle for a place in the city and for genuine urban citizenship, which entails, among other things, access to basic services.

By contrast, notes Murray, "the propertied, privileged, and powerful" have very different preoccupations as they "seek to maintain (and even extend) the prevailing hierarchies and structural imbalances." With the end of minority rule, white middle class urbanites retreated behind high walls, gated communities, fortified office complexes and enclosed shopping malls both to protect their privileges and to opt out of public life in the new South Africa. These sequestered enclaves have also become places of refuge for sections of the black *nouveau riche* who, like their historical counterparts elsewhere in the world, can do no better than to mimic the habits of their class forebears.

Taming the City's most prescient analysis occurs in its engagement with the spatial politics of Johannesburg's inner city, whose decline has been lamented

for many years by city officials, policy-makers and citizens. Conventional analyses of the causes of this decline have been superficial and have tended to lay the blame for the state of affairs at the door of the poor. Critical scholars and activists have countered these arguments by pointing to capitalist interests, often articulated in the short-hand of 'capital flight,' as the underlying causes of the city's demise. Murray deepens and extends these arguments and explains capital flight in terms of the rhythms of capitalism. Thus he argues, "Like other components of the city building process, capital flight – a shrill, moralistic term for the regular cyclical movements of investment capital seeking highest profitability – deprived Johannesburg's inner city of the upscale vibrancy that stamped it as the premier business centre of the nation, let alone the African subcontinent."8 Moreover, the relocation of corporates to the leafy northern suburbs of the city is not a phenomenon of the 1990s: it commenced in the 1970s and accelerated from the mid-1980s. One may argue the author underplays the significance of white anxieties over the influx of black people into the city that was triggered by the collapse of the notorious influx control system in the 1980s and which contributed to white flight from the city centre, especially in the early and mid 1990s.

After two decades of decline Johannesburg has been transformed "into an almost lifeless wasteland of vacant office buildings, shuttered storefronts, and abandoned warehouses: an increasingly hollowed-out dead zone of unused, empty spaces." In other words, it has been allowed to become a slum. Murray observes that officials generally blame the deterioration of housing stock on factors such flat hijacking, building invasions and subletting. This view is roundly rejected in Taming the City. For the author it is wholly inadequate to explain the growth of slums "as the unwanted by-product of market failures or inefficiency." Slum-making, he correctly insists, is an inherent part of the "contradictory dynamics of real estate capitalism." Residential property owners in South Africa as elsewhere in the global market place respond to declining market demands and crises of profitability by adopting alternative uses for their buildings. In the case of Johannesburg this was manifested in the rapid and decisive shift away from investment in residential building in the inner city to heavy investment in office blocks located in the new financial locales of northern Johannesburg, particularly Sandton. When the residential property market experienced a new and explosive boom, investments were directed overwhelmingly in the middle class property market, as is evident from the proliferation of townhouse complexes across the city's landscape. A main corollary of this process is that the real estate market has failed miserably to deliver decent and affordable housing to the poor of the inner city, which, it is argued, has spawned a largely underground "slumlord economy" of absentee ownership, overcrowding, rack-renting and building hijacking." Everyay life for the poor in the city is thus characterised by a struggle for survival, homelessness and insecurity. For Murray life in the inner city is precarious: in winter a poor person may die from the cold or burn to death in one of the regular fires that ravages overcrowded buildings. Or, death could come in the form of HIV/AIDS.

The life of the poor – homelessness and deprivation – is constructed as an "aberrant intrusion" that unsettles official perceptions and hopes of an orderly city. Murray's analysis of officialdom's responses to the perceived urban disorder proceeds by distinguishing between "two analytically different modes of thought – one creative and the other destructive." The "creative impulse," he argues, constructs the housing problem within a framework of "positive environmentalism" by promoting plans to improve the physical environment and by providing appropriate amenities and social services to engender a "satisfactory urban life." In contrast, "destructive impulses" perceives inner city decay through the demonising lens of "negative environmentalism," based on the presumption that excising "unhealthy parts of the city is critical to the preservation of an orderly urban landscape." This approach echoes the sanitation syndrome that was so central to the urban segregation and control programmes of the early 20th century, which sought physically to remove poor black people (who were criminalised and constructed as vectors of disease) to the outskirts of the city. Today, "bad buildings" are identified as hubs of criminality from which people are evicted in order to sanitise the inner city. These contemporary removal schemes are designed, Murray suggests, "to remake Johannesburg in the roseate image of a world class city."

Urban renewal became the leitmotif of city planners and politicians from the mid-1990s as they attempted to grapple with city's rapid transformation. These ideas were driven by modernist planners who, following in the traditions of urban planners around the globe, were "consumed by the desire to impose visual regimentation, symmetrical uniformity, and legible coherence on the unruly landscape..." These urban revitalisation plans draw their ideological inspiration from Western experiences of urban regeneration at the heart of which lay corporate-centred strategies. According to Murray this approach has placed serious constraints on the ability of the municipality to address the needs of the poor: "Because they have endorsed technocratic principles that favour a business friendly environment and because they are compelled to operate within the constraints of fiscal responsibility, urban policy makes have limited maneuverability in implementing a basic-needs approach that can address the quality of life concerns for all citizens." In fact, the privatisation policies that were encapsulated in the grand plans

- Igoli 2002 and Igoli 2030 - have placed serious limitations on people's access to basic services.

A second dimension of the local state's response to the crisis of the inner city has been the promotion of gentrification schemes of downtown Johannesburg. Murray criticises these plans as primarily "about the revalorisation of real estate values" that are aimed at the upwardly mobile young black middle class. The revitalisation of urban communities for low-income residents is thus pushed further to the margins in the grand plans of the authorities.

Murray concludes his analysis of the city authority's responses to the perceived crisis by characterising Johannesburg as a "revanchist city." In the revanchist city, the poor are criminalised and held responsible for urban disorder, including homelessness, occupation of buildings, illegal trading and other identified problems. The "vindictive rhetoric" of the privileged and policy-makers against the "crime and grime" is indicative of "revanchist urbanism." This paradigm, he continues, is distinctive for its portrayals of the city "at war with itself." In this "zero-sum competition over access to scarce resources ... the haves are willing to go to great lengths to defend their privilege ... and have become increasingly vicious in keeping the have-nots at bay." 11

However, the people of Johannesburg have resisted efforts to tame the city. Although Murray detects resistance, and acknowledges their salience, he also laments the limited impact of the 'atomised individuals – homeless squatters, itinerant workers and other socially marginalized persons – who, he argues, "do not possess the organization power of disruption – that is the meant to withhold critical resources." This approach does however tend to draw too sharp a distinction between different types of movements and their actions. It is true that many forms of resistance are often ephemeral and parochial, and often defensive and reactive, confined to specific building and streets. But these multiple movements have demonstrated the potential to transcend these restrictions and have often coalesced around social movements such as the Inner City Forum. Solidarity struggles against evictions and water privatization have also contributed to the growth of collectivities. By not focusing on urban social movements active in townships and squatter settlements, Murray's analysis of the responses of the poor misses an important dimension of the class struggle over the future of the city. Also, other collectivities, such as immigrant networks and Pentecostal churches have also impacted on the socio-political landscape of the city.

In recent years Johannesburg has received increased scholarly and popular attention.<sup>12</sup> Although some of these have provided interesting and some-

times innovative interpretations of post-apartheid Johannesburg, few have achieved Murray's critical theoretical engagement with the underlying processes of the city's transformation. It is simply indispensable for anyone who wants to comprehend the complex dynamics of city building. However, it is also a vital handbook for critical scholars and activists who aim to challenge the dominance of capitalist agendas in the reconstruction of Johannesburg.

## N. Nieftagodien

#### **Footnotes**

- <sup>1</sup> M. Davis, *Planet of Slums*, New York: Verso, 2006.
- <sup>2</sup> M. Murray, p.4
- <sup>3</sup> C. Van Onselen, New Babylon, New Nineveh: Everyday Life on the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914, Jonathan Ball Publishers, 1982, p.3
- <sup>4</sup> M. Murray, p.2
- <sup>5</sup> The Mercury, 29 October 2008
- <sup>6</sup> The Star, 26 November 2008
- <sup>7</sup> M. Murray, p.21
- <sup>8</sup> M. Murray, p.66
- <sup>9</sup> M. Murray, p.72
- 10 M. Murray, p.85
- 11 M. Murray, p.234
- <sup>12</sup> J. Beall, O. Crankshaw & S. Parnell, Uniting a Divided City: Governance and Social Exclusion in Johannesburg. Earthscan, 2002; K. Beavon, Johannesburg: The Making and Shaping of the City, University of Pretoria Press, 2004; A. Mbembe & S. Nuttall (eds), Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis, 2004; R. Tomlinson, R. Beauregard, L. Bremner & X. Mangcu (eds), Emerging Johannesburg: Perspectives on the Postapartheid City, Routledge, 2003.

# ASINIMALI:

# UNIVERSITY STRUGGLES IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

Richard Pithouse, editor Africa World Press, 2006

How does a movement, a party, a state, go about transforming a society? The distribution of property, access to power, the construction of culture, are all, undeniably, central to this project. But perhaps most important of all is the reshaping of education, particularly higher education, especially when the society in question has rested for generations on the empowering of one group, one race, and the disempowering of another. The monopoly of knowledge has legitimated power and the reproduction of ruling elites, on the one hand, while it has positioned the subaltern as ignorant and incapable, on the other. Since the replacement of the apartheid regime in South Africa in 1994, the new ruling party, the African National Congress, has articulated and reiterated its commitment to "transformation," but its left critics, inside and outside South Africa, have questioned the implementation of this commitment. ASINIMALI (which translates as "We have no money" and was a popular catchphrase of the anti-apartheid movement) provides a detailed assessment of the ANC's transformation of higher education.

This alone would be a worthy endeavor, but ASINIMALI offers even more. This thin – but rich – volume is a collection of essays produced by the Committee for Academic Freedom in Africa, whose founding (1991) predates the transfer of power in South Africa. CAFA was organized to develop analyses of the impact of neoliberalism and structural adjustment on African universities. It was also attentive to the resistance of students, teachers, and staff, and to the building of networks of solidarity between academics and students in Africa and their North American colleagues.

Thus, while this book has a very specific focus – higher education in South Africa since 1994 – it aspires to a broader applicability. Co-published in the United States, it is more accessible to North American readers than far too many South African texts. We can read it, use it to better understand the limitations of the transformation in South Africa (that is, get beyond our "disappointments" in that revolution's "shortcomings"), and use its essays' insights to better analyze our own experiences with the neoliberal transformation of the academy in North America. From my little private liberal arts college in Minnesota to the sprawling public University of Minnesota across the Mississippi River, to Canada, Mexico, and to South Africa and

beyond, the chilling grip of the neoliberal fist and its market-driven ideologies and practices threatens to choke the life out of higher education. The silver lining in the neoliberal cloud, I would argue, is that its global agenda makes transnational solidarity more necessary – and more possible – than ever. ASINIMALI is a valuable step in that direction.

In his introductory essay, editor Richard Pithouse, a scholar-activist at the University of KwaZulu Natal and amidst the Abhalalhi Base Mjondolo, the Shack Dwellers' Movement, lays a foundation for understanding the neoliberal agenda for the academy as not merely budget-cutting and an ideological shift to the right, but also as a new neo-colonialism, a capturing of the African academy by the financial, political, and foundation arms of the Global North. Students are faced with higher fees and diminished scholarships, while sub-contractors are brought on campus to replace full-time workers. The corporatization of university governance has gone hand-in-glove with the commodification of research and knowledge, undercutting the possibilities for social critique. Effective teachers are steered into revenue-producing research projects and encouraged to write grants which will employ their students. The undergraduate classroom and curriculum are vacated of provocative and innovative ideas. It's a grim picture with which most readers of this review are all too familiar, and it is fleshed out by the individual essays Pithouse and his colleagues have assembled.

Andrew Nash, who left the South African academic scene to become editor of Monthly Review Press in the U.S., argues that, despite the publicly articulated agenda of "transformation" in South Africa, its university scene has been captured by "the American model": "... a highly differentiated hierarchy of institutions, academic specializations defined in such a way as to establish precise norms of achievement and research 'output,' concentration of massive resources behind the highest achieving individuals and institutions, an ethos of individual self-advancement and undisguised careerism, and a strong orientation to the marketplace." While this model claims to be blind to race, Nash summons considerable evidence that it has replicated the cleavages of race and class long current in the U.S. - and in South Africa. Despite this apparent course towards corporatization and colonization, Nash argues, there remains alive the memory of student struggles in South Africa, struggles which were central to the anti-apartheid movement. "It is no longer a visible presence," he writes, "and many would wish to forget it. But events could still awaken its memory and bring its energies back into play."

Several following essays in ASINIMALI's opening section ("From Autonomy to Managerialism") argue that the ANC's and the state's claims to be mar-

shalling the resources of the academy for the project of transformation have reduced the autonomy and free space that universities once enjoyed (even under the Nationalist regime!) and made it more difficult to practice critical work within this arena. Academic freedom has been "smothered" by corporate authoritarianism, which makes the struggle for the right to dissent a central goal for activist academics and students (Jonathan Jansen, "Accounting for Autonomy," and Roger Southall and Julian Cobbing, "From Racial Liberalism to Corporate Authoritarianism").

But the CAFA comrades refuse to close this section on a despairing note. They turn to two activists, one from the older generation (though certainly and significantly still an activist), former Pan-Africanist Congress leader and Robben Island prisoner Neville Alexander, and contemporary student and community-based activist Prishani Naidoo. Alexander, now a theorist and practitioner of adult education, ("Language Policy, Symbolic Power, and the Democratic Responsibility of the Post-Apartheid University") links the validating and valuing of language diversity to the resurrection of academic freedom in the age of globalization. His work in adult education at the University of Cape Town and his political activism around language diversity lead him not merely to advocate but also to demonstrate the consequences of work which turns the knowledge of "ethnic" languages into access to employment, free speech, and political power. In her essay ("Constituting the Class": Neoliberalism and the Student Movement in South Africa") Naidoo critiques the student movement of the early 1990s (and her own involvement in it) for its willingness to endorse state control of higher education. Older and wiser now, she and her comrades recognize that the "academic freedom" of the neoliberal university has meant the hegemony of the market and private business interests. Drawing on her experiences in the anti-privatization movement based in townships, she highlights recent university-based struggles which have linked students and staff in opposition to neoliberal budget cuts, sub-contracting, and reorganization. Thus, from both Alexander and Naidoo, readers of ASINIMALI learn of the possibilities and realities of struggle, in both new and older forms.

Part Two of ASINIMALI ("Student and Worker Struggles at Three Universities in Post-Apartheid South Africa") offers three detailed case studies of recent struggles: at the former University of Durban-Westville, the University of the Witswatersrand, and at the University of Cape Town. Essays by Fazel Khan, James Pendlebury, Lucien van der Walt, and Jonathan Grossman offer similar narratives of the late 1990s and early 2000s: overt managerial actions towards rationalization, sub-contracting, budget-cutting, curricular, and research changes were met with grassroots activism which often bridged boundaries between students, faculty and staff. While the

details differed somewhat in each situation, the dynamics were substantially similar. So, too, were the outcomes, as the neoliberal agenda emerged scarred but victorious. The struggles, however, suggest that that memory of earlier student activism referenced early in the volume by Andrew Nash is indeed still alive and accessible.

Part Three of ASINIMALI ("Post-Apartheid Disciplines") features three essays which explore the ways that neoliberalism is restructuring the production of knowledge. These essays suggest how much is at stake, but, like so much of this collection, they also reveal the persistence of struggle. Mahmood Mamdani, now a Professor of Government and Anthropology at Columbia University in New York City, uses his experiences as Director of the Centre for African Studies at the University of Cape Town in 1997 as a basis from which to critique the production of a national narrative of South Africa which sees it as separate from the rest of the African continent. His refusal to participate in this discourse, let alone to build a department which would propagate it, led to his separation from the University of Cape Town in remarkably short order. Mamdani's trenchant analysis reveals the interconnections between neoliberalism, neo-colonialism, the corporatization of the academy, and the structure and content of curriculum. Along the way in this stunning essay, Mamdani asks readers to reconsider the ways we think about the relationships between past and present, the ways we employ particular disciplines to produce and organize knowledge, and how intellectual work is indissolubly linked to struggles for social transformation. In this essay, Mamdani's challenges to the dominant and conventional structures of knowledge, structures which could not tolerate his presence and participation for more than a year, provide a powerful intellectual resistance to neoliberalism's agenda. His critique of the organization of "African Studies" research, teaching, and publication extends into laying the foundation for an emancipatory discipline, one which could, as he writes, "reconstruct Africa from a political standpoint." Mamdani's experience and his writing and publication of this essay also says to each of us – each of us, even alone, can take a stand and make a difference in the struggle over the reorganization of the academy.

Peter Vale follows Mamdani's essay with his critique of the practice of "International Relations" as an academic discipline in South Africa, and he, in turn, is followed by Sheena Essof, who provides a critical assessment of "Women's and Gender Studies." Vale pulls no punches, calling the academic discipline of "International Relations" a "pathology" in South Africa, while the practice of the field in the world has been "domesticated." [W]riting about the writing of International Relations in South Africa ... will remain a dismal duty in a doomed but still very dangerous discipline."

One might hope for more for and from Women's and Gender Studies, "an innovative transdisciplinary field." Despite some interesting and hopeful inroads in development studies and related fields, Essof argues, Women's and Gender Studies has been limited, tamed, and isolated from the efforts of African women to improve their lives. Essof details labor-intensive efforts by women scholars just to carve out miniscule niches in the ever-more hostile neoliberal academy, while also experiencing deeper isolation from women struggling outside its walls. The problem is not feminists' work or feminism's insights, but the hostility of the academy to a "holistic" discipline which inherently challenges the tidy categories in which knowledge has been organized. Essof holds out hope that feminism can yet reach a wider audience than women, that it can connect struggles inside the academy with those outside, and that it can offer new analytical and intellectual perspectives from which social critiques can be launched.

As I was reading this book and preparing this review, news reached me that the administration of the University of KwaZulu-Natal was threatening to close the Centre for Civil Society, one of the few bastions of critical thought and activism left in the South African academy (see <a href="http://www.">http://www.</a> ukzn.ac.za/ccs). Led by Patrick Bond, born in Northern Ireland, raised and educated in the U.S. (ultimately as a student of the critical Marxist thinker David Harvey), and a student of the dashed hopes of Zimbabwe, the Centre for Civil Society has aided and abetted troublesome scholaractivists like Ashwin Desai, Fazel Khan, Dennis Brutus, Richard Pithouse, and Raj Patel; has provided links to the World Social Forum movement; and has connected with independent social movements, from the Shack Dwellers' Movement to the Anti-Privatization Forum. It was little wonder that the UKZN management wanted to shut them down. What was more interesting – and more hopeful – was the breadth and depth of the support they received, from a 33-1 Faculty Board vote in favor of keeping the Centre open to letters, emails, and phone calls from around the world. Here was a stunning example of how the authoritarian, neoliberal academy prompts its own resistance, how quickly that resistance can congeal, and how, even in this political and economic climate, it can succeed.

This sort of solidarity, reaching from informal settlements and townships to dormitories and cafeterias to classrooms and lecture halls, circulated by the internet, cell phones, DVDs, and word of mouth, can cross boundaries between homeless workers, undocumented immigrants, cafeteria and janitorial workers, students and professors, and, yes, even between countries. *ASINIMALI* was written and composed in the hopes that it might contribute not just to a critique of the neoliberal university but also to global struggles inspired by very different visions. Recent events suggest that the hopes

of the Committee for Academic Freedom in Africa may not have been misplaced.	ı
Peter Rachlef	f

# POETRY AND PROTEST: A DENNIS BRUTUS READER

Lee Sustar and Aishna Karmin, eds. Haymarket Books, 2006

# SEASONAL FIRES: NEW AND SELECTED POEMS

Ingrid de Kok Seven Stories Press, 2006

[This review was written prior to the passing of Dennis Brutus, to whose memory this issue is dedicated. Ed.]

A couple of years ago a poet-colleague of mine Paul Allen went to Zimbabwe to look at the poetry scene there. It was a typically quirky mission and resulted in a typically quirky essay in the *Southern Review*—part travelogue, part personal essay, part critical article on the state of poetry in Zimbabwe, part polemic on the state of poetry and poetry production in the United States. Allen comes to the conclusion that contemporary Zimbabwean poetry is "panic poetry, uttering statements about issues and meaning, none of which is much different from others. It's as though each poem is saying, 'I don't have time to be a neat little package—the world's collapsing" (129). For Allen, the extremity of the poets' situations excuses what he sees as the poetry's verbal clunkiness and logical lapses. Such a claim might smack of patronization were it not that Allen uses it to attack the inexcusability of similar clunkiness and logical lapses in some highly reputed contemporary US poets' work—including David Ignatow, Lucille Clifton, Ai, and John Ashbery.

Furthermore the claim resonates with a very similar claim made by South African poet-activist Jeremy Cronin some twenty years earlier with regard to the poetry produced "under the rine of terror" in the 1980s, the last full decade of formal apartheid. In that essay, published in *Research in African Literatures*, Cronin described the kind of poetry being performed in South Africa as poetry that was frequently produced under similarly urgent circumstances, the poets themselves often being literally on the run. This poetry had an energy about it, an urgency, and a sense of its necessary-ness to the situation at hand that meant that writing it off as sloganeering or as *merely* protest-poetry showed a massive misunderstanding of the nature not just of this particular poetry or protest poetry as a sub-genre, but of poetry as a form and of composition as a pedagogical and ideological practice.

Cronin's and Allen's essays raise questions about the anthologizing of such poetry—after the fact, as it were, once the occasion for their production has passed )(nd the creation of literary histories that might be separate from or at best parallel to political histories). These questions become all the more problematic when the histories are told for different audiences—no longer just after the fact, but out of place, too. Which might lead us to Ezra Pound's famous definition of poetry as "news that stays news." In the case of South African poetry published outside the country it certainly appears to be the case that ever since the early Heinemann anthology Seven South African Poets in 1971 American audiences have indeed looked to South African poetry for news. Rather than publishing new volumes by individual poets or publishing volumes of selected poems or collected poems by individual poets, non-South African publishers tended to publish multi-author anthologies whose purpose seemed to be to bear witness to the broad cultural landscape of South Africa and the ravages of apartheid. Occasionally, as in two still riveting anthologies from the 1980s, The Return of the Amasi Bird, and David Bunn and Jane Taylor's special issue of Triquarterly, From South Africa: New Writing, Photographs, and Art, this purpose is explicit. The Return of the Amasi Bird was originally entitled What Every Black Man Knows, for instance, and Bunn and Taylor's introduction to From South Africa works from an underlying premise that the issue's "various stories, speeches, articles, poems, and political documents" offer the "combined evidence" of a contemporary "South Africa" quite different from "versions of the same land suggested by texts" a mere five years earlier. Even after the demise of formal apartheid, a number of anthologies of South African poetry—and not only those with an eye to an international market—have been concerned in one way or another with telling a communal history, using selected poems to delineate the experience of "South Africa," periodizing history by way of poetry. All of these volumes are valuable samplings of the staggering aesthetic wealth and historical interest of South African poetry, lending credence to Stephen Gray's bold assertion in 2000 that "what happens in South African culture is poetry . . . so don't give me the novel as the measure of South African culture."

So it is all the more interesting that in the space of a couple of months in 2006 two volumes of selected poems by individual authors—Dennis Brutus and Ingrid de Kok—appeared in the United States. If these books are still designed, like the anthologies, to give us the measure of South African culture, it seems that they are now doing so in the Poundian sense of "news that stays news" rather than of the urgent Stop Press variety that Cronin and Allen described. I want to suggest that the appearance of Haymarket Press's Brutus selection Poetry and Protest: A Dennis Brutus Reader and Seven Stories' de Kok selection Seasonal Fires: New and Selected Poems indicates a new stage

in the representation of South Africa in the outside world, exemplary of what Anthony O'Brien has called the "normalization" of South Africa. As O'Brien has it, there are two opposing ways to consider this normalization. In a positive light one might see it as confirmation that the news from South Africa these days has, mercifully, changed: with the formal end of apartheid, South African poets can now breathe a sigh of relief and concentrate on their individual "craft" just like their professional peers in the USA—never mind the fact that doing so will restrict their circulation to a tiny coterie of other publishing poets and one or two totally marginalized academics. The extremity of the political situation having diminished, South African poetry naturally becomes less political, naturally approximates more closely to the dominant mode of English-language poetry elsewhere in the world. Surely that's a good thing—as much a benefit for poets and poetry as it is a relief politically for all South Africans. Now that the house isn't on fire any longer we can take a little time to take stock of how it came to be built, how the fire started, and so on.

We might, however, read this process of normalization in O'Brien's second, more pessimistic and pejorative sense as representing "the circumscription in advance of just where a search for deep democracy could lead in politics, in economics, and in culture." That American presses consider it appropriate to move from multi-author anthology to single-author selection indicates that even in the case of an avowedly political, avowedly spokespersonly poet as Dennis Brutus, South African poetry can now most effectively or appropriately be considered in light of individual careers rather than as representative of the whole.

A number of South African poets and critics share O'Brien's latter position, and are determined to resist the former, seemingly inexorable, seemingly desirable logic of "normalization." In one of the strongest, most sustained, and most substantial of such statements, Kelwyn Sole came out strongly in defense of poetry's continued relevance in post-apartheid society as a mode of witness. In a 2002 essay in the British leftist academic journal New Formations, Sole argues that "it is the poets who have continued to stress most insistently the role of social responsibility and political commentary, and to demonstrate these in practice. . . . In a situation where, too often, critics of the arts have been quick to ease back into studies which display literary concerns in isolation, or to carry out 'interrogations' all but blind to the strong economic traces which bind and direct consciousness in a situation of structural impoverishment and uneven development, this poetry bears witness both to the unrelenting needs of the country's impoverished majority and the contentiousness of a number of national policy choices." Allan Kolski Horwitz reprinted Sole's essay in South Africa in *Botsotso*, a magazine that even in its typography attempts to maintain some of the unruliness of apartheid era publications.

Sole and Horwitz and his Botsotso Jesters project are, however, little known outside South Africa and even though they might have some academic and/or political support, in the normalized South Africa, the people making decisions about what news will stay news there—i.e., what poetry will take the measure of national culture—make those decisions based on expected sales. And those expectations are in line with broader expectations about poetry as an essentially private practice, produced by more or less gifted individual poets.

Hence (perhaps) my slightly ambiguous response to the nearly simultaneous appearance in the United States of the single-author Selecteds by Brutus and de Kok. Reading these two collections in tandem is, however, nothing if not instructive about South African politics and poetry and the relationship between the two—especially, inevitably, in regard to race, but also, illuminatingly, in regard to gender and generation. At the obvious level, contrasting the two poets' work brings out their differences of approach and perspective in stark relief, Brutus boldly adopting the burden of spokesperson speaking the "wordless woe" of South Africa's underclass, de Kok following her own advice that "it behooves white people to be a little restrained, respectful, suspicious of themselves as knowers of reality" ("Interview"). Thus, we could compare the scars Brutus bears on his body as a result of having been shot by apartheid police with the frequently psychological scars de Kok repeatedly refers to in her poetry; or we could contrast Brutus's Robben Island in the well-known and powerful sequence of poems from Letters to Martha with de Kok's equally well-known and powerful "Our Sharpville." There is anger and shame in both works, but de Kok recounts that her shame at "having heard my grandmother lie" pushes her back to "the closed rooms, home," while Brutus, though confessing to hearing the "whispers of horrors/ that people the labyrinth of self" asserts that free from falsifying rhetoric or immature posturing "we were simply prisoners/ of a system we had fought/ and still opposed" (emphasis added).

There are plenty of other similarly obvious ways in which Brutus and de Kok's differences stand out, even down to the appearance of the two books: in keeping with Brutus's dual role as poet-activist, *Poetry and Protest*'s inclusion of essays, speeches, interviews, historical background and analysis gives extraordinarily dense contextualization to the generous and judicious selection of Brutus's poems, which are squashed onto the pages much as Brutus often squashes his originals onto scraps of paper when he travels. Ingrid de Kok's *Seasonal Fires* is a more traditional collection, demonstrating due respect for

the poems as poems by laying out each one on its own page. It makes sense that de Kok should get this kind of treatment at this time since her work has always been more obliquely political than that of Brutus (or, for that matter, of Sole, or Horwitz, or many of the non-professional poets whose work exploded from the pages of *Staffrider* and elsewhere in the 1980s).

But such obvious differences should not obscure the similarities between the two. If the scars of apartheid are to be healed, then indeed maybe South Africa should still be looking to its poets to come to terms with the physical violence and psychic mess of apartheid. In de Kok and Brutus both there is a "continental sense of sorrow" that accompanies them wherever they go—in Brutus this manifests itself in his contemporary commitment to global economic justice; in de Kok in an almost nostalgic empathy with African immigrants in Venice; and both are driven by compassionate rage at the specter of AIDS stalking the land, orphans whose "satchels are packed with / two thousand brothers and sisters. / Two million more are in the wings," while Mbeki's recalcitrance thwarts efforts to force reparations out of apartheid profiteers. Furthermore, while Brutus proclaims himself "the world's troubadour" or even more grandiosely as a rebel with freedom as his cause, and de Kok gives us intimate, quotidian domestic images of knitting and darning, both poets in two sequences that deserve to be spoken of in the same breath as the greatest political poems of the twentieth century, superbly combine the personal and the political. Rereading the poems from Letters to Martha in Poetry and Protest I registered with something like shock in the depth of interiority of Brutus's remarkably restrained and painterly images, his representation of the boredom and self-doubt of prison life, the effort of self-discipline required to resist such simple, brutal deprivations as listening to music or being allowed to see the stars.

Conversely, with de Kok, the magnificent apartheid-era poem "Small Passing" speaks way beyond the poem's original occasion—a man who told a woman whose child had died stillborn to stop grieving because her suffering was insignificant when compared with the daily suffering of black women in South Africa. Surely this is one of the great humanistic poems of the twentieth century, squarely confronting the vast discrepancies of deprivation and privilege in the world, but quietly insisting on the necessity of individual mourning. Indeed in its final image of the grieving woman being "armed" with one of the babies of her sister (black) women, the poem hints at the ultimate political efficacy of a Foucauldian souci de soi. Likewise, it seems to me that, in face of the horrific revelations of the TRC, de Kok's skeptical meditation on the value of words and narrative, while couched with typical tentativeness as a question, actually offers us as readers and writers a useful activist credo: that we still owe it to ourselves and others, to resist the

great defeat of the world by continuing to "imagine whole words, whole worlds:/ the flame splutter of consonants,/ deep sea-anemone vowels,/ birth-cable syntax, rhymes that start in the heart,/ and verbs, verbs that move mountains."

If the appearance of these two fine single-author collections betokens a kind of acceptance of the pastness of South Africa as a locus of political struggle, and the abandonment of poetry criticism to the trackers of aesthetic pedigrees, then I regret the passing of a democratic moment. In his very brief introduction to the anthology It All Begins: Poems from Postliberation South Africa, culled from his decade-long editorship of the important journal New Coin, Rob Berold praises poetry as "the most low-tech of the arts"—a feature which allows it, as Lesego Rampolokeng says, updating Shelley, to be "democracy beyond the statute book." Let us hope that publishers both in South Africa and out continue to recognize that democratic spirit, that readers still look for it and are prepared to support it with their subscriptions, and that teachers train their students how to see it, cherish it, and pass it forward.

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**Simon Lewis** 

## TO THE BRINK: THE STATE OF DEMOCRACY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Xolela Mangcu University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2008

Xolela Mangcu is a self confessed intellectual. In him we find a brave, insightful academic who, since his time at WITS University in South Africa in the 1980s, has risen as a critical writer. His new book, To The Brink: The State of Democracy in South Africa, although somewhat inciting, captures the progress of the political system of democracy in South Africa since 1994.

On the 21 September 2008, the president of the republic of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, resigned. The run up to this monumental event was fraught with intimidation, political pressure on the judiciary, and threats of murder. In this context, the recently released book by Xolela reads like a blow by blow commentary of the events that have lead South Africa to the brink of the collapse of democracy and peace in the rainbow nation. Xolela has spelled out the problem with the house of cards that was Thabo Mbeki cabinet and in a very short time, his insight has proven to be true.

Xolela puts forward that Mbeki has followed the path of many other African leaders in aspiring to hold onto power and leadership long after the political sentiment and laws of the country allow him too. His exile abroad allowed him the opportunity to gain considerable insight into the running of a state and afforded him a Masters degree in Economics. However, his leadership style and personality saw him surround himself with 'yes' men and lackeys.

Without much warning, Mbeki became stubborn. This was so unexpected as Nelson Mandela, the stalwart of leaders, endorsed Mbeki as the future leader of both the ANC and the Country. However, Mbeki's stubbornness and inability to listen to critics has had fundamental failures in policy, most notably AIDs and the crisis in Zimbabwe.

Xolela is not afraid to spell out the problems facing South Africa and lays many of these problems squarely at the feet of the ex-president. This was a brave thing to do as Mbeki held the seat of President. With his resignation from office in September 2008, Xolela's thoughts on the topic prove to be insightful and noteworthy.

#### The Barrier of Racism

As a white South African it is always interesting to see how black South Africans address the issues of race and racism. This is particularly so in politics, as political parties are often divided by race and not class. Xolela puts forward a spell binding account of the black consciousness movement in South Africa and looks at how race has played a significant role in shaping the current political crisis. He says, "The central argument of this book is that racial nativism goes against the long tradition of racial syncretism that have always characterized South Africa..."

His vision in To The Brink is for a multiracial and inclusive South Africa that does not rely on cronyism but rather a strong civil society that is critical of government. This system has to be multiracial to avoid the stereotypes that have been prevalent under the Mbeki regime. These include labeling white critics racists and black critics white colluders. Xolela has strong criticism for this type of rhetoric and says of Mbeki, "In Mbeki's hands racial nationalism, which had become the source of political adaptation and survival for black people for centuries, had become a weapon of defense for wounded politicians bent on salvaging his personal intellectual reputation." Although this certainly seems to ring true there must be a recognition that elements of the media have seemed to propagate rumors and even lies about the Mbeki leadership, not that this in any way justifies the move to regulate the media. Xolela shows how this racial nationalism has lead to one of the greatest disasters of Mbeki's tenure, the failure of the State of Zimbabwe. He tells how Mbeki actively stood by and allowed Mugabe, the president of Zimbabwe, to become a tyrant. His adoption of quiet diplomacy was never going to succeed and has only proven to be a catastrophic failure.

Not only has Mbeki's failure been an embarrassment to African democracy and intervention but it has lead to a massive influx of illegal immigrants into South Africa. While Mbeki quietly tried to persuade Mugabe of his failures, Zimbabwe collapsed into economic and political chaos. Yet this attitude towards Mugabe was not based on his political importance but rather on his historical role as a freedom fighter and liberator. Xolela put forward that Mbeki could not and would not put pressure on a leader who had contributed to the freedom of Africa regardless of his current status. Mbeki had chosen to use the same, although valid, rhetoric of Mugabe, the idea that colonialism was the cause of all evil in Africa. Because of this, the cronyism and corruption within the Mugabe government had to be ignored.

Xolela recognizes that this attitude of national racism was used against

Mbeki's critics within the ANC. However, he was inconsistent with his punishment and went after some party members with vigor while shielding and protecting others.

This is very clear in the arms deal corruption case. The arms deal was a multibillion dollar military deal for the purchasing of ships, planes and other military hardware. Not long after the deal, rumors of corruption began to emerge. The most significant and prominent of those implicated was the then deputy president Jacob Zuma. Initially this was seen as a good move by Mbeki in removing a corrupt politician but it became increasingly clear that the removal of Zuma was simply a political move to remove the strongest opposition to Mbeki taking an unprecedented third term as head of the ANC.

Besides the political problems, Mbeki's other catastrophe has been his stance on HIV/AIDS. South Africa has one of the highest AIDS prevalence rates in the world. In this context Xolela points out that the county needs a significant HIV/AIDS policy. However, Mbeki's denial of the link between HIV and AIDs has only served to create confusion in the population. His determination to keep the incompetent Manto Tshabalala-Msimang is cronyism and the reward of loyalty over competence at its worse. The absurd stance on HIV/AIDs has made South Africa a laughing stock in the medical world and lead to millions of unnecessary deaths.

#### The Future

Interestingly much has happened in South Africa since the release of Xolela's book in the beginning of 2008. Most importantly Mbeki has been removed from the office of the president and replaced with one of Zuma's allies and deputy leader of the ANC, Kgalema Motlanthe, and then in May 2009 with Zuma himself. However, Xolela's book explores the future of Zuma. The author is a little vague on the future of the president of the ANC. Xolela is not particularly keen on either Zuma or Mbeki being the president, yet if forced to choose, he would opt for Zuma. This however is where To the Brink becomes a bit vague. As a South African I am aware of the context in which Zuma has been prosecuted, tried and acquitted. Without this knowledge, the context for the future of Zuma is not clear and there seems to be some unwritten context in this chapter needs to be placed.

### Conclusion

The most significant aspect of *To The Brink* is that it places the current situation of South African politics into context. Although his book was published before the removing of the president in 2008, his analysis preempts this and he shows clearly why this scenario played out. His work is insightful and interesting. This is certainly a book that contributes to the current understanding of politics in South Africa.

**Ashley Gunter** 

# DEMOCRATIZING DEMOCRACY: BEYOND THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC CANON

Boaventura de Sousa Santos, editor Verso Books, 2007

## SPACES FOR CHANGE?:

## THE POLITICS OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN NEW DEMOCRATIC ARENAS

Andrea Cornwall and Vera Schattan Coelho, editors Zed Books, 2007

## DEMOCRACY AS PROBLEM SOLVING: CIVIC CAPACITY IN COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE GLOBE

Xavier de Souza Briggs MIT Press, 2008

## Is this what democracy looks like?

A decade and a half after the African National Congress (ANC) won the landmark 1994 multi-racial elections that marked the end of apartheid in South Africa, millions of South Africans, most poor and Black, remain homeless. Many are the very women who built the large, grassroots bases of militant labor unions, such as those in the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), that helped to topple the apartheid regime. Most are unskilled. Today's South African economy needs fewer workers than before, and only skilled ones. So, the women who struggled for a new South Africa have gone back to the rural regions from which they came. Although COSATU membership numbers have held steady, its new members are decidedly middle-class, white-collar workers, in government agencies or finance. The new South Africa has left its poorest behind.

What happened? Why has this democracy, one with a progressive Constitution guaranteeing housing and healthcare, not fulfilled its promise of power to the people? Some of the answers to these questions lie in *Democratizing Democracy*, a collection of essays edited by Boaventura de Sousa Santos.

Santos and his co-authors argue that liberal democracy, whereby everyday citizens vote for representatives in government, has become hegemonic. When combined with neoliberal globalization, this type of democracy is tepid and low-intensity. It's marked by governments that fail to substantively

improve the welfare of the people. Social inclusion is framed as an excess of demands, rather than an acknowledgment of "the right to have rights." A large percentage of the voting populace feels disenchanted with their elected representatives, who seem to come from an ever-shrinking, ever more privileged elite. Sound familiar?

In *Democratizing Democracy*, the people at large don't respond by voting for blue-blooded politicians fashioning themselves as "folksy," but by taking matters into their own hands. The book showcases a wide range of participatory democratic forms where those forced to play by the rules help to shape the rules. Everyday citizens make concrete policy decisions themselves (on city budget priorities, hospital finances, land ownership, etc.), rather than relying on elected representatives to report (or distort) their concerns. Along the way, they create what Santos calls "a new social grammar," one where fair distribution of public goods and democratic negotiation of access to these goods take precedence.

The volume focuses on five country case studies—South Africa, India, Brazil, Colombia, and Mozambique—to glean geographically diverse lessons for meaningful participatory democracy. Other strong essay collections, such as *Deepening Democracy*, edited by Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright, have examined the "countervailing powers" of participatory governance before, and there is some overlap in their case studies. However, with the exception of Mozambique, the project at hand focuses solely on middle-income, "semi-peripheral states," ones gaining in global power but still considered part of the Global South. The book's key strengths stem from this consideration of each country's participatory experiments in the context of larger patterns of industrialization and neoliberal power.

Some special attention is paid to Colombia because of its continued severe violence. For instance, Francisco Gutiérrez Sanín and Ana María Jaramillo delineate the ways in which each new cycle of pendular movement (between compromise pacts and armed struggles) renders it that much more difficult for everyday citizens to imagine anything else. Mauricio Romero emphasizes how international support strengthened the efforts of Urabá banana workers, even as it also ironically isolated these workers from the *national* union scene. In a heart-wrenching, essential piece on the communities of peace in San José de Apartado, María Teresa Uribe describes one community's attempt to work and live with dignity, even as the residents are caught in the crossfire of guerilla armies and state authorities.

Santos applied the project's theoretical principles to the book itself. All chapter contributors, save for one co-author and Santos himself, come

from the Global South, and give us the sorts of insights best conveyed by those at the center of the action. Together, the fourteen chapters make a real contribution to English-language studies on participatory democracy worldwide. They highlight two of the key challenges of democracy as ongoing projects for robust nation-states: the fight against social oppression, as is particularly acute in India and Mozambique, and the consolidation of new democracies, as in the cases of Brazil and Colombia. The case of South Africa illuminates efforts to meet both of these challenges.

#### Context, context, context

Sakhela Buhlungu traces the democratic tradition in South Africa's liberation movements. Organically developed student representative councils, "people's courts," and street and area committees served as "organs of people's power." Local communities had to actively hold these people's courts accountable, knowing that those that didn't would be left with kangaroo courts. Further, before the 1994 elections, unions had "no choice but to be democratic." In a context of employer and state repression, these horizontal, egalitarian leadership structures ensured that, if a leader were victimized, the work would go on. These unions, in turn helped to lay the foundations of an impressive democratic infrastructure.

However, democracy cannot be reduced to any set of procedures. When the official democratic transition began after apartheid, grassroots mobilization atrophied. Ordinary citizens assumed that the new elected government would continue the work of the national liberation movement and represent their interests, but the elites were busy making deals amongst themselves. Further, formerly exiled and imprisoned leaders were unaccustomed to participatory democratic traditions when they took high-ranking positions in the ANC.

Shamim Meer takes a closer look at how ANC-sanctioned neoliberal policies have impacted women in South Africa. She highlights the ways in which issues of intersectionality—whereby social forces such as race, gender, class, sexuality intersect in unique ways—have long been overlooked in South African policy-making, to the detriment of poor, Black women. The ways in which they have been counted as mere bodies in quantitative outcomes of economic development projects, for example, masks the ways in which specific subpopulations bear a disproportionate burden of poverty.

In some ways, such gender disparities are extensions of women's struggles during apartheid, when women-led campaigns were often seen as distractions

from socialist revolutions and national liberation. In those social movements, too, acceptance of women was often instrumentalist; their membership was critical to factory agreements, but issues like sexual harassment were largely ignored within workers' unions. Still, women's groups garnered some victories, like a quota of 101 of 400 democratic parliamentary seats in the ANC. In addition, despite fierce opposition, they defeated attempts to exempt traditional authority structures from equality clauses in the Constitution.

Today, women's organizations still pursue smaller, focused initiatives, but neoliberal discourse has become so pervasive that non-governmental organizations and feminists now frame domestic violence in terms of economic cost, rather than human rights. Further, some leading activists became beneficiaries of the post-apartheid, "deracialized" society, leaving women without a single umbrella organization to represent them.

Ultimately, Democratizing Democracy articulates the problems to be solved better than the potential solutions to undertake. For instance, D.L. Seth's chapter on India is full of illuminating details about the co-optation of Independence movement activists into middle-class civil servitude, but the circumstances and triggers for civic revitalization in the 1990s—when "all this [pessimism and apathy] changed, almost suddenly, when protests again globalization... gained momentum"—remain obscured. Further, the poster children of participatory democracy advocates tend to be municipal participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil and the local panchayat councils of Kerala and West Bengal. In those contexts, the ruling parties face strong opposition parties, and they must work with allied groups and continuously engage the populace to stay in power. Without countervailing forces against the ANC, South Africa is left with few domestic role models.

Spaces for Change?, edited by Andrea Cornwall and Vera Schattan Coelho, and Democracy as Problem Solving, by Xavier de Souza Briggs offer significant clues on what can be done in South Africa.

In Spaces for Change?, John J. Williams examines the case of Health Facilities Boards (HFBs) in the Western Cape to understand. HFBs were supposed to be vehicles for community-driven healthcare, with community representatives constituting at least of the decision-making bodies. Unsurprisingly, forbidding (and forbiddingly white) hospitals do not change overnight. At one hospital, patrols employed by a white-owned security firm surveil the premises during the visiting hours of predominantly Black patients. Norms of deference to doctors discourage substantive dialogue and pervade already unequal relations. Election rules that only get publicized in newspapers and discriminate against poor, illiterate community members exacerbate

matters. HFBs focused on bureaucratic management goals, rather than concrete community needs.

Nevertheless, even institutions designed in part to protect elite interests can serve as rallying points for collective struggles. They fight the limits of the imagination of those who have internalized inferiority and second-class citizenship; they verbalize the need for something *more*, something *different* than the status quo. With grassroots mobilization, these newly stirred hopes can then be rendered concrete. As one Black HFB member, tired of being a passive recipient of information rather than an active participant in policy-making, put it:

This is how we speak,
This is how we look,
This is the image we want to project,
This is taboo to us,
This we do not tolerate.

## The fine line between legitimacy and co-optation

Both insider strategies, those working with government, and outsider strategies, those working via grassroots mobilization and social movements, are constantly needed to keep governmental institutions accountable. (Even when a success story is found, as in Porto Alegre, Santos underlines the need for renewed reflection and adjustments whenever participation stagnates.)

In another *Spaces for Change?* chapter, Bettina von Lieres gauges efforts by the Landless People's Movement (LPM) to reform land tenure laws in South Africa, which by and large reinforce traditional power structures. Over time, those who demanded services in slum areas were deemed "beneficiaries" rather than active citizens. In response, LPM helped to join hundreds of thousands of landless people, both rural and urban, in asserting their rights to basic services, to stay in one place or to travel, and to help to make decisions that impact their own lives. Although LPM leaders themselves have sometimes disagreed on collaborative or confrontational strategies vis-à-vis the state, they have gathered enough grassroots mobilization and NGO support to put land tenure reform and distribution on the official state agenda.

In *Democracy as Problem Solving*, Briggs examines a spectrum of collaborative and confrontational strategies pursued by community-based organizations to assert basic Constitutional rights. For example, the Homeless People's Federation collaborated with the state to build high-quality, affordable hous-

ing. They did so by combining technical assistance and capital accumulated by the poor people themselves with government subsidies, and they were successful in Durban, where the local government retained enough flexibility to support community-based initiatives. In Cape Town, however, local governments attempted to enact hostile national, top-down policies. Without sufficient government allies, the federation risked becoming an apologist for state inaction. Therefore, all three books question whether it is possible to institutionalize inclusion of outsiders in ways that don't co-opt them.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign (AEC) employed confrontational rallies, protests, and anti-eviction resistance. They were thus denounced by the ANC as "ultra-revolutionaries," even though some leaders in AEC have strong ties to the political party. This community group has successfully raised public awareness of their plight, but they have not consistently compelled the state to provide resources for their poor communities.

Given these tensions, both von Lieres and Briggs highlight the work of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) as an exemplar sociopolitical navigator with adept insider-outsider strategies. TAC used Constitutional Court mandates to win subsidizes retroviral treatments, even as President Thabo Mbeki insisted that HIV is not definitively linked to AIDS. Alongside media education, protest and civil disobedience, and litigation, it works with international aid groups, like Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders), to challenge governmental authorities and carve out new participatory spaces within state institutions, demanding public hospitals to carry out HIV and AIDS services. In addition to overt policy campaigns, TAC also worked to shift public sentiment towards HIV/AIDS and increase agencies' capacity to deliver services.

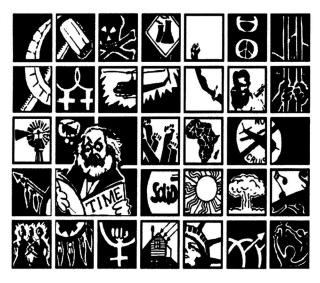
The three books complement one another well. Democratizing Democracy spells out the moral imperatives of meaningful democracy, but it brims with challenging sentences like, "It has to do with the negation of substantive conceptions of reason and the homogenizing forms of the organization of society, and with the recognition of human plurality." The other two books are stylistically much more accessible to lay readers. None of the books depict a dramatic revitalization of South African civil society, but all alluded to growing dissent against the ANC around the time of the 2000 elections. Briggs also hints that the 2010 World Cup, to be hosted by South Africa, presents both opportunities and challenges for new participatory mechanisms in decision-making. Together, the authors demonstrate that ordinary citizens can and should do more than just fill in the spaces allotted by technocrats, governmental institutions, and business interests. While

ordinary citizens have few "best practices" of participatory democracy to implement, at least there are some good ones to try. They're worth a shot.

Celina Su

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