

**Tracing the (Post)Apartheid Novel beyond 2000.**

Danyela Dimakatso Demir & Olivier Moreillon (eds.).
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Tracing the (Post)Apartheid Novel beyond 2000 (2021) is a reflection on and conversation about the trajectory and shifts within the South African literary landscape since 2000. The formatting of '(Post)Apartheid' in the title is eye-catching and thought-provoking. It is also problematic since there are contending views on the delineation of the term. The editors, Demir and Moreillon, admit that the term '(post)Apartheid' is a "compromise" (9). According to them, the strength of the term "lies in its 'contextual neutrality', that is the fact that it is not linked to a particular historical event in potential need of later re-evaluation" (9). This explanation indicates that the book is not merely focused on the 'after' Apartheid period, but also on how we (re)imagine the legacies of Apartheid in the 'now' and the future. The second question that comes to mind is how the focus on the novel only is justified. It is a truism that the South African literary landscape is rich with diverse literary forms. In response to this, the editors note that their analysis derives from the world literature theoretical framework which "sees the novel as a paradigmatic literary form [and] an entry point into a discussion of various literary centers and their (semi-)peripheries [...]" (27). My reading of Demir and Moreillon here is that the novel is a unique genre that allows for multiple methods of analysis owing to its adaptability and complexity.

The book sets itself apart from stale academic research by using the methodology of interviews with the selected authors. Instead of textual analysis or a quantitative survey of the literary production since 2000, the book goes "beyond" the period by using the methodology of interviews. The volume contains interviews with fourteen contemporary South African authors: Mariam Akabor, Sifiso Mzobe, Fred Khumalo, Futhi Ntshingila, Niq Mhlongo, Zukiswa Wanner, Nthikeng Mohlele, Mohale Mashigo, Lauren Beukes, Charlie Human, Yewande Omotoso, Andrew Salomon, Imraan Coovadia and Fred Strydom. Among the questions asked of the writers are "Which genres do

you see becoming more prominent in South African fiction [...]" and "What future project(s) are you working on"? In my reading of the responses, these questions allowed for the imagination to dwell on the present and future of literary production in South Africa. Interestingly, several the responses point towards the genre of speculative fiction. This genre is not 'new' in the landscape: Mohale Mashigo, Lauren Beukes and Andrew Salomon have, for example, already published quite a few texts. Another future trend predicted by the interviewees is a look into the South African past through historical fiction, which some authors argue has been neglected. Futhi Ntshingila comments on how history, black identity and memory should be central in our literature, "[w]e are like a memory fighting to remember, or fighting to keep away from forgetting" (71). Yewande Omotoso makes an important observation on the development of the country's fiction, saying, "as we repair and right the wrongs of our past, we'll be hearing from people that were previously told to keep quiet, who were told their point doesn't matter" (176). What these contentions reveal is that the future of South African fiction remains speculative about the past, present and the future and importantly, what these mean for the writer.

A second contribution made by the book is the focus on space in the novels. In tackling this issue, the editors focused on works that are set in one of South Africa's three major cities: Durban, Johannesburg and Cape Town. In line with this, one of the interview questions is "What aspects of home, belonging and community do you engage with in your fiction?" This enquiry revealed layered ideas of what/where home is and in turn how these homes(s) are imagined in South African literature. For example, Mohale Mashigo notes how "*black spaces, black people and the legacies affect what we call home, and how, when there is a change, we have to change our idea of home and our community and how we relate to each other*" (123, italics in original), and that this influences the themes and forms of her writing. It is not surprising that this spatial enquiry also reveals a local/global tension in South African novels. Writers such as Lauren Beukes, Nthikeng Mohlele and Imraan Coovadia shift geographical locations beyond South Africa. In contrast, Niq Mhlongo suggests a move from the predominantly depicted city to the rural

arguing that we need more stories about “those places that were silenced or ignored [...] writers should not be limited to only a few spaces” (91). This demonstrates on the one hand a shift to the global, and on the other a desire for a shift towards the specifically local.

Lastly, the collection’s significance to the current academic and literary scene lies in the question of tackling taboos in South African literature. Although this question might seem simple and straightforward, it captures contemporary and future trends in South African literature. Contemporary writers such as Thando Mgqolozana and Siphiwo Mahala are good examples of writers tackling cultural taboos since both wrote on male circumcision. Moreover, several writers discuss nuanced considerations of themes such as homophobia, xenophobia, race and racism. With regard to the latter two themes, Niq Mhlongo makes a bold statement: “I think in South Africa we are very apologetic in tackling issues that we feel will offend another race or people” (93). However, some writers such as Fred Khumalo point to another shift in the political landscape, in that “post-1994, many of us took this great sigh of relief that we were no longer obligated to use our art as a weapon of struggle [...] now I can pursue my art without feeling guilty” (59). Hence, Khumalo makes the observation that the future of South African fiction needs to “go back to Njabulo Ndebele’s exhortation to rediscover the ordinary; just telling ordinary stories of how people live because we’ve been consumed by the spectacular, as he calls it” (65). Similarly, Charlie Human makes the point that “[w]hat builds strong literature [...] is that people are telling the stories they want to tell, rather than people feeling that they have a duty to tell stories [...]” (165). Yewande Omotoso shares a similar sentiment of re-discovery, saying, “this is a time of discovery and permission, writers giving themselves permission to explore whatever it is that obsess them” (177). These comments and outlooks create an impression of what readers, archivists and literary scholars can expect from the creatives. Thus, the book makes a timely contribution to the ongoing discussion of (post) apartheid literature and beyond and whet the reader’s appetite for what is to come in South African literature.

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