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Resensieredakteur
Dr Bibi Burger
Departement Afrikaans
Geesteswetenskappe gebou 15-11
Universiteit van Pretoria
Hoek van Lynnwood en Roper
Hatfield 0083
Pretoria
bibi.burger@up.ac.za

Review editor
Dr Bibi Burger
Department of Afrikaans
Humanities Building 15-11
University of Pretoria
Corner of Lynnwood and Roper
Hatfield 0083
Pretoria
bibi.burger@up.ac.za

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Intellectuele toe-eigening en discursief geweld in Focquenbrochs *Afrikaense Thalia* (1678)

Tom Laureys

Intellectual appropriation and discursive violence in Focquenbroch's *Afrikaense Thalia* (1678)

In 1668, the Dutch medic and poet Willem Godschalck van Focquenbroch left Amsterdam for the African Gold Coast to become "fiscaal" (a kind of public prosecutor) on behalf of the Dutch West India Company (WIC) at Elmina Castle in Guinea, which was a bulwark of the Dutch transatlantic slave trade. In his posthumously published *Afrikaense Thalia* (African Thalia, 1678), a collection of poems and letters containing the well-known *Afrikaense Brieven* (African Letters), Focquenbroch testifies to his life and work in Elmina Castle through his *alter ego* "Focq". In this article, I use Stephen Greenblatt's notions of "wonder" and "possession" to demonstrate that Focq's descriptions in the *Afrikaense Brieven* can be read as an expression of his initial wonder for, and subsequent appropriation of Guinea and its inhabitants. I argue that Focq's literary-intellectual appropriation of the African Other, which at first sight seems rather innocent compared to the brutal physical appropriation of African people by the Dutch colonists, can nevertheless be considered violent at a discursive level. Focq's conviction that he is superior to the Guineans because he possesses written language enables him to frame his writing in a discourse which stresses the superiority of the own culture and the culturelessness of the African Other. As such, Focq degrades and instrumentalizes the African Other in order to glorify and preserve the Self. **Keywords:** *Afrikaense Thalia, Afrikaense Brieven,* Focquenbroch, early modern travel writing, Elmina Castle, intellectual appropriation

Inleiding: op de Afrikaanse Parnassus

Op 10 juli 1616 werd in het Nederlandse Vlaardingen het startschot gegeven van het landjuweel "Op de Hollandse Parnas", een organisatie van de plaatselijke rederijkerskamer *De Akerboom* (Ramakers 7–9). Tijdens deze acht dagen durende feestelijke bijeenkomst voor *rhétoriqueurs* ging men na welke kamer de beste zinnespelen, kniedichten en refreinen kon schrijven. De naam die het landjuweel meekreeg, verwijst naar de mythische berg Parnassus, waar volgens de Griekse mythologie Apollo—de god van de dichtkunst—en de negen muzen hun woonst hadden. De Hollandse Parnassus zou in de jaren na het landjuweel uitgroeien tot een topos in de Nederlandse literatuur, waarmee de Nederlandse literatuur zelf gesymboliseerd werd.[1] De symboliek die achter de naamgeving van de rederijkerswedstrijd schuilt, is tamelijk doorzichtig: de kamer die tijdens het landjuweel excelleerde met haar poëtische hoogstandjes, beklom de spreekwoordelijke Hollandse Parnas(sus) en eigende zich als het ware de Nederlandse poëzie toe.

Een man die de Nederlandse poëzie op een ietwat andere manier probeerde te veroveren, was de Amsterdamse stadsarmendokter en dichter Willem Godschalck van Focquenbroch (1640–70).[2] "Focq", zoals de dichter zichzelf schertsend noemt in zijn gedichten, schreef naast serieuze poëzie in de traditie van Petrarca—zoals de erotische gedichten waarin Focq zijn ongelukkige liefde voor Maria van Sypesteyn bezingt—ook burleske, anti-petrarkistische verzen en scabreuze satires, waarin hij verschillende heilige huisjes—zoals geleerdheid, rijkdom, schoonheid, liefde, het huwelijk en de literatuur zelf—op humoristische wijze op de hak neemt (Kuik 20). Zijn voorliefde voor het burleske stempelt Focquenbroch volgens Kuik (11) dan ook "tot een persoonlijkheid met weinig eerbied voor het verhevene, het aanzienlijke, het achtenswaardige". Focquenbrochs lichtend voorbeeld was wat dat betreft de Franse dichter Paul Scarron, die dankzij zijn ophefmakende travestieën *Typhon* (1644) en *Virgile travesti* (1648) uitgroeide tot de grootmeester van het burleske genre. De burleske auteur, schrijft De Ligt (163), "beoogt de lezer te overrompelen door volhardend en vaak schaamteloos grappig te zijn". Om dat effect te bereiken staan er een aantal kunstgrepen te zijner beschikking, zoals "een zeer gedifferentieerde woordenschat, het zich veroorloven van vrijheden met de syntaxis en een veelvuldig gebruik van diverse stijlfiguren" (163). Uit de

Tom Laureys is als doctoraatsbursaal verbonden aan de Vakgroep Letterkunde (Afdeling Nederlandse Letterkunde) van de Universiteit Gent, Gent, België.
E-mail: Tom.Laureys@UGent.be
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3372-2045

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studie van Marguc, die onderzoek deed naar de receptie van Focquenbrochs burleske poëzie in de eigen tijd, blijkt dat de dichtende dokter de nodige populariteit genoot bij het grote publiek. Zijn bundels werden zelfs tot ver in de achttiende eeuw herdrukt. Toch was lang niet iedereen even opgezet met Focquenbrochs soms grofgebekte literaire productie. Focquenbrochs werk, zo weet Marguc (44), "hatte begeisterte Aufnahme gefunden, war aber auch auf schroffe Ablehnung gestoßen", vooral dan bij de Nederlandse *nouveaux riches* van dat moment: de koopmansstand. Het was namelijk hun leefwereld die in Focquenbrochs gedichten geridiculiseerd werd. Helaas voor Focquenbroch stond de Nederlandse elite nogal op haar *ponteneur* en hadden zij volstrekt geen behoefte aan lachspiegels waarin hun aanzienlijkheid werd bespot (Kuik 11). Voor de elite van het land was Focquenbroch dan ook een gevallen arts, een *outcast* die hun achting volstrekt niet verdiende.

Rijk is Focquenbroch niet geworden van zijn dichterschap, en ook als armendokter verdiende hij slechts een karig loontje (Koopman en Wetzels 26). Financiële overwegingen nopen hem dan ook een drastische beslissing te nemen: "Met eene leege beurs, eene slechte reputatie en eene wanhopige liefde" (Worp 512) vertrekt Focquenbroch op 17 juli 1668 met het schip *Gideon* vanuit Texel naar de Guineese Goudkust om daar zijn geluk te beproeven (Gelderblom 8).[3] In West-Afrika werkt Focquenbroch gedurende twee jaar als fiscaal (een bestuurlijk-juridische functie) in dienst van de West-Indische Compagnie in het slavenfort St. George del Mina (Portugees: São Jorge da Mina, letterlijk vertaald: "St. Joris van de Mijn"), of kortweg Elmina, dat in het huidige Ghana gelegen is. Het fort, dat in 1482 gebouwd werd door de Portugese gouverneur-generaal Diogo de Azambuja en in 1637 werd veroverd door de Nederlanders onder leiding van Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen (Bostoen 1; Damen 48; Van Engelen 23–4), was een van de belangrijkste centra van de lucratieve WIC-handel in goud, ivoor en slaven (Den Heijer; Postma). Vanuit Elmina werden vele duizenden gevangengenomen Afrikaanse mannen, vrouwen en kinderen overgebracht naar de Nederlandse gebieden in Zuid-Amerika en het Caribische gebied, of verkocht aan andere naties. Op Elmina hoopte Focquenbroch snel fortuin te maken. Onfortuinlijk genoeg sterft hij reeds twee jaar later op het slavenfort, wellicht aan de gevolgen van de hevige epidemie die van april tot en met juli 1670 in de handelspost woedde (Koopman en Wetzels 28).

In zijn postuum gepubliceerde bundel *Afrikaense Thalia, of het derde deel van de geurige zang-godin* (1678), en dan meer bepaald in de klassiek geworden *Afrikaense Brieven* die in de bundel zijn opgenomen, krijgen we een rauw verslag van hoe Focquenbroch zijn verblijf in Afrika heeft beleefd.[4] Met zijn literaire brieven lijkt Focquenbroch te willen doen wat hem in Nederland niet was gelukt: zich de plaatselijke literaire wereld toe-eigenen. Niet toevallig beschrijft hij zijn nieuwe verblijfplaats in termen van de mythische Parnassus. Elmina, zo lezen we, is gesitueerd op "een hogen Bergh" en "gebouwt op een Rondom-uytgehouwe Rots", alwaar Focquenbroch zijn vermaak vindt "by reijn Boeken, en by de Negen Susters van den Helicon" (*Afrikaense Thalia* 161–3).[5] Focquenbroch lijkt op Elmina als het ware zijn eigen Afrikaanse Parnassus te hebben gecreëerd. De geafrikaniseerde Thalia in de titel van de bundel—de muze van het blijspel en dus een van de "Negen Susters van den Helicon"—wijst ook in die richting. Focquenbroch tracht in zijn brieven evenwel niet uitsluitend de Afrikaanse Parnassus te beklimmen. Zoals ik verderop zal beargumenteren, poogt hij door zijn schrijven Guinee en de Afrikaanse Ander op een literair-intellectuele manier toe te eigenen. Die literaire toe-eigening lijkt op het eerste gezicht tamelijk onschuldig, zeker in vergelijking met de gewelddadige fysieke inbezitneming van de vele duizenden West-Afrikanen door Focquenbrochs landgenoten. In wat volgt zal ik onderzoeken of dat beeld wel degelijk klopt. Het is namelijk mijn verwachting dat Focquenbrochs intellectuele inbezitneming op het discursieve niveau niettemin gewelddadig kan worden genoemd. Net zoals dat het geval is voor Focquenbrochs liefdespoëzie, wordt een autobiografische lezing van de *Afrikaense Brieven* in de historische neerlandistiek voor lief genomen (zie Bostoen; Gelderblom; Groenenboom-Draai). Toch ben ik me ervan bewust dat een zuiver autobiografische lezing van de brieven bemoeilijkt wordt door de voor Focquenbroch kenmerkende burleske (zelf)spot en door het feit dat hij zichzelf opvoert als *persona* ("Focq"), waardoor hij zichzelf als het ware vanop een afstand bekijkt, verheerlijkt én bekritiseert. Zoals Van Stipriaan terecht aanstipt,

> is het maar de vraag hoe goed we over de in de brieven beschreven Afrikaanse periode geïnformeerd zijn. Zoals ook in ander werk van Focquenbroch worden we in de waan gebracht de inhoud van de brieven als autobiografisch op te vatten, terwijl de komische toonzetting dat tegelijkertijd moeilijk maakt. In de brieven en ook in veel gedichten is een Mr. Fok of een 'ik' aan het woord die gebukt gaat onder veel mislukkende liefdes en die moeite heeft een geregeld leven op te bouwen. Maar wat is overdrijving, wat is kokette zelfspot, wat is feit en wat is fictie? (30)[6]

De door Van Stipriaan opgesomde discrepanties in acht nemend, zal ik in wat nu volgt een duidelijk onderscheid maken tussen de historische persoon Focquenbroch en zijn *persona* Focq. Bovendien zal ik de typisch burleske

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kenmerken van Focquenbrochs *Afrikaense Thalia* een centrale plaats toebedelen in de hiernavolgende analyse. De *Afrikaense Brieven* zullen voor die analyse als vertrekpunt fungeren, aangezien het de enige plaats is in de bundel waarin er over Focquenbrochs reis naar Guinee verhaald wordt. Her en der in mijn betoog zal ik ook verwijzen naar passages uit de overige delen van de *Afrikaense Thalia* die mijn punt helpen illustreren.

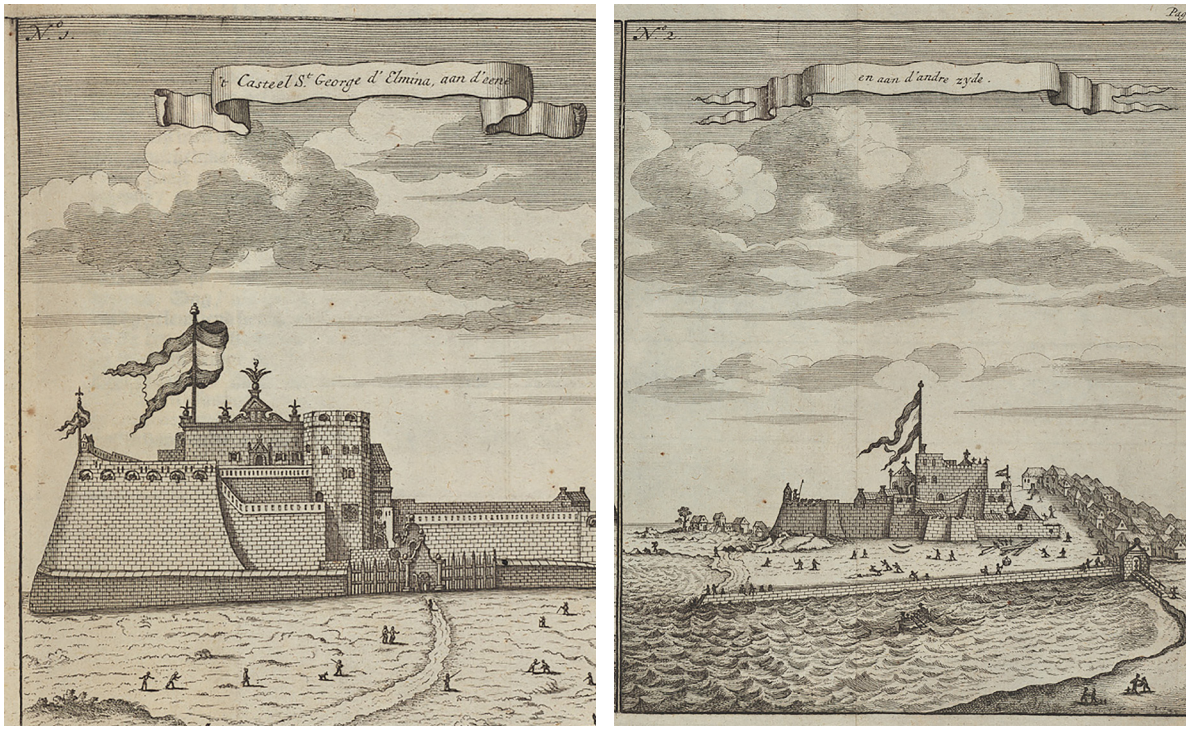
Verwondering en toe-eigening: een twee-eenheid?

Wanneer Focq na een lange zeereis met de *Gideon* voor het eerst voet aan wal zet op Guineese bodem, is hij danig overdonderd door wat hij allemaal te zien krijgt. Op het strand, zo schrijft hij in de eerste van vier *Afrikaense Brieven*,

> bevondick [...] Duysenden van Swarten; Welckers verf, Naecktheyd, vreemde Posturen, Geschreeuw, en Gejuygh met ongehoorde, en Barbarische Toonen, my so wonderbaerlijck opgetogen maeckte dat ick als betovert, en gansch buyten mijn self, door dien Spoockenden hoop door-dringende, endelijck tot binnen in 't Casteel [...] geraeckte. (*Afrikaense Thalia* 160)

Focq is zodanig verwonderd door het aanschouwen van de plaatselijke bevolking en hun festiviteiten dat hij aangeeft "wonderbaerlijck opgetogen", "betovert" en zelfs "gansch buyten [zich] self" te zijn. De aanblik van Elmina veroorzaakt eenzelfde vorm van verwondering. Het fort, dat welhaast uit de Atlantische Oceaan lijkt op te rijzen, wordt namelijk vergeleken met het kasteel van Amadis de Gaula uit de gelijknamige zestiende-eeuwse Spaanse ridderroman:

> U nu de wonderbarelijcke Vreemdigheden te verhalen, die ick hier op mijn aenkomst (als voor my noyt gesien) met verwonderingh, en verbaestheyd aenmerckte, souw my 't eenemael onmogelijck zijn; alleen weet ick u te seggen, dat geen betovert Casteel van Amadis my wonderbarelijcker souw hebben kunnen voor komen. (*Afrikaense Thalia* 160)



Afbeelding 1: Schetsen van kasteel Elmina. Archief Koninklijke Bibliotheek Den Haag.

Termen als "betovert", "wonderbarelijck" en "verwonderingh" doordrenken Focqs discours over Guinee. "For someone who had never been to a tropical country, such astonishment is not unwarranted", schrijft Beekman (101) in zijn Focquenbroch-biografie *The crippled heart* (1997). De nagelnieuwe fiscaal van Elmina is dusdanig

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onder de indruk dat hij zelfs niet in staat lijkt de wonderbaarlijke zaken die hij heeft mogen aanschouwen onder woorden te brengen: dat "souw [hem] "'t eenemael onmogelijck zijn". Wat Focq ziet bij zijn aankomst op Elmina kan eenvoudigweg niet onmiddellijk worden gevat binnen het conceptuele kader van (zijn moeder)taal.

Focqs haast kinderlijk naïeve verwondering voor wat hij in zijn exotische nieuwe werkplek aantreft is zeker geen unicum in zeventiende-eeuwse reisbeschrijvingen. Zoals Stephen Greenblatt heeft aangetoond in zijn boek *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (1991), wordt in veel vroegmoderne reisverslagen een proces beschreven waarbij de Europese kolonisatoren uitdrukking geven aan hun initiële verwondering (*wonder*) voor datgene wat ze in de Nieuwe Wereld aantreffen. Greenblatt (14) omschrijft *wonder* als "a decisive emotional and intellectual experience [felt] in the presence of radical difference". Het is de intense emotioneel-intellectuele ervaring die men heeft wanneer men iets aanschouwt dat men niet kan vatten in vertrouwde, conventionele termen. Lichamelijk uit die verwondering zich in de zogenaamde "startle reflex" die men vaak bij kinderen ziet: "eyes widened, arms outstretched, breathing stilled, the whole body momentarily convulsed" (14). Maar wat betekent het nu precies om verwondering te ervaren, stelt de heraut van het New Historicism zichzelf de vraag: "Is it a sign and an agent of renunciation or possession?" (14). Anders gesteld: zorgt verwondering ervoor dat de verwonderde het object van verwondering zo ver mogelijk van zich vandaan wil houden, of zorgt het er daarentegen voor dat de verwonderde het object van verwondering zo dicht mogelijk bij zich wil hebben, d.i. in zijn bezit wil brengen? Uit de reisverslagen van Europese kolonisatoren die Greenblatt aanhaalt in *Marvelous Possessions* (onder meer die van Christoffel Columbus en Hernán Cortés) wordt duidelijk dat *wonder* haast onmiddellijk de behoefte tot inbezitneming van het object van verwondering opwekt, *in casu* de nieuw ontdekte territoria in de Nieuwe Wereld. Terecht concludeert Greenblatt (83) dan ook dat "[t]he claim of possession is grounded in the power of wonder".

In onderstaande passage uit Focquenbrochs gedicht "De Clagende Nooteboom Van Ovidius", dat in de *Afrikaense Thalia* is opgenomen, speelt de thematiek van verwondering en inbezitneming eveneens een belangrijke rol:

> Had POLIDOOR geen Gout noch schatten,
> En and're schoone roof beheêrt,
> Hy was soo vroeg niet voort gaen spatten,
> Met Duysend Piecken gelandeert;
> Had PARIS Prins van 't magtigh Troyen
> Dien roof gehouden van sijn gront
> Men had sijn Stadt niet uyt sien royen
> En soo verpletteren tot stront;
> Indien geen Boom met Goude Peeren,
> In uwe Boomgaard had gepraelt,
> HESPERIDES ick wilje sweeren
> Dat'er geen Mensch na had getaelt. (*Afrikaense Thalia* 123–4)

In de zonet geciteerde verzen is er sprake van Polydorus, de jongste zoon van de Trojaanse koning Priamus. Polydorus werd gedood door de Thracische vorst Polymestor, die op die manier het goud en de schatten die Polydorus bezat voor zich kon houden. Daarnaast wordt in het gedicht ook melding gemaakt van "Dien roof" van "PARIS Prins van 't magtigh Troyen" (de beeldschone Helena) en van de "Goude Peeren" (volgens de overlevering eigenlijk appels) van de Hesperides. Zowel het goud van Polydorus als Helena van Troje als het fruit van de Hesperides veroorzaken een onweerstaanbaar gevoel van verwondering bij degenen die het/haar aanschouwen. Het blijft evenwel niet bij verwondering alleen. Zoals de drie voorbeelden laten zien, veroorzaakt die verwondering op haar beurt een verlangen, of zelfs een drang tot toe-eigening van het object dat de verwondering heeft teweeggebracht. Polymestor steelt immers Polydorus' goud, Hercules ontvreemdt de appels van de Hesperides, en om Helena weer in zijn bezit te krijgen, laat Agamemnon de Grieken tien jaar lang krijg voeren tegen de Trojanen. Hoewel deze literaire gemeenplaatsen over inbezitneming op het eerste gezicht weinig of niets te maken hebben met koloniale inbezitneming zoals beschreven door Greenblatt (*possession*), werken beide vormen van toe-eigening niettemin volgens dezelfde logica, een logica die begint met oncontroleerbare verwondering en eindigt met inbezitneming. Of om het met de woorden van Hamann (46) te zeggen: "Die Verwunderung [...] ist das erste Glied einer Kette, an deren Ende die Inbesitznahme steht". Uit wat voorafging mocht Focqs verwondering voor Elmina en de Guineese bevolking al blijken. De vraag is nu of die verwondering ook in Focqs geval slechts de eerste schakel is van een

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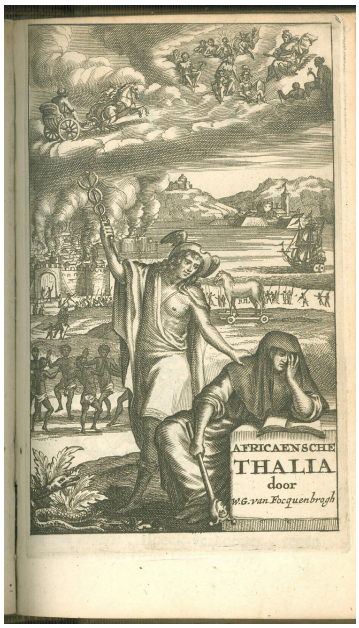
keten die uiteindelijk naar inbezitneming van het object van verwondering leidt. In dat verband wil ik wijzen op een impliciete intertekstuele verwijzing in de *Afrikaense Thalia*. Het betreft met name de ogenschijnlijk onschuldige beschrijving van Elmina als een "betovert Casteel van Amadis". Bostoen merkt in zijn bijdrage aan het volledig aan de Focquenbroch-studies gewijde tijdschrift *Fumus* op dat het "[m]erkwaardig is dat Focquenbroch hier ongeveer hetzelfde gevoel beschrijft dat de Spanjaarden onder Hernán Cortés kregen, toen ze voor het eerst de stad Mexico zagen liggen. Ook voor hen was het als een betoverde plaats uit het boek van Amadis. Focquenbroch die Spaans las, kan dit in het boek van Bernal Díaz del Castillo uit 1632, capit. 87 hebben gelezen" (Bostoen 18).



Afbeelding 2: Titelpagina van *Afrikaense Thalia* door Jan ten Hoorn (1678). Archief Koninklijke Bibliotheek Den Haag.

Intertekstuele verwijzingen vormen een geliefkoosd middel van burleske auteurs om hun belezenheid te demonstreren. Toch is de verwijzing naar het kasteel van Amadis—en dus naar Cortés—in Focquenbrochs geval niet louter een pronken met eruditie. Het feit dat Focq hier net als Cortés de vergelijking maakt met het kasteel van Amadis wijst erop dat hij zich als Nederlandse veroveraar identificeert met de Spaanse *conquistadores*. Net zoals de Spanjaarden vol verwondering aankwamen in wat nu Mexico-Stad heet en vervolgens vanuit een onbedwingbaar verlangen overgingen tot de inbezitneming van de stad, koestert de heftig verwonderde Focq eenzelfde oncontroleerbaar verlangen tot toe-eigening wanneer hij voet aan wal zet op de kust voor Elmina. Zijn identificatie met de Spaanse *conquistadores* is in mijn lezing dan ook als een symptoom op te vatten van de toe-eigenende reflex van de witte Europeaan die, eenmaal op de Afrikaanse kust aangekomen, meteen begint te dromen van *possession*.

Nog nadrukkelijker dan met de Spaanse veroveraars identificeert Focq zich met de mythische Trojaanse held Aeneas. Dat mag allerminst verwonderen: de parallellen tussen de levensloop van Focq en die van Aeneas zijn legio. Op de postuum toegevoegde titelplaat van de *Afrikaense Thalia* (zie afbeelding 2) wordt het verlies van het brandende Troje betreurd. Aan de linkerzijde is Aeneas te zien, die samen met zijn zoontje Ascanius en zijn vader Anchises (die hij op zijn rug draagt) uit de gevallen stad wegvlucht. Na jaren van omzwervingen werpt een door Juno gezonden storm Aeneas uiteindelijk op de Noord-Afrikaanse kust. Net als Aeneas ontvlucht ook Focq noodgedwongen zijn thuisstad en trekt hij naar het Afrikaanse continent. In het gedicht "Salve Amice", dat Focquenbroch vlak voor zijn afreis naar Elmina schreef, geeft Focq uiting aan zijn vrees dat hem wellicht hetzelfde gevaar op zee te wachten staat als Aeneas:

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Wat weet ick of ick niet Gebooren
Ben, uyt dien Trooyschen Held sijn Bloedt
En dat Vrouw Junoos bitse Tooren
My licht niet mee wat potsen doet? (*Afrikaense Thalia* 155)

Eenmaal aangekomen op Elmina is Focqs vereenzelviging met Aeneas heel wat heroïscher te noemen. Vol trots meldt hij hoe hij, net als Aeneas destijds, "aen dese Noorder stranden van Lybien, en een gedeelte van het Oude Koninckrijck van de Schoone Dido" aan land is gekomen (*Afrikaense Thalia* 156). Aeneas wilde Carthago dan wel niet veroveren; hij veroverde niettemin het hart van de Carthaagse koningin Dido, en kreeg daardoor de kans om als buitenstaander uit te groeien tot koning van Carthago en zo bezit te nemen van de stad. De zoon van Anchises zou de heerschappij over Carthago ook aanvaard hebben, ware het niet dat de goden er anders over beslisten door Aeneas weer de zee op te sturen. Waar Aeneas niet in geslaagd is, lijkt Focq wel te zijn gelukt: met de nodige fierheid benadrukt hij even verderop in de *Afrikaense Brieven* dat hij op Elmina wordt "ontsien, en geëert, als een Vorst" (160). De trots waarmee Focq bericht over het vorstelijk aanzien dat hij op Elmina geniet, is misschien wel de belangrijkste indicatie van zijn diepe verlangen tot toe-eigening.

Beschrijven om te bezitten

Zoals duidelijk wordt tijdens het lezen van Greenblatts *Marvelous Possessions*, zijn er velerlei manieren om iets of iemand toe te eigenen. Vooreerst kan men fysiek beslag leggen op het andere of de Ander (bijvoorbeeld de fysieke inbezitneming van Elmina en duizenden Afrikanen door de Nederlanders), maar men kan eveneens op een conceptuele of talige manier toe-eigenen. Greenblatt geeft het voorbeeld van Columbus, die in 1492 bezit neemt van enkele Amerikaanse eilanden door de gebieden een nieuwe naam te geven. "For Columbus", schrijft Greenblatt (57), "taking possession is principally the performance of a set of linguistic acts: declaring, witnessing, recording". De nieuwe benamingen die Columbus aan de eilanden toekent, hebben volgens Greenblatt (83) "appropriative power": door het uitwissen van de oorspronkelijke namen die de plaatselijke indiaanse volken aan de eilanden hadden gegeven en ze vervolgens te hernoemen, veranderen de eilanden niet alleen van naam, maar ook van eigenaar. Vanaf het moment dat Columbus de eilanden hernoemt, zijn het territoriale gebieden van Spanje.

Toe-eigening aan de hand van taal beperkt zich evenwel niet tot gesproken taalhandelingen. In zijn studie *L'écriture de l'histoire* (1975) legt Michel de Certeau expliciet de link tussen inbezitneming en geschreven taal. De Certeau opent de inleiding tot zijn boek met een bespreking van een ets van Jan van der Straet, waarop Amerigo Vespucci te zien is die Amerika—gesymboliseerd als een naakte vrouw in een hangmat—met vaandel en astrolabium in de hand tegemoet treedt. De scène verbeeldt volgens Certeau een machtsrelatie op basis van geschreven taal:

> *Après un moment de stupeur* […], *le conquérant va* écrire *le corps de l'autre et y tracer sa propre* histoire. […] *C'est l'écriture* conquérante. *Elle va utiliser le Nouveau Monde comme une page blanche (sauvage) où écrire le vouloir occidental,*
>
> Na een moment van verbijstering […] gaat de veroveraar het lichaam van de ander *beschrijven* en er zijn eigen *geschiedenis* op traceren. […] Dit is *veroverend schrijven*, dat de Nieuwe Wereld gaat gebruiken alsof het een lege (wilde) pagina is waarop het Westerse verlangen kan worden geschreven. (De Certeau 3, cursief in origineel, mijn vertaling)

Wie geschreven taal bezit, bezit dus controle over de representatie van de werkelijkheid en van de Ander, of zoals Pieters ("'Be Silent Then, for Danger is in Words'. The Wonders of Reading and the Duties of Criticism" 110) stelt: "Writing becomes an instrument of power, a means to fix and produce reality: he who possesses writing, possesses reality, possesses power and civilization".

Ook in de *Afrikaense Thalia* lijkt het geschreven woord een instrument te zijn om een bepaalde werkelijkheid te produceren en vast te leggen. Aan de hand van literaire brieven biedt Focq namelijk een talige representatie van Elmina en de Afrikaanse Ander. Daardoor suggereert hij een schriftelijke controle over de werkelijkheid van de Guineese bevolking, die naar eigen zeggen "sonder Boecken, en Schriften leven" (*Afrikaense Thalia* 168). Immers, "[t]he culture that possessed writing could accurately represent to itself (and hence strategically manipulate) the culture without writing, but the reverse was not true" (Greenblatt 11). Geschreven taal is met andere woorden een uiterst machtig, maar daarom ook gevaarlijk medium, dat de waarheid kan verbloemen, verdraaien

of eenvoudigweg verzwijgen, zeker wanneer het gaat om beschrijvingen van personen in een cultuur die zelf niet over een schriftcultuur beschikt. Het vermogen tot (be)schrijven wordt op die manier een wapen om de werkelijkheid te manipuleren en om die gemanipuleerde werkelijkheid vervolgens aan iedereen op te dringen. Veelzeggend is in dat verband het enigszins metapoëtische gedicht "Aen Mijn Heer C. H.", waarin Focq verraadt welke functie hij aan de lyriek toekent:

> Wat is het eyndt, waer toe een Dichter treckt aen 't singen?
> Is 't niet om yder een, met sijn gesangh te dwingen,
> Gelijck eer Orpheus met sijn liefelijcke Lier (*Afrikaense Thalia* 127–8)

Als we Focq mogen geloven, produceert een dichter verzen "om yder een, met sijn gesangh te dwingen", waarbij "dwingen" volgens het *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal* (WNT) zoveel betekent als "zijn macht opleggen aan". Dichters, zo lijkt Focq te willen aangeven, produceren poëzie om aan de hand van woorden hun macht op te leggen aan degenen die hun woorden lezen of horen. Anders gesteld: met zijn verzen manipuleert de dichter zijn lees- of luisterpubliek, waardoor hij hen stevig in zijn macht weet te brengen.

Vroegmoderne reisverslagen staan nu niet bepaald bekend om hun objectieve beschrijvingen van de Ander en het andere, maar het beeld van Guinee dat uit de *Afrikaense Brieven* naar voren komt, is—ondanks de soms komische noten—een wel erg navrant en ontluisterend beeld.[7] Toch is het de waarheid en niets dan de waarheid, zo wil de tekst ons althans doen geloven. Bij aanvang van de derde brief—waarin onder andere de "aert der Guineesche inwoonders" ter sprake komt—wordt immers benadrukt dat de navolgende beschrijving "veel opmerckelijcke, en geloofwaerdige saecken" bevat, "*Soo dat wy met waerheydt mogen seggen dat in dese weynigh Letteren meer bysonderheden van Guinea zijn, als in al de Boeken die'er tot noch toe van beschreven zijn*" (*Afrikaense Thalia* 166, cursief in origineel). Met reden kan men een aantal kritische kanttekeningen plaatsen bij de oprechtheid van deze wellicht door de drukker toegevoegde aanprijzing. De nadruk op het "geloofwaerdige" karakter van de *Afrikaense Brieven* lijkt namelijk niets anders dan een retorische strategie te zijn om subjectieve beschrijvingen als objectief voor te stellen en om zo geloofwaardigheid af te *dwingen*. De eigenlijke tekst van de brieven spreekt die aangekondigde geloofwaardigheid overigens zelf tegen. Wanneer Focq namelijk zijn beschrijving van Guinee wil aanvangen, geeft hij expliciet aan dat hij "niet gesind" is "dit Barbaersche, Melancholique, en verbaesde Dorre Land […] heel net af te schilderen" (162–3). In het WNT vinden we voor het lemma "net" onder meer de volgende omschrijving: "Nauwkeurig, juist, precies". Focq geeft dus met zoveel woorden aan dat zijn beschrijvingen niet altijd even nauwkeurig of precies zijn, en dus zeker niet altijd even waarachtig. De "geloofwaerdige saecken" die de *Afrikaense Brieven* zouden bevatten, representeren dus slechts *een* waarheid: de persoonlijke, gekleurde en gefilterde waarheid van Focq. Hij beslist namelijk niet alleen *wat* er over de Ander (en het andere) verteld wordt (en wat niet), maar bepaalt bovendien ook *op welke manier* dat gebeurt. Dat is de ongebreidelde macht van de verteller. Focqs gekleurde waarheid is op zich niet problematisch; dat die gekleurde waarheid voorgesteld wordt als de ene zaligmakende waarheid, is dat wel.

Blockage: een kunstmatige poging tot cultureel zelfbehoud

De *Afrikaense Brieven* bevatten veel herhaling. De zaken die herhaald worden betreffen opmerkelijk genoeg quasi uitsluitend negatieve eigenschappen van de autochtone bevolking. Zo geeft Focq in zijn eerste brief een eerste maal aan hoe afstotelijk lelijk hij de plaatselijke vrouwen wel niet vindt, die—volgens het stukje Latijn in onderstaand citaat—bij het WIC-personeel nochtans voor "lekkernij" doorgaan (Rosenboom 91):

> Wat aengaet Juffers, Alias, Negrinnen, en Malatinnen (*quae hic in Dilitiis habentur*) die vind ick soo Doodelijck, infaem Desperaet, ja Godloos leelijck, dat by aldien ick een Hond was, ick mijn selfs niet souw willen verontwaerdigen, daer tegen aen te Pissen. (*Afrikaense Thalia* 161)

Dit citaat belichaamt Focquenbrochs anti-petrarkistische burleske stijl. In tegenstelling tot in de liefdeslyriek van Petrarca worden de vrouwen hier niet in hyperbolische bewoordingen als volmaakte, haast goddelijke wezens voorgesteld, maar worden hun "gebreken" karikaturaal uitvergroot en misvormd (Kuik 21). Bovendien combineert Focq een platvloers beeld (een hond die tegen iemands benen urineert) met enkele verheven woorden ("Alias", "infaem Desperaet") en een plechtstatige Latijnse frase, wat voor een komisch effect zorgt. Even verderop beschrijft Focq de plaatselijke vrouwen in haast vergelijkbare bewoordingen: "de Swarte Vrouwen, haet ick dapper: En ick geloof niet dat ick tot [hen] heel light sal vervallen, alsoo ick het egael voor Beestachtigheyd, en een Doodelijcke Coyonnerie houw" (*Afrikaense Thalia* 164). Ook in het spottende gedicht "Gedachten, gehouden in een Canóa", *op*

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zee kan Focq het niet nalaten nogmaals te vermelden dat hij de Afrikaanse vrouwen "Gelijck een pest, van alle Pesten" mijdt (174). Ook de "verf, Naecktheyd, vreemde Posturen, Geschreeuw, en Gejuygh met ongehoorde, en Barbarische Toonen" (160) van de Guineeërs moeten het meermaals op burleske wijze ontgelden. De spotternij wordt voortgezet in Focqs volgende brief, waarin hij nogmaals uithaalt naar de "half-naeckte, en Kool-Verwige Schimmen, die u den ganschen dagh de ooren warm maecken met een eeuwig getoet van Loejende Hoorens, daer sy haer *Artem Musicam*, met het Abominabelste geschal des Werelts op exerceeren" (163). Zoals gezegd behoren dergelijke laatdunkende, pejoratieve omschrijvingen tot de stijl van de burleske auteur, die moedwillig aanstoot wil geven. Niettemin leggen de zonet opgesomde omschrijvingen van Guinee en de Ander een pijnpunt van de *Afrikaense Brieven* bloot dat we als discursief gewelddadig zouden kunnen catalogeren. Focq lijkt in zijn beschrijvingen van het vreemde namelijk steeds de vergelijking te maken met het vertrouwde, het eigene. Op die manier wordt de Ander geïnstrumentaliseerd, vermits zijn eigenlijke identiteit hier simpelweg niet van belang is; het beeld van de Ander dient uitsluitend om het Zelf te beschrijven, zonder een daadwerkelijke (antropologische) interesse in de Ander. Edward Said (3) spreekt in dat verband van een zogenaamd "underground self" dat gecreëerd wordt, waartegen de als superieur beschouwde Europese cultuur wordt afgezet. De Afrikaanse Ander wordt in de *Afrikaense Brieven* steeds afgemeten aan de Europese standaard, waar de Ander in Focqs optiek per definitie bij tekortschiet. Daardoor wordt de Ander voortdurend als minderwaardig voorgesteld. Zo kunnen we ons de vraag stellen welk ideaalbeeld Focq in gedachten heeft wanneer hij de in zijn ogen afschuwelijke "Juffers, Alias, Negrinnen, en Malatinnen" in voornoemde bestiale termen omschrijft. Natuurlijk is Focqs *default* de witte, westerse vrouw. De Guineese vrouwen worden in zijn ogen dan ook pas "Godloos leelijck" in vergelijking met hen. Uit Focqs beschrijvingen spreekt aldus een diepgeworteld wit superioriteitsgevoel. Hetzelfde geldt voor de niet bepaald complimenteuze beschrijvingen van de "vreemde Posturen" en "half-naeckte", "Kool-Verwige Schimmen" die hij bij zijn aankomst ziet. Natuurlijk neemt Focq hier de witte westerling en zijn barokke kledingstijl als maatstaf. Daarbij vergeleken verbleekt de exotische "half-naeckte" Ander voor Focq al snel tot een primitieveling en een cultuurloze barbaar. Ook hier is Focqs witte superioriteitsgevoel weer aan het woord.

Focq stelt de Guineese cultuur dus voor als radicaal verschillend van de door hem als superieur beschouwde Europese cultuur. Op die manier worden het vreemde en het eigene elk in hun persoonlijke leefsfeer gehouden en treedt er niet de minste vermenging van beide categorieën op. Dit proces wordt door Greenblatt geduid als *blockage*. Pieters ("Tekst, cultuur en geschiedenis: het New Historicism van Stephen Greenblatt in het licht van het (post)structuralistische erfgoed" 132) omschrijft *blockage* als "een cultureel-psychologisch mechanisme waarbij men het object dat de verwondering oproept niet volledig kan verklaren in de mimetische categorieën van het zelf en het daarom ervaart en tegelijk uitsluit als zijnde radicaal ander(s)" (zie ook Pieters, "Gazing at the Borders" 64). Dit uitsluitingsmechanisme werkt echter met kunstmatige uitsluitingen. Na de initiële verwondering zal bij een nadere beschouwing namelijk blijken dat het object van verwondering een aantal opmerkelijke gelijkenissen vertoont met objecten uit de eigen, vertrouwde leefwereld, waardoor de aanvankelijke verwondering snel verdwijnt. Het vreemde is namelijk niet meer zo vreemd als men eerst dacht. De gelijkenissen tussen het vreemde en het eigene (of tussen de Ander en het Zelf) bemoeilijken dan ook in ernstige mate de persoonlijke legitimatie van het proces van toe-eigening—in welke vorm dan ook—van het vreemde (of de Ander). Door het andere evenwel als radicaal verschillend van het vertrouwde *voor te stellen* en elke mogelijke overeenkomst tussen het vertrouwde en het vreemde letterlijk te "blokkeren", wordt dat probleem op een handige manier afgewend, "for the blockage that constitutes a recognition of distance excites a desire to cross the threshold, break through the barrier, enter the space of the alien" (Greenblatt 135). *Blockage* is met andere woorden het proces dat de inbezitneming terzelfdertijd uitlokt én vergoelijkt. Een tweede "gevaar" van de gelijkenissen tussen het vreemde en het eigene bestaat erin dat het culturele identiteitsbehoud van de Europese kolonist in het gedrang dreigt te komen. Die ziet namelijk in dat de culturele identiteit van de Ander niet meer zo verschillend is van de eigen culturele identiteit als hij eerder wel dacht. Door elke gelijkenis te blokkeren, probeert de kolonist het behoud van zijn eigen culturele identiteit niettemin te garanderen. *Blockage* is aldus "the principal by which homologies are resolved into antitheses, brothers into others" (138), of om met Spivak (138) te spreken, het mechanisme dat ervoor zorgt dat "the radically other cannot be selfed".

Dat de eigen culturele identiteit in een vreemd land sterk onder druk komt te staan, mag Focq aan den lijve ondervinden. Bekeken vanuit het perspectief van de plaatselijke inwoners is Focq immers de Andere, of zoals Frantz Fanon (31) het verwoordt: "in spite of his appropriation, the settler still remains a foreigner. […] The governing race is first and foremost those who come from elsewhere, those who are unlike the original

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inhabitants, 'the others'". De enige manier voor Focq om zijn culturele zelfbehoud te garanderen, lijkt erin te bestaan de culturele identiteit van de Guineeërs als radicaal verschillend—en minderwaardig—voor te stellen aan de voor hem vertrouwde Europese culturele identiteit. Focq kiest er namelijk voor om het vreemde in zijn eigen zone te behouden, een zone die radicaal verschillend en veilig afgebakend is van de voor hem vertrouwde zone van het eigene. Dat konden we al afleiden uit de beschrijvingen van de Afrikaanse vrouwen en de Afrikaanse muziek, maar het wordt nog duidelijker uit onderstaande passage, waarin Focq over zijn wederwaardigheden op Elmina verhaalt. Vaak, zo lezen we, blijft hij wekenlang in zijn kamer (zijn "Sel"),

> al waer ghy my soud sien sitten, in Compagnie van mijn twee Swarte Jongens, al Dampende dat het sijn Oogen verdraeyt, en dat sy met hun beyde eeuwigh werck hebben, met Toeback te kerven, en te stoppen; Dit gaet soo sijn gangh al Schrijvende, of iets vermakelijcks Lesende, of met een eerlijcke Ziel of twee by my. (*Afrikaense Thalia* 163)

In deze passus wordt kennelijk een onderscheid gecreëerd tussen "mijn twee Swarte Jongens" (let op het bezittelijk voornaamwoord) en diegenen die volgens Focq tot de categorie van "eerlijcke Ziel[en]" (eerbare mannen) gerekend mogen worden. Ook al wordt er niks gezegd over de huidskleur van die eerbare lieden, het feit dat Focq hen in contrast plaatst met zijn zwarte knechten doet vermoeden dat hij hier op wit WIC-personeel doelt. Het onderscheid wordt dan "wit" versus "zwart".

Zwaarmoedigheid en zelfvervreemding

Niettegenstaande het feit dat Focq zijn culturele identiteit probeert te beschermen door een discours van radicale alteriteit te hanteren wanneer hij het over die van de Guineeërs heeft, lijkt hij de nodige moeite te hebben om de eigen (culturele) identiteit vast te houden. Het beeld dat we van Focq krijgen tijdens het lezen van de *Afrikaense Brieven* is dat van een neerslachtige, verzuurde man op de rand van een depressie, die vervuld van heimwee beschrijft hoezeer het moeten missen van zijn Amsterdamse vrienden zijn gemoedsgesteldheid bezwaart: "Wat beklaegh ick dickmael mijn ongeluck […] van nu voortaen van sulck een tal van waerde Vrinden versteeken te zijn" (*Afrikaense Thalia* 161). Focq heeft moeite om te aarden in zijn nieuwe leefomgeving: hij voelt zich thuisloos in Afrika en mist zijn vroegere sociaal-culturele leven verschrikkelijk. "For an urban intellectual such as Focquenbroch", aldus Beekman (106), "the complete absence of anything that resembled civilized culture must have been difficult to bear". Daar komt nog bij dat zijn neef Philip van Heeden, die samen met hem naar Elmina was afgereisd als onderkoopman (Gelderblom 9), al vlug komt te overlijden, waarop Focq wegkwijnt van eenzaamheid.

Focqs thuisloosheid en eenzaamheid lijken gepaard te gaan met een gevoel van zelfvervreemding. Dat lijkt al te worden aangekondigd in de hierboven aangehaalde passage waarin Focq voor het eerst voet aan wal zet op Afrikaanse bodem. Daar geeft hij aan dat hij door het aanschouwen van de "Duysenden van Swarten […] gansch buyten [zich] self" raakte. In zekere zin, schrijft Korsten (104–5) over die bewuste passage, ervaart Focq "the reality in which he finds himself as a dream that leads to a doubling of perspective." Focq "is someone who is looking at himself from a sort of distance, and at the same time he is a body wrestling itself through a whirling collective of other bodies". Die perspectiefverdubbeling lijkt ten grondslag te liggen aan Focqs gevoel van zelfvervreemding. De aanblik van de plaatselijke bevolking brengt namelijk het gevoel teweeg dat hij niet langer *in* zichzelf, maar "buyten" zichzelf staat. Bovendien lijkt Focqs zelfvervreemding in de hand te worden gewerkt door het feit dat hij, niettegenstaande zijn aanstelling als fiscaal, niet echt een duidelijk omlijnde taakomschrijving heeft op Elmina. Zoals Focq zelf aangeeft, dient hij "buyten Fiscael" ook "voor Secretaris, voor Raed, voor Notaris, voor Ambassadeur" en "voor Caper" te spelen (*Afrikaense Thalia* 162). Focq is met andere woorden een manusje-van-alles, die door zijn collega's bij de WIC voor zeer uiteenlopende betrekkingen wordt ingeschakeld. Als arts van opleiding zal hij bovendien onvoldoende gekwalificeerd zijn geweest om al die hoedanigheden op een degelijke manier uit te oefenen. Aangezien iemands job voor een groot deel iemands identiteit bepaalt, valt het niet zwaar om te realiseren dat een dergelijke veelheid aan functies Focqs reeds aanwezige gevoel van zelfvervreemding alleen nog maar moet hebben geïntensiveerd.

Een bijkomende indicatie van Focqs identiteitscrisis kan worden gevonden in het feit dat hij "Venus Gelijck een pest, van alle Pesten" mijdt in Guinee. Die uitspraak staat in schril contrast met de levensstijl die Focq erop nahield in Nederland, zoals mag blijken uit de overige delen van de *Afrikaense Thalia*. Het beeld van Focq dat de lezer krijgt tijdens het doornemen van de bundel, is dat van een *womanizer*, "een voortdurend op vrijersvoeten ronddolende erotomaan" (Kuik 13), die van de ene verovering naar de andere huppelt. Wie zijn blik over de inhoudstafel van de *Afrikaense Thalia* laat glijden, merkt dan ook op dat veel van Focquenbrochs gedichten aan

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vrouwen gewijd zijn. “Aen Climene”, “Aen Clorimeen”, “Aen Eranemite”, “Aen Phillis” en “Op de Oogen van Cloris” zijn slechts een greep uit Focquenbrochs lofdichten op vrouwelijk schoon, wat er volgens Worp (509) op wijst dat hij “een ontvlambaar gemoed bezat.” Eens in Guinee is zijn gemoed echter lang niet meer zo ontvlambaar. Van de ene dag op de andere zegt Focq vrouw Venus vaarwel en leidt hij een celibatair bestaan. We weten dat de plaatselijke vrouwen Focq niet konden bekoren, maar toch blijft het moeilijk voor te stellen dat deze Focq dezelfde Focq is als de *donjuan* van vóór zijn reis naar de Afrikaanse Goudkust.

Afbeelding 3: Pieter de Wit (1669). Portret van directeur-generaal Dirck Wilre in zijn slaapkamer in fort Elmina. Een zwarte slaaf laat Wilre een schilderij van het fort zien. De persoon uiterst rechts, leunend op de balustrade, is wellicht de van heimwee en eenzaamheid wegkwijnende Focquenbroch (zie Binder en Schneeloch 22–3).

Dat Focq met zijn eigen identiteit worstelt, wordt ook duidelijk uit zijn tanende interesse in musiceren. Sinds het overlijden van zijn “Cousin van Heden” is zijn muziek immers

> sodanigh verstorven, dat ghy mijn Violon met droefheyd aen de wand soud sien hangen, sodanig gediscordeert, dat ghy daer niet, dan de enkele Bas op soud vinden; terwijl in de holte van dat droevigh instrument, de Spinne-koppen sodanig haer Logement hebben verkosen, dat ick geloof, dat sy van sins zijn van hun eygen weefsel, nieuwe Snaren daer op te maken. (*Afrikaense Thalia* 164)

Focqs “Violon” blijft onaangeroerd aan de wand hangen. Enkel de somber klinkende bassnaar is nog intact, geeft hij aan. Muziek maken laat de even somber klinkende Focq volledig koud. Nochtans profileert Focq zich in andere gedichten als een gepassioneerd violist en een fervent muziekliefhebber *tout court*. Dat leren we onder meer uit het lofdicht “Op het Snarenspel van Mejuffr. S. L. T.” en uit “Op ’t Verjaeren Van Juffr. A. G.”, waarin Focq de kracht van muziek bezingt:

> Want heb ick macht om met gesangen,
> Met Fluyt, Fiool, of Cyter-Snaer,
> Uw Levens loop wat te verlangen,
> Je leeft te minsten hondert jaer. (109)

Die kracht lijkt, nu hij ernstig in de knoop ligt met zichzelf, geen vat meer op hem te hebben. Zowel zijn liefde voor muziek als zijn pleziertjes met vrouwen—twee cruciale bestanddelen die Focqs identiteit constitueren—komen in Guinee op een extreem laag pitje te staan. De vitaliteit en levenslust van weleer hebben plaats gemaakt voor zwartgalligheid en eenzaam verdriet, waardoor Focq nog maar half de man lijkt te zijn die hij voordien was.

Anti-conquest: de Nederlandse slavenhandel doodgezwegen

Wat Focq merkwaardig genoeg nergens vermeldt in de *Afrikaense Brieven*, is dat zijn nieuwe werkplaats een bolwerk is van de Nederlandse trans-Atlantische slavenhandel. Over die slavenhandel zwijgt hij werkelijk in alle talen. Dat mag op z'n minst opmerkelijk worden genoemd. Als WIC-functionaris werd hij dagelijks geconfronteerd met tot slaaf gemaakten die wachtten om naar de Nederlandse overzeese gebieden te worden overgebracht, om ginds de plantages te bewerken. De absolute afwezigheid van de Nederlandse slavenhandel in Focqs brieven is zonder meer vreemd, te meer omdat recent onderzoek heeft aangetoond dat er in de zeventiende-eeuwse Republiek wel degelijk kritische geluiden te horen waren over slavernij en koloniaal geweld (Paijmans). Op geen enkel moment wordt er gewag gemaakt van de op Elmina aanwezige slaven, laat staan van de omstandigheden waarin zij gevangen werden gehouden in het fort. Die pijnlijke stilte, schrijft Marcel van Engelen, is geen anomalie, maar net typerend voor heel wat egodocumenten van WIC-functionarissen op Elmina:

> Ook in veel andere brieven en verslagen is de stilte over het leven van de slaven in het kasteel zo flagrant dat de vraag zich opdringt of de WIC-dienaren en andere ooggetuigen de slavenhandel en de beestachtige behandeling van Afrikanen zo gewoon vonden, of zo onbelangrijk, dat ze niet bedachten om erover te schrijven. Of speelden andere dingen een rol? Was er misschien sprake van schaamte? Gaf de wens om al te schokkende zaken verborgen te houden de doorslag? (Van Engelen 125–6)

Ook Bostoen (16) maakt zich een gelijkaardige bedenking bij de volstrekte afwezigheid van de Nederlandse slavenexport in Focqs brieven: "Had hij er een afkeer van of vond hij dit een te deprimerend onderwerp om daarover te schrijven?"

Waarschijnlijker is dat we deze stilte als een vorm van intellectuele toe-eigening kunnen beschouwen. In haar boek *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992) introduceert Mary Louise Pratt haar concept "anti-conquest". Daarmee doelt ze op "the strategies of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony" (7). Wat aldus in veel koloniale geschriften tot stand komt, is "a utopian image of a European bourgeois subject simultaneously innocent and imperial, asserting a harmless hegemonic vision that installs no apparatus of domination" (33–4). Het actieve subject van *anti-conquest*, schrijft Pratt (7), "is a figure I sometimes call the 'seeing-man,' […] he whose imperial eyes passively look out and possess." Die "imperial eyes" vormen ook de filter waardoor de lezer "ziet": de "seeing-man" kiest bewust wat wel en wat niet vermeld wordt.

Het door Pratt beschreven proces van *anti-conquest* lijkt zich ook te voltrekken in de *Afrikaense Brieven*, waarin Focq als "seeing-man" optreedt. Hij is de witte koloniaal die op een passieve manier waarneemt en vervolgens (fragmentarisch) rapporteert wat hij heeft geregistreerd. Daarbij wordt de eigen superioriteit en hegemonie (en dus die van de Nederlanders in het algemeen) sterk beklemtoond. Zo gaat Focq openlijk prat op de "staet […] van aensien" die hij als fiscaal geniet in Guinee. Dat merken we bijvoorbeeld aan het feit dat Focq, ondanks de wetenschap dat het "eenighsins voor Vaniteyt, en opsnyery geacht [souw] worden", het *paraleipsis*-gewijs toch niet kan nalaten om mee te delen dat hij in Elmina "de tweede Persoon van een kleyn Koninckrijck [is], ontsien, en geëert, als een Vorst" (*Afrikaense Thalia* 160). Door de hegemonie van de Nederlanders op Elmina waant Focq er zich de koning te rijk. De minder fraaie mogelijkheidsvoorwaarde voor die hegemonie—het Nederlandse "apparatus of domination": de slavenhandel—wordt echter vakkundig weggefilterd uit Focqs discours. Daardoor draagt het Nederlandse kolonisatieproject zoals het in de *Afrikaense Brieven* wordt voorgesteld een—in Barthes' terminologie—"mythisch" aura van onschuld met zich mee: de Nederlanders zijn wel degelijk *in charge*, maar hun overheersing lijkt op een natuurlijke manier tot stand te zijn gekomen, zonder wat we in hedendaagse termen misdaden tegen de mensheid zouden noemen. Hun hegemonie lijkt een schuldeloze hegemonie.

Focqs categorische stilzwijgen over de Nederlandse slavenhandel is discursief gezien gewelddadig. Zijn overtuiging dat hij, doordat hij geschreven taal bezit, superieur is aan de Afrikaanse bevolking die daar niet over beschikt en over wie hij dus via de pen kan heersen, stelt hem immers in staat om zich de controle over de werkelijkheid toe te eigenen, of scherper gesteld: om zijn schrijven te kaderen in een discours over de superioriteit van zijn eigen cultuur en de cultuurloosheid van de Afrikaanse Ander. Voor de slavenhandel en de mensonterende praktijken die daarmee gepaard gaan, is in Focqs discours geen plaats. De slaven hebben geen deel aan Focqs proces van betekenisgeving, zij hebben letterlijk géén betekenis. De gewelddadigheid van Focqs toe-eigening is het resultaat van zijn monopolie om naar eigen inzicht betekenis te geven aan de werkelijkheid, zonder dat de

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duizenden daaruit weggegomde tot slaaf gemaakten bij machte zijn om een genuanceerder counter-narratief van diezelfde werkelijkheid te bieden.

Besluit

Met dit artikel heb ik een nieuw licht willen werpen op Focquenbrochs *Afrikaense Thalia* en de daarin opgenomen *Afrikaense Brieven*, waarin Focquenbrochs *persona* Focq in zijn welbekende burleske spottende stijl verslag doet van zijn wederwaardigheden als WIC-beambte op de Guineese Goudkust in de periode 1668–70. Zoals veel Europese kolonisten die naar de Nieuwe Wereld trokken, ervaart ook Focq een gevoel van verwondering in zijn contact met Guinee en de Afrikaanse Ander. Die verwondering brengt op haar beurt een verlangen tot (intellectuele) toe-eigening met zich mee van datgene wat die verwondering heeft veroorzaakt. Ik betoogde dat Focq die intellectuele inbezitneming van het land en zijn inwoners op een talige manier tracht te bewerkstelligen, met name door zijn toe-eigenende manier van beschrijven in de *Afrikaense Brieven*. Focq schrijft namelijk vanuit de overtuiging dat hij superieur is aan de Afrikaanse bevolking en dat maakt zijn geschreven taal tot een gewelddadig instrument. Net als de gewelddadige (fysieke) inbezitneming van Elmina door de Nederlanders, kan dus ook Focqs intellectuele toe-eigening van de Ander op het discursieve niveau gewelddadig worden genoemd. Dat wordt nergens duidelijker dan in de volstrekte afwezigheid van de Nederlandse slavenhandel in zijn brieven. De duizenden zwarte slaven die naar de Nederlandse overzeese gebieden werden verhandeld, worden volledig doodgezwegen; zij hebben gewoonweg géén betekenis in Focqs discours. Eveneens gewelddadig is het feit dat de Afrikaanse culturele identiteit in Focqs beschrijvingen voortdurend wordt afgemeten aan de voor hem vertrouwde, Europese maatstaven.

Het resultaat is steeds hetzelfde: Focq stelt de Afrikaanse cultuur voor als radicaal verschillend van én inferieur aan de eigen westerse cultuur. Dit cultureel-psychologisch mechanisme—door Greenblatt omschreven als *blockage*—is een poging tot bescherming van de eigen culturele identiteit, die in een exotisch land en omringd door een onbekende cultuur ernstig onder druk komt te staan. De culturele "blokkering" lijkt bij Focq echter niet het gewenste effect te hebben: de sombere stemming van de *Afrikaense Brieven* verraadt dat Focq heftig te kampen heeft met zijn (culturele) identiteit, in die mate zelfs dat hij van zichzelf begint te vervreemden en langzaamaan in een depressie verzeild raakt. In 1670, op amper dertigjarige leeftijd, sterft Nederlands beroemdste *poète maudit* in wat hijzelf zag als "de hel van Elmina" (Koopman en Wetzels 28). Hoewel Focquenbroch er niet in geslaagd is met zijn *Afrikaense Thalia* de Afrikaanse Parnassus te beklimmen, heeft hij postuum alsnog zijn plekje weten te veroveren op de Hollandse Parnas. Wie goed luistert, kan zelfs de burleske duetten horen die hij daar aangaat met zijn "geurige zang-godin" (al dan niet in geafrikaniseerde vorm).

Erkenning

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Eindnoten

1. Niet voor niets betitelde Ton van Strien zijn bloemlezing van de Gouden Eeuwse poëzie *Hollantsche Parnas: Nederlandse gedichten uit de zeventiende eeuw* (1997).
2. De gebruikte citaten in dit artikel zijn gebaseerd op de facsimile-editie van de *Afrikaense Thalia* door Jan Helwig die in 1986 verscheen. Van de *Afrikaense Brieven* verscheen in 2007 een uitstekende hertaling door Thomas Rosenboom, met een voorwoord van Arie Jan Gelderblom.
3. Met de term "Guinee" werd de lange kuststrook tussen het tegenwoordige Senegal en Kameroen bedoeld (Postma 56–7).
4. De *Afrikaense Thalia* vormt het derde en laatste deel van Focquenbrochs postuum uitgebrachte *Thalia*-cyclus, dat zijn verzameld werk bevat. Het eerste deel verscheen eind 1664, het tweede deel in 1668 (Gelderblom 7). Helwig (viii) wijst erop dat sommige teksten in de *Afrikaense Thalia* niet van de hand van Focquenbroch zijn, maar geschreven werden door diens goede vriend Johannes Ulaeus, een Nederlandse theoloog die wellicht ook als tekstbezorger van de bundel optrad. Volgens Gelderblom (18) is het "niet onwaarschijnlijk" dat Ulaeus ook de ontvanger was van de *Afrikaense Brieven*.
5. "De berg Helicon is een bosrijke uitloper van het Parnassusgebergte, dat zich bevindt in het Griekse Beotië", lezen we in Thijs (9). Beide bergen waren in de klassieke oudheid aan Apollo en de negen muzendochters van Zeus en Mnemosyne gewijd (9).
6. Zie ook de kritiek van Lefevere (111–23) op studies die Focquenbrochs *persona* gelijkstellen met de persoon Focquenbroch.
7. Vergelijk met het al even ontluisterende beeld dat Bosman (112–3) van de psychologie van de Guineeërs schetst: "Om dan een aanvang te maken, zoo zeg ik, dat de *Inboorlingen* of *Negers*, *Negros* soo als ik haar voortaan zal noemen, (vermits het woord van *Neger* of *Niger*, *Swart* beteekend, en *Negers*, *Swarten*, alle, en geene uytgezonderd, van een *schelmagtigen* en *bedrieglyken Aart* zyn, op wien men zig zelden mag verlaten. Zy en zullen geen gelegentheid om een *Europiaan*, ja om malkander te bedriegen, laten voor by gaan; 't is een *witte Valk* indien men 'er een van een opregte trouw vind."

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Discourses of transnational feminism in Marie du Toit's *Vrou en feminist* (1921)

Małgorzata Drwal

Discourses of transnational feminism in Marie du Toit's *Vrou en feminist* (1921)

In this article I investigate transtextuality in *Vrou en feminist* (Woman and Feminist, 1921) by Marie du Toit in order to demonstrate how she grafted first-wave transnational feminism onto the Afrikaans context. Du Toit's book is approached as a space of contact between progressive European and North American thought and a South African, particularly Afrikaner, mindset. Du Toit relied on a multiplicity of late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries discourses to support her argument that Afrikaner women become part of the feminist movement. Due to the numerous quotations from scientific papers and literary fiction, mostly English but also Dutch, her book can be described as a heteroglot text. Utilizing the *histoire croisée* approach, I discuss Du Toit's text on the macro and micro scale: I locate it in a historical perspective as a literary document and focus on the ways in which diverse voices intersect and converse with one another. I argue that the book was an unsuccessful attempt at inviting the Afrikaans reader into a transnational imagined community of suffragettes because of prejudice against the English language and culture. English sources, which Du Toit extensively quoted, deterred potential Afrikaans supporters, and consequently prevented transfer of feminist thought. Even though she also supported her views with some texts in Dutch in wanting to appeal to her reader's associations with a more familiar Dutch culture, this tactic was insufficient to tip the balance. **Keywords:** cultural mobility, first-wave feminism, heteroglossia, hybridity, intertextuality, Marie du Toit, transtextuality.

Introduction

South African white women were granted suffrage in 1930. Until the 1990s, social historians claimed that only the English-speaking part of South African society was receptive to the ideas of first-wave feminism (Vincent 1–2). This movement, which originated in Europe and in the United States in the late nineteenth century, fought for the acknowledgement of women's presence and agency in the public sphere. Its goals included granting women political rights by means of suffrage, but also providing both sexes with equal access to all forms of education and professional careers and raising women's awareness of their reproductive health. Afrikaners—both women and men—perceived it as an unwanted English influence and a foreign threat to social order, this aversion being a result of the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902). The claim about Afrikaner women's disinterested stance on women's suffrage has, however, been revised. Lou-Marie Kruger (183–4), Marijke du Toit (214–5, 317), and Louise Vincent (10–2) accentuate that even though these women did not subscribe to the English-speaking campaign, they did advocate the right to vote—but within a different rhetoric. Afrikaans-speaking women's emancipation served a nationalist design aiming to increase the number of white voters. Consequently, it can be concluded that transnational feminism did not manage to offer a shared identity to all white South African women.

Yet, South Africa did produce such feminist writers as Olive Schreiner (1855–1920) and lesser-known Marie du Toit (1880–1931), whose texts subscribed to the transnational character of the feminist movement and were an attempt to introduce white South African women to an imagined community of suffragettes. Benedict Anderson proposes that, in a sense, this imagined community was formed thanks to circulating printed texts.

Anderson argues that Luther's translation of the Bible was the first highly influential best-seller (39) and later on the novel (25–6) and the newspaper (33–5) played a crucial role in shaping communities consisting of readers who, although they never had a chance to meet in person, were connected by a shared worldview communicated by texts. Although this concept initially served to explain a nation-forming mechanism, it is also applicable to other, transnational formations (Venuti 482)—a community of feminist readers being one of them.

Małgorzata Drwal is assistant professor at the Department of Dutch and South African Studies, Faculty of English, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan, Poland.
Email: mdrwal@wa.amu.edu.pl
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4871-1170

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Olive Schreiner's *Woman and Labour* (1911) formed the most influential theoretical contribution by a South African author to early feminism. Recognized by the Afrikaans and English press, this book, however, had a far-reaching impact on feminism outside South Africa. It was translated into a number of languages. The English feminist Vera Brittain in her *Testament of Youth* (1933) referred to it as the "'bible' of the feminist and suffrage movements" (28); the Dutch feminist press described Schreiner as:

> *een vrouw met helderen blik, die de dingen overziet in hun geheel, niet de wereld afmeet naar het kringetje, dat om haar cirkelt.*
>
> a woman with a clear vision, who sees things in their entirety, does not measure the world according to the little circle around her. (Anon, "De vrouw en arbeid" 29, my translation)

Ten years after Schreiner's English publication, Du Toit wrote its Afrikaans counterpart *Vrou en feminist* [sic]. *Of iets oor die vrouevraagstuk* (1921) (Woman and Feminist. Or Something about the Woman Question). Both books advocated not only women's suffrage but also women's economic independence, equal remuneration for equal work that women and men do, and equal access to all kinds of education and professions. They presented all the goals the first-wave feminist movement strove for. When Schreiner published her book, she already was a recognized author, but Du Toit was—and has remained until today—a rather obscure figure. Despite Du Toit's book being published by the nationwide publisher Nasionale Pers, it did not attract a wide readership. The more conservative voices of M. E. Rothmann and Mabel Malherbe were those that came to be identified with the Afrikaner women's political emancipation in the 1920s (Marijke du Toit 209–10).

Until today there has been relatively little scholarly interest devoted to Du Toit and her *Vrou en feminist*. Brink (281) and Pretorius (9–10) merely acknowledge that the book was a marginal, lonely voice, unrecognized due to its critical attitude towards the idealized image of Afrikaner femininity, the *volksmoeder*. As an object of a more detailed inquiry, the book first drew the attention of theologians: Landman points out that Du Toit presented ideas that were exceptionally progressive for her Calvinist milieu (339). More recent discussions of the text as a literary document have, however, not been comprehensive enough. They only signal the existence of the text rather than provide an in-depth analysis or explore its content. The most extensive gesture of attention to *Vrou en feminist* is a ten-page long chapter containing a discussion of her text and a couple of shorter excerpts from it in an anthology of South African women writers compiled by Pieta van Beek and Annemarié van Niekerk (533–42).

Du Toit's book is remarkable for a couple of reasons. Firstly, because it constitutes an entry of the Afrikaans language into a transnational feminist discourse. Secondly, because of its encyclopaedic character and syncretic, intertextual content: Du Toit refers to a large number of very diverse sources, mostly in English but also in Dutch. Consequently, the book is a product of cultural mobility (Greenblatt 250–3) of European and North American texts to South Africa.[1] In this respect *texts* are understood both as material objects—books—but also as modes of thinking and kinds of discourse with their vocabulary and rhetorical devices.

In this article, I present *Vrou en feminist* as a space of contact at an intersection of discourses transmitting progressive European and North American thought and a South African—in particular Afrikaner—mindset, utilizing the *histoire croisée* method. As part of transfer studies, this approach explores "connected and shared" (Werner and Zimmermann 31) aspects of history. Focusing on intersections of contexts, discourses, cultures, and concepts (31), it invites looking at the object of inquiry from the macro and micro perspectives (42). Applying the first one, I locate the text as a literary document functioning in a historical social context. The latter, employing Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of heteroglossia (Bakhtin 324–6) and hybridity of an utterance (358), allows me to focus on its content where diverse voices intersect and converse with one another.

In this article, I start with a brief presentation of how Du Toit positioned herself as an author. After that, I introduce the concepts of transtextuality, heteroglossia, and hybridity. Then, by analysing transtextual references and discourses on which Du Toit relied in order to legitimate her views, I situate *Vrou en feminist* against a transnational background, demonstrating how it engages in a debate about local and global issues. Finally, I analyse press reviews of the book. Pointing to the Boer-Brit resentment, I set out to answer the question of why Du Toit's propositions attracted so little interest and failed to draw Afrikaans women into an imagined community of suffragettes.

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Marie du Toit as an author

Biographical information about Du Toit is scant. Maria Magdalena du Toit was born in 1880 in Paarl and died of tuberculosis in 1931 in Potchefstroom, in the house of her famous brother (Jacob Daniël, known as Totius) where she, an unmarried teacher, lived (Van Beek and Van Niekerk 536). She must have been a rebel, considering the profiles of her brother, a well-known poet, who expressed the conservative Calvinist spirit in his work, and her father S. J. du Toit, a prominent activist that advocated for the Bible to be translated into Afrikaans. In the foreword to her book, she modestly excuses her attempt at writing, a task for "'*n ander geleerde en knappe Afrikaanse dame*" (some other learned and capable Afrikaans lady). Claiming that she is not competent enough to expertly present the women's movement's goals to the Afrikaans reader, she argues that she felt compelled to take up the challenge nevertheless, because:

> *daar [het] bykans nooit in Afrikaans 'n woord ter ere of ter gunste van 'n vrou verskyn nie en wel heelwat van die teenoorgestelde.*
>
> there has virtually never appeared a word in Afrikaans in honour or in favour of a woman and a lot of the opposite.

Despite this excuse, she goes on to demonstrate an impressive erudition, giving a broad picture of diverse aspects of international feminism, supporting her arguments with references to numerous sources. She undertakes to mediate not only between the perspectives of two sexes but also between two cultures: those of the English and the Afrikaner. Her book appeared in 1921 when, in the wake of the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902), anti-British sentiment was still rife. The resentment was due to the memory of British aggression, aggravated by subsequent reconstruction policy conducted by Alfred Milner, Governor of the Transvaal and Orange River Colony (1902–1905). Anglicization of administration and diminishing the significance of Dutch at the cost of English as the language of instruction in schools (Swart and Van der Watt 134–5) were seen as yet another act of violence against Afrikaners.

Therefore, Du Toit wishes to further the efforts of Olive Schreiner who strove not only for female emancipation but also for a better understanding and reconciliation between the British and the Boer. On a number of occasions in the book, Du Toit expresses her admiration for Schreiner and regrets that neither Dutch-Afrikaans press nor Afrikaans women appreciated Schreiner's merits as an outstanding thinker and a mediator between the British and the Boers during the Anglo-Boer War (155).

Transtextuality, heteroglossia, and hybridity

One of the most prominent features of *Vrou en feminist* is its transtextuality, which Genette defines as "the textual transcendence of the text" (*Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* 1), including all manners, both conspicuous and latent, in which one text is related to other texts (1). Using transtextuality as an umbrella term, he introduces a systematic sub-classification of interconnections between texts, drawing attention to different ways in which each of them affects the reader. Thus, transtextuality encompasses intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, and architextuality, among others.[2] As Genette argues, intertextuality involves "the actual presence of one text within another" (2). Intertextuality includes acknowledged borrowings, such as quoting, but also unacknowledged ones, such as plagiarism, and more subtle or covert references, such as allusion. Paratexts are the "thresholds" (Genette, *Paratexts. Thresholds of Interpretation* 2) that the reader has to pass to enter the text. These are such elements adjacent to it as the title, prefaces, epigraphs, footnotes, illustrations (peritext), but also all pieces of biographical data about the author, interviews, correspondence, and reviews (epitext) (5). Metatextuality denotes commentaries on other texts, and architextuality describes a generic relationship between texts (*Palimpsests* 2–4). While metatextuality is a critical relationship between texts, which presents the reader with a voiced opinion, architextuality is a "completely silent" (4) mechanism which addresses the reader's familiarity with the codes employed by diverse genres, and thus markedly determines the reader's expectations and reception of the text (5).

Transtextuality is related to heteroglossia (in Russian *raznorečie*, which can be translated as "varied-speechedness"), which is the key concept in Bakhtin's discussion of the nature of language. It is a quality describing every single language as consisting of a multitude of languages, each of which is always "ideologically saturated" (271). By this he means that language contains "forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values" (292), which can be interrelated, contradictory, or supplementary to one another.

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Heteroglossia allows for the creation of hybrid utterances which are, according to Bakhtin, "a mixture of two social languages" (358). The language of the novel is an intentional hybrid of two individualized "language-intentions": that of the author and of the character that the author employs to speak. Although Bakhtin focuses on the novel's "dialogic word", his point of departure is an observation that every utterance, not only novelistic prose, "partakes of social and historical heteroglossia" (272).

The abundance of references to foreign sources in *Vrou en feminist*—ranging from popular Dutch and English novels to theoretical publications on the history of female emancipation in Europe—testifies to the circulation of thought and texts between Europe and South Africa. Du Toit was also by no means a passive recipient. On the contrary, addressing a wide range of topics, from theology to fashion, her book catalogues issues with which first-wave feminism was concerned and situates them in the local South African context. The result is a hybrid text, rhetorical and polemical (see Bakhtin 353–4), creatively incorporating borrowings from other contexts. As Bakhtin argues, hybridity entails merging "two speech manners, two styles, […] two semantic and axiological belief systems" (304), therefore rhetorical genres, so eagerly employing hybridity, are "intensely dialogized forms" that serve "the double-voiced rhetorical transmission of another's word" (354). Du Toit makes use of this feature in her persuasive prose where various voices speak from inserted translated excerpts, paratexts, and other transtextual references.

The resultant heteroglossia provides the text's architextuality, as it involves a range of professionally specific languages: the language of the fiction writer, the scholar, the feminist theoretician, the journalist. All of these languages import their respective genres with their dictions (see Bakhtin 288–9), both artistic—introduced by means of excerpts from novels—and non-artistic, by means of quotes from press and from scientific, theological, sociological, historical, and biographical writings.

A hybrid text possesses yet another quality: it can subvert existing order and threaten the centre of cultural power (Bakhtin 368–70) by appropriating existing discourses to its own ends. While Du Toit lists science-based facts or resorts to the discourse of theological treatise to legitimate her argument, she engages in discussion playing by the rules set by dominant—both progressive and conservative—discourses. But she adopts them all to refute charges levelled at feminism by conservative voices in South Africa and presents a subversive alternative.

Paratextuality: Reading lists and epigraphs

Addressing the Afrikaans middle-class reader, Du Toit's *Vrou en feminist* speaks in the persuasive voice of a well-read intellectual who, in a systematic and disciplined way, argues for an unpopular view. To back her views, she invites voices representing the discourses that were dominant in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—she is interpreting and providing emphasis to some, while polemicizing with others, criticizing or even ridiculing them, creating a heteroglot text (see Bakhtin 353).

Paratexts are the most conspicuous forms of referencing other sources. In Du Toit's book they include a list of consulted and recommended literature and epigraphs that precede chapters. The list contains publications on the history of feminism in Europe: *Feminism in Germany and Scandinavia* (1915) by Katherine Anthony; *The Women's Victory and After* (1920) by the English feminist Millicent Garrett Fawcett; *Way Stations* (1913), a collection of essays about suffrage struggle by the American suffragette Elizabeth Robins; and a South African take on the women's emancipation issue—Olive Schreiner's *Woman and Labour* (1911). Other books that are mentioned discuss the presence of women in the medical profession (*English Medical Women* by A. H. Bennett, 1915) and their roles during the war (*Women War Workers*, edited by Gilbert Stone, 1917 and *Women and Soldiers* by Alec-Tweedie, 1918), or offer an anthropological perspective, like *Problems of the Sexes* (1913) by Jean Finot.

Next to theoretical writings, the list also contains belletristic ones, all offering progressive role models, such as the novel *The Convert* (1907) by Elizabeth Robbins, with a suffragette as a protagonist, and *Elisabeth Davenay* (1909) by Claire de Pratz, presenting a young, educated and independent woman. Furthermore, every chapter is interspersed with more recommendations or criticism. For example, Du Toit praises Mary Wollstonecraft's *The Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), one of the founding texts of feminism, describing it as "*een van die moedigste ondernemings van die wêreld*" (one of the bravest endeavours of the world) (110). Among the works that she criticizes

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is Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Emile, or on Education* (1762). Du Toit argues that the character of Sophie, allegedly the ideal woman, is presented in such a way that:

> *geen vrou, as sy waarlik selfrespek het, die beskrywing kan lees sonder dat die bloed van verontwaardiging haar na die gesig styg.*
>
> no woman, if she really has some self-respect, can read this description without the blood of indignation raising to her face. (111)

Most of the recommended literature is publications in English, including texts that Du Toit read in English translation. Worth mentioning, however, is a Dutch text by Henriëtte Roland Holst. *De maatschappelijke ontwikkeling en de bevrijding der vrouw* (The Social Development and the Liberation of the Woman, 1914) gives a glimpse of the discussion between European feminists and socialists and positions the issue of women's emancipation against society's class structure. Since the white working class was a new social formation in South Africa that had only begun to take shape in the 1920s (Berger 90), including this text in the reading list indicated that Du Toit anticipated social change.

Another sort of paratext is the epigraphs that precede each of the eleven chapters. These are usually English or Dutch excerpts coming from diverse sources ranging from novels to the Bible. This syncretism is characteristic for the whole of Du Toit's argument. She can seamlessly move between the discourse of literature and the discourses of natural sciences or theology to illustrate the same point. For example, the first chapter entitled "*Misverstand*" (Misunderstanding), in which Du Toit elaborates on why women's position is inferior to men, is preceded by a quote from an English translation of Jean Finot's anthropological work *Problems of the Sexes*: "By believing themselves of unequal importance, the two sexes have erected between themselves, for centuries, barriers of falsehood" (9). In turn, the chapter "*Klere-klagte*" (Clothes complaints), in which she discusses how clothes have hampered female health and freedom of movement, is preceded by a quote from the Dutch novel *Majoor Frans* (1875) by Geertruida Bosboom-Toussaint:

> *Ik weet heel goed […] dat ze mij overal aangapen als een kermiswonder, omdat ik de vrijheid neem mij te kleden naar mijn conveniëntie, en niet naar hun smaak.*
>
> I know very well […] that everywhere they stare at me as if I was a country fair curiosity, because I take the liberty to dress conveniently and not according to their taste. (93)

Before the chapter "Huwelik en huislike lewe" (Marriage and home life) come two mottos: an English and a Dutch one, with which Du Toit seems to demonstrate that the same message comes from both language traditions. A stanza is taken from a poem by the American poet and politician Thomas Dunn English (1819–1902):

> Women are timid, cower and shrink
> At show of danger, some folk think;
> […] And, gentle is their manner, they
> Do bold things in a quiet way.[3]

This echoes a passage from the Bible, the *Statenvertaling*, a text that was important and familiar to the Calvinist reader:

> *Zij doet haren mond open met wijsheid, en op hare tong is leer der goeddadigheid.* (Spr. 31:26)
>
> She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue [is] the law of kindness. (Proverbs 31:26, English version after King James Bible)

References to prose fiction

Offering a reading list of progressive literature in English and Dutch and referring to external sources throughout the book, Du Toit engages in an awareness-raising campaign through reading. She states her desire:

> *Ek wou dat ek de 'talen der menschen en der engelen' magtig was om my sekse te beweeg meer tyd en geld te bestee aan lees en leesstof; te lees wat leersaam, diep en opvoedkundig is.*
>
> I wish that I spoke 'the languages of humans and angels' to inspire my sex to spend more time and money on reading and literature; in order to read what is informative, deep and pedagogic. (31)

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Since reading grants an access to a broader perspective, Du Toit wishes her readers would transcend the parochial view so that they can see "*waar ons staan in vergelyking met andere landen*" (where we stand in comparison with other countries) (32). In this way, she declares her striving that Afrikaner women be included into the transnational imagined community of modern women aware of their social and political position.

She observes, moreover, that women all too often waste their time and mental capabilities either on unnecessary handiwork or on reading only light recreational content. Taking a keen interest in social and political life would be beneficial for their mental faculties as it is "*oefening vir haar brein*" (exercise for her brain) (120). Therefore, Du Toit carefully chooses instructive texts for her readers as she believes that literature "*gee 'n goeie kykie in 'n vrouehart*" (gives a good insight in a woman's heart) (73), and, furthermore, is an effective medium of presenting situations and characters with which the reader can identify. For example, she praises Olive Schreiner for the accuracy with which she depicted women's position in her "almost prophetic" ("*haas profeties(e)*") (155) allegory "Three Dreams in the Desert" (1890).

Unlike Olive Schreiner, Du Toit was not a professional writer. Therefore, to support her view that Afrikaner women need feminism, she included other authors' voices—voices expressing their intention "in a refracted way" (Bakhtin 324) through characters' words. Thus she introduces into her argument the "double-voiced, internally dialogized discourse" (324) of the European novel, quoting the Dutch A. G. L. Bosboom-Toussaint's *Majoor Frans* (75, 79–80, 93), Everhardus Johannes Potgieter's *Marie* (1864) (71), or the English George Meredith's *Diana of the Crossway* (1885) (76–8), to name just a few examples. The references to Dutch fiction in Du Toit's argumentation can be interpreted as an attempt to underline the affinity of the Afrikaner middle-class to the Dutch cultural centre, especially to its common-sense mentality. *Majoor Frans* serves to introduce a new model of womanhood: Frans, the protagonist, emanates strength and resolve in her down-to-earth approach to life. This quintessentially unconventional and independent heroine manifests her freedom not only by the choice of the clothes she wears but also by openly declaring unwillingness to marry, knowing that it involves subjugation.

Another Dutch text, E. J. Potgieter's novella *Marie*, illustrates another aspect of self-conscious femininity and situates it within the nature-civilization opposition which permeated both scientific and novelistic writings of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Bud and Shiach 4). Referring to *Marie*, Du Toit discusses tomboys whom she defines as girls who have a "*seungeaardheid* [...] *wat tog maar 'n natuurlike liefde tot vryheid beteken*" (the nature of a boy [...] which means a natural love for freedom") (72). As her argument goes, girls' nature is often stifled by social conventions, "*dwang der beschaving*" (compulsion of civilization) (71), which imposes passivity and obedience. Then she goes on to add a quote from George Meredith's *Diana of the Crossways*, showing the same model of unrestrained femininity in English novels. In this way, Du Toit stresses that being active is a natural feminine quality: "what Nature originally decreed, men are but beginning to see, that women are fitted to most of the avenues open to energy, and by their entering upon active life, they will no longer be open to the accusation [...] of being narrow and craven" (78).

It is worth noting that Du Toit's effort to introduce transnational feminism among Afrikaans women by referring to the Dutch culture is not the first such attempt. The prominent Dutch suffragist, Aletta Jacobs, president of the Dutch Vereeniging voor Vrouwenkiesrecht, visited South Africa during her 16-month long female suffrage world tour. From mid-August to late October 1911, at several meetings, she addressed Afrikaans-speaking audiences to emphasize the idea of their shared Dutch heritage. As she reports in her *Reisbrieven uit Afrika en Azië* (1913), her speeches were usually enthusiastically received. This should not surprise since the audience consisted of those middle-class women who were already in favour of female franchise. Jacobs does not mention any instances in which she manages to convert sceptics.

References to the discourse of natural sciences

Utilizing the concept of natural disposition, Du Toit moves freely between the discourse of prose fiction and the discourse of science. This is particularly evident in the chapter "*Is die onderskeid so groot?*" (Is the difference so big?) in which Du Toit addresses the differences between the sexes from a scientific perspective. She claims that her argument is based on "*'n noukeurige studie van die autoriteite*" (a meticulous study of authorities) (55), but precedes her discussion with an excerpt from a novel by George Meredith, *The Tragic Comedians* (1881): "the choicest women are those who yield not a feather of their womanliness for some amount of manlike strength" (Marie du Toit 55).

The architextuality of *Vrou en feminist* lies in Du Toit's attempt to emulate the discourse of the authors she refers to, such as Elizabeth Robbins, Jean Finot, and Olive Schreiner, who presented the women's issue as a

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many-sided problem beyond the suffrage struggle. Du Toit adopts an anthropological perspective and lists, as per Finot and Schreiner, factors determining differences between men and women, such as material conditions, lifestyle, physical exercise, climate, and food (58–60). In this way her argument follows the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries positivist approach with its focus on observable data. She refers to research on the relationships between the brain structure and intellect and concludes that:

> *[d]ie meeste skrywers wat ons teengekom het meen dat juis daar geen onderskeid is tussen man en vrou—veel meer verskeidenheid is te vinde deur een ras met 'n ander te vergelyk ook in dese.*
>
> most writers whom we came across claim that in this very aspect there is no difference between a man and a woman—much more variety can be found when comparing one race with another in this respect. (64)

Then she goes on to provide a list of medical doctors in favour of the claim that differences between a male and a female brain are negligible. She mentions such names as A. T. Scofield, Julius Bernsteinand, Havelock Ellis (author of *Man and Woman*, 1894), and concludes the enumeration by referring to the statement of Schofield:

> *Schofield gee b.v. aan dat Prof. A. Kirkhoff 'Die Akademische Frau', 1897, bymekaar gebring het uit die opienies van oor die honderd vernaamste Duitse professore omtrent die bekwaamheid van vrouens in intellektuele wetenskap, en die uitslag is gepubliseer in 'n boekdeel van 400 bladsye.*
>
> Schofield mentions, for example, that Prof. A. Kirkhoff, in 'The Academic Woman', 1897, collected opinions of more than a hundred prominent German professors as regards the competence of women in intellectual science, and published the result in a book chapter 400 pages long. (65)

Finally, Du Toit mentions distinguished women scientists, such as Madame du Chatelet, who in 1740 translated into French and provided commentary on Newton's *Principles of Natural Philosophy* (1687), and Madame Curie who discovered radium (66). Stressing that these women are only selected examples from a longer list and not exceptions or "abnormal" (67) women, she again debunks the argument of the alleged natural female inclination towards home tasks.

The scholarly diction that she emulates is marked by the drawbacks of then-popular Eurocentric Social Darwinism (see also Krebs (129) on Olive Schreiner and Jansen (107) on Aletta Jacobs). The inclusion of the racial argument betrays her adherence to the discourse that justifies the white man's superiority. Du Toit's racist thought can also be observed when she discusses the franchise system in the Cape Province which allowed certain non-white men to vote while excluding white women. Emphasizing the injustice done to women, she points to the inconsequence of the claim that women are ignorant of politics, noting that "*(daar) nie gevra word of 'n bruin jong weet wat in die politieke wereld aangaan niet*" (nobody asks if a coloured boy knows what is happening in the world of politics) (121). Expressing her indignation at women being treated worse than 'coloured' people, as they were called at the time, she concludes:

> *Vrouens is dus minder bekwaam om 'n stem uit te bring as gekleurdes, hulle (die vroue) word dan ook in dieselfde klas gesit as minderjarige, idiote, en misdadigers—die kannie stem nie—'n grote eer, voorwaar!*
>
> Women are thus less capable of voting than coloureds, they (the women) are placed in the same class as minors, idiots, and criminals—who cannot vote—a great honour, indeed! (121)

The issue of miscegenation also serves to support her demand for the equality of men and women in the face of law. Arguing that white men should also be punished for intimate relationships with black women, she subscribes to the belief in the necessity of preserving racial purity (48).

Elsewhere, however, she refers to the writings of the anti-racist activist Jean Finot and compares the emancipation of women to the emancipation of slaves, arguing that sex prejudice is equivalent to racial prejudice (11).

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She extends the parallel to stress that women are practically a possession of men and as long as men take proper care of them, they should be content:

> *Onder die argumente teen hulle vrystelling is dit so opvallend dat die beskouinge en verontskuldiginge altyd van die baas se kant gesien is: hoe goed hy die slaaf behandel; hy bevestig hoe tevrede die slaaf is, dat hy die slaaf van al die nodige voorsien, ens. Maar […] die vernaamste is tog: hoe voel die slaaf daaromtrent?*
>
> It is remarkable that as the arguments against their liberation the observations and excuses are always made from the perspective of the master: how good he treats the slave; he confirms how content the slave is, that he provided the slave with all that is necessary, etc. But […] the main point is rather: how does the slave feel about it? (12)

The inability to see a contradiction in advocating for the emancipation of white women at the cost of non-whites was, however, typical of her era's progressive European intellectuals and proponents of female suffrage (see also Drwal 10–1). In the South African context, however, denying non-whites political rights was directly linked with growing Afrikaner nationalism. The fear of miscegenation, of "racial contamination" (Van der Westhuizen 34), juxtaposed with "a collective 'inferiority syndrome' and 'feeling of humiliation'" (27) after the loss of the Anglo-Boer War, led to the Afrikaners' need to assert themselves as equal—by virtue of their whiteness—but also distinct from the white English South Africans. As it turned out, this distinctiveness, defined as ethnicity (29), formed a stronger identification basis for Afrikaner women than the transnational gender-based emancipation struggle.

References to theological writings

The argument of natural inclination according to which women who want to vote are considered "unnatural" ("*onnatuurlik*") (Marie du Toit 208) was also employed by the discourse of theology. When commenting on the role of church teachings in perpetuating the inferior position of women in the family, Du Toit becomes sarcastic. Hinting at the supposedly reverent treatment that the woman receives as a wife, she observes:

> *aan die man behoort die vrou, die slaaf, die os en die muil, en dit wordt dan haar ere-posisie genoem!*
>
> to the man belongs the woman, the slave, the ox and the mule, and this is called her honourable position! (139)

In the same sarcastic tone, she exclaims: "'*n Pakkameel-ereposisie voorwaar!*" (a beast of burden (literally: a load-carrying-camel) position of honour indeed!") (139).

The repetitive use of "*ere-posisie*" (honourable position) seems to be an allusion to Abraham Kuyper's *De eerepositie der vrouw* (The Honourable Position of the Woman, 1914), a book in which the Dutch theologian and politician expounded why women should not vote. An Orthodox Calvinist, Kuyper based his argument on the Bible as presenting directives concerning the natural social order. Kuyper found devoted followers in a group of ministers who studied at the theological school in Potchefstroom, among them Jacob Daniël du Toit, called Totius, and Willem Postma, the author of *Die boerevrouw, moeder van haar volk*, in which he presents the *volksmoeder* ideal as the model of Afrikaner femininity (Giliomee 269).[4] Even though Du Toit does not mention Kuyper's name in her book, the use of the very same vocabulary that he used allows us to assume that this is a metatextual reference, and that she is framing her commentary and polemics within his pattern of thought (Landman 345).

Similar references to Kuyper's writings can be found in Du Toit's attack on the church for propagating female subordination. Writing that "*in die huisgesin is die vrou die mindere; sy is dus nie 'n persoonlikheid of indiwidu nie*" (in a family the wife is the less important one; she is therefore not a personality or individual), Du Toit (38) seems to be alluding to Kuyper's claim that:

> *[h]uisgezinnen, […] waarin de vrouw numero één geworden is en manlief de ondergeschikte speelt, zijn zondig saamgestelde gezinnen.*
>
> families […] where the woman has become number one and the man plays the subjugated part, are sinfully composed families. (Kuyper 64)

The publication of *Vrou en feminist* needs to be situated in the context of Du Toit's father and brother's political activism. In 1920, Totius participated in a commission called by the Synod of the Reformed Churches (Synode van die Gereformeerde Kerke) to act as an advisory body to the parliament on the issue of female franchise. The commission ruled against granting women the right to vote on the grounds that it would be against the Christian

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character of the Afrikaner nation (Landman 338–9). Therefore, Du Toit refers also to the official organ of the Reformed Church (139–41) that listed the reasons for the discarding of the female franchise proposal which echo Kuyper's views. The ideals of the French Revolution, which give individuals the right to decide their own lot, are presented as harmful to society's "*organiese opbou*" (organic structure) (140) that is designed by God (see Kuyper 11–3). Within this organism, women and men occupy naturally predestined positions and a woman who dares to act in the public sphere trespasses: "*sy sal daar 'in oneer geraak*'" (she will fall into disrepute) (Marie du Toit 141). Precisely the same claim can also be found in Kuyper's *De eerepositie*:

> *Wat in de natuur der vrouw het schoonst uitkomt, richt zich op het particuliere, wat den man uitnemendst siert, hoort bij het publieke leven. […] De vrouw die, […] den man wil nabootsen, verheft zich niet, maar daalt op de maatschappelijke ladder.*
>
> What is the most beautiful in the nature of the woman is directed towards the particular, what the man adorns most excellently belongs to the public life […] The woman […] who wants to imitate the man does not elevate herself but sinks on the social ladder. (Kuyper 164–65)

Pointing to the fact that the Church allows widows to act as the head of a family (Marie du Toit 141, see Kuyper 58), Du Toit exposes the faults in this logic.

Furthermore, Du Toit demonstrates her knowledge of theological writings which contradict the dominant interpretations of the Bible. Engaging in a theological dispute, she quotes (in her Afrikaans translation) passages from Philip Mauro, an American author and lawyer (Marie du Toit 90–2). With excerpts from his *The "Wretched Man" and His Deliverance* (1910) she refutes the claim that the woman is the source of the original sin and concludes: "*Die hele Bybel word erg eensydig en soms baie inkonsekwent teen ons aangehaal*" (The whole Bible is quoted against us in a highly biased and sometimes very inconsequent way) (92).

Commenting on the women's issue in English and Afrikaans press

Du Toit looks up to the Europe of her time as the model for South Africa. She is up to date with the latest developments in Germany, Switzerland, and England—thanks to reading progressive press. Emphasizing that women's organizations and their press organs play a crucial role in furthering women's emancipation, she expresses her contentment that a new magazine, *Time and Tide*, has recently been established in England (42). Discussing the growing presence of women in new public spheres, performing equally well in professional jobs, Du Toit refers to an article in the March 1921 issue of *Woman's Outlook*, the Women's Enfranchisement Association of the Union of South Africa (WEAU) official magazine, in which women are praised for their efficiency and competence as members of the jury in courts in London (15).

The WEAU published contributions in both English and Afrikaans in its official publication *The Woman's Outlook* (1912–22) and subsequently in *The Flashlight* (1927–30) (Scully 74). Johanna Brandt, the author of *Die Kappiekommando* (1913), a popular Anglo-Boer War account based on her wartime activities as a spy, wrote for *The Woman's Outlook*. In her articles, she advocated female franchise because of women's responsibility as mothers of future generations. Presenting the woman as "*de moeder van de staatsman*" (the mother of the statesman) (Brandt 13) meant that middle-class women internalized the patriarchal nationalist volksmoeder discourse and adapted it in such a way as to legitimize suffrage as a duty towards the nation (Vincent 2). Nevertheless, most rural Afrikaner women were, if not sceptical of the idea of female suffrage, indifferent or simply unaware of it (Kruger 182–3). To overcome this attitude and to attract them to the movement, the WEAU issued recommendations to its activists to agitate by appealing to their duty as mothers of the nation (180).

Du Toit, however, protests reducing Afrikaner women to *volksmoeders*. She opposes women being defined by their duties to their family and people (117), just as she opposes their being described as parasites (125), reduced to the reproductive functions of their bodies—here she concurs with Schreiner's *Woman and Labour*. She envisions Afrikaans women as members of a transnational movement, and critically notes that the image of womanhood presented by local Dutch-Afrikaans press "*is om enige feminist* [sic] *te laat wanhoop*" (would make any feminist despair) (39). She goes on to accuse authors writing for these magazines of "*verdraaiing van feite, vergesogte beskuldiginge of halwe waarheden*" (bending facts, far-fetched accusations or half-truths) (39) in order to suppress the women's movement in South Africa.

Commenting on women's activism in South Africa, she admits that women who fight for franchise are predominantly English-speaking. She observes with satisfaction, however, that the English publication *Woman's*

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Outlook is active in South Africa and hopes that it will get more subscribers. She furthermore mentions that the WEAU has thirty-four branches in the Union and an association in Rhodesia (118). Yet, she points to Afrikaans women's indifference and ignorance of feminism and its worldwide dimension. This lack of gender solidarity between Afrikaans and English women is, she believes, the major obstacle to female emancipation (24). Regretfully, she reports that

> *Afrikaanse vrouens is […] met weinige uitsonderings, baie lou en lusteloos teenoor so 'n belangrike saak.*
>
> Afrikaans women are […] with few exceptions, very lukewarm and apathetic about such an important issue. (116).

Mentioning forms of Afrikaans women's involvement in politics, such as membership of the Vroue Nasionale Party and Vroue Suid Afrikaanse Party, she emphasizes that these organizations are mostly concerned with the Nationalist Party interest and not with the interest of women and their right to vote (117).

Reception of *Vrou en feminist* in South African press

Brink (281), Pretorius (10), and Van Beek and Van Niekerk (536) unanimously accentuate that *Vrou en feminist* was not widely read at the time of its publication. However, it did not go unnoticed and received some reviews in both Afrikaans and English women's press which suggested that the book is a valuable contribution to the debate about women's social and political position.

It needs to be noted that the reviews did appear in the most widely read Afrikaans women's magazines, such as *Die Boerevrou* or *Die Huisgenoot*, but no reader's letters concerning the book were printed. The responses of Afrikaans critics were generally ambiguous. A rather sceptical review appeared in the September 1921 issue of the conservative magazine *Die Boerevrou* (Anon, "Die Boerevrou se Boekrak" 9). The reviewer encourages the readers to get acquainted with *Vrou en feminist* and praises the author's erudition, but also observes that Du Toit describes the underprivileged position of women in England, which is completely irrelevant for a South African reader. The review stresses that the South African legal system, based on Roman-Dutch law, is more favourable to women and adds that even Englishwomen's legal position has recently improved, and that Du Toit relies on outdated information. This short discussion of the book closes with a remark that Afrikaner women have always been held in high esteem by their people and that in the nearest future there will hopefully be more publications truthfully reflecting social reality and the women's issue in South Africa. The contributor expresses regret that "*een van ons eerste boeke oor die belangrijke onderwerp miskien 'n verkeerde indruk kan maak*" (one of our first books about this important topic could perhaps give a wrong impression) (9). *Die Huisgenoot* of November 1921, in contrast, presents the book in a much more positive light. It expresses admiration for the eloquent and clear style, and recommends reading it, because it may have a positive result, namely:

> *[om] ons tot dink aan [te] spoor, sodat ons dit graag sou wou sien in die hande van elke leseres van Die Huisgenoot, om vir die eerste keer of opnuut kennis te neem van die belangrike vraagstukke hierin bespreek.*
>
> [to] encourage us to think, therefore we would like to see it in the hands of every woman reader of *Die Huisgenoot*, so for the first time or again she can learn about the important issues which are discussed therein. (Van Niekerk 275)

The *Woman's Outlook* informs readers that the WEAU wished that the book would help to bridge the gap between Afrikaans and English-speaking women, so they may engage in a joint emancipation struggle. An article in the November 1921 issue reports that "[l]etters have been sent to the leading Dutch papers advising people to read the book" (Anon., "Vrou en feminist" 10). Moreover, the organization purchased fifty copies of the *Vrou en feminist* and planned to distribute them among the Afrikaans women who would then "bring it to the notice of their friends" (10). No information can be found as to whether the action was successful.

Conclusion

Vrou en feminist originated as an attempt to introduce the Afrikaner readership to European and North American feminism. Writing in Afrikaans about the woman question, an allegedly British and alien phenomenon, Du Toit wanted to overcome prejudice and incorporate transnational thought into the local South African context. To legitimize her unpopular views, she relied on recognized discourses and authorities. Employing a multitude of

voices to support her argument, she created a heteroglot text with a subversive potential serving to criticize the conservative local social order and to offer an alternative transnational image of femininity.

The book is a literary document presenting a particular facet of Afrikaans literary history. It illustrates how progressive discourses of science (natural sciences, sociology, anthropology), which served a transnational modernizing trend of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, operated in an Afrikaans text. The list of consulted and recommended literature and numerous intertextual and paratextual references give an insight into what a progressive South African intellectual woman read and how she aspired to a transnational imagined community of feminists. Thus, the book documents a history of readership and circulation of texts between Europe and South Africa, and in particular reflects on the impact of English texts—which form the vast majority of sources cited—but also of literature in Dutch. As a source of cultural identification, the Dutch cultural legacy could have potentially served to balance the prejudice against feminism as a British concept that is hostile to the Afrikaner worldview. The text testifies to the simultaneous presence in South Africa of both the conservative political and theological thought of Abraham Kuyper, and of progressive feminism as manifest in novels read and recommended by Du Toit. It is worth stressing that she chose Dutch novels (by Bosboom-Toussaint and Potgieter) to discuss everyday issues, since they could most effectively reflect and shape mentality and offer role models with which her readers could identify. Furthermore, a reference to working-class women emancipation at the intersection with socialism in Roland Holst's theoretical writings presents the Netherlands as a progressive cultural and social centre.

The press reviews show, however, that Du Toit's book did not meet with a truly receptive public. Despite interest in the new approach and appreciation for her erudition, the reactions show that the references to Dutch progressive literature were insufficient to overcome the negative image of feminism as a British concept. The reviewers point to excessive references to England and argue its situation is irrelevant to the South African context. The transnational idea that the woman becomes an agent voting for her own sake lost to the local view that women need franchise as *volksmoeders* responsible for their nation—and are thus responsible for supporting Afrikaner men in the pursuit of a nation-building project.

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Notes

1. Greenblatt proposes that the point of departure for cultural mobility studies should be movement—understood both literally and figuratively—which leads to cultural exchage. He suggests identifying contact zones that enable exchange: circulation of texts (e.g. translations), physical movement of people (travel, migration), and personal contact between individuals (as recorded in letters and diaries). He also points to the importance of looking into "the tension between individual agency and structural constraint" (251).
2. Genette distinguishes five ways in which transtextual relationships are formed. This is done by means of intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, hypertextuality, and architextuality. Hypertextuality, which is a form of reference including, for example, parody and pastiche, does not appear in du Toit's text, therefore I list only four types which are discussed in the article.
3. The poem was written to honour Betty Zane, a heroine from the American Revolutionary War. Risking her life, Zane managed to provide ammunition to Fort Henry in West Virginia under British attack in 1777.
4. Postma's book (published under the pseudonym Dr. Okulis) and *Die Vrou in die Geskiedenis van die Hollands-Afrikaanse Volk* (1921) by Eric Stockenström were two highly influential publications that perpetuated the *volksmoeder* image.

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Wole Soyinka's *The Road* as an intertext

Richard Oliseyenum Maledo & Emmanuel Ogheneakpobor Emama

Wole Soyinka's *The Road* as an intertext

Studies on African drama have shown the influences and the intertextual relations between African drama and European (Classical and Elizabethan) plays. It is also a known fact that African drama exhibits traces of African tradition and instances of textual relations with already existing oral and written texts. However, existing studies on Wole Soyinka's *The Road* have tilted towards the usual literary interpretation or as a piece of theatrical performance with little attention paid to the intertextual nature of the text. Based on the challenges of these usual approaches to the study of literature by contemporary literary and cultural theories, this study adopts intertextual theory as a framework to examine Wole Soyinka's *The Road* as an intertext showing traces of textual influences from oral and written external sources. The aim is to reveal the source texts from which the playwright draws in the creation of the text and to show how these sources contribute to the overall thematic significance of the play. Findings reveal that Soyinka draws extensively from Yorùbá oral sacred texts, the Bible, and his own earlier texts and that these sources contribute to the eclectic nature of the thematic preoccupation of the play. It is hoped that this has gone a long way to mitigate the obscure claim of structural and thematic incomprehensibility with which the play is associated. **Keywords:** *The Road,* intertextual relations, thematic significance, Wole Soyinka

Introduction

Wole Soyinka, poet, dramatist, and novelist is one of the most prolific playwrights in the annals of Nigerian literature in particular and African literature in general. As a dramatist, his serious work in the theatre started between 1957 and 1959 when he was attached to the Royal Court Theatre, London, as a play reader. His return to Nigeria in 1960 marked a significant development in the history of Nigerian drama because, prior to this period, there was no tradition in Nigerian drama in the English language. Soyinka has written over thirty plays and his plays have received attention both from scholars and in the theatre. Whether in drama as a text or in the field of theatre, Soyinka remains unequalled in the history of modern African drama. His play, *The Road*, has been adjudged as one of his most exciting and problematic plays (Izevbaye 52). It is also one of his most widely discussed plays (see Ògúnba; Jones; Ogude; Katrak; Jeyifo; Maledo; Shamsi, Faghfori, and Booryazadeh; and Pouille; among others). A brief overview of his biography is important in a discussion of intertextuality in one of his most significant plays, *The Road*.

Born on 13 July 1934, in Ijubu Isara, Soyinka is the son of Ayo and Eniola Soyinka who were Christian converts. His biography and influences must begin with his Yorùbá heritage, his rootedness in Yorùbá culture, cosmology, and worldview. The Yorùbá are one of Africa's most culture-conscious ethnic groups in Nigeria. Traditional Yorùbá life is dominated by religion with their belief in the existence of the gods, spirits, and ancestors. In fact, the Yorùbá are said to have about four hundred and one gods (Jones 20). Among these are Olodumare, the supreme god; ÒrìṣàŃlá; Èṣù, a trickster god; Sango, god of thunder and lightning; Ọbàtálá; and Soyinka's favourite god,

Richard Oliseyenum Maledo is a lecturer in the Department of English and Literary Studies, Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria. His research focuses in English linguistics and literary stylistics.
Email: omaledo@gmail.com
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9347-6619

Emmanuel Ogheneakpobor Emama teaches in the Department of English and Literary Studies, Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria. He is interested in the sociolinguistics of English and the New Englishes.
Email: emama73@gmail.com
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7690-0812

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Ògún, which he describes as a creative and a destructive god in *Myth, Literature and the African World* (1976). These gods are worshipped through the Egúngún (a masquerade which also functions as the spirit of the ancestors in Yorùbá cosmology during festivals and ceremonies). Coupled with Soyinka's belief in gods is also his belief in the African cyclic view of life from the living, the dead, and the unborn. All these have an overwhelming influence on Soyinka as a literary artist and they manifest in his writings.

Equally, his Western education and early contact with the Christian religion influenced him in no small measure. He attended a missionary school of which his father was the headmaster, thus, his introduction to Christian beliefs during his youth and early exposure to the English language. This brought about the co-existence of two cultures in the child who was able to reconcile this apparent contradiction between the Yorùbá traditional religion and Christianity in his later years. This apparent biculturalism equally manifests in the eclectic nature of his writings.

Soyinka's return to Nigeria in 1960 on a Rockefeller Research Fellowship between 1961 and 1962 was very significant for him as a dramatist. With this he undertook intensive research of Nigerian tradition and culture. This research became very important in his development as a dramatist and in his understanding of the African world view. Katrak (6) observes that much of the materials gathered through this research were incorporated into his writings. Soyinka also observes the purpose of this research as he states that "A considerable dramatic activity exists already (in Nigeria) but it is chiefly European in content and imitative in conception. What is needed [...] is a fusion of the two enthusiasms" (qtd in Katrak 6–7). Thus, he fuses the two traditions in his English language drama in Nigeria. This is very explicit in *The Road*.

Soyinka's ultimate concern as a literary artist is his society. This is also very explicit in *The Road*. In an interview with Rex Colling, Soyinka avers that *The Road* is based on what he calls a personal intimacy which he developed with a certain aspect of the road: "*It concerns the reality of death*" and it is a very strange personal experience which developed out of his travels on the road (qtd in Dingome 32; emphasis in original). The play fictionalises the profession of driving and motor park touting that the road infrastructure brings to Yorùbáland, Nigeria. With the first inter-city road in Nigeria constructed between Ibadan and Oyo in 1913, a new profession of driving and touting emerged, especially in Lagos and the Yorùbá south-west of Nigeria. *Ona* (road) is a metaphor for progress in Yorùbá. The play therefore has progress as its factual thesis, which demonstrates a disastrous growth with society's worthless members in charge. Soyinka observed the drivers and touts in Lagos, Abeokuta, and Ibadan (his immediate environment) to design his play. Anyone who grew up in his time and had to travel on the vehicles plying the new roads experienced most of the events described in *The Road* (Dingome 31).

The Road as an intertext

One of the most common approaches to the study of literary texts is to find the intrinsic meaning of a text—literary interpretation. However, contemporary literary and cultural theories have challenged this 'usual' approach. This is due to the fact that works of literature are composed from systems, codes, and traditions established by previous works of literature. The implication of this is that a work of literature lacks independent meaning and to discover the total meaning of a text requires a network of textual relations. This is what gave rise to the term intertextuality (Allen 1).

Intertextuality can be defined as the appropriation of earlier texts in the present texts by means of the author's selecting from texts, editing some parts of them, transforming, or even distorting them for his or her own use (Zengin 323). It is a poststructuralist and postmodernist critical theory which changed the concept of text, recognising it as an intertext owing to the interrelations of texts and texts' absorption of other texts (300). Its origin as a critical theory in the 20th century can be traced to the works of Ferdinand de Saussure's structuralism which challenged the long-established belief and assumption that a literary work expresses its author's mind and personality and that it gives its reader an objective reality (305). Following the tenets of the structuralists, language is conventional and a language event or a text imitates language structures that have been conventionally used. The above implies that, by convention, a current text has its source in a previous linguistic event. Thus, intertextuality can be remotely traced to structuralism.

However, the ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin, a poststructuralist, gave birth to the intertextual theory as propounded by Julia Kristeva in 1966. According to Kristeva (35–6), "Bakhtin was one of the first to replace the static hewing of texts with a model where literary structure does not simply *exist* but is generated in relation to *another* structure" (emphasis in original). Bakhtin's insistence on *otherness* and his theory of dialogism and

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heteroglossia are the roots of Kristeva's theory. In her *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984), Kristeva states that the term intertextuality means "the way in which one signifying practice is transposed into another" (qtd in Zengin 314). It "is a way of interpreting texts which focuses on the phenomenon of texts borrowing words and concepts from each other" (301). Another leading figure in the development of the intertextual theory is Barthes. His conception of intertextuality is presented by Eagleton thus:

> All literary texts are woven out of other literary texts, not in the conventional sense that they bear traces of influence but in the more radical sense that every word, phrase or segment is a reworking of other writings which precedes or surrounds the individual work. There is no such thing as literary 'originality', no such thing as the 'first' literary work: all literature is 'intertextual'. (119)

The above calls forth the concept of intertext. An intertext is a text which has interrelations with other texts. An intertext cannot be said to be self-identical and autonomous in terms of form, language, and meaning. In fact, no text is an island; whenever a text comes into being it relates to previous texts and in its turn becomes the precursor of subsequent texts (Plett 17). Thus, it rejects the autonomy of the text as a pretext or a source text that is produced in a subsequent text or a target text. However, it should be noted that in intertextuality a pretext is not produced in its entirety, but only partially. It does not constitute an organic part of the target text but a removable alien element (9). In linguistics, intertextuality is synonymous with text incorporation which is defined as "the re-use of features or portions of existing text in the creation of a new text" (Adejare 124). It belongs to the textual meta-function of language which enables the language user to create cohesion within the text and the text's context of situation (Halliday 53). Such intertextual relations or text incorporations can be achieved through allusion, borrowing, parody, quotation, calques, plagiarism references, and translation, among others. For Kristeva, intertextual studies depend on the interpretation of a text's intertextual connections through which the text is created. It is an analysis of how the intertextual materials are transformed into the other text as well as its functional integration in the later text (qtd in Zengin 322).

An intertext has twofold coherence: an intratextual one which guarantees the immanent integrity of the text and the intertextual one which creates the structural relations between itself and other texts (Plett 5). The intertextual coherence makes a text eclectic. This eclectic reality manifests in the works of Soyinka and certainly adds to their difficulty and complexity and any study of his drama must confront its implications fully (Katrak 5). Adejare identifies two broad sources of intertextuality (text incorporation) in the works of Soyinka: from outside sources and from the writer's earlier text. In *The Road* Soyinka makes use of both sources. Yorùbá oral sacred texts and the Bible constitute the external pretexts or source texts from which Soyinka draws.

Yorùbá sacred texts

Soyinka makes extensive use of the Yorùbá oral sacred text as pretext in the creation of *The Road*. This is made possible by his in-depth knowledge of the Yorùbá oral tradition. One major source of incorporation in *The Road* is the Agẹmọ sacred text in Yorùbáland. It appears as the Agẹmọ preface poem prior to the opening of the play. The Agẹmọ is the deity believed by the Ijebus of Western Nigeria to be their supreme god. Agẹmọ, like the Egúngún, is a ritual of the dead. It embodies the ritual of the dead as practiced by the Ijebu people in Yorùbáland. The Agẹmọmasquerade parades through Ijebu towns during festivals. Only men are entitled to wear the mask and only certain families can participate in the ritual. One is appointed to be an Agẹmọ masquerade from childhood and is initiated through chants, certain sacrifices, and forms of religious purification. The Yorùbá people believe that one enters the shrine as flesh and emerges as the spirit of the dead. Hence Soyinka refers to it in a note to the producer as "a religious cult of flesh dissolution". Soyinka has described two Agẹmọ elements which he uses in *The Road*:

> The thing about Agẹmọ that I use essentially in a sort of representative way is a masquerade. There are many forms of Agẹmọ festival. Some Agẹmọs are just like any other Egúngún masquerade. There are certain others who dance within mats rolled around their bodies. The human being, the form, is there (inside the mat) to symbolise the passage from flesh to nothingness [...] What had body, shape, before has become fibres. So, I use Agẹmọ in that sense as an illusion. (qtd in Katrak 63)

This Agẹmọ cult chant is spoken by the Alagẹmọ, a carrier of the Agẹmọ masquerade in the preface poem. It dominates the mood of the play. It is a symbol of death, the central message of the play. The essence of this spirit of

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Agẹmọ (death) is what Professor wants to find out in his quest for the Word. Murano, in whom the Word reposes, has experienced both life and death. He thus becomes the Agẹmọ spirit which Soyinka introduces into the main body of the play. His muteness (failure to reveal the meaning of the Word which reposes in him) accounts for the Yorùbá belief that death reveals itself only in one's death. This belief is made explicit in the ultimate death of Professor at the end of the play.

In the Preface Poem (*The Road* 150), the Alagẹmọ has been summoned from the other world:

I heard! I felt their reach
And heard my naming named.
The pit is there, the dagger fell right through
My roots have come out in the other world.
Make away.

and he begins to boast:

[…] Agẹmọ's hoops
Are pathways of the sun.
Rain-reeds unbend to me, Quench
The burn of cartwheels at my waste!

He threatens the future of the living community that nothing will prevent his anger from visiting them:

No sweat-beads droop beneath
The plough-wings of the hawk.
No beetle finds a hole between Agẹmọ's toes

The living community is the "sweat-beads" and the "beetle" while the Agẹmọ is the "plough-wings of the hawk", a predator on the living. He further elucidates the nature of his predatory visitation: that in which there will be no moment of relief:

[…] the Not-to-be
of the moistening moment of a breath […]

This spirit of death haunts all the characters in this play. The Preface Poem foreshadows the mystery and the numerous deaths in *The Road*.

The absence of a female character in this play has two implications. First, it reflects the social fact that women, to date, do not get involved in driving and touting business that *The Road* is concerned with. Women are generally passengers. Even though they are not barred from driving, the motor park job is for male dropouts. It would have been inappropriate in the fictional world if female characters had been involved in *The Road.* Secondly, since Agẹmọ is a male cult among the Ìjẹ̀bú sub-group of the Yorùbá, the non-participation of women in the cult suggests the patriarchal structure of the Yorùbá society. This further reiterates the aptness of Yorùbá epistemology and ontology in relation to serious existential concepts like life and death. Since women are forbidden to see the AAgẹmọ masquerade, it becomes apparent that it is this spirit which controls the atmosphere of the play. A fuller understanding of *The Road* should consider the implication of the Alagẹmọ preface poem to the structure and preoccupation of the play.

The Yorùbá world view of the continuity between life and death is a major source text in the creation of *The Road*. It is the major force behind Professor's quest for the meaning of the Word which is interpreted by critics as a quest for the essence of life. This cyclic link between life and death is first projected in the Alagẹmọ poem:

The pit is there, the dagger fell right through
My roots have come out in the other world.
Make away […]

[…]

Pennant in the stream of time—Now,
Gone, and Here the Future
Make way.

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The line "My roots have come out in the other world" shows the link between life and death while the expression "Now, / Gone, and Here the Future" shows the link between the living, the dead, and the unborn as enshrined in the Yorùbá cosmology that death is not the end of life.

Professor's quest as guided by this Yorùbá world view is also presented in the opening scene of the play. He states thus: "I have sight and vision only for the Word and it may chance sometimes, that I missed my way among worldly humans" (158). Thus, his death at the end of the play shows the inability of humans to decipher the mystery of the cyclic nature of human life. This cyclic belief is also expressed in the character of Murano. He is dumb and he is the only one who has the ultimate meaning of life and death as he has been proclaimed sole guardian of the Word (186) and he "has one leg in each world" (187). This is also seen in his passage from the human to the divine during the drivers' festival as he wears the Egúngún mask. His lack of oral expressive power shows the futility of Professor's quest in particular and man's quest in general for the ultimate meaning of life and death. Furthermore, Professor's quest as enshrined in the Yorùbá cosmology makes him sleep in the graveyard as Samson says: "I cannot understand the man, going to sleep in the church yard with all that dead-body" and Professor says: "my bed is among the dead". Again, the graveyard is situated inside the church, a supposed place for the regeneration of life. This further suggests the mystery behind life and death.

The Ògún myth is another major oral text appropriated by Soyinka in the creation of *The Road*. In the Yorùbá cosmology, Ògún is a god with both creative and destructive powers. This dual nature of Ògún is represented in this text. Aspects of its creative power are seen in the modern technology that brought tarred roads into existence and the creation of motor vehicles made of iron and steel. Subsequently, this gave rise to its destructive influence that results in the numerous accidents and deaths that occur on the road in the play.

The Ògún festival as celebrated in the play is an aspect of the Yorùbá tradition. It is celebrated in many parts of Yorùbáland annually to appease Ògún to ward off imminent accidents on the road or in the farm or bush (Oderinde 6). The drivers responsible for the numerous accidents on the road are worshippers of Ògún. The drivers' festival in *The Road* is the Ògún festival. It is celebrated by them to ward off accidents on the road. The choice animal for the Ògún festival is a dog and it is offered on the road. Failure to do so will result in accidents through which Ògún will take humans as sacrifice. Thus, Samson tells Kotonu to:

> Kill us a dog, kill us a dog. Kill us a dog before the hungry god lies in wait and makes a substitute of me […] Dogs intestine looks messy to me he says […] Ògún likes it that's all. It is his special meat. Serve Ògún his titbit so Ògún won't look us one day and say Ho ho you two boys look juicy tome. The one who won't give Ògún willingly will yield heavier meat by Ògún's designing. (*The Road* 188–9)

That Ògún is responsible for the accidents and the deaths on the road is underscored by the presence of the Ògún mask inside the Aksident Store and Kotonu sees it as his "humble quota to the harvest on the road".

Ritual is one of the wide variety of performances appropriated by Soyinka in *The Road* (Jeyifo 123). Ritual is an actor, a form of worship or communion or communication between one and one's object of worship (Adelowo 163). It goes with sacrifice which is an act of giving or offering an item to a god or a deity to show appreciation or to expect something in return. It is a very significant aspect of Yorùbá culture.

The above aspect of the Yorùbá tradition is brought into play by Soyinka in *The Road*. Samson states that "a dog is Ògún's meat" (165) and during the drivers' festival two of the mask followers are carrying a dog. In the absence of a dog, humans are killed by Ògún on the road as he states further: "Kill us a dog before the hungry god lies in wait and makes a substitute of me" (198). Thus, the numerous deaths on the road are ritual sacrifices to Ògún. Among the many sacrificial deaths in the play, Professor describes the death of the three people in an accident which he witnessed as "the latest offering of the Word" (188). He parodies the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross: "they died, all three of them crucified on rigid branches". Ritual festivity is also concentrated in the play. An instance of this can be seen in the flashback scene which re-enacts the accident during the drivers' festival when Murano, masked as an Egúngún spirit, was knocked down and presumed dead by Kotonu and Samson (Jeyifo 122).

Soyinka also draws from the aspect of the Yorùbá Egúngún mask as an oral source text. Egúngún is a masquerade or spirit of the ancestors in Yorùbá cosmology. The Egúngún mask is used extensively during the drivers' festival when Murano is masked as an ancestral Egúngún spirit. During the festival, the Egúngún followers are armed with whips. They chant, dance, and get involved in whipping context as is the norm in Yorùbá tradition.

The Egúngún masquerade is believed to possess enormous powers by the Yorùbá people. When the Egúngún spirit experiences mystical possession, it performs the Egúngún ritual dance. This dance is the movement of transition as is observed in the Alagẹmọ poem. The dance and the mask are means of connection with the other world and this explains Professor's interest in Murano, the Egúngún mask carrier in whom the Word reposes (Dingome 39). The Egúngún must be treated in the normal ritualistic manner. Say Tokyo Kid's injunction that "you gorra do it proper" stems from the Yorùbá traditional belief in the dire consequences that result from the non-observance of proper ritual (Dingome 39). Thus, Professor's non-observance of the proper ritual by holding Murano—who has the spirit of the gods captive in him—results in his tragic death at the end of the play.

Incorporation of songs is common in Soyinka's plays. In *The Road* the songs range from the dirge to the thugs' war chant. In terms of their placement and preoccupation, these songs are structurally fit in the text. According to Jones (61), music is used suggestively and symbolically in *The Road*.

The first song, "*Ona orunjin o eeeee*" (It's a long road to heaven), was a popular highlife song in Nigeria in the fifties. It originated, probably, from the motor park touts (Adejare 125). In its original context, it was a warning song to drivers to beware of road accidents. Its incorporation into this text has changed the meaning. It now serves as a comment on the regular occurrence of road accidents caused by untrained drivers like Salubi who is waiting for Professor to forge a driving license for him. In this song, we are equally told that, no matter how skilful a driver may be, he is likely to die because of a road accident:

Esin baba Bandeleje l'odan
Won o gbefuno

Bandela's house galloped home a winner
but the race eluded him. (*The Road* 165)

In the thugs' war-chant "*Eni ro'oro Ke Juba*" (Who meets Oro and makes no obeisance), the thugs compare themselves to two Yorùbá gods, Oro and Èṣù. Oro is the Yorùbá spirit of punishment and Èṣù is a trickster spirit. Thus, the song implies that anyone who refuses to yield to the whims and caprices of the thugs shall be severely crushed. This song is suited to the reign of violence and political terrorism symbolised by the thugs and Chief-in-Town.

The dirge for Kokol'ori is a folksong sung by the Yorùbá people during the burial of a prominent person or a hero who dies unexpectedly. It is a conclusion of the episode in which Samson gives a description of Kokol'ori. A truck pusher, father of Kotonu, he made love to his female passengers in lieu of monetary payments. He died in a motor accident. The song portrays Kokol'ori as a hero and his death as a tragedy:

Iri se l'oganjoorunniki lo ti je
Iri se l'oganjoorunni kilo s'orun
Irierun ta si mi l'Èṣùikugb'omi tan
Irierun ta si mi l'aiyaotutueru mu mi
Iku se ni o, akonil'aiye lo
E ba mi kedun, Kokolori o [...]

It fogged certainly at noonday
The sun asked, what is this wonder?
The dew of drought settled on my feet
Death deprived us of rain
The dew of drought settled on my breast
And the chill of fear took me
Death has sinned against us
A man among men is gone [...] Kokol'ori (191)

Ironically, Kokol'ori's life never merits such a eulogistic dirge. He lived a life of adultery and left nothing for his children to inherit. Perhaps Soyinka is being humorous and satirical here rather than commenting on the society. Unlike Kokol'ori's dirge, Professor's praise song is a form of an Ijala poem, a folksong in Yorùbá oral poetry. According to Babalola, in Ijala poems the chanter presents a character of the subject of the poem in the form of a verbal salute to him or her and the portrait tends to be biased in favour of the person. However, some unpalatable

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truths may be mentioned in the poem. Although it is a praise poem, it is a direct attack on the attributes of Professor. The song refers to him as "a being like demon", a "coiled snake on mystery". He calls for this song after his long speech wherein he espouses himself as "a gleaner" and describes his favourite paths as "trickles among green fastness on which whole forests are broken up". This makes the content of the song appropriately suited to the character of Professor in the context of *The Road.*

Music and drumming are likewise used appropriately in structuring the mood of the play. In this play, drums perform both a social and a mystical function as used in the Yorùbá oral tradition. At the social level, Say Tokyo Kid summons his gang (the thugs) with a drum after Chief-in-Town's visit. Here the drum is used to announce to his partners in violence that another violent act is at hand. The drum is originally used as a symbol which suggests the unity of a tribe or a group in African society. Here the context has changed the meaning; it now suggests a sense of evil and disorder in the society. At the mystical level, the drum is used to revive Murano's dance and possession during the drivers' festival. The last scene of the play in which the rhythm of Agẹmọ is emerging from the bowels of the earth and the Egúngún begins to dance stands for possession. Thus, Agẹmọ music calls for the spirit of possession.

Apart from the instances discussed above, there is background music which initiates the appropriate mood in each of the episodes of the play. These songs range from church music to other organic music. These are instances of the text's absorption of other texts and they are all structurally and thematically relevant to the understanding of *The Road*. The Yorùbá belief in the existence of spirits in the external world is also incorporated into the text through Say Tokyo Kid. The Yorùbá people believe that inanimate beings like trees and plants have spirits that inhabit them and such spirits should be appeased. Say Tokyo Kid drives a timber lorry and he believes that there is a particular spirit that dwells in a particular timber. According to him, the reason why he has never been involved in an accident is because he knows how to appease the spirits that inhabit the logs which he carries in his lorry. Thus, he says: "There is a hundred spirits in a every guy of timber [...] You reckon a guy just goes and cuts down a guy of timber. You gorra do it proper man or you won't live to cut another" (171). To show his relationship with the spirits that inhabit the logs, he says: "[W]ell you tell me. Why ain't I cut and bruised like all these guys? Cause timber don't turn against her own son [...] I'm a son of timber" (172).

The Bible

The Bible is a major source, either of influence or inspiration, to writers. Soyinka's father, as noted earlier, was a Christian convert. This led to Soyinka's early engagement with the contents of the Bible. Scripture has a lot of traces in his novels, poems, and plays.

In *The Road* Soyinka creates the central character, Professor, as an ex-Sunday School teacher and a lay reader. This provides him with knowledge of the Bible, albeit imperfectly. Through him, Soyinka explores the scriptures to project the subjects at hand. Soyinka explores religious atrocities as he gives us an insight into Professor's old days in the church. He deliberately misinterprets the Bible and thus misinforms the children. He interprets the sign of the rainbow as a promise by God that he will not destroy the world with water and the palm frond worn on Palm Sundays as a sign that the world shall not perish from the thirst of palm- wine. The taking of palm wine in his bar is regarded as the Christian Holy Communion and he calls their evening songs hymns. These instances underscore the themes of religious hypocrisy and perversion which are major subjects in Soyinka's works.

The secular nature of the church which Soyinka projects is portrayed through the collapsing of the fence separating the church from the Aksident Store in the play. This is captured in the phrase "the day the wall of Jericho fell [...] down" (*The Road* 163) which has the book of Joshua, chapter 20 as the source text. Verse 5 reads: "[...] and the wall of the city shall fall down flat" while verse 20 says "[...] and the wall fell down flat [...]".[1] This fall of the wall separating the church, a religious institution, and the roadside shack, a citadel of corruption, decay, and secularity, underscores the concerns of the church with externals and secularity. The central message projected here is the collapse of the church as a religious institution.

Professor's quest for the Word has been given various interpretations. One could trace the origin of the Word to scripture. The Bible is the sole repository of the Word and the church its guidance as it is recorded in the book of St. John: "In the beginning was the *Word* and the *Word* was with God and the *Word* was God [...] And the *Word* was made flesh, and dwelt among us [...]" (John 1:1 and 14; emphasis added).

Perhaps it is this revelation that "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" that spurs Professor on in his quest. Or, as Ogude observes, the lectern bearing the Word on the bronze may refer to the Bible itself on the lectern (62). In focusing on religious hypocrisy, Soyinka incorporates the Word from the Bible and makes Professor's quest for it destructive and revolutionary. He affirms that anything is possible in the quest. In rejection of St. John's incarnation, he says: "The Word may be found in companion not to life but to death".

Soyinka also incorporates scriptural language through Professor. This use of scriptural language is an attempt by Professor to assume a Christ-like control over his people to enhance his exploitation and domination. He parodies Christ's answer to the Pharisees when asked why he eats with sinners and tax collectors. Christ answered: "Those who are well have no need of a Physician but those who are sick [...] For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matthew 9:12–3). Similarly, Professor says: "My task is to keep company with the fallen. Only the fallen have need for restitution" (220).

Again, he parodies the death of Christ on the cross in the description of the death of three persons in an accident which he witnessed: "They died, all three of them crucified on rigid branches". The "three of them" is an allusion to Christ and the two thieves who were crucified with him while "rigid branches" refers to the crosses. The implication of this is that their death is a sacrifice to Ogun, the god of the road.

In presenting the picture of poverty and disease which is endemic in the society, he draws on the metaphor of friendship between David and Jonathan in the first book of Samuel. Samson tells Salubi that: "Your body and lice day like David and Jonathan" (185). In the Bible the relationship between David and Jonathan is that of love and intimate friendship: "The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and David loved him as his own soul [...] Then Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as his own soul" (I Sam. 18:1–3).

Semantically, the above extracts are parallel. Structurally, they are also parallel with the relationship between Salubi and disease and Jonathan and David. It implies that Salubi and lice are intimate friends and that they have one soul just like Jonathan and David.

With an informed knowledge of the scripture, Soyinka captures the divisions in the society. It is a materialistic society with a high sense of perversion: the best option open to this society is bribery and corruption. Thus, Salubi parodies the Lord's Prayer in an attempt to receive a bribe from Samson, the assumed millionaire. He says: "Give us this day our daily bribe" (155) in place of the scriptural "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11), substituting the lexical item *bribe* for *bread*. Thus, the emphasis in the society is placed on bribery which comes in the form of tips and drops. However, the above instances are reshaped quotations from the Bible with a new meaning to suit the context of the play. This does not imply that the playwright has a shallow knowledge of the scripture. Rather, it shows his artistic and creative ingenuity and his deep knowledge of the scripture. This is explicit in his ability to manipulate texts from the Bible to fit his present context in order to project his messages.

Other external sources

Soyinka appropriates texts from other external sources to project aspects of the thematic preoccupation of the play. One of these is the lexical item "BEND" which has the lexicon of a road traffic sign as the source text. It is used by Soyinka to convey to the readers that the accidents are caused deliberately. This is seen in the description of Professor in the stage direction as he enters the scene:

> Professor is a tall figure in Victorian outfit—tails, top-hat etc., all thread-bare and shiny at the lapels from much ironing. He carries four enormous bundles of newspaper and a fifth paper odds and ends impaled on a metal rod stuck in a wooden rest. A chair-stick hangs from one elbow, and the other arm clutches a road sign bearing a squiggle and the one word, 'BEND' (156–7; emphasis in original)

The fact that the lexical item BEND is made prominent graphologically shows its importance. As a traffic sign on the road, BEND is meant to caution road users and Professor's removal of it and his taking it to his Aksident Store as he enters the scene of the play shows his intentional and wilful act to cause accidents on the road. This further projects the themes of man's inhumanity and bestiality. And to show how passionate he is in protecting the removed road sign, Soyinka further states thus: *[Suddenly suspicious, he clutches the road-sign possessively]*. "If this is a trick I swear they shan't take it from me. If my eyes were deluded and my body led here by spells I shall not surrender the fruit of my vigil. No one can take it from me! (157; emphasis in original)"

In the above extract, *it* and *the fruit of my vigil* refer to the road sign. To Professor, taking the road sign from him implies taking his source of livelihood because accidents that occur due to a lack of signs on the road help him to

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stock his store. Referring to the road sign as the fruit of his vigil implies that he removed it at night to avoid being seen. This underscores his wickedness as a gleaner.

Soyinka also alludes to the Burma war (216), the Remembrance Day memorial (216), and the King George Cross (217) and Victoria Cross (217) to drive home the theme of racial prejudice and injustice. Sarcastically, Soyinka condemns wars when he alludes to the Burma war: "It is peaceful to fight a war which one does not understand, to kill human beings who never seduced your wife or poisoned your water. Sapele to Burma—that was a long way for a quarrel" (216).

In the above, Sapele stands for Africa, while Burma stands for all the foreign wars taken part in by Africans. Through this, Soyinka condemns the involvement of Africans in wars as enforced by white people. Africans were forced to fight in wars that did not concern them. In particular, it is the Burma war that endows Sergeant Burma with his predatory nature. Like Professor, the gleaner, he has no compassion for humanity. Remembrance Day is a memorial in Commonwealth countries instituted after the end of the First World War to honour the soldiers who died in the war. All Sergeant Burma was awarded during one of the memorial church services after the war was a long service ribbon. The King George Cross is a United Kingdom and Commonwealth medal while the Victoria Cross was introduced by Queen Victoria to honour acts of valour in the Crimean War. The reward for Sergeant Burma's involvement in the Burma war that neither concerned him nor his nation was for him not to be honoured. The authorities refused to honour Sergeant Burma with the King George Cross because he was black. Even when the general cabled that he should be awarded the Victoria Cross the colonial government in Africa refused out of fear of his becoming a political agitator on his return. He thus sums up his disappointment in Nigerian pidgin: "Haba! Justice no dey for white man world" (Ah! There is no justice in white men's world).

Borrowing from prior texts

In the works of a writer, it is possible to identify some recurrent features. In most cases this might be consciously done by the writer. In *The Road*, Soyinka consciously incorporates from his other texts. The problem of date of composition and publication makes it difficult to determine the pretext(s). However, there are traces of the re-use of some materials either in whole or modified in *The Road*.

One subject that has continued to fascinate Soyinka in his writings is the never-ending carnage on Nigerian roads. An untold number of travellers have lost their lives in motor accidents and, as such, death on the road has become a recurring intertextual thematic focus in Soyinka's works. Specifically, a group of poems designated "Poems of the road" in *Idanre and Other Poems* are concerned with death on the road. Among the poems, "In Memory of Segun Awolowo" is a poem to a young friend killed in such an accident. "Death in the Dawn" is also concerned with the same subject. It is based on an experience which Soyinka had in Lagos. A white cockerel flew out of dusk and smashed against his windscreen. A mile further he came across a motor accident and a freshly smashed man (*Idanre* 10). The same subject of death on the road becomes the subject of one of his most fascinating plays, *The Road*. Like the poems above, it is inspired by Soyinka's awareness of deadly road realities in Nigeria. These works dwell on the rich harvest that Ògún regularly reaps on his domain, the road, as a result of numerous automobile crashes. These deaths are attributed to Ògún who is celebrated in Yorùbá folklore as the pathfinder. "In Memory of Segun Awolowo" condemns Ògún as a "scrap-iron dealer". The sacrifice of the "dawn's lone trumpeter" in "Death in the Dawn" is futile to Ògún and in *The Road* Samson tells us that "The one who won't give Ògún willingly will yield heavier meat by Ògún's design".

Of interest are the identifiable similar linguistic structures in describing these accident scenes. Soyinka describes the death of the "dawn's lone trumpeter" as:

> [...] cascades.
> Of white feather-flakes [...] (*Idanre* 10)

In "Death in the Dawn" in *The Interpreters* he describes the death of Sekoni thus:

> Showers of laminated glass around, him his head one
> fastness of blood and wet earth (*The Interpreters* 155)

And in describing an accident scene which Professor witnessed in *The Road*, a similar pattern is sustained:

> And showers of crystal flying or broken
> souls. (*The Road* 159)

The above extracts are similar semantically. Also, similar imagery is sustained in describing the different scenes. More striking is the similarity between the last two texts. The language is the same: "Showers of laminated glass" means the same thing as "showers of crystals" and "broken souls" is a reduction of "one fastness of blood and wet earth". It is obvious from this that one of the texts is a source for the other.

In "Idanre" what appears to be an assertive statement of the fate of wayfarers becomes a prayer in "Death in the Dawn" and *The Road*:

> Fated lives rides on wheels of death
> when The Road waits, famished ("Idanre" lines 94–5);
>
> May you never walk
> When the road waits, famished ("Death in the Dawn" lines 23–4)

and

> May you never walk when the road
> waits, famished. (*The Road* 199)

The semantic and linguistic similarities in the above extracts are explicit enough. The only difference lies in the structure of the first text. However, the same phrase and structure is repeated—the same pattern of punctuation: a comma before "famished". No doubt, this is a case of conscious incorporation by the playwright to underscore the theme of accidents and deaths on the road.

Another identifiable source from Soyinka's own text is from *The Interpreters*. Chief Winsala with his "deep alcoholic amorousness" is described by Mathias in pidgin in this manner: "He and him bottle dey like David and Goliath" (*The Interpreters* 74). Similarly, in *The Road*, the disease-stricken Salubi with his mouth that "stinks like night-soil lorry" is referred to by Samson thus: "Your body and lice dey like David and Jonathan" (*The Road* 185). These utterances are made in pidgin and the references are to the same personalities in the Bible. This use of "David and Goliath" by Mathias is a reflection of his shallow knowledge of the scripture; he intends to say, "David and Jonathan". The relationship drawn is that of friendship as illustrated by David and Jonathan in I Samuel Chapter 18. Similarly, Winsala's and Salubi's souls are knitted to drink and disease, respectively. The scripture is the source text for these two extracts. The above examples are instances of intertextual deviations.

There is also a similar context of the usage of the Word in *The Interpreters* and one context of usage in *The Road*. These are cases in which the Word is used as a curse or swear word. Bandele uses the Word in this manner: "old and immutable as the royal mother of Benin throne, old and cruel as the Ogboni in conclave pronouncing the Word. I hope you all live to bury your daughters" (*The Interpreters* 251). Professor damns Salubi in a similar context:

> May the elusive Word crack your bones
> in a hundred splinters! (*The Road* 184)

or,

> May your tongue of deception be rotted in pestilence from
> the enigma of the Inviolate Word. (*The Road* 184)

or

> Get out of my sight, and the Word follow you as you leave
> my threshold. (*The Road* 184)

Izevbaye (38) identifies these usages as a divine power manifesting itself in potent utterances. This recalls the Ogboni's use of the earth cult as a means of gaining power and transmitting it verbally.

That these features are identifiable in a similar context shows that Soyinka incorporates into a text features from another text. This source is secondary. However, identifying the initial text may be difficult, but the ability of the reader to identify a similar usage of a text is important. It facilitates understanding of a text in a similar context. This goes a long way to enhance the understanding of a writer's thematic preoccupation and worldview.

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Conclusion

This paper has shown the extent to which Soyinka relies on the Yorùbá sacred texts, the Bible, and his own already-existing texts in the creation of *The Road*. This reliance on external sources should not be seen as plagiarism, but rather as a mark of versatility and creative ingenuity on the side of the playwright in as much as some of the texts incorporated are not just borrowing but instances of creative incorporation. Intertextuality has helped Soyinka to achieve thematic significance in this play. This is in view of the fact that, through these intertextual sources, the play is able to reflect the complex society which he mirrors and foreground the various themes of the play.

Notes

1. All citations from the Bible are from the Revised Standard Version, 1901.

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Winterbach's *Spyt* and Scholtz's production: An expression of a postmodern impasse

Lida Krüger

Winterbach's *Spyt* and Scholtz's production: An expression of a postmodern impasse

Some scholars have declared metamodernism to be postmodernism's successor, and Afrikaans novelist Ingrid Winterbach's work has been argued to be an example of this distinct move away from the postmodern paradigm. However, in this article I present the alternative interpretation that Winterbach's play, *Spyt* (Regret), rather represents postmodernism's inability to give way to its successor. An investigation from a postmodern perspective leads me to conclude that, in both the text and performance of this play (directed by Brink Scholtz), an escape from the postmodern paradigm entails the end of all representation. Winterbach reduces all of the characters' endeavours to surfaces which become parodies. All their experiences are commodified and any attempt at uncovering a deeper meaning to life is undermined by ridicule. Winterbach furthermore draws attention to some of her characters' limited vocabulary and reliance on English loanwords. This culminates in a powerful scene where the loanword 'awesome' is repeated to the extent that it becomes simultaneously meaningless and indispensable; a tension that she does not resolve. In addition, the crossing of the boundary between life and death, which has been described as postmodernism's final frontier, is portrayed by relying on an obsolete narrative. The play therefore suggests a postmodern impasse, rather than a move towards a new paradigm. **Keywords**: Brink Scholtz, Ingrid Winterbach, metamodernism, postmodernism, *Spyt*, surfaces.

Introduction

Afrikaans novelist Ingrid Winterbach's oeuvre has been read as a clear deviation from the postmodern paradigm (Van der Merwe 95; Human 9). Her characters' search for meaning and the juxtaposition of the scientific and the spiritual in her trilogy *Die boek van toeval en toeverlaat* (*The Book of Happenstance*), *Die benederyk* (*The Road of Excess*), and *Die aanspraak van lewende wesens* (*It Might Get Loud*) are interpreted by Van der Merwe (95) and Human (9) as a return to the possibility of a deeper meaning. In this article, I present an alternative reading of Winterbach's work, arguing that in her play, *Spyt* (Regret), she uses affect and borrows elements from ancient Greek mythology, the Baroque era, and contemporary science, not in an attempt to move away from postmodernism but rather to dramatize postmodernism's inability to give way to its successor. This is done through a proliferation of surfaces and excess (especially in the language use of the characters), a preoccupation with death, and the aesthetic choices in the play's representation of death.

These aspects of the play find expression in both the written text as well as its first performance in Potchefstroom at the Aardklop National Arts Festival of 2010, which was directed by Brink Scholtz. While I regard Scholtz' interpretation of *Spyt* as faithful to the written text, the performance emphasized the aspects of the play that I analyse below. For this reason, as well as the fact that a drama text is necessarily incomplete until performed, I consider both the written text and performance in my analysis.

In this article I situate Winterbach's oeuvre within current debates on the end of postmodernism, before providing a brief synopsis of *Spyt* and a discussion of the reception of its first performance. This is followed by an exploration of the tension between surface and depth and the use of excess and parody in the play. Thereafter I discuss the undermining of attempts at self-improvement and claims of access to a deeper meaning, before moving on to an investigation of the meaninglessness of language and the representation of death.

Lida Krüger is a senior lecturer in the Department of English Studies at the University of South Africa (UNISA), Pretoria, South Africa.
Email: Krugeja@unisa.ac.za
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0336-3096

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Postmodernism's demise and Winterbach's oeuvre

Postmodernism's demise had been announced decades ago by, among others, one of its most prominent scholars, Linda Hutcheon. In the second edition of *The Politics of Postmodernism*, she states that the "postmodern moment has passed, even if its discursive strategies and its ideological critique continue to live on—as do those of modernism—in our contemporary twenty-first century world" (181). Hutcheon then invites her readers to find a new label to chart the cultural changes and continuities that succeeds postmodernism (181).

This is, in fact, what Vermeulen and Van den Akker aim to do in their article "Notes on Metamodernism", where they argue that postmodernism has been replaced by a new "structure of feeling" which entails a return to myth, hope, and engagement. Building on this research, Van der Merwe (95) argues that various post-millennial literary works from different parts of the world are examples of metamodernist works. Although none of Winterbach's works are the primary texts of Van der Merwe's study, he identifies the presence of both the scientific and the spiritual in *The Book of Happenstance* as metamodern (95).

Also, Human (9) interprets Winterbach's works, in particular the above-mentioned trilogy, as a definite marker of a paradigm shift away from postmodernism. Despite his identification of the blurring of genre boundaries, the use of pastiche, cynicism, semiotic games, and the relationality of meaning and knowledge in *It Might Get Loud*, Human argues that Winterbach's work clearly shows that postmodernism's days as dominating cultural paradigm are numbered (9).

Human sees a renewed interest in master narratives and transcendence, the rediscovery of relationality and love, the reappraisal of authenticity and artistry, and the body as origin and eventual remnant as the signs of the new cultural paradigm. In addition, he interprets the characters in *It Might Get Loud*'s faith and longing for that which is meaningful, true, and pure as confirmation of his argument (9), despite the fact that they do not necessarily find the answers and solutions that they search for so zealously.

These scholars therefore see the *search for* or *interest in* the things that postmodernism questions, such as authenticity, the spiritual, master narratives, and other related concepts, as indicative of the new paradigm. This would entail that postmodernism is seen as exclusively rational, unfeeling, cynical, a-religious, and by implication restricted and stable. In *Spyt*, however, Winterbach uses the same concepts and themes as in her trilogy, in a manner that I interpret as decidedly postmodern.

***Spyt*: Winterbach's text and Scholtz's production**

Spyt shows the audience the last day in the life of Braam, a successful businessman and art investor whose life is characterized by luxury and decadence. His death is hinted at from the first scene of the play, which, as the stage directions indicate, is a tableau vivant resembling Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Tulp*. As if aware that he will die soon, Braam acts in an odd manner throughout the rest of the play, disconnected from his environment and the people close to him. His behaviour also seems to be out of character, as his wife, best friend, and two of his mistresses observe repeatedly. Throughout the play, Braam, his wife, Mariana, and two of his mistresses receive threatening phone calls from one of his former employees, who warns that Braam will die on that particular day. Braam's day consists of having breakfast with his wife, going to the gym with his friend, Frans, and meeting his three mistresses, the last one being Frans's wife, Jolene. A stranger, Moira Jean, approaches him and asks if his metaphorical slate is clean, again hinting at his imminent death. Braam is then violently kidnapped by two men wearing masks, but this incident proves to be a red herring: the abduction is arranged by Frans, who discovered Braam's affair with Jolene and wanted to warn and scare him. The two reconcile and go out for a drink. Braam returns home before going out again to meet up with the threatening caller, who then shoots him. In the last scene, Braam is rowed across a body of water while reminiscing about the meaning of his father's life and his love of nature.

The text clearly juxtaposes seemingly irreconcilable things, like a life of excess and superficiality, with a consideration of conscience. Mythological and Baroque elements are juxtaposed with a contemporary preoccupation with surfaces. While the text and production received critical recognition, its depiction of excess seemed to baffle and offend the audience of its first performance.

Spyt premiered in 2010 at the Aardklop National Arts Festival. In her review for the festival paper, *Spat*, Deborah Steinmair (8) finds it a pity that the production of *Spyt* did not live up to its promising text. Nevertheless, the play won the FynGoud prize for the best production. Unfortunately, most of the general reaction that *Spyt*

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elicited centred on two sex scenes, which many audience members found offensive and excessive. Johannes de Villiers (3) observes that it was specifically the interracial sex scene between Braam (Stian Bam) and his second mistress (Ntombi Makutshi) which prompted more or less twelve audience members to leave the auditorium in protest during the performance of 29 September 2010.

In a blog post on *versindaba.co.za*, poet and sociologist Andries Bezuidenhout laments the fact that so many audience members fixate on the sex scenes, while completely missing the more profound significance of the text. He states:

> I see *Spyt* as a play that (among other things) is about excess—times when pleasure becomes a commodity, but when people lose the ability to express meaning in language. Excess and superficialization. One scene, where two characters discuss the art of a young black artist as a good investment while having wild sex, in various positions, comically, as in pornographic films, also makes this point. The characters are constantly busy with their bodies—in the gym and on the bed. The sex scenes are comical, or sad throughout, but at one particular moment potentially beautiful—as when an artist traces the outlines of the main character on a huge piece of paper (exactly the point where many people left). (my translation)

The potentially beautiful moment that Bezuidenhout refers to is, of course, the interracial sex scene. Bezuidenhout's reaction highlights the irony of the audience members fixating on the sex scenes, seeing the play as cheap and superficial, while missing the point that Winterbach and Scholtz make about cheapness and superficiality. In *Spyt*, as in many of her other works, Winterbach focuses on death, mortality, and its meaning, sometimes ruminating on the possibility of a spiritual world. However, the question remains whether her engagement with these themes can be seen as postmodern or not.

Tension between surface and depth

Postmodernism, according to Barry (84–5), revels in both excess and surfaces. In contrast to modernism, which advocates for minimalism, postmodernism embraces excess, gaudiness, and a mix of qualities (84). Postmodernism often entails bizarre "mixtures of imagery, viewpoint, and vocabulary" which "jostle on a surface which seems happy to be nothing *but* surface" (85, emphasis in original). It is furthermore, according to Nigel Watson (56), also concerned with consumption rather than production.

Postmodernism also does not endeavour to abandon metanarratives, but, according to McHale (24), to reduce them to "little narratives". McHale therefore regards postmodernism's collapse of hierarchies as a myth (226). Without hierarchies, the juxtaposition of the incongruous, which is so closely associated with postmodernism, would not be possible. Postmodernism merely juxtaposes "disparate discursive orders" without "any attempt to reduce them to a common order" (226). Importantly, Hutcheon (1–2) argues that postmodernism's defining characteristic lies in its "commitment to doubleness, or duplicity". According to her, postmodernism installs and reinforces as much as it undermines and subverts (1–2).

It is from this postmodern theoretical vantage point that I interpret the familiar themes found in Winterbach's novelistic oeuvre as they appear in the text and performance of *Spyt*. Scholtz (8) suggests that the play works with meaning in an open way, which was very exciting but difficult for her to work with. In a manner reminiscent of Umberto Eco's claim that, although meaning is fluid, not every interpretation is valid (*Interpretation and Overinterpretation* 24), Scholtz explains that in *Spyt*, there is

> an incredible amount of room for interpretation, but at the same time you cannot tack an interpretation onto the text. […] There is for example a type of juxtaposition between, on the one hand a worldview wherein things are arbitrary and meaningless and accidental and episodic and so on, and then there is almost on another level a very metaphysical, a very clear meaning. Yes, a metaphysical process. Almost literally that there is a reality beyond. It is a strange tension. I think it is always there in Winterbach's writing. (Scholtz 8, my translation)

Scholtz therefore interprets the text as ambiguous regarding an absolute truth, on the one hand suggesting that there is a reality beyond the present world, and on the other revelling in arbitrary meaninglessness, without any attempts to reconcile this ambiguity.

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Excessive sex scenes and parodies of pornography

The meaninglessness, excess, and surface-driven aspects of the play are most obvious in the first sex scene, as suggested by Bezuidenhout above. The scene starts with Braam knocking on his first mistress's door. As soon as she opens, they immediately start having sex while she tries to discuss a possible investment in the work of a young, upcoming black artist, Lesego Motlau, while he tries to focus on the sex:

> *SY. Jy maak dit vanoggend vir my baie moeilik. Ek weet nie wat de hel dit met jou is nie—jou aandag was nog geen oomblik by ons gesprek nie.*
> *BRAAM. O nee, jy maak 'n fout—my aandag is hier, presies hier met jou! (Fluister.) Is daar 'n posisie wat jy dalk nóg lekkerder vind?*
> *SY. Braam—jy maak dit nie vir my maklik nie! Ek het moeite gedoen met die Lesego Motlau! Ek het werk te koop gekry wat nie eintlik te koop was nie!*
>
> SHE. You are making it very difficult for me. I don't know what the hell it is with you—your attention has not for a moment been with our conversation.
> BRAAM. O no, you are making a mistake—my attention *is* here, exactly here with you! (*Whispers.*) Is there a position that you maybe find even nicer?
> SHE. Braam—you are not making it easy for me! I made an effort with this Lesego Motlau! I got work for sale that wasn't actually for sale! (emphasis in original).

When she later mentions the use of blood as medium in Motlau's work, Braam launches into a technical, scientific explanation of why blood is red, while plants are green:

> *In 'n chlorofiel-molekule* [sic] *is daar 136 verskillende atome, gerangskik om 'n magnesium-atoom in die middel. Vervang hierdie magnesium-atoom met 'n yster-atoom, en jy kry 'n hemoglobien-molekule. Die yster-atoom kombineer met die ander atome om bloed rooi te maak.*
>
> In a chlorophyll molecule there are 136 different atoms, positioned around a magnesium atom in the centre. Replace this magnesium atom with an iron atom, and you get a haemoglobin molecule. The iron atom combines with the other atoms to make blood red.

These characters are having sex and discussing art and science, acts which, separately, might point to a connection between them, or an interest in a profound intellectual pursuit, but together become incongruent. The scene is described in the didascalia as follows:

> *Terwyl hulle praat het hulle deurgaans seks, in allerlei denkbare posisies—op die vloer, op die bed.*
>
> While they talk they have sex throughout the scene, in all kinds of conceivable positions—on the floor, on the bed.

Her cell phone rings twice, and she answers without interrupting the sex. As Bezuidenhout points out, the depiction of sex in this scene therefore becomes a parody of pornography. This idea is furthermore underscored by the fact that Braam has not one but three mistresses, "*een wit, een swart, en een die vrou van 'n goeie vriend van my*" (one white, one black, and one the wife of a good friend of mine), as he describes them, and that he visits them all before lunch on the same day. These sex scenes do not indicate engagement but, rather, a surface of pornographic representation.

In addition, both characters seem less interested in Motlau's art than in the return they could get on their investment in his work. It is even suggested that they are in the business of exploiting young, upcoming artists when Braam's mistress describes Motlau's work and its possibilities as follows:

> *Lúister: hy's pas uit die township, sonder enige of baie min opleiding, en hy maak hierdie ongelooflike gesofistikeerde werk!*
>
> *Listen:* he is just out of the township, without any or with very little training, and he makes this incredibly sophisticated work! (emphasis in original).

When Braam seems uninterested, she says,

> *Jy begryp waarom ons nou moet koop, nè? Hierdie man, hierdie jong man—meneer Christo reken dis nou 'n goeie tyd om sy werk te koop, voor hy die internasionale oog vang, en hy het spesiaal gereël dat ons …*
>
> You realize why we have to buy now, right? This man, this young man—Mr Christo reckons it is a good time to buy now, before he catches the international eye, and he arranged especially for us to …

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Her interest in Motlau's work therefore centres on the fact that he is black and has not received much training. The assumption is that he would sell his work for less than it is worth. In addition, his disadvantaged background only makes him more appealing to a politically correct European market. Motlau's work is therefore reduced to its value as a commodity to be consumed by an international market. Just as the sex between Braam and his mistress becomes a parodic surface, their interest in art is reduced to a banal conversation about a commodity.

Capitalist icons and the quest for self-improvement

Apart from the bedrooms of Braam's mistresses, the gym is an additional space where the focus is on his body, as Bezuidenhout points out. In the third scene of the play, Braam and his friend, Frans, are in the gym, sitting side by side on rowing apparatus. The didascalia describes the action as follows: "*Hulle roei onophoudelik tydens die gesprek. Albei is in pakke geklee*" (They row non-stop during the conversation. Both are dressed in suits). This ludicrous representation firstly mirrors the sex scene discussed above, where there is also a frantic physical action which accompanies the dialogue. Secondly, the fact that they are wearing suits in the gym parodies the suit-clad capitalist figures of the 1980s and 1990s. Thirdly, the rowing apparatus foreshadows the rowboat in which Braam finds himself in the last scene of the play.

The ridiculousness of the two men using gym apparatus while wearing suits also reduces this image to a mere surface, and the men's conversation suggests further superficiality. Frans and Braam discuss a rugby game that they will attend the coming Saturday. Frans mentions that he has organised two sex workers, who are apparently twins, as entertainment for him and Braam after the game. Frans then shares with Braam that he is worried about his prostate. Braam reacts unsympathetically, and Frans is offended. Braam apologizes:

BRAAM. Jammer. Maar daar is nog altyd die vooruitsig van Saterdagaand—wanneer ons die tweeling gaan laat les opsê.
FRANS. Yip! So praat 'n bek, Braam, so praat 'n bek!
BRAAM. Die tweeling met hulle identiese, blonde, bonsende tiete.
FRANS. Jirre Braam, hoe lus maak jy my nou!
BRAAM. 'n Oog vir 'n oog en 'n tiet vir 'n tiet.
FRANS. Wat ook al, Braam. Maar jy moet onthou dit het moeite gekos om die girls in die hande te kry. En hulle is nie goedkoop nie.
BRAAM. Ek sal betaal! Ek sal betaal wat hulle vra! Vir 'n nag se ongebreidelde rinkinkery betaal ek wat ook al die prys is.
FRANS. Dit sal nie goedkoop wees nie maar dit sal elke sent werd wees, my vriend.

BRAAM. Sorry. But there is always the prospect of Saturday night—when we are going to teach the twins a lesson.
FRANS. Yip! You can say that again, Braam, you can say that again!
BRAAM. The twins with their identical, blonde, bouncing tits.
FRANS. Lord Braam, how you are whetting my appetite now!
BRAAM. An eye for an eye and a tit for a tit.
FRANS. Whatever, Braam. But you should remember that it took effort to get hold of the girls. And they are not cheap.
BRAAM. I'll pay! I'll pay what they are asking! For a night's unbridled gallivanting I'll pay whatever the price.
FRANS. It won't be cheap, but it will be worth every cent, my friend.

The scene ends with Frans sharing his concern that his wife might be cheating on him. It is therefore clear that sex also functions as a commodifiable service in this scene. While Frans does have deeper concerns, such as his health and the fidelity of his wife, he chooses to distract himself from these anxieties with the services of a pair of blonde twins: sex workers with large breasts. The level to which the twins serve as a commodity to fulfil a male fantasy becomes preposterous as they are later described as having bouncing breasts like balloons, udders, or teats. Again, the text represents sex as a surface, a parody of clichéd pornographic images.

However, it is not only the sex lives of these two men that are represented as a superficial commodity. Braam and his wife, Mariana, have an argument in which he tells her that she under-utilizes her abilities. When Mariana sees Braam again at the end of the day, she tells him about her plans to enrich and develop herself. However, these plans also become laughable. Mariana describes them as follows:

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Ek wil die nuwe jaar 'n nuwe blaadjie omslaan. Ek het 'n hele program uitgewerk. Ek het myself laat gaan die afgelope paar jaar. Ek het net op oppervlakkige dinge gefokus. Ek gaan inskryf vir een of ander kursus. Miskien Kunsgeskiedenis. Miskien Argeologie. Miskien Remediërende Onderwys. Ek wil ook 'n kookkursus doen. Iets soos Indonesiese kookkuns. Leandré het dit gedoen. Sy sê dis awesome.

I want to turn a new leaf this year. I worked out an entire program. I let myself go these past few years. I only focused on superficial things. I am going to enrol in some or other course. Maybe Art History. Maybe Archaeology. Maybe Remedial Education. I also want to do a cooking class. Something like Indonesian cooking. Leandré did it. She says it's awesome.

Mariana continues to describe a course that a couple that she knows completed. This course supposedly helps a person to connect with their true inner self. The couple that Mariana knows allegedly benefited from the course in such a degree that their relationship is strengthened; they are, in fact, planning ambitious projects, like converting their Wendy house into a summer house.

Mariana's desire for self-improvement may be sincere, but it is anything but focused. She simply wants to enrich her life; the way in which is seemingly of no importance to her, be it Art History, Archaeology, Education, a cooking class, or pop psychology. The courses that she is interested in promise unrealistic radical changes in people's personal lives, as if an emotional miracle cure. By focusing only on these courses, which seem to be packaged and sold to stereotypically bored, middleclass housewives, Mariana's search for a deeper meaning to her life also becomes a potential act of consumption, rather than production.

A playboy bunny and a psychotic gunman

While Braam, Frans, and Mariana seem to be stuck in an existence of excess, superficiality, and surfaces, there are two characters who are concerned with a deeper meaning, as Scholtz (8) suggests. After Braam's visit to his third mistress, he goes to a park. Here he is confronted with Moira Jean, a woman who asks him if his proverbial slate is clean. He evades her questions, but he does ask her how he could clean his slate. The stage directions indicate that she takes a tape deck from her handbag and they dance energetically to Donna Summer's "Hot Stuff". After the dance, Moira Jean explains that this was only the warmup:

MOIRA JEAN. Okay. Nou's ons opgewarm. Ek wil jou weer vra, meneer, is jy gereed?
BRAAM. Gereed waarvoor?
MOIRA JEAN. Vir die afrekening.
BRAAM. Watter afrekening?
MOIRA JEAN. Die opweeg en die afweeg.
BRAAM. Waarvan?
MOIRA JEAN. Meneer, jy hou jou verniet onnosel. Jy weet goed wat opgeweeg en afgeweeg word.
BRAAM. Ek glo nie in daardie soort afrekening nie. Ek het eintlik nie tyd vir enige van jou praatjies nie. Hoe aanvallig jy ook al is.

MOIRA JEAN. Okay. Now we're warmed up. I want to ask you again, mister, are you ready?
BRAAM. Ready for what?
MOIRA JEAN. For the reckoning.
BRAAM. What reckoning?
MOIRA JEAN. The weighing off.
BRAAM. Of what?
MOIRA JEAN. Mister, you are playing dumb in vain. You know very well what is being weighed.
BRAAM. I don't believe in that sort of reckoning. I don't really have time for any of your chats. Charming as you may be.

Halfway through a play that has up to this point been depicting characters who busy themselves with meaningless pursuits, the audience, and Braam, are confronted with Moira Jean, a character who believes in eternal life and that our actions in this life have consequences in the next. It might seem that Moira Jean functions as Braam's conscience, as the voice of reason that might bring him to repentance for his selfishness and callousness.

This idea is, however, undermined, not only by their bizarre dance to "Hot Stuff" but also by Moira Jean's name and appearance, although the latter differs between text and performance. Her name, which sounds suspiciously similar to Marilyn Monroe's original name, Norma Jeanne Mortenson, suggests that she might be giving Braam a false name, which already makes it hard to take her seriously. The didascalia describes her as follows: "*Sy dra 'n kort rokkie, lachals-toppie en iets soos bunny ore*" (She is wearing a short skirt, low cut top and something like bunny

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ears). Moira Jean is therefore presented as a parody of a sex symbol. In the performance, Moira Jean (Lulu Botha) was clad in a tracksuit. Botha portrayed the character as an intrusive, over-familiar stranger, thereby discrediting her in a different way. Nevertheless, the only thing about her that interests Braam is the possibility of having sex with her, as is clear when he tells her: "*Juffrou, ek het 'n beter idee. Jy kom saam met my. Ons soek 'n hotel. Ons vergeet voorlopig van hierdie onsinnige praatjies*" (Miss, I have a better idea. You come with me. We look for a hotel. We forget for now about this nonsensical talk).

The other character concerned with a deeper meaning to life is Micky, the man who has been stalking, and eventually shoots, Braam. He seems to be in contact with an alternate reality. After numerous threatening phone calls throughout the play, Micky appears for the first time in the penultimate scene, when Braam finally confronts him face to face. It quickly becomes clear that Micky is in conversation with a cast of voices, loosely based on common archetypes. Micky tells Braam that he has received instruction to kill him from the Centurion and that the Centurion gives the orders and does not make mistakes. Yet, among Micky's cast of characters, there is also the Whore. Micky describes her as "*die moeder van die hoere en die gruwels van die aarde*" (the mother of the whores and the horrors of the earth). The Whore apparently says "*lelike, godslasterlike dinge*" (nasty, blasphemous things) and Micky says that she is "*baie, baie, baie onrein*" (very, very, very unclean). The Whore seems to be the only figure who can challenge the Centurion, and as Braam gets this information from Micky, he tries to use it to dissuade Micky from killing him.

However, Micky is represented as mentally unstable. In this scene, he is described by the didascalia as "*baie gespanne en na aan histeries*" (very tense and almost hysterical), and he starts to cry midway through their confrontation. During one of the scenes where Braam speaks to him over the phone, he asks if Micky has been taking his medication. Braam also placates Micky during these phone calls with words such as: "*Nee. Ek dink nie jy's vlermuiskak of hondestront nie*" (No. I don't think you're bat shit or dog dung), and "*Nee. Ek dink nie jy's 'n drol en 'n freak nie*" (No. I don't think you are a turd and a freak), suggesting that Micky has been voicing his insecurities to Braam. The audience is therefore unlikely to take Micky seriously.

While Winterbach and Scholtz therefore do juxtapose excess, surfaces, and meaninglessness with concerns about a deeper meaning to life, these concerns are undermined. In the end Moira Jean's and Micky's viewpoints are represented as no less ridiculous than Braam's parodic sex life or Mariana's consumerist attempts at self-improvement.

The meaninglessness of language

The importance of excess and surfaces in *Spyt* takes on an additional significance when the characters' use of language is considered. Within postmodernism, attention is often drawn to language for its own sake. Jacques Derrida argues that the link between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary and contends that a supposedly fixed concept behind a word does not exist (qtd in Zima 142). Bert States (25) points out that a sign must be repeated to be of value, and that "the inclination of the sign is to become more efficient, to be read easily". However, to be "read easily" does not cement the link between meaning and sign. Derrida argues that repetition shifts the meaning of a word or expression, rather than strengthening its precise meaning (qtd in Zima 151). Since the precise context of each utterance cannot be repeated, the exact repetition of a word or expression is not actually possible. The contextual shift of every repetition changes the meaning of the word. Therefore, repetition leads to disintegration, rather than a consolidation of meaning.

Furthermore, a word, expression, or symbol can not only shift in meaning, but become meaningless, as Eco explains when he states that "the rose is a symbolic figure so rich in meanings that by now it hardly has any meaning left" (*Postscript to The Name of the Rose* 3). Postmodernism therefore aims to detach words from their meanings, to draw attention to language itself, how we use it, and how we are implicit in its use.

In *Spyt*, the use of language achieves these postmodernist aims: the play draws attention to the words themselves, detaching them from their accepted meaning in certain cases. Braam's dissatisfaction with his environment and life also includes a pedantic preoccupation with the precise meaning of words. In the scene where Braam and Frans discuss their planned evening with the blonde sex workers, for example, the following exchange happens:

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FRANS. Ons gaan rinkink my vriend, ons gaan—
[…]
BRAAM. Wat beteken rinkink, Frans? Wat is na jou mening die presiése betekenis van rinkink?
FRANS. Wat de fok gaan met jóú aan?
BRAAM. En sommer die etimologie van die woord rinkink ook?
FRANS. Jy's nou moedswillig my ou.

FRANS. We are going to rollick, my friend we are—
[…]
BRAAM. What does rollick mean, Frans? What is, in your opinion the *exact* meaning of rollick?
FRANS. What the fuck is wrong with *you*?
BRAAM. While you're about it, also the etymology of the word rollick.
FRANS. You're wanton, my mate (emphasis in original).

By portraying Braam's concern with language as unusual, Winterbach draws attention to the fact that these characters use language without considering the words themselves, taking their meaning for granted. These exchanges also lay the groundwork for the ninth scene of the play, in which the English loanword 'awesome' is used repeatedly. In this scene, Braam and Frans are sitting in a bar, having their reconciliatory drink. According to the didascalia, the rest of the cast stand in a row at the back of the stage, doing disco dance moves while standing in one place. The text indicates that snippets from the conversations around Braam and Frans are heard through a voice over:

Karate Kallie. Daar's hierdie een toneel.
Man.
Dit was awesome.
Ja, Karate Kallie is great. Hy's die beste. Hy's awesome.
Ons het peanuts geëet.
Awesome. Dit was 'n awesome aand.
Awesome.
Alles is awesome.
Karate Kallie is awesome.
Wildlife is awesome.
2010 is awesome.
Awesome. Awesome. Awesome.

[…]

Probeer jy maar net jou bes, sê ek [vir my seun].
Jou heel heel beste.
Jou heel heel héél beste.
En moenie jou pen voor die tyd neersit nie.
Sê ek vir hom.
Jou heel awesome beste.
Awesome.
Aaaaw-some.
Aaaaaaaaaw-some.
Aaaaaa-sem.
Asem.
Aaaa-sem.

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Karate Kallie. There's this one scene.[1]
Man.
It was awesome.
Yes, Karate Kallie is great. He's the best. He's awesome.
We ate peanuts.
Awesome. It was an awesome night.
Awesome.
Everything is awesome.
Karate Kallie is awesome.
Wildlife is awesome.
2010 is awesome.
Awesome. Awesome. Awesome.

[…]

You just try your best, I say [to my son].
Your very very best.
Your very very *very* best (emphasis in original).
And don't lay down your pen before time is up.
I say to him.
Your very awesome best.
Awesome.
Aaaaw-some.
Aaaaaaaaaw-some.
Aaaaaa-sem.
Asem.
Aaaa-sem.

Clearly, something happens during this scene in which the word "awesome" gradually becomes the word "*asem*", Afrikaans for "breath". This change is even more evident in performance, as the subtle shift in sound from "awesome" to "*asem*" is audible. Bezuidenhout describes the scene as follows:

> A voice that was recorded beforehand, a father, tells about the rugby he saw with his son. […] [T]he man does not have the vocabulary to describe how he enjoyed the rugby. All he can do is to repeat the word "awesome". "Awesome" becomes a refrain standing in for the man's inability to express himself in Afrikaans.

After the voiceover is heard, the cast walks downstage and, according to the didascalia, "*inkanteer stadig: a-sem, a-sem, a-sem*" (incantates slowly: *a-sem, a-sem, a-sem*). Bezuidenhout interprets the resulting effect as follows: "[The actors] repeat the word 'awesome'. Its meaning changes, as they stop talking and only breathe. 'Awesome' becomes 'asem' […]. What is the difference between 'awesome' and 'asem'"?

As Bezuidenhout observes, the word is used in so many contexts that it fails to denote anything specific. The word can now mean almost anything, as long as it carries a general, positive association. Its meaning is restricted to a vague, positive concept. Instead of a word, the sound is reduced to breath, to nothingness. In the production that I saw on 2 October 2010, the voice over created the effect of engulfing the audience in sound; the word "awesome" seems to become omnipresent, resulting in a strange sensory experience for the audience.

In the next scene, Braam's wife uses the word "awesome" to describe her plans for self-improvement. In the script, he responds by asking: "Awesome?", to which she replies: "*Jy weet, amazing*" (You know, amazing), incapable of defining the word without using another worn-out loanword. In the 2010 production, Braam lost his temper just as Mariana said the word "awesome", suggesting that he, too, has been affected by the sensory overload in the preceding scene. The word's changed meaning is thus underscored by Braam's reaction.

Furthermore, the fact that Mariana uses one overused loanword to define another, instead of drawing from a richer Afrikaans vocabulary, as Bezuidenhout puts it, could also point to a degeneration, not only of the Afrikaans language but also culture. The banality of the content of this excerpt emphasizes a superficial white middle class experience that revolves around predictable slapstick comedies, vicariously living through your offspring, the

2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup, and a tourist-like experience of the country that centres on wildlife, game parks, and beaches, mostly mediated through glossy magazines.

However, the tension between meaninglessness and meaning that Scholtz (8) refers to is present also in this scene. The word "breath" denotes the essence of life, something which Braam is about to lose. The word therefore refers at the same time to nothing as well as something as vital as life itself, which raises the question: what is the meaning of a life devoid of meaning? The word "awesome" therefore becomes heavy as attention is drawn to it. As a result, the word simultaneously becomes rich in meaning and devoid of meaning.

Representation of death

Winterbach and Scholtz, however, do not only ruminate on the meaning of life in *Spyt*, but as suggested from the tableau vivant in the very first scene, also on the meaning of death. According to Alice Rayner (30), death is the definitive 'other' for life. Also, according to McHale (261), death is the ultimate ontological boundary and therefore any ontologically-oriented poetics, such as postmodernism, are also preoccupied with death. As a result, the representation of death in a postmodern work points to a crisis of representation, because, as Rayner (30) argues, death can only guarantee the truth of its otherness and the absence of a substantive thing.

In this play, where there is an ontological tension between the possibilities of a life consisting of meaningless surfaces versus a deeper significance and eternal consequences behind these surfaces, death, as the ultimate ontological boundary, should resolve this tension. However, since death is the ultimate other, its representation can only be based on representations. This is most obvious in the first and last scenes of *Spyt*. From the first scene, which can be interpreted as Braam's autopsy, the representation borrows from Baroque visual art in its resemblance to Rembrandt's painting. This visual image is accompanied by a voiceover describing the anatomy of the heart as well as the consequences of different types of heart wounds in clinical terms, as indicated in the script. The biological consequence of Micky's gunshot is therefore conveyed via a text resembling a contemporary medical textbook, as well as an artwork from Baroque times representing medical instruction.

The didascalia specifies that in *Spyt*'s last scene, Braam is seated in a rowboat with a silent boatman in a raincoat and red hat. Braam reminisces about his father's life. The memory of his father, in his moderation, his appreciation of nature, and his single uncontrolled passion—his support for the Springbok rugby team—elicits a nostalgic response from Braam, who seems to contrast his father's life with his own. When the boatman leaves the stage and the presumption is that they have reached their destination, Braam removes his clothes and stands in the shirt and underpants which he wore in the first scene of the play. He then leaves the stage and the play ends as Donna Summer's "Hot Stuff" starts to play.

The representation of death in the final scene therefore borrows from Greek mythology. The assumption is that Braam is rowed across either the Styx or the Acheron rivers by the boatman, Charon. Both of these rivers are considered the boundary between the world of the living and the underworld, which the souls of the deceased have to cross with the help of Charon (Roberts; Leeming).

By falling back on this ancient narrative in her depiction of Braam's death, Winterbach acknowledges the limits of the representation of death. All that is left is to leave the realm of representation, by leaving the stage. The stage therefore represents the world of the living, and the only way to exit from this world, is to exit from its representation. Interpreted in this way, *Spyt* seems to suggest that the only escape from the aesthetic impasse that postmodernism leaves us in, is crossing the final frontier, which is death. However, we are unable to represent this without resorting to obsolete myths and images from bygone times.

Conclusion

Spyt engages many of the themes that Winterbach's work has been known for. While these themes have been interpreted as marking a distinct shift away from a postmodern paradigm, I consider in this article if the search for meaning and juxtaposition of the scientific and spiritual do not serve a postmodern purpose in the play.

Firstly, all of the characters' endeavours are reduced to surfaces: their sex lives, their gym routines, and their quests for self-improvement. By parodying pornography or clichéd tropes from the 1980s and 1990s, none of the characters' pursuits can be taken seriously. This corresponds to postmodernism's propensity for surfaces, as described by Barry (85). Although the characters may be searching for a deeper meaning, they remain trapped

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within a postmodern existence of surfaces. The characters that do claim to have access to a deeper meaning are represented in such a ridiculous way that it is difficult for the audience to take them seriously.

Secondly, the tension between meaninglessness and meaning is represented without resolution. The word "awesome" is at the same time reduced to nothingness and representative of the essence of life. The word becomes a contradiction in itself, simultaneously representing duplicitous ideas, as Hutcheon (1–2) suggests is characteristic of postmodernism. Although the characters are trapped in an existence of surfaces, in the case of language, these surfaces are also the essence of life.

Thirdly, Winterbach represents postmodernism's final frontier, which according to McHale (261), is death, by relying on obsolete narratives from ancient Greek culture. The play therefore makes a point about the crisis of representation that postmodernism leaves us in. All that remains is existing narratives, or else to cease representation altogether.

Spyt therefore shows the audience a world where characters' lives are known for their banality and superficiality. This banal superficiality is, however, also the essence of existence, and to escape from it, is to escape from the realm of representation altogether, and by implication from life itself. Postmodernism might, therefore, be out-dated and decaying, but in *Spyt*, the characters remain unable to be released from it.

Notes

1. *Karate Kallie* is the title of a slapstick Afrikaans film that was quite popular around the time that this play was written.

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Different narration, same history: The politics of writing 'democratic' narratives in Zimbabwe

Walter Kudzai Barure & Irikidzayi Manase

Different narration, same history: The politics of writing 'democratic' narratives in Zimbabwe

Over the past five decades, Zimbabwe's political trajectories were characterised by a historiographic revision and deconstruction that revealed varying ideological perceptions and positions of political actors. This article reconsiders the current shifts in the Zimbabwean historiography and focuses on the politics of positioning the self in the national narrative. The article analyses three Zimbabwean political autobiographies written by political actors from the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), particularly Michael Auret's From Liberator to Dictator: An Insider's Account of Robert Mugabe's Descent into Tyranny (2009), Morgan Tsvangirai's At the Deep End (2011), and David Coltart's The Struggle Continues: 50 Years of Tyranny in Zimbabwe (2016). It also discusses how writing in Zimbabwe is a contested terrain that is bifurcated between oppositional and dominant imaginaries of politics, the revolutionary tradition, and past performances of power. Keywords: history, narratives, oppositional and dominant imaginaries, political autobiographies, Zimbabwe.

Introduction

This article considers how oppositional narratives answer back to patriotic narratives' denigration of opposition and civic discourses, and their exclusion of the citizenship of minorities such as white Zimbabweans. Zimbabwean letters have witnessed the rise of a body of writings, produced by the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and other political and human rights actors, termed 'democratic' narratives, which contest patriotic narratives that were constructed using a singular version of history (see Ranger who defines patriotic history as a monolithic version of history that supports the performance of power by ZANU-PF political actors). In essence, these oppositional narratives subvert the autocracy and knowledge produced by the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) that draws on discourses of decolonisation, nationalism, Afro-radicalism, and nativism to suppress other narratives. As a result, the power to narrate *by the MDC* and other human rights activists or to block other narratives from forming and emerging *by ZANU-PF* is very important in the constitution of connections that exist between the former and the latter (Said xiii; emphasis added). The occlusion of alternative narratives has been used since independence by ZANU-PF, especially through a hegemonic production and control of memorialising the past, termed as "Mugabeism" by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (1–2). Nonetheless, ZANU-PF's "silencing strategies" incited what Ndlovu (140–2) calls "Writing back [...] the Zimbabwean way", which implies an answering back to ZANU-PF and its patriotic canon.

We chose political autobiographies, which consider self and nation and history and narrative, and disrupt singular narrative focuses because the autobiographical discourse here positions the narrator as either the performer of power or the victim of the performance of power. Smith and Watson (6–10) note that autobiographical strategies of representation include the autobiographical acts of storytelling; counter-narration and rhetorical aims such as self-interrogation; and campaigns for social change, justice, and human rights, thus underlining this genre's counter-discursive quality. It is in line with this context that we infer in this article the connotative power of self-writing and how it influences subjectivity, multi-vocality, and the disavowal of myths and stereotypes. As such, we have singled out these three autobiographies for three reasons. Firstly, they were written by founding

Walter Kudzai Barure is associated with the Department of English at the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa.
Email: wbarurek@gmail.com
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9169-4874

Irikidzayi Manase is an associate professor in the Department of English at the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa.
Email: Manasel@ufs.ac.za
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7720-4464

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members of the MDC who were born in Southern Rhodesia (present day Zimbabwe). Secondly, Auret, Tsvangirai, and Coltart have backgrounds in civil society organisations such as the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP), Zimbabwe Congress for Trade Unions (ZCTU), and the Legal Resources Foundation (LRF) as well as the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) that criticised the ZANU-PF government. Thirdly, these political actors perceive themselves as 'witnesses' of an unfolding democracy in postcolonial Zimbabwe. Therefore, Michael Auret, Morgan Richard Tsvangirai, and David Coltart's conception and claim of the 'democratic' space in the MDC is based on their personal endeavours in introducing participatory democracy and their frank and sound political ideals into the narrative of the nation.

The entry point of this article is to understand the writers and the context of their work. We note that Auret's autobiography was written in exile and omits personal information such as the year of his birth and childhood experiences, while both Tsvangirai and Coltart's trace their birth in the racially-segregated Southern Rhodesia and how the existing conditions led to a protracted liberation struggle aimed at attaining majority rule. Auret's narrative is fast-paced and disconcerting because it begins in the 1960s when he was a young white Rhodesian soldier who rose through the ranks to become a Military Intelligence Officer. Auret later resigned from his military career in 1965 after Ian Smith's Unilateral Declaration of Independence and became an outright critic of Smith and the Rhodesian Front. Auret joined the opposing Rhodesian Party with his wife Diana when it was in its early stages and stood in the 1974 election as a candidate for the Bulawayo District constituency. He also worked at the CCJP as its Director and was responsible for reporting human rights violations and electoral violence. In 1998 Auret was Tsvangirai's deputy in the NCA, an association that fought for constitutional change, and later joined the MDC. He won the parliamentary seat in 2000 for the Harare Central Constituency but resigned the same seat in 2003 and emigrated to Ireland.

Auret's autobiography, as the title suggests, grapples with the serious error of judgement on the character of Robert Mugabe who transformed from a hero and an international symbol for African freedom to an international outcast who brooked no opposition. Thus, Auret highlights identity politics through the portrayal of Mugabe's unpredictable Janus-faced personality, which became synonymous with the country's trajectory from hope to disillusionment. We also note how Auret's narrative differs from the other two texts. Auret does not criticise Tsvangirai like Coltart despite the contradictions and ambivalences immanent in Tsvangirai and the MDC. Therefore, Auret, unlike Coltart, does not comment on Tsvangirai's character and the political culture of the MDC, yet his text mirrors the national picture of political dislocation and disintegration within the MDC that Tsvangirai himself covers but with limited critical perspective.

Tsvangirai, who rose from the ranks of trade unionism to become the founding president of the MDC and the second Prime Minister of post-independent Zimbabwe, draws on these personal experiences to construct a symbolising self and paragon of the 'democratic' struggle. Ironically, we note reflections in his self-writing of how this 'democratic' struggle was invested in one person who ended up institutionalising a personality cult and hence highlight the politics of representation inherent in patriotic narratives. Nonetheless, Tsvangirai's narrative alters the meaning of heroism, a status traditionally viewed and reserved for those who fought for the nation's liberation, to include those who fought for democracy.

Finally, David Coltart, a white Zimbabwean lawyer by profession, founding member of the MDC, former government minister and opposition Member of Parliament, documents the complex and dynamic nature of belonging that is dissimilar from that of Auret and Tsvangirai. Coltart begins his narrative by setting the record straight that he is "not originally indigenous to Zimbabwe" despite having been born on 4 July 1957 in Gwelo, in the then Southern Rhodesia (2). This narrative path resonates with Auret's in which he concedes that he would never have called himself a "white Settler" until it became clear that the majority of the people in Zimbabwe considered anyone of Rhodesian background to be an interloper (xvi). However, it should be underlined that the politics of locating the self in the national narrative is bound up with the three autobiographical narrators' allegiance to Zimbabwe and Africa. Therefore, Coltart's quest for belonging is a major dimension of his struggle over the nativist turn in ZANU-PF's politics of nationality.

The above writers' life narratives are in contradistinction with the ruling ZANU-PF's grand narrative about the nation. Coltart's and the other two autobiographies express narrative confrontations that map the differences between oppositional narratives and patriotic narratives. Here, the patriotic narratives focus on the state-sponsored version of the past in which only heroic deeds are projected and misperformances of the past are conscientiously glossed over. In contrast, oppositional narratives debunk authorised versions of history and

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privilege national issues such as state-sponsored violence and human rights violations omitted in the grand narrative of the nation.

This politics of writing the nation is demonstrated by how Mugabe was infuriated by the publishing of the Gukurahundi Massacre report entitled *Breaking the Silence*, which was compiled by Auret and Coltart in 1997 (Auret 151). Subsequently, Mugabe swiftly expressed his displeasure by castigating the report as "insensitive to national unity" because it was reopening old wounds (Tsvangirai 183). Mugabe further retorted that "the wrongs of the past by whoever should not be allowed to come into the future of the nation" (Coltart 242). Nonetheless, Coltart depicts both the ambiguities in the national narrative and historic events that were censored by patriotic narratives. Ironically, Auret and Tsvangirai, in a way similar to patriotic narratives, do not treat some of the historic moments. We argue further that Coltart's narrative is also distinct from both Auret and Tsvangirai's because it criticises both ZANU-PF and the 'democratic' struggle. Therefore, the politics of writing the narrative of the nation is predicated on the control of the past and modes of memory-making.

We underscore that 'democratic' narratives offer a counter-interpretation of the dominant patriotic narratives and the ritualised performances of power by the then Mugabe-led ZANU-PF. The personal narratives we examine here subvert and are hence counter-narratives to the 'romanticised' story of the nation. Ndlovu (140–42) postulates the need for counter-narratives, a view that is in tandem with Mbembe's proposition for "another form of writing" that deconstructs a romanticised history imbued by myths and nativist theses, postulations that guide our analysis here ("African Modes of Self-writing" 241).

This counter-narrative dimension is evident in the paradigmatic juxtaposition of the MDC and ZANU-PF in the three autobiographies under discussion. Tsvangirai's *At the Deep End* exemplifies this differentiation when he writes "[w]e were talking about democracy; Mugabe was talking about patriotic history" (274).

This comparison is akin to what Culler (48) calls the "difference by differing", a mere attempt by the MDC to be what ZANU-PF is not. Thus, patriotic and oppositional narratives are constantly competing and countering each other, especially in the depictions of the political selves in the postcolonial trajectories of the nation. However, this article argues that 'democratic' narratives confront and de-silence the past in a way that promotes a reconfiguration of the political space. It also considers how 'democratic' narrations answer back to the dominant ZANU-PF story by paradoxically appropriating some of the central ideas of patriotic narratives.

Situating the politics of writing 'democratic' narratives

Auret, Tsvangirai, and Coltart's texts are significant in mapping the essence of 'democratic' narratives in post-2000 Zimbabwe through their interweaving of the autobiographical narrators' political subjectivity with the memory and fate of the nation. Earlier on we stated that the ZANU-PF elite has been dominating the narrative of the nation while the MDC and, in particular the authors under study here, contest this control of the past and modes of memory-making. Thus, Auret, Tsvangirai, and Coltart narrate a national and, by extension, 'democratic' identity through selecting, plotting, and interpreting events from their childhood memory of colonial times to the present post-2000s Zimbabwe.

According to McAdams (233), narrative identity reconstructs the autobiographical past and imagines the future in a way that provides a person's life with some degree of unity, purpose, and meaning. Similarly, Lejeune (14) highlights the politics of representation in autobiography and argues that the reader will attempt to establish resemblances and automatically look for differences, errors, and deformations. As a result, we note how the three political autobiographies perform 'rhetorical acts' of narration such as settling scores, disputing accounts by other political actors, upholding reputations, justifying perceptions, and inventing desirable futures (Smith and Watson 10). Nonetheless, these narratives are key in that they map the narration of the self and nation as underlined by contested interests and a blurring of the personal and the political which complicates the distinction between 'democratic' and patriotic narratives.

One of the major areas used in the grand narrative of the nation, which Auret, Tsvangirai, and Coltart contest, is the issue of participation in war against colonialism. ZANU-PF's grand narrative records failure to participate in the liberation struggle as an act of cowardice. Various political rhetoric and popular culture texts such as political songs and party insignia venerate all those who participated in the fight to liberate the country. However, Tsvangirai justifies his non-participation in the liberation struggle by grounding his memories of suffering during the colonial era. For instance, he laments that: "Perhaps I would have become a political activist but my parents

needed financial help to support the other children through school" (25) and "Politics aside, I was increasingly concerned about the future of our own family and my role in pulling them out of poverty" (31).

As expected, Mugabe and ZANU-PF deride Tsvangirai, Auret, and Coltart as unpatriotic sell-outs, non-participants of the liberation struggle, and unrepentant Rhodesians respectively.[1]

The foregoing review of past national politics shows that ZANU-PF's political imaginary equates participation in the liberation war with heroism and hence most of its leaders use this as a major trope in their political autobiographies. Interestingly, Tsvangirai brings in a counter-narrative image where personal circumstances defined by the same colonial domination such as poverty would lead to a different subjectivity that includes opting to look for a job to sustain one's family and perhaps craft heroism at a micro and family level. In addition, one could still contribute patriotically in the post-independence era as Tsvangirai notes in the description of how he joined the ZANU-PF Bindura Town branch after the 1980 elections and was elected secretary of the local structure of ZANU-PF (78).

The formation of the opposition MDC, as pointed out later, is still an extension of the different forms of patriotism that needs to be acknowledged in the face of the monolithic ZANU-PF based idea, just as the decision to seek work for the family's survival. The same paradigm of an over-arching grand narrative of patriotism that is nonetheless contested by different forms of patriotism is also evident in the way Auret—a Rhodesian Military Intelligence Officer—and Coltart—a member of the British South African Police, having not officially joined ZANU-PF—later join opposition politics in the post-2000s only to contend with the label that they are sell-outs owing to their colonial past.

It should be acknowledged that the three autobiographies indeed highlight the disillusionment with Mugabe and ZANU-PF felt by Auret, Tsvangirai, and Coltart. Auret documents his short-lived support for Mugabe and ZANU-PF as shown below:

> For my part, I spent the first decade believing in Mugabe, despite Matabeleland, and working hard to bring about the development he seemed to want for the country. In the second decade, disillusionment began and the drive for development became a drive for democracy and the protection of human rights. But it became clear as time went on that a white person who considered himself indigenous and who dared to criticise would not be accepted in an authoritarian state. (170–1)

Tsvangirai says, "Full of enthusiasm, and regarding Robert Mugabe as a champion of freedom, I had joined the ruling party after the elections of 1980. I would leave it in 1984, after losing faith in both the party and its autocratic leader, giving myself over to national trade union activities" (88).

It is clear that the post-independence disillusionment compelled Auret, Tsvangirai, and Coltart to seek alternative formations in the form of civil society and political organisations, which include the CCJP, ZCTU, and the Forum Party as equally significant in advancing checks and balances in the nation's politics and governance. This seeking of alternatives is commonly used by political actors when criticising other political parties and yet these three writers present their experiences and choices as constituting other forms of the larger attempts at entrenching freedoms in the nation.

Ultimately, the three autobiographical narrators illustrate that ZANU-PF used its liberation credentials to exclude other forms of subjectivities seeking various freedoms for the citizenry, thus underlining the oppositional stance embedded in the 'democratic' narratives that critique patriotic history.

Another central premise of 'democratic' narratives concerns the politics of representation and deterioration in the country's political leadership. Auret, Tsvangirai, and Coltart treat the issue of politics of representation in their depiction of Mugabe as more of an enigmatic leader and embodiment of popular aspirations than the commonly-held image of nationalist par-excellence. This political inquest is clearly noted in Auret's rumination: "Zimbabwean politics is about Robert Mugabe—no more, no less. Indeed, strip out all the eloquent anti-imperialist and anti-Western rhetoric and you find an old man desperate to cling to power. [...] Those who knew Mugabe during the struggle say that we are witnessing the real Mugabe" (xiv).

Auret paints the image of Mugabe as a political figure who had always been authoritarian, and this is something that those who had known him during the struggle had witnessed (see Tekere's *A Lifetime of Struggle*). Similarly, Tsvangirai (90) and Coltart (123) underscore how Mugabe altered his communist and 'terrorist' image in 1980 into that of a darling of the West by appropriating the renowned reconciliatory rhetoric in a timely manner.

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Both Tsvangirai and Coltart's autobiographies suggest that this was just personal political brinkmanship aimed at gaining international recognition. It is our contention that Auret, Tsvangirai, and Coltart's autobiographies are critical and revisionist of the colonial and postcolonial historiography that ignores the hidden elements of populist and self-serving leadership in Zimbabwe. In addition, Auret, Tsvangirai, and Coltart's criticism is indicative of the need to recognise the surface and hidden, and hence multiple views about the nature of both the performance of the liberation war and the nationalist leadership. Finally, reference to Mugabe's early 1980s reconciliation rhetoric, which is dramatically discarded in the post-2000 black-nationalist and anti-Euro-American discourses, calls for a much more critical view of the politics and governance under the ZANU-PF.

'Democratic' narratives also focus on how the ZANU-PF engineered past events such as the use of political violence and undermining electoral processes. Each autobiographical narrator outlines how Mugabe scorned them during the 2000 parliamentary election, which was the first tough multi-party election ZANU-PF had to content with after the formation of the MDC in September 1999. The authors state that they were labelled as "vassals of imperialism" (Tsvangirai 349; emphasis added) and "former Selous Scouts" making a political come-back in the political scene (Auret 149; Coltart 329).

As a result, some white Zimbabweans who opposed the ruling party were displaced politically, socially, and economically, with some like Auret being forced into foreign lands as political exiles. Furthermore, Tsvangirai was given a contemptuous nickname, "Tsvangson" which, according to patriotic narratives, sounds non-Zimbabwean (Tsvangirai 279). The same nickname was exploited by Mugabe to depict Tsvangirai as a surrogate son of his colonial masters and, hence, an outsider who should not be allowed to take power in Zimbabwe. Ironically, Tsvangirai became the second Prime Minister during the government of national unity in 2009, despite Mugabe's renunciation of his performance of power.

A further irony which falls within the focus of the following section—the paradoxes inherent in democratic narratives—is evident in the way Tsvangirai denigrates his political rivals in the opposition camp. For instance, he engages in a semantic derogation of other political players as noted in his likening of Professor Welshman Ncube and Gibson Sibanda to parasitical ticks after the MDC split in 2005 over the introduction of the Senate in the Zimbabwean government (451).

Tsvangirai also undermines Auret and Coltart by making himself a well-decorated 'democrat' in the narrative of the nation. Coltart rebuts this by portraying a sense of belonging in Zimbabwe as noted in his resilience to stay in Zimbabwe when white Zimbabweans were leaving the country (390) and thus disrupts the organicist interpretation of national identity. Nonetheless, this static yet contradictory binary representation of black or white, insider or outsider, and patriot or sell-out in colonial and post-independent Zimbabwe is also narrated in the irrational and public pronouncements by Mugabe's predecessor, Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian Smith. During the liberation war Smith vowed that there would never be majority rule in Rhodesia in a thousand years (Smith 199), a view echoed by the then President Mugabe in his mantra that Tsvangirai and the MDC will never govern the country and that Zimbabwe will never be a colony again.

In essence, the above use of political violence and creation of unstable electoral conditions underlines a fixity on controlling the performative space of representation and maintaining the performance of power that is synonymous with patriotic narratives and which 'democratic' narratives vividly capture.

The 'democratic' narratives' engagement and reading of the nation's liberation history is also instructive in defining the nature and context within which 'democratic' narratives came into being. As already noted, patriotic writings always affirm the heroic performance of the liberation struggle and undermine the roles of non-participants and non-combatants. Auret, Tsvangirai, and Coltart appropriate the liberation struggle not to venerate ZANU-PF nor claim some form of participation but to justify their pursuit for a 'democratic' struggle. Tsvangirai clearly outlines this in the way his narrator links the story of the liberation struggle with patriotic history and how this history often provides a rationale for instability, corruption, abuse, and dictatorship (274). This crafty appropriation of the patriotic narrative to undermine its purveyor, ZANU-PF, is shown in other textual examples. Auret writes: "Now Mugabe began to show his true colours. He twice made death threats against the opposition and those who supported it. […] He described the MDC as a white-led party that would take the country back into colonization […]" (158–9). According to Tsvangirai:

> Mugabe's mentality and political strategy had never moved out of the ideological shell with which [...] [h]is ideas on governance were permanently rooted in the defeat of white Rhodesia and colonialism. To him, defeat of those twin evils was both symbolic and terminal; it was in a sense the end of his story [...]. Those who sought to move on in a postcolonial framework were treated with utmost suspicion. (209)

Both authors show how patriotic narratives constantly link the past with the post-2000 political developments that they focus on. Auret reveals how the post-2000 violence on the opposition is unjustifiably legitimated through the invocation of the past war of national liberation. Tsvangirai also shows how patriotic narratives proclaim the need for continuity of the history of the Zimbabwean revolutionary tradition in a way that stifles any new forms of 'revolutions' such as the MDC's fight for values that include the respect for political and civic freedoms, the rule of law, and individual rights to property. It is interesting that this war of liberation tradition is ritualised through an affirmation of Mugabe and the ZANU-PF's past heroic performances and veneration as the sole liberators of Zimbabweans. For instance, political (auto)biographies such as Martin and Johnson's *Struggle for Zimbabwe* (1981) and Mutambara's *The Rebel in Me: A ZANLA Guerrilla Commander in the Rhodesian Bush War 1975–1980* (2014) depict Mugabe and ZANU-PF as the only liberators of Zimbabwe.

Therefore, 'democratic' narratives engage with ZANU-PF's veneration of the patriotism enshrined in the 1970s liberation war, invert the ZANU-PF's assumption of the history as a linear continuum of the heroic tradition, and in that way offer an alternative discourse that seeks to create new ideals and values that will set the nation on a new path in the post-2000s present and future.

It should be underscored that part of the explanation for the MDC's point of departure from patriotic history is that they envisage a leadership guided by a framework that is different from the anti-colonial worldview of Mugabe. The representation of Mugabe and ZANU-PF in Auret, Tsvangirai, and Coltart's texts reflects the 'democratic' narratives' attempt at departing from the liberation struggle narrative. For instance, Coltart records an alternative account of the liberation struggle, as a British South African Police Patrol officer and then as a Joint Operations Command Research Officer, who felt entrapped by a war that was costly on all fronts (80). In addition, Tsvangirai, as a non-participant of the liberation struggle, only focuses on the 'democratic' struggle against ZANU-PF and Mugabe (352).

In essence, a counter-discursive demystification of the performance of power by ZANU-PF is shown in how "ZANU PF refused to see this vision, insisting on a sense of ownership of Zimbabwe" (Tsvangirai 210). This explains why Tsvangirai justifies the MDC's non-concern with the past performances of the liberation struggle because they claim ownership of "an entire generation of educated 'born-free' Zimbabweans without any emotional attachment to the liberation struggle" (210).[2] A variant of this position is shown by Coltart (340) in his rumination that some of the so-called 'born-frees' were forced by ZANU- PF to join the national service programme, a principal campaign tool to counter the opposition's dominance (see Ranger for a detailed analysis of how the ZANU-PF government instituted youth militia training camps). Therefore, the 'democratic' narratives present patriotic history as weaponised by ZANU-PF to disrupt the political performance of the MDC, a move that the MDC itself counters in its alternative story about the liberation of the country.

Nevertheless, the MDC's and other 'democratic' narratives' presentation of an alternative history proved to be a futile exercise. The historiographic revisionist approach failed to differentiate the MDC's narrative from that of ZANU-PF. Mbembe contends that "[m]any things are not simply set by side; they also resemble each other" (*On the postcolony* 148). Seen in this light, the MDC fortified the simplification of the past and sustained a monolithic narrative in favour of ZANU-PF. This reproduction of ZANU-PF and, by extension patriotic history in oppositional circles, is what Bond and Manyanya (271) and Tendi (236) label "Zanufication of the MDC". We are interested in the way the MDC replicated ZANU-PF's performances of power and slowly digressed from their 'democratic' claims and principles.[3] Coltart (430) highlights that they were not closer to rooting democracy six years after the party's formation and, hence, they had not changed anything other than causing great suffering for all who had stuck their necks out in support of the party. Auret and Tsvangirai even employ the rhetoric of democracy to appeal to the Zimbabwean electorate and the rest of the world in order to be considered as a preferable alternative to the ruling ZANU-PF. For instance, Tsvangirai places expediency above principle, maintains the guise of a tightly controlled 'democratic' party, yet depicts his assimilation of dictatorial tendencies, as noted in the following comment:

> Personally, I abhor the use of too much executive authority. I believe in sharing. I believe that it is always better to start by random sharing [...]. Perhaps this is a weakness. There were instances where, as the party leader, I felt I had to take a firm stance and drive the political agenda and process. Dictatorial as it may sound, the truth is that in the end the buck stops with the party-leader not a committee or the executive team. (315)

Thus, Tsvangirai shows that he loathes the use of unrestrained authority and considers it a form of weakness, and claims justification when he takes firm and autocratic decisions on behalf of the party. Coltart's narrative bemoans this leadership style because it is contrary to the ideals of participatory democracy that distinguishes the MDC from ZANU-PF (426–7). Coltart's criticism is also reflected in his ruminations on how Tsvangirai felt betrayed and angry when most of his trusted colleagues voted in favour of the reintroduction of the Senate, an upper house of the parliament, in 2005 (466). Ultimately, we note a contradiction of political performance where Tsvangirai appropriates ZANU-PF's leadership style yet attempts to be different; hence the next section evaluates such paradoxes evident in the democratic narratives.

Paradoxes in 'democratic' narratives

The examined narratives are indeed replete with various contradictions. Tsvangirai's attempt to recast what constitutes a hero from a 'democratic' perspective is evidently paradoxical. ZANU-PF's bestowing of a nationalist hero, as already noted above, has been inward and exclusionary. Ironically, Tsvangirai perpetuates and maintains the ZANU-PF hierarchisation of heroism. This is depicted in Tsvangirai's non-conferment of hero statuses to white Zimbabweans such as Alan Dunn, a regional organiser of the MDC, while hailing the activist Tichaona Chiminya and his wife, Susan, as true national heroes (Tsvangirai 532).[4]

In addition, Tsvangirai's text includes many unsung heroes such as Learnmore Jongwe, the young spokesperson of the MDC who is glossed over because he committed suicide in October 2002 after being arrested for killing his wife in a domestic dispute. This position is parallel to the politics of recognition that is prevalent in patriotic narratives as is evident in Mugabe's refusal to confer hero status on former ceremonial president Canaan Banana in November 2003 because of the scandals associated with his sexuality. Nonetheless, Auret (160) and Coltart's (546) autobiographies express a contrary view by recognising unsung heroes, black or white, political or apolitical, living or dead.

The second paradox is in the way Auret, Tsvangirai, and Coltart consider other opposition parties in relation to the MDC. Tsvangirai (158), contrary to Auret and Coltart's narratives, regards opposition leaders such as Reverend Ndabaningi Sithole, Reverend Abel Muzorewa, Edgar Tekere, and Margaret Dongo as loose political groupings that were largely symbolic and inconsequential. Tsvangirai terms himself and the MDC as the 'real' opposition because some of the traditionally ardent ZANU-PF supporters found comfort in the new movement (266). Conversely, the MDC is considered as a democratic party because it is inclusive and fosters a liberal culture of debate and popular participation. This is prone to ridicule, especially considering how some of the MDC's political actors began to mimic authoritarian and repressive leadership styles. Nevertheless, all autobiographical narrators insist that the inclusive structures of the MDC made it popular across the country and a real threat to ZANU-PF.

The third paradox is reflected in the ideological differences that are constantly politicised by both ZANU-PF and the MDC to create partisan dichotomies and hierarchies. We have noted above that the three autobiographical selves consider their activism as different from the ZANU-PF's and that the MDC emerged as a 'democratic' alternative to the ruling party. This essential difference, inferred by Auret, Tsvangirai, and Coltart, becomes a self-made marker of 'democratic' identity.

Ironically, the call for attention to "difference" ends up rendering "difference" into a metahistorical principle and thus it becomes impossible to distinguish one kind of "difference" from another politically (Dirlik ix). In addition, the three assume that political identity thrives through differentiation and can be constituted through a radical criticism of ZANU-PF structures. This assumption considers identity as a product of difference rather than negotiation. In addition, Auret, Tsvangirai, and Coltart disclose that the structuring of the MDC leadership after its formation in 1999 indicated the emergence of a new kind of politics (Auret 148; Tsvangirai 298; Coltart 262). This 'new kind of politics' can be interpreted as a new political discourse that is based on participatory democracy, inclusivity, and non-racialism. However, the same discourse underlines what Spivak (361) calls a

"triumphalist self-declared hybridity" as the majority in the MDC were at one time in ZANU-PF, as noted in the way Tsvangirai left ZANU-PF in 1984 having been its member since 1980.

Notably, the autobiographical narrators in Tsvangirai and Coltart's autobiographies lament that the MDC's organisational approach mimicked the ZANU-PF's structural models (Tsvangirai 292; Coltart 472). Evidently, this created internal party contestations. It is inevitable that when two or more political cultures blend, people tend to return to what they were used to rather than move towards change. The autobiographical narrators describe this oscillation in the following manner:

> In September 1999 a new opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) was founded, based on the labour movements, which commanded a sizeable following in the country. [...] The followers of this new party were by no means exclusively from labour movements, as the desire to see democracy restored in the country was embraced by many people from civil society—the legal profession, business and agriculture. (Auret 148)

Tsvangirai (242) writes, "The few whites in the MDC exhibited both their strengths and their own idiosyncrasies. Our cultures are different—and that resulted in friction over policies, organisational styles and mass mobilisation activities" and according to Coltart (296), "[...] many white farmers started funding the MDC, demonstrating to ZANU PF that this block would vote against them in the election. Some farmers went to the extent of taking leadership positions in rural structures of the MDC".

The implication of these divergent yet competing political influences shows the hybridity of the party. As such, many whites in the MDC did not want to adopt the structural models of the party that were preferred by former unionists (Tsvangirai) and Civil Society activists (Auret and Coltart).

As a result, white MDC members devised their own structures in the form of support groups that also comprised of influential black Zimbabweans who were not always keen to be seen at the forefront of political activism but preferred to work behind the scenes, supporting MDC programmes and activities on the ground (Auret 156; Tsvangirai 245; Coltart 269). It is clear that the MDC endured the combination of influences from different political backgrounds. Nonetheless, the paradox here is that the disagreements on matters of policy were governed by individual and group interest dynamics in a party that viewed itself as democratic.

Conclusion

In this article we discussed the different perspectives inherent in 'democratic' narratives and laid out some of the foundational issues encountered in the politics of narrating Zimbabwean politics from an oppositional standpoint. We highlighted how autobiographical narrators from the Zimbabwean opposition MDC contested the legitimacy of patriotic narratives by writing back to ZANU-PF and its authorised patriotic historiography. They also sought to fill the historiographical gaps that were decisively generated in the narration of the nation in the making. We noted Coltart's criticism of Tsvangirai and vice versa, which we view as leading to a reconfiguration of the political space where political actors should be accountable for their actions. However, the self-representation of political actors from the MDC as 'democrats' led to the Zanufication of the MDC. Given these nuances, the autobiographical act of narrating democratic politics is riddled with the appropriation of undemocratic tendencies, such as the maintenance of dictatorial structures, de-legitimisation of other political actors, and a cult of personality politics.

This can be attributed to the reality that the majority of members defected from ZANU-PF and hence mimicked some of the nationalist party's policies and structures. Thus, there is a sense in which the 'democratic' project ended up emulating hate-speech and violence and assimilating dictatorial structures. Tsvangirai simultaneously appropriates ZANU-PF's leadership style yet seeks in vain to project himself as different. Political actors on both sides of the divide are primarily obsessed with personalising power in order to firmly control the party under the illusion of unity and democracy. Therefore, we have demonstrated that 'democratic' narratives make use of differences in order to forge a 'new' narrative of the nation. However, the same discourse ends up assimilating undemocratic tendencies that are common in patriotic narratives. The sum of such an exploration reveals a very limiting and limited conception of patriotism, patriotic history, nationhood, national belonging, unity, and democracy.

Finally, the implicit paradoxes of the democratic narratives compel us to ponder the kind of political autobiography that can emerge in the present Zimbabwe, especially in an era after the 2017 military coup that deposed Mugabe and some of his close allies. While the exercise seems an act of speculation and an attempt to analyse a

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text that has not yet been produced, one may still wonder how political figures in Zimbabwe will narrate the self and nation in an era where the country's political trajectories are now under the open hand of the military and former military figures that present themselves as the champions of people's wishes and democratic rights.

There is a particular interest here in the likely nature of political autobiographies—currently being written by the deposed ZANU-PF leaders now in exile—and how they will depict a counter vision to the present political condition and the subjectivity thereof.[5] The kind of 'democratic' narratives likely to be produced from the political figures in the different MDC formations and civic organisations is also worth pondering considering the contestations within the MDC formations over constitutional principles and access to positions of power. Whatever the next political autobiography to be produced will look like, the old trope on the control of history and its impact on imagining political subjectivities is likely to continue. Perhaps this time the contest will be on the history of the MDC's founding principles and figures, and that related to ZANU-PF's hold of Mugabe as a true hero (although he was not buried at the National Heroes Acre in Harare) as well as the new ways of reconciling the 1970s liberation struggle and the 2017 'second liberation' of the country from Mugabe's rule.

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Notes

1. Huddleston records Tsvangirai's argument that it is ironic that the anti-colonial war, which was waged to preserve Rhodesia as a sanctuary for whites, gave him so many opportunities to advance himself. This statement caricaturises Tsvangirai in patriotic narratives as a self-interested coward.
2. The born-frees are a generation that was born after independence and were eligible to vote for the first time in the general election of 2000.
3. Chan highlights that there are several similarities, such as patronage, vote-buying, factionalism, violence, and class exploitation between Tsvangirai's thinking and that of many ZANU-PF thinkers.
4. Vesta Sithole regards her husband, Reverend Sithole, as a true hero and the father of the armed struggle.
5. Jonathan Moyo, the former Minister of Higher Education, is writing a book and stories about Mugabe's last years in exile.

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Narrating the Ugandan nation in Mary Okurut's *The Invisible Weevil*

Theresa Frances Namirembe, Alex Wanjala & Joseph Muleka

Narrating the Ugandan nation in Mary Okurut's *The Invisible Weevil*

This article seeks to study how Mary Okurut narrates the Ugandan nation through her novel *The Invisible Weevil* while at the same time exploring how the author centers upon women in her imagination of the new nation. The arguments in this article are derived from concepts proposed by Benedict Anderson and Homi Bhabha, among other scholars, on nationalism. These are arguments that explore the question of identity formation in nations and what holds these nations together in terms of their cultural standpoints and even at times a desire for a better nation for future generations. Through a close textual analysis that focuses on elements of narratology, the study explores the issue of nationalism in the novel. Of interest to this study is how Okurut as a contemporary writer engages history in the novel to narrate the nation and the challenges it faces as it evolves through different and tumultuous leaderships. The narration is undertaken through the viewpoint of various characters who describe different periods, thus creating a channel through which knowledge from each epoch is transmitted by the actions of women who attempt to define a new nation of Uganda that would be devoid of pestilence from 'the invisible weevil'. **Keywords**: nation, narration, Ugandan literature, historiography.

Introduction

In this article, we investigate the concept of nationhood in the novel *The Invisible Weevil* (1998) and how the author, Mary Okurut, wrestles with the question of what constitutes a nation, in particular from a gendered perspective, thereby writing women into the history of Uganda. Nationhood and nationality have been famously explored by Ernest Renan who argues that:

> A nation is a soul and spiritual principle. Two things which, in truth, are but one. One lies in the past, another in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form [...] The Nation, like the individual, is the culmination of a long past of endeavours, sacrifice, and devotion. Of all cults, that of the ancestors is the most legitimate, for the ancestors have made us what we are. A heroic past, great men [and women], glory, this is the social capital upon which one bases a national idea. (19)

Renan implies that though a nation may be comprised of different entities in terms of the struggles to create and maintain it, it is a single fabric. Benedict Anderson considers a nation to be an "imagined political community—imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (3). Anderson further argues that terms like *nation*, *nationality*, and *nationalism* have proved difficult to define, or rather to analyze, and calls them cultural artifacts of a particular kind (4). For his part, Homi Bhabha argues that nations are complex organic entities in the sense that they are comprised of people who identify themselves with regard to a specific culture (*Nation and Narration* 9). It is this complex process of cultural identification that subsequently morphs to function as a nation or a people. A nation,

Theresa Frances Namirembe is affiliated with the Department of Literature in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Nairobi, Nairobi, Kenya.
Email: nalwaterry@gmail.com
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5094-1763

Alex Wanjala is a senior lecturer of French in the Department of Literature, Faculty of Arts at the University of Nairobi, Nairobi, Kenya. He is the Chair of the East African Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (EAACLALS).
Email: nelungo@uonbi.ac.ke
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0609-5982

Joseph Muleka is a senior lecturer in the Department of Literature, Faculty of Arts at the University of Nairobi, Nairobi, Kenya.
Email: muleka@uonbi.ac.ke
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3595-9054

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thus, is a cultural force. In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha says that nations function through complex strategies of cultural and discursive addresses which make them subjects of a range of literary narratives (140). He also examines the concept *nation* as both historically-determined and general. He reiterates that a nation as such refers to the "modern nation-state and to something more ancient and nebulous—the nation—a local community, domicile, family, condition of belonging" (45). Even as we write *nation*, Bhabha continues, we cannot ignore the ambivalence of the nation as a strategy of narration which is brought about by the cultural difference in the act of writing it. This sense of ambivalence—the duality that presents a split in the colonized other—creates room for hybridity which acts as a subversion of the dominant cultures. Bhabha further asserts that the series of inclusions and exclusions on which a dominant culture is premised is deconstructed by the very entry of the formerly excluded subjects into the mainstream discourse.

From another angle, Frantz Fanon, writing earlier than Bhabha, argues that the struggle for a national culture cannot occur without first of all fighting for national liberation. He argues that "[t]o fight for national culture means in the first place to fight for the liberation of the nation, that material keystone which makes the building of a culture possible" (154). He also affirms that "national culture is the whole body of efforts made by people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify and praise the action through which that nation has created itself and keeps itself in existence" (168). The native writer, Fanon argues, moves from addressing the oppressor to addressing the people, thereby molding a national consciousness through literature. While Fanon's idea of a national culture that embraces the whole body of efforts made by all the people sounds all-inclusive, the appearance of the constructed nation in majority cases tends to bear a male face, thereby rendering women's contribution peripheral. Besides, the very liberation that follows the people's fight to bring the nation into being has its pitfalls.

Nationalists who take over leadership oftentimes end up betraying the ideals they represented before they assumed power and thereafter embrace the ideals of the oppressors, thus missing the very essence of the nation. Fanon rightly argues that oftentimes the new leaders, whether advertently or inadvertently, aid and abet the bourgeoisie who subsequently plunge into the mire of corruption and pleasure. Fanon's arguments on the role of the native writer are reflected in Christopher Odhiambo's argument that "narrating the nation is arguably one of the most evident preoccupations pursued with such obsessive frequency by postcolonial literary writers and critics" ("Whose Nation? Romanticizing the Vision of a Nation in Bole Butake's 'Betrothal without Libation' and 'Family Saga'" 1). Odhiambo, for his part, moves away from the subject of narrating the nation and focuses on how Bole Butake envisions the Cameroonian nation. He is obviously less concerned with the narrations of nations and more concerned with the ways that the playwright deals with the more salient and elusiveness nature of the literary vision. This vision of nationhood in Butake's play, Odhiambo concludes, remains "ever romantic" and leads the author to "some kind of utopian vision" (14).

The concerns of narrating the nation also permeate Odhiambo's examination of the role of memory in narrating the nation in Alex Mukulu's play *30 Years of Bananas* which traces Uganda's history from independence in 1962 to 1992 ("Memory, Dialogue and Reconstruction of the Nation" 45). Odhiambo argues that the play explores the importance of the past by revisiting, excavating, re-enacting, and interrogating Uganda's traumatic memory before seriously beginning the project of national reconstruction (45). In this article, we would like to lean on Odhiambo's reading of Mukulu's play, especially his conclusion that "Mukulu seems to suggest that for the nation to move on it must engage with its past in a sincere and open dialogue" (61).

Tirop Simatei offers an almost similar reading regarding Okurut. He reads her as a woman writing in a "period of great political promise and cultural renaissance [...]" (152) and argues that Okurut places women in her novel not as subordinate to men but as equals since they too participated in the formation of the nation: "Okurut's concern is to show that women occupy political positions in the post-Amin Uganda because they participated in its formation [...]" (156). In this article we acknowledge the arguments by Simatei and Odhiambo and build on them by focusing on the nuances involved in narrating the Ugandan nation. Critics of Okurut's *The Invisible Weevil* such as Marie Kruger have studied how the novelist imagines the family as the anchor of the nation. Kruger argues that Nkwanzi's authority as national figure comes from her status as a forgiven wife, nurturing mother, and dutiful daughter-in-law. These arguments give this article a substantive backdrop from which to conduct a critical reading of *The Invisible Weevil*.

A reading of *The Invisible Weevil* reveals the struggles to liberate the nation from oppressive cultures and move it towards a nation that is more accommodating of diverse opinions and encouraging of the growth of its citizens—both male and female—and not at the expense of each other. This, Anderson argues, requires a deep sense

of community between the freedom fighters since the concept of the nation is always conceived of as a deep horizontal comradeship with a fraternity that makes it possible for millions of people to be not so much willing to kill as willing to die for it (7).

The presentation of the Ugandan nation in *The Invisible Weevil*

The Invisible Weevil borrows heavily from the monumental years of the political history of Uganda, especially during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Uganda became a fully independent nation in October 1962 and Sir Edward Mutesa became the first president of Uganda in 1963. Milton Obote abrogated the 1962 constitution in 1967 and declared that the country would have one central government as opposed to the Kabaka kingdoms which were incorporated into the governance structure upon attainment of independence.[1] This, however, was not a voluntary transition since Obote unleashed military power upon the Kabaka kingdoms which led to the death of thousands. Idi Amin Dada, who led the operation against the Kabakas, deposed Obote in 1971 and in 1972 he expelled the Asians and unleashed terror upon intellectuals and symbols of intellectual status such as spectacles, books, and chess sets. During his regime, "[p]ublic order rapidly deteriorated, and murder, destruction, looting, and rape became the hallmarks of the regime" (Kyemba 1). Amin's invasion of Tanzania in 1978 became the trigger that led to his ousting. Tanzania retaliated and took over Kampala in 1979. After Amin's escape, Professor Yusuf Lule took over and was replaced by Godfrey Binaisa two months later. Binaisa was replaced by a military commission in 1980 which organized the elections that restored the reign of Obote in the same year amidst claims of widespread rigging. Leading the National Resistance Army (NRA), Yoweri Museveni launched the bush struggle in 1981 which contributed to the ousting of Obote by Tito Okello's Uganda National Liberation Army in 1985. Okello's rule was short-lived, however; in January 1986 Museveni's NRA invaded Kampala and dethroned Okello. Museveni has been Uganda's president ever since.

These years of political upheavals form the basis of Okurut's narration in *The Invisible Weevil* where she engages most of these historical moments in Uganda while centering women as people who endeavor to restore order in a country that was led into political and social confusion by male leaders. This is an observation corroborated by Simatei when he notes that Okurut writes in and of a period of great political promise and cultural renaissance where women did not only play secondary roles to men but also participated in the process of the formation of the nation (152). What we read in *The Invisible Weevil* is a narration that weaves the past into the present and the future imaginations of the nation as argued by Odhiambo ("Memory" 47) where he sees memories of the past as important instruments in the imaginations of the future. These memories become backdrops for revisiting and interrogating traumatic experiences before beginning any imaginations of national reconstruction.

Okurut's narration in the novel is from a female omniscient narrator's point of view where she introduces us to the protagonists: Kaaka, Genesis, and Nkwanzi. Kaaka is the mother of Genesis—a young man who grew up just after the colonialists left Uganda. Together with his wife—Nkwanzi—it could be argued that both were and are witnesses to the becoming of the nation of Uganda. This is so because both grew up and went to school—at all levels—together. Through their eyes and feelings, we get to not only see a nation that is coming to terms with its identity but also the feelings that drive this process of cementing a desirable national identity. Nkwanzi and Genesis are at the center of the author's imagination of the new Uganda.

In her novel, Okurut succeeds in constructing the image of a country that is struggling to rectify its mistakes and create a better future for its citizens. Uganda is presented as a nation that is perpetually in conflict with its various constituent elements. Kaaka becomes a representation of the conflicts that characterized pre-independent Uganda such as conflicts against patriarchal institutions. Some conflicts are not entirely harmful since some are aimed towards restructuring the society for the good. These conflicts are represented by Nkwanzi, Mama, and the younger generation who begin and support an underground struggle for a more stable and accommodative nation. The retrogressive conflicts which are mostly represented by the political conflicts lead to the death and destabilization of the country while the progressive conflicts are presented by women who seek to restore social order. Whereas the men are pitted against one another in orchestrating coups and counter coups which lead to a degeneration of the society, women are depicted as characters who come out to correct this wrong and create a better society for future generations.

Narrating the nation in *The Invisible Weevil*

Kaaka, who begins the narration, is at the periphery of the new nation, as has always been the culture, but the writer centers her as the story progresses, perhaps to foreground the ideal spirit of the new nation that will be all-inclusive. Apparently, the new nation aspires to capture women's participation as they take on key roles in the building of the Ugandan nation. Kaaka's story, thus, comes out as a story of women empowerment. She assumes the role of a historian in the novel by retrospectively narrating to Nkwanzi how life used to be during the colonial and the pre-colonial times. Kaaka is presented as the historian who prioritizes revisiting and re-enacting the memories of the past before any meaningful dialogue of future imaginations of the nation is embarked upon. The perception herein is that Kaaka seems to be the reader's point of contact with the history of Uganda before Genesis and Nkwanzi were born. Through her story we get to understand how the country came to be as it is in the novel. To some extent, Kaaka grounds the reader's understanding of Uganda as it evolves.

As the country evolves, various characters occupy various positions in the history of the country. Kaaka occupies the past. Genesis and Nkwanzi occupy the present and are central figures in the agitation for the new Uganda and its cultural renaissance as suggested by Simatei. Towards the end of the novel, we are introduced to Ihoreere—Nkwanzi's daughter who the author seems to hint occupies the future of the country. This imagining of the future comes after the author has seemingly sufficiently dealt with the past and the present, reflecting Odhiambo's postulation on revisiting the past before embarking on national construction. In narrating the nation, the past, the present, and the future are intertwined. The nation's present builds on its past, as it constructs the future. The past, which Kaaka occupies, is central in our understanding of the narrative temporalities, which are different times of narration, argued for by Genette, *et al*. The past that Kaaka recollects is an anachrony—narrative distortion—which comes as an analepsis/flashback. The analepsis helps us use the past to understand the present and make meaning out of it (33). The reader's understanding of the nation of Uganda during Kaaka's time is a recollection from her memories. Kaaka, in her conversation with Nkwanzi, looks back at what used to be of the Ugandan nation. She gives us a backdrop to the identity of the nation from the coming and the reception of the white man to the nation's infection with the first invisible evil—HIV/AIDS. Kaaka introduces us to the soul of Uganda. She realizes the importance of this part of her country and, as such, she somehow refuses to narrate to Nkwanzi Genesis's past before she lets her know the past of her country. Nkwanzi requests:

> Kaaka, you've never told me about his [Genesis's] birth. Why don't you tell me now that he's still sleeping? [...] Let us sit near where we can watch him while I tell you the story of his birth. But I cannot tell you the story of his birth without telling you about my own life as a girl and how I met your father-in-law. (*Invisible Weevil* 10)

It could be argued that, to Kaaka, the nation bore absolute importance compared to Genesis who was almost dying. The nation and its culture would live on, so she felt the importance of passing on not only the memories of the past but also the lived experiences and lessons she picked from this past.

The present, which Nkwanzi and Genesis occupy, is central to our understanding of the concept of time in narratology, especially as espoused by Gunther Muller who looks at the role different time spans such as the past and the present play in any narrative form. Two observations drive the arguments in this part of the article. The first is the argument by Renan where he contends that a nation is a soul and spiritual principle where one lies in the past and the other in the present (10). The one in the past possesses a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form. Kaaka's place in *The Invisible Weevil* is one that conforms to Renan's argument of what a nation truly is. What emerges from Kaaka's narration is that she does not focus on the kingdoms that existed in pre-colonial Uganda but instead speaks as though the entire nation was one since her days as a young girl. She seems to concur with Renan's argument with regard to the nation being a soul and a spiritual principle. The implication is that the soul and the spirit cannot be divided. Kaaka, in her wisdom, does not seem to point a finger to an imaginary other or even play victim. It could be deduced that the challenges that Kaaka faced were the same as the challenges faced by women in other pre-colonial kingdoms, even though the narration does not divulge this to the reader. What is evident from Kaaka's retrospective narration is that it gives her some agency that comes with reflective narration. By detaching herself from the events she can interpret these events and make judgment about herself and others. What is interesting is that this agency—power—is allocated to Kaaka. She is the custodian of the history of the country.

The second view is Bhabha's argument that the nation is a complex cultural entity in which there exists some sort of power play between the colonizer and the colonized other (*Location of Culture* 201). This power play creates a new breed that occupies a somewhat liminal space and, in turn, gives rise to what Bhabha considers a hybrid. Kaaka occupies an important position in the narrative of *The Invisible Weevil.* If we were to consider Bhabha's perspective, Kaaka occupies a liminal space in the sense that she is neither the colonized nor the colonized other. Kaaka does not belong to the society that she was previously part of and she is also not incorporated into the present society. Largely, she is in the middle, an ambiguous space from where she controls the narratives of the past. By taking us back to the history of Uganda, Kaaka subverts the dominant narrative that women could not be part of history making. It is also worth noting that Kaaka herself was a victim of dominant and retrogressive cultural practices. As such, she falls in the in-between space where she is neither one nor the other. This liminal position in the character of Kaaka gives her some sort of objectivity in her narration since she does not appear to romanticize one side of the divide at the expense of the other. It is also through Kaaka's narration that we get to understand how white people came to Uganda, how they were received and what their activities were. Arguably, it is Kaaka who saw the first white man in her village (11). Kaaka, a woman, is elevated to the level of a discoverer and this further gives her credibility as the custodian of not only her history but also the history of her community. Kaaka's retrospective narration not only introduces us to the coming of the white man but also to the beginnings of economic activities in Buganda (12). It is through yet another flashback (analepsis) that we get to discover this.

In Okurut's imagined community, Kaaka is centered as the bearer of knowledge about the people of Buganda. This assertion is seen by the fact that it is through her that our questions are answered. It is further reinforced by the fact that it is she, Kaaka, who introduces us to the instances when the first weevil was noticed in Buganda and the probable causes of it. Apparently one weevil, explained as HIV/AIDS, was brought about by the cultural practice of wife-sharing among brothers. This was done even though the women did not like or approve of it. As Kaaka puts it, "how could the wife refuse when it was her duty?" (13). Apart from the constant wars that took place then, Kaaka attributes the massive death of her people to the invisible weevil. She says: "That's one reason why this weevil is killing many of our people" (13). The weevil is sustained in the community by the customary practice of wife-sharing and also by fathers-in-law sleeping with the brides of their sons so as to approve of the marriage. It is also sustained by beliefs that it is some sort of witchcraft and, to cure it, witchdoctors embark on a spree of cutting each family member of the infected with the same razor blade that was used to cut the infected. By cutting them and filling the cuts with herbs, the witchdoctor believes that he has succeeded in getting rid of the weevil, unaware that he has just fanned the fire.

The Invisible Weevil reveals Okurut's stance in positioning women at the center of national history. Okurut engages in historiography—which in this case is the narration of the histories of individuals or places. This reflection goes against reflections by other scholars such as Evan Mwangi and Abaasi Kiyimba who largely focus on the political environment and the victimhood of women, ignoring the triumphs and the organization women show in liberating Uganda. Mwangi (1) argues that the novel is a satirical account of women's dependency on men as well as a nation's blind belief in frauds as messiahs. He further notes that Okurut captures Africa's regional politics, bringing out the spirit of regionalism in toppling dictatorial regimes, and the ascendency of demagogies like the illiterate Duduma, alluding to Idi Amin's destruction of Uganda and the seeming reconstruction of the nation. On the other hand, Kiyimba reads the novel as a comprehensive protest against various levels of violence and suffering by women. He argues that it is the system that elevates men that makes Genesis and Nkwanzi have different values regarding virginity and concludes that women in the novel are either victims of the system, its accomplices, or fighters against it (198–200).

However, we argue that the weevils that Okurut revisits are so much part of the construction of the Uganda nation that they cannot be sidestepped in discussing the nation. It is through Kaaka's recollection of the weevil of HIV/AIDS that we get to appreciate what Renan refers to as the "rich legacy of memories" (10) and the soul and the spiritual principle. He further argues that the past and the present are two things which are actually one and are unified by the said soul or principle. This unification is evident in the conversation between the two women, Kaaka and Nkwanzi, at the start of the novel. The former passes age-old knowledge to the latter who occupies the present; Kaaka acts as a conduit of information from the past and an exemplification of Renan's "rich legacy of memories" and further still the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form. This heritage is undivided because Kaaka's narration does not seem to malign one side—the patriarchal—but rather just tells the story without any adulteration.

One could, however, also argue that perhaps Kaaka had somehow accepted her fate and adopted a self-defeatist approach to her story but this would not be so. Kaaka knows the power she wields as a member of the nation and does not spend it speaking against the men of her generation but instead speaks of her nation. Okurut grants Kaaka the power to look at the bigger picture regarding her heritage and make sure that she propagates it in an undivided form. Kaaka thus appears to be retaining the soul and the spiritual principle of the nation. The long past made of sacrifices is evident in Kaaka's life who bears it all in her youth and adulthood without resistance or questioning. This idea of a nation being entrenched in the memory of a people and its cultural significance is further corroborated by Miroslav Hroch who argues that a nation is created fundamentally upon three issues, one of them being "a memory of a common past" which is viewed as the "destiny of the group" (88). This memory of a common past is shared between Kaaka and Nkwanzi through whom we see the steps the nation has taken to be as it is.

Odhiambo's argument that for the nation to move on it must engage with its past in a sincere and open dialogue opens the channel for my examination of the present in this article. Kaaka, as argued, becomes the prioritization of the past in the process of national imagination. The present is occupied by Nkwanzi, her contemporaries, and Genesis, her husband. It is a present that one could argue contradicts Renan's notion of perpetuating the value of the heritage received in an undivided form and also clearly reflects Simatei's idea of "cultural renaissance" (152) and the placement of women as co-contributors, not just subordinates to men, in the process of nation formation.

The cultural renaissance in the novel involves women making their voices heard and breaking the silences that characterized the past. This happens because Nkwanzi and her contemporaries, being aware of the sacrifices and endeavors of their forbears, strive for something more. One comes to realize from the narration that the present which Nkwanzi occupies is a present not of silence but of strife. It is a present that contrasts to Kaaka's past. Nkwanzi's present is marked by questioning and seeking of solutions to the challenges that face not only the women but also the nation. This spirit of strife and questioning is not the preserve of Nkwanzi alone. When she joins the university we get to see it in the friends she makes: Mama,who leads the underground revolution; Rex, who is part of this revolution though he falters once he tastes the trappings of power and ends up selling out his comrades in the struggle; and even lecturers and fellow students at the University. It is this group that agitates for change at the risk of their lives and also embodies Renan's argument that the sacrifices of our forbearers are the fabric that knits the spirit of nationalism.

As we further examine the question of nationalism in *The Invisible Weevil*, we find it important to consider the arguments of Timothy Brennan about the post-war novel. In *The Nation Longing for Form*, Brennan argues that there is uniqueness in the post-war novel due to the fact of the insurgent nationalism that occupies it. Further still, he argues that: "The idea of nationhood is not only a political idea but a formal binding together of disparate elements. And out of the multiplicities of culture, race, and political structures, grows also a repeated dialectic uniformity and specificity: of world culture and national culture, of family and of people" (173). Brennan's argument that nationhood is not exclusively a political idea, but a unification of several elements is at the core of *The Invisible Weevil*. While it is indeed true that the novel narrates the political history of Uganda, it also narrates the cultural history, which is rooted in the family unit as well as other social institutions. The political idea in Brennan's argument is seen in the history of coups that are evident in the novel. The coups that take place become the points from which we can center the political idea of nationhood while also not ignoring the disparate elements that enable the reader to determine the identity of the nation that the author wants.

It is also from these coups that we get to understand Fanon's argument that fighting for national culture means "fighting for the liberation of the nation" (154) which is the material keystone upon which national culture is built. The progression of these coups also suggests the argument of the disenfranchisement of the people by their leaders. People put their trust in leaders who fought for their independence and after independence the said leaders turned their backs on the people. Fanon contends:

> The people who for years on end have seen this leader and heard him speak, who [...] have followed his contests with the colonial power, spontaneously put their trust in this patriot. Before independence, the leader generally embodies the aspirations of the people for independence, political liberty, and national dignity. But as soon as independence is declared, far from embodying in concrete form the needs of the people in what touches bread, land, and the restoration of the country to the sacred hands of the people, the leader will reveal his inner purpose: to become the general president of that company of profiteers impatient for their returns which constitutes the national bourgeoisie. (157)

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It is true that Ugandans in the novel felt marginalized by the colonial master and this subjugation is what necessitated the agitation for independence. This disenfranchisement is later substituted with a sense of a rather reckless euphoria at the attainment of independence which is evident when the narrator points out that:

> Meanwhile, reports were coming in from all parts of the country about how people had received independence. Some lay in the middle of the road and refused to move, declaring that they were independent. Quite a number of them were run over by cars and died shouting that they were independent. In Kampala, white men were made to carry bananas on their heads and Ugandans laughed at them. (43)

What is evident from this narration is that the concept of independence was perceived differently by people. Some, in a state of euphoria, thought that independence meant defying some rather common-sense laws such as giving way to vehicles. Others perceived independence to be a time of mocking white people. Apparently, independence meant payback time to this group. Later on in the narration, we discover that President Opolo, who took over from the colonialists, leads an onslaught against the traditional rulers, the Kabaka of Buganda. "Four years after independence [...] Opolo has fought with the Kabaka of Buganda [...] President Opolo has said that the kingdoms are no more" (44). In the first instance independence meant doing away with colonial leadership. Later on, it morphs into doing away with any other form of subsidiary leadership other than the national one.

The successive coups narrated in the novel as the country evolves and creates its own identity are reminiscent of Gennette's analysis of time usage in a novel. He distinguishes between order, duration, and frequency (11). Focusing on order and frequency, one notes that the coups in the novel are somewhat recurrent and follow each other in almost quick succession. An evaluation of the external time in the novel reveals that Okurut borrows heavily from actual historical events to narrate her story. The narrated fictional time between the ascension to power of President Opolo and the attack on the Buganda Kingdoms reflects the factual and historical ascension to power of President Milton Obote and his attack on the factual Kabaka Kingdoms. The parallel that exists between the fictional time and the factual historical time is reflected as such: four years after independence, Opolo unleashes the military against the Kabaka kingdoms. Similarly, factually, four years into Obote's reign, he unleashed the military against the Kabaka kingdom and revised the constitution to make himself the president:

> Dr. Obote became the country's first prime minister in 1962 at the head of an uneasy coalition between his own Uganda People's Congress and the Kabaka Yekka or King's party representing the Baganda [...] Sir Edward Mutesa, better known as "King Freddie", became president. Four years later Obote ousted the king and revised the constitution to make himself president. (BBC)

Okurut utilizes the principle of external time where historical events are intertwined in fictitious narrations. This comes about when she narrates the second coup that defines the fictitious Uganda (94). Opolo, who had taken over from the colonial masters, is ousted by Duduma, his trusted lieutenant: "'But who is this Duduma?' they asked. [...] 'Duduma is the army commander [...] Duduma entered the force and later on Opolo used him to fight his battles'" (97).

The reign of Duduma subsequently picks up from where the reign of Opolo left off. While Opolo shed the blood of those who paid allegiance to the Kabaka Kingdoms, Duduma's reign heralds the widespread killing of all those who paid allegiance to Opolo, including fellow soldiers (101–2). As discussed by Alfonso de Toro in *Time Structure in the Contemporary Novel* (2011), the concept of time in narratology is further divided into external time, which is time outside the novel; empirical and historical time of the author; and internal time which in the novel is constituted within act time and text time (113). Okurut disrupts the narration of the coups such that in between the attainment of independence and the ousting of Opolo by Duduma (45–94) the narrator takes us through the lives of Nkwanzi meeting Genesis, the experiences of Nkwanzi in high school, and her process of becoming a woman. This perhaps is to highlight the need to revisit the nation's present represented by Nkwanzi and her contemporaries, at least a change from the disillusioning narration of a nation of coups. The history of bloodshed that characterized the presidencies of Opolo and Duduma which also parallels the history of Uganda seems to have been detrimental to the unification of the nation. Okurut engages the reader with this narration to chronicle the nation as it made progress towards becoming a stable democracy. History in the novel is not just for mere purposes of narration but for the purposes of taking stock of the past, the present, and also setting ground for future aspirations with women at the center of the process of stabilizing the nation.

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At the core of Brennan's argument is the paradox of finding unity in differences. It is an argument that seems to project the different elements of a nation that make up its fabric. A nation, thus, cannot exist and define itself as a singular entity, i.e. ignoring the political and favoring the cultural. All these elements work together to create and sustain the fabric of nationhood. These disparate elements and the multiplicities of cultures and political structures are evident where the nation seeks to create a singular identity, to identify itself as democratic and free from corruption as the characters try to define themselves as individuals and not as communities. The omniscient narrator narrates the lives of Nkwanzi and Genesis both in the villages and in the city. It is a narration that brings to light the life of Nkwanzi as an individual while growing up and going to school to the point where her path intersects with Genesis' and they begin their courtship before getting married. The narrator adopts a simultaneous and a subsequent narration. In the simultaneous narration, she narrates events in the present and as they occur, while in the subsequent narration, she narrates events from the past that have somehow shaped the present. This is evident when Nkwanzi seeks to know of the birth of Genesis but Kaaka insists that she cannot tell her of Genesis until she tells her of her own life as a girl.

The novel shifts between the present and the past as the narrator shifts between the two temporal positions, thus inviting the reader to connect the two plot lines and actively participate in making sense out of the story. While narrating the history of Uganda from the 1960s to early 1990s, the novel captures the metaphorical three 'weevils' that bedevil the country over that period: the subjugation of women by a harsh patriarchal culture, the AIDS pandemic, and the turbulent leadership. Since we cannot divorce our historical happenings from our national identity and vice versa, the three weevils remain a permanent part of the Ugandan nation. Gennette's concept of external time in narratological analysis affirms this where factual historical events are applied in fictitious narrations. *The Invisible Weevil* is a novel that takes us through the process of creating a sense of national identity. The narrator ropes the reader into the life of Nkwanzi to show the progress women are making not only in relation to the political future of Uganda but also the cultural future.

The second point of reference in the narration of the nation of Uganda is through Nkwanzi. The character of Nkwanzi in *The Invisible Weevil* is one that shows the shift in the battle against retrogressive cultural practices to the battle against retrogressive political practices. It is largely through Nkwanzi and partly through Kaaka that Okurut demonstrates her concurrence with Fanon in his argument on combat literature where he argues that it "molds national consciousness" (155). This foundation on the philosophy of commitment is also further echoed and reinforced by Fanon when he says that the "native writer progressively takes on the habit of addressing his/her own people" (155) which is what Okurut does. She does this in her narration by placing women at the center of creating a new Uganda. The women are engaged in the agitation and creation of underground movements that push for leadership reforms. They are aware of their political as well as social responsibilities and remain focused on the task they have at hand.

The women in the novel appear to be fighting the political confusion that is associated with their oppression. It is true that this political turmoil results in the suffering of many women at the hands of the brutal regimes, a trend that Okurut attempts to banish in the new nation. Apparently both the women who are and those who are not associated with the regimes suffer. The irony in this is that while the women who support the soldiers want to live extravagant lives, those who fight for the underground movement prefer simplicity as they fulfill their duties. Mama, the underground movement leader, tells the women in her team that: "From now on you'll wear your hair short and natural. Never hot-comb it" (122). The women of the struggle believe they should be natural and not waste money making artificial images of themselves.

The author seems to imply that for the struggle for political order to be achieved, the women should focus on the task rather than beautifying themselves. Okurut delves not only into restoring social order but also into the political spheres. She presents women as the driving forces for a free and democratic society. She advocates for uniformity and unity among the soldiers of the underground movement through the character of Mama who informs her troops that: "As long as we remain fragmented, the struggle will take longer" (149). While the women are agitating through a united front, the men, led by Duduma, appear to be a group of individuals making reckless decisions such as attacking Tanzania. This move eventually becomes the downfall of Duduma as he is deposed by Polle.

Towards the end of the novel, Okurut shows the reader that she is not just concerned with the process of narrating the lives of two women but also with narrating a history, a present, as well as making it possible for the reader to project into the future. While the history is occupied by Kaaka, the present is occupied by Nkwanzi,

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and the future is occupied by Nkwanzi's daughter Ihoreere. It is a future that one cannot be certain of in terms of the challenges that Ihoreere will have to surmount. This is indicated by the question that Nkwanzi asks herself. wondering whether her daughter will stand the invisible weevils (203). Kaaka, as argued earlier, accepted her place in the society as a woman. It is through bearing the history of her nation and her community that she gets to redeem herself. This knowledge accords her agency which the society had robbed her of by denigrating women.

Nkwanzi also fights a spillover of the retrogressive patriarchal practices from Kaaka's time such as the use of sex by men to dominate women or to assert their masculine power. This is a fact that is visible when Rex, Genesis' best friend, rapes her on the morning of her wedding. This spillover is also evident in Genesis who cannot stomach the fact that his wife is travelling abroad on a work-related trip. Genesis assumes that this is the beginning of her infidelity and to somehow "tame" her he demands unprotected sex while he understands he is HIV positive. Nkwanzi does not give in on any occasion. With this generational backdrop, it is at this point that We argue that these women give us a representation of the Ugandan nation at various stages and that they offer a span of the imagined Ugandan community of their pains, motives, dreams, and aspirations towards the formation of a nation that is more accommodative of women. When it comes to Ihoreere, the reader can only speculate about what the future holds for her, just like Nkwanzi. It would be far-fetched to argue that Ihoreere would find a softer landing ground in the society. She, just like her grandmother and mother, must learn to fight and assert herself in the face of injustice that is sure to be a part of the new nation.

Conclusion

This article was motivated by the desire to show how Okurut in *The Invisible Weevil* centers women in the fight for a better Uganda while paying attention to the artistic nuances of narration. She seemingly pulls women from the peripheries of a harsh and patriarchal society and brings them to the heart of the agitation for a better nation and for its development. The article was informed by narratology as a theoretical framework and we use textual analysis to bring out the theme of nationalism in the novel. This said, we conclude that Okurut has succeeded in her desire to bring women to the center through her narration of what is happening in the nation of Uganda both in the past and at the present.

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Notes

1. The Buganda kingdom, from which the Kabaka kingdoms descended, was one of the most powerful kingdoms in East Africa during the 19th century, and even before. The kingdom had a "[…] highly organized system of government and well established traditions […]" (Kiwanuka 21). The governance structure in the Buganda kingdom in the 19th century was unlike any other in the region and this led the early explorers to conclude that "[…] the kingdom must have been founded by a superior race from outside tropical Africa" (21). The Buganda kingdom, apart from being independent and dynamic in the 19th century also boasted of "a long list of ancestors stretching back for nearly five hundred years" (21). It is from this kingdom that Uganda derived its name upon the scramble and partition of Africa by the European colonizers.

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South goes East. Zuid-Afrikaanse literatuur bij Volk & Welt

Paweł Zajas

South goes East. South African literature at Volk & Welt

The paper analyses the transfer of South African literature to the German Democratic Republic. In its historiographic/methodological dimension it presents findings on the statistics of (South) African literature(s) translations in the Verlag Volk und Welt (the major East German publisher in the area of contemporary world literature), and on the place of literary translations in the East German foreign cultural policy, as well as in the socialist solidarity discourse of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) and the antiapartheid movement. Furthermore, findings are presented on the publisher-internal selection criteria applied to South African literature, based on the archival data from the Bundesarchiv in Berlin (i.e. applications for a print permit and internal/external reviews), on issues around the transformation and adaptation of literature translated in the realm of the East German *Weltliteratur*, and on the transfer of South African literature from the GDR, based on the English language series *Seven Seas Books*. Lastly, the function of this alternative canon, framed within the so-called 'minor transnationalism', is spelled out. **Keywords:** East Germany, minor transnationalism, socialist solidarity, sociology of translation, South African literature, Volk & Welt.

Inleiding

De literatuurwetenschappelijke *global turn*, ingeleid door Pascale Casanovas *La République mondiale des Lettres* (1999), berustte op de vaste overtuiging dat de val van het IJzeren Gordijn opeens een ongehinderde circulatie van literaire teksten mogelijk maakte. Een dergelijke stelling negeerde echter zowel sterke internationalistische ambities van het communistische cultuurbeleid, alsook de invloed van socialistische en linkse esthetica op de ontwikkeling van emancipatiebewegingen in Afrika of Azië en op de kritiek van het nationalistische imperialisme in Japan of Korea. De Amerikaanse cultuurhistoricus Michael Denning verwijst in zijn magistrale boek *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds* (2004) naar de transnationale circulatie en globale aspiraties van proletarische literatuur in de tweede helft van de twintigste eeuw. Volgens Denning kwam een culturele expressie, die door deze literatuur geproduceerd werd, in vier situaties tot stand: in staten geregeerd door communistische regimes, in landen met fascistische/autoritaire regimes, in de gecreoliseerde culturen van Zuid-Amerika en gekoloniseerde landen in Azië en Afrika (Denning 60). Zodoende werd door Denning een kaart van de wereldliteratuur geschetst die in werken van onder meer David Damrosch, Wai Chee Dimock en Emily Apter nauwelijks voorkomt. Hoewel deze grootschalige literaire transfer veelal afhankelijk was van het ideologische klimaat, kan de "Internationale van het socialistische realisme" (volgens Johannes R. Becher, belangrijke DDR-dichter-politicus en Minister van Cultuur) zonder twijfel als een transculturele *contact zone* worden beschouwd (Pratt 27).

In deze context is het onderzoek naar de literaire transfer vanuit Zuid-Afrika naar de Duitse Democratische Republiek (DDR) de moeite waard. Op het kompas van de Koude Oorlog namen beide landen weliswaar tegenovergestelde posities in: aan de ene kant stond een kapitalistische staat met een racistische ideologie, aan de andere kant het boegbeeld van het communistische Oostblok. Toch waren de wederzijdse (culturele) contacten niet onbeduidend.

Eerst probeer ik de vertalingen van Zuid-Afrikaanse auteurs in kaart te brengen. Grotendeels waren ze te vinden in het fonds van de uitgeverij Volk & Welt waar men bijzondere aandacht besteedde aan 'kleine' literaturen. Een dergelijke kwantitatieve verkenning is onontkoombaar. Terwijl er bijdragen/monografieën zijn verschenen over de publicatie- en receptiegeschiedenis van onder meer Britse, Latijn- en US-Amerikaanse, Australische,

Paweł Zajas is hoogleraar Algemene Literatuurwetenschap, verbonden aan de Vakgroep Nederlandse en Zuid-Afrikaanse Studies van de Adam Mickiewicz-Universiteit in Poznań (Polen) en *research fellow* aan de Universiteit van Pretoria, Pretoria, Zuid-Afrika.
E-mail: zajas@amu.edu.pl
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6041-297X

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Noorse en Nederlandse literaire werken (Eickmans; Gemert; Giovanopoulos; Grave, "Eva Schumann", "The GDR and Dutch Literature", "Theun de Vries en "Gutachten in de DDR"; Jager; Kirsten; Korte, Schaur en Welz; Missine en Michajlova; Moore en Spittel; Perry; Vandevoorde), werd de Zuid-Afrikaanse literatuur in de DDR tot nu toe nauwelijks onderzocht.

Ten tweede laat ik zien dat vertalingen van Zuid-Afrikaanse teksten in de centraal geleide economie noodzakelijkerwijs gekoppeld waren aan het buitenlands cultuurbeleid van de regerende Socialistische Eenheidspartij van Duitsland (SED). De antiapartheidsbeweging en de officiële steun voor het ANC speelden namelijk een significante rol in het Oost-Duitse solidariteitsdiscours.

Ten derde gaat mijn aandacht uit naar de selectiecriteria van vertaalde literatuur uit Zuid-Afrika. Gegevens daarover zijn in het Berlijnse Bundesarchiv te vinden waar veel complete dossiers het gehele productieproces van boeken documenteren. Aan de hand van leesrapporten van de uitgeverij en het censuurapparaat (de zogenaamde *Gutachten*) kan de vraag beantwoord worden op welke ideologische en esthetische gronden de in aanmerking komende Zuid-Afrikaanse werken werden geselecteerd. Interessant is in deze context vooral de opvatting van de Zuid-Afrikaanse literatuur als deel van de 'socialistische wereldliteratuur'.

Tot slot analyseer ik de transfer in de omgekeerde richting, vanuit de DDR naar het (voornamelijk kapitalistische) buitenland in de Engelstalige reeks *Seven Seas Books*, een soort cultuurpolitiek subbedrijf van de uitgeverij Volk & Welt. Hier doe ik een poging om de dimensie van deze literatuuroverdracht als een concept van *minor transnationalism* beter in de verf te zetten.

Afrika bij Volk & Welt

Wie zorgde in de DDR voor de internationale literatuur? Hoe kon dus een boek uit Zuid-Afrika de aandacht van redacteuren trekken? Zoals de gehele socialistische economie was ook het boekwezen centraal geleid. Er waren speciale uitgeverijen voor kinder- en jeugdliteratuur, sciencefiction en crimiromans (Neues Berlin), humor en satire (Eulenspiegel-Verlag). Aankomende auteurs werden van de Mitteldeutscher Verlag in Halle onder de hoede genomen, Hirnstorff-Verlag in Rostock specialiseerde zich op maritieme en regionale thema's en Greifenverlag in Rudolstadt was vooral verantwoordelijk voor de lichte amusementslectuur. De 'serieuze'—zowel Duitse alsook internationale—literatuur verscheen weliswaar af en toe bij de wereldberoemde Leipziger Reclam-Verlag. Ze bleef echter in hoofdzaak gereserveerd voor twee leidinggevende bellettrie-uitgeverijen: Aufbau-Verlag en Volk & Welt.

Bij Aufbau-Verlag verschenen vooral belangrijke DDR-auteurs (onder meer Bertolt Brecht, Anna Seghers en Christa Wolf), de klassieke literatuur (Goethe, Heine, Schiller) alsook het zogenaamde "humanistische burgerlijke erfgoed" (Thomas Mann). Op één boek na, *Down Second Avenue* (1961, *Zweite Avenue*) van Ezekiel Mphahlele in een oplage van tien duizend exemplaren, publiceerde Aufbau geen vertaalde bellettrie uit Zuid-Afrika. Deze was bijna in het geheel bij Volk & Welt ondergebracht: de *Leitverlag* voor de moderne internationale literatuur. Met meer dan twintig redacteuren en een groot aantal competente scouts beschikte de uitgeverij over een eigen netwerk en institutionele infrastructuur zodat zij systematisch de *Weltliteratur* kon selecteren, aankopen, (laten) vertalen, redigeren en produceren. De literaire wereld was in vijf grote redactieafdelingen ingedeeld. De grootste afdeling verbruikte de helft van het toegekende contingent aan papier voor de literatuur van de Sovjetunie. Verder bestonden er redactieafdelingen voor socialistische landen, alsook Germaanse (Zwitserland, Oostenrijk, de Lage Landen, Zweden), Romaanse (Frankrijk, Italië, Latijns-Amerika) en Engelstalige literaturen. De twee laatste afdelingen waren tevens voor literaturen uit Afrika verantwoordelijk. Volk & Welt propageerde met zijn "progressieve internationale literatuur" een "strijd tegen het imperialisme" en koos de kant van onderdrukte minderheden. Zodoende sympathiseerde de uitgeverij met Algerijnse en Palestijnse onafhankelijkheidsstrijders, opteerde in Latijns-Amerika (met opschorten van eigen esthetische regels) voor het autochtone magisch realisme, favoriseerde in Afrika de Négritude-beweging, en in de Verenigde Staten gaf zij, ongeacht de ideologische verschillen, haar steun aan de Black Power beweging. Overeenkomstig deze internationalistische oriëntatie bestonden er in de jaren zeventig zelfs (nooit gerealiseerde) plannen voor een aparte derde wereld-redactieafdeling (Lokatis, "Nimm den Elefanten" 26).

Aan de hand van beschikbare bibliografieën (Tschörtner, *40 Jahre* 374–442; *Internationale Literatur* 40–7) kan gekeken worden naar de kwantitatieve verhouding van de bellettrie uit Zuid-Afrika tot andere gepubliceerde romans en dichtbundels uit Afrika.

Algerije: **Mohammed Dib**: *Das größte Haus* (1956, *La grande maison*), *Der Brand* (1956, *L'incendie*), *Der Webstuhl* (1959, *Le métier à tisser*); **Malek Haddad**: *Die Brücken tanzen* (1961, *La dernière impression*); **Bernd Schrirmer** (red.): *Erkundungen. 22 algerische Erzähler* (1973); **Abdelhamid Benhedouga**: *Südwind* (1977, *Le vent du sud*); **Ahmed Akkache**: *Der Ausbruch* (1978, *L'évasion*); **Rachid Mimouni**: *Namenlos* (1989, *Tombéza*).

Angola: **Castro Soromenho**: *Senhor Américo kehrt nicht zurück* (1964, *Terra morta*); **Luandino Vieira**: *Das wahre Leben des Domingos Xavier* (1974, *La vraie vie de Domingos Xavier*); **Pepetela:** *Mayombe oder Eine afrikanische Metamorphose* (1983, *Mayombe*), *Schöpfungsregen der Yaka* (1988, *Yaka*).

Ivoorkust: **Bernard B. Dadié**: *Das Krokodil und der Königsfischer. Märchen und Sagen* (1975).

Ghana: **Asare Konadu**: *Eine Frau in den besten Jahren* (1974, *A Women in her Prime*).

Guinee: **Camara Laye**: *Der Blick des Königs* (1983, *Le regard de roi*).

Kameroen: **Eza Boto** (Alexandre Biyidi Awala): *Die grausame Stadt* (1963, *Ville cruelle*); **Ferdinand Oyono**: *Der alte Mann und die Medaille* (1972, *Le vieux nègre et la médaille*); **Mongo Beti** (Alexandre Biyidi Awala): *Perpétue und die Gewöhnung ans Unglück* (1977, *Perpétue et l'habitude du malheur*), *Besuch in Kala oder wie der junge Medza eine ungetreue Ehefrau heimführte oder obendrein eine Herde fetter Hammel gewann* (1979, *Mission terminée*), *Sturz einer Marionette* (1982, *La ruine presque cocasse d'un polichinelle*), *Der arme Christ von Bomba* (1988, *Le pauvre Christ de Bomba*).

Kenia: **James Ngugi** (Ngugi wa Thiong'o): *Abschied von der Nacht* (1969, *Weep not, Child*), *Preis der Wahrheit* (1971, *A Grain of Wheat*), *Verborgene Schicksale* (1977, *Secret Lives*), *Land der flammenden Blüten* (1980, *Petals of Blood*).

Kongo: **Emmanuel Dongala**: *Der Morgen vor der Hinrichtung* (1976, *Un fusil dans la main, un poème dans la poche*); **Henri Lopes**: *Revolution ohne tam-tam* (1982, *Sans tam-tam*), *Blutiger Ball* (1984, *Le pleurer-rire*); **Hubert Kröning, Reinhard Gerlach**: *Erkundungen. 17 kongolesische Erzähler* (1984); **Tchicaya U Tam'si** (Gérald Félix Tchicaya): *Das Geheimnis der Medusen* (1986, *Les méduses ou Les orties de mer*).

Madagaskar: **Jacques Rabemananjara**: *Deine unendliche Legende. Gedichte* (1985).

Mali: **Amadou Hampaté Bâ**: *Das seltsame Schicksal des Wangrin. Ein Schelmenroman aus Afrika* (1985, *L'étrange destin de Wangrin ou Les roueries d'un interprète africain*).

Nigeria: **Amos Tutuola**: *Der Palmweintrinker. Ein modernes Märchen aus Afrika* (1970, *The Palm-wine Drinkard*); **Chinua Achebe**: *Der Pfeil Gottes* (1975, *Arrow of God*); **Wole Soyinka**: *Zeit der Gesetzlosigkeit* (1977, *Season of Anomy*); **Nkem Nwankwo**: *Mein Mercedes ist größer als deiner* (1985, *My Mercedes is Bigger than Yours*).

Senegal: **Léopold Sédar Senghor**: *Wir werden schwelgen, Freundin. Gedichte* (1984).

Zuid-Afrika: **Peter Abrahams**: *Reiter der Nacht* (1957, *The Path of Thunder*); **Dan Jacobson**: *Tanz in der Sonne* (1964, *A Dance in the Sun*); **Jack Cope**: *Aufstand der Speere* (1966, *The Fair House*), *Auftrag in Kapstadt* (*The Dawn Comes Twice*), *Der zahme Büffel. Kurzgeschichten* (1976; een bloemlezing uit verschillende bundels); **Hilda Bernstein**: *Die Männer von Rivonia. Südafrika im Spiegel eines Prozesses* (1970, *The World that was Ours*); **Arthur Nortje, Oswald Mtshali, Mazisi Kunene, Dennis Brutus**: *Gedichte* (1975); **Alex La Guma**: *Im Spätsommernebel* (1975, *In the Fog of the Season's End*), *Die Zeit des Würgers* (1982, *Time of the Butcherbird*); **Athol Fugard, John Kani, Winston Ntshona**: *Stücke* (1980); **Nadine Gordimer**: *Sechs Fuß Erde* (1980, *Some Monday for Sure*), *Der Besitzer* (1983, *The Conservationist*), *July's Leute* (1984, *July's People*), *Burgers Tochter* (1989, *Burger's Daughter*); **André Brink**: *Stimmen im Wind* (1981, *An Instant in the Wind*), *Die Nilpferdpeitsche* (1985, *A Chain of Voices*); **Elsa Joubert**: *Der lange Weg der Poppie Nongena* (1983, *Die swerfjare van Poppie Nongena*); **Peter Magubane**: *Magubanes Südafrika* (1983, *Magubane's South Africa*); **Zindzi Mandela, Peter Magubane**: *Schwarz wie ich bin. Gedichte und Fotos aus Soweto* (1986, *Black as I am*); **Wilma Stockenström**: *Denn der siebte Sinn ist der Schlaf* (1988, *The Expedition to the Baobab tree*).

Puur kwantitatief gezien zijn dus in het fonds van Volk & Welt tot 1989 zestig titels met vertaalde literaire teksten uit Afrika verschenen. Er zijn bovendien twee bundels met Algerijnse en Congolese verhalen uitgegeven. Als literaire medium waren bloemlezingen in de DDR immers bijzonder populair: in de periode 1945–1990 kwamen van dit genre niet minder dan 3250 titels op de markt, waarvan 170 bij Volk & Welt. De redenen voor deze populariteit waren vooral van economische aard. Wegens het tekort aan deviezen kozen de uitgeverijen graag voor diverse bloemlezingen, om met kortere teksten zo veel mogelijk auteurs uit het kapitalistische buitenland aan de lezer bekend te stellen. Niet minder belangrijk was echter de 'beschermende' functie van de bloemlezingen. Het formaat werd gebruikt om controversiële namen op een onopvallende plaats in kleine oplage te laten verschijnen. Deze testcase was dus een handig instrument voor het invoeren van een omstreden auteur in de canon van de internationale DDR-literatuur. De uitgeverij schiep zodoende een precedent: was een verhaal van een potentieel door de censuur aanvechtbare schrijver eenmaal in een bloemlezing opgenomen, dan kon de redactie zich daarop beroepen en het erop wagen om in de toekomst zijn werk in vorm van romans/dichtbundels te publiceren. Ten slotte was de diplomatieke functie van de bloemlezingen opmerkelijk. De bundels ontstonden niet zelden in opdracht van en in samenwerking met het ministerie van buitenlandse zaken, en signaleerden de ontvankelijkheid van het literatuursysteem voor nationale literaturen vanuit landen die voor een buitenlands

beleid van de DDR op een gegeven moment van belang waren (Barck 3; Lokatis, "Die zensurpolitische Funktion" 47, 50, 56). Dit gold niet alleen voor bundels over Nederland/België (1976), Albanië (1976), China (1984) en Israël (1987), maar ook voor bloemlezingen met verhalen uit Algerije en Congo.

In zijn interne exposé voor *22 algerische Erzähler* (1973) verwijst Bernd Schirmer vooral naar cultuurpolitieke belangen die verbonden waren aan de uitgave van deze bundel. Met selectie- en vertaalwerk werd direct na de aanvang van de diplomatieke betrekkingen met Algerije in 1970 begonnen, teneinde te bewijzen dat de geleverde inspanning voor de Algerijnse literatuur in de DDR aanzienlijk sterker was dan die door West-Duitse uitgeverijen. Alhoewel de meeste geselecteerde verhalen niet aan esthetische standaarden van de reeks voldeden, legde de redacteur de nadruk op het feit dat de DDR van het begin af aan de onafhankelijkheid van Algerije ondersteund had en dat, met de publicatie van teksten die tijdens en kort na de bevrijdingsstrijd zijn ontstaan, een belangrijke bijdrage werd geleverd tot "*Emanzipationsbestrebungen der jungen Staaten gegenüber dem Kolonialismus und Neokolonialismus auf kulturellem Gebiet*" (emancipatieambities van jonge staten tegenover het kolonialisme en het neokolonialisme op cultureel vlak). (BArch, DR1/2352)[1]

Om dezelfde redenen is elf jaar later *17 kongolesische Erzähler* (1984) verschenen; het redactiewerk werd gedaan door twee medewerkers van de Oost-Duitse ambassade in Kinshasa. Ze rapporteerden in hun exposé:

> *Indem der Verlag Volk & Welt die Anthologie kongolesischer Erzähler publiziert, unterstützt er—wie es in seiner internationalistischer Tradition liegt—bewußt das kongolesische Volk in einer neuen Phase des Befreiungskampfes, fördert sein Suchen nach einer nationalen Identität, stärkt sein internationales Ansehen.* (BArch, DR1/2382a)
>
> Met de publicatie van de Congolese anthologie steunt Volk & Welt—overeenkomstig zijn internationalistische traditie—welbewust het Congolese volk in de nieuwe fase van de bevrijdingsstrijd, ondersteunt het in zijn zoektocht naar een nationale identiteit, versterkt zijn internationale prestige.

Terwijl in interne leesrapporten en exposés de cultuurpolitieke functie van bloemlezingen werd benadrukt, kwamen andere boeken van Afrikaanse auteurs om andere redenen op de markt. Antikoloniale initiatieromans met een overzienbare vertelstructuur (Mongo Beti en Camara Laye) waren bijzonder populair. Voor Oost-Duitse lezers was het niet moeilijk om *Sans tam-tam* van Henri Lopes—een verhaal over een leraar die tussen eer, geweten en carrière moet kiezen—tussen de regels te lezen. De ongelijke strijd van een individu tegen het machtsapparaat was in de DDR het leven van alledag, men zag de tekst als een Aesopische fabel die de meeste DDR-burgers aan hun voortdurende gevecht met de bureaucratie deed denken. Amadou Hampaté Bâ's schelmenroman *L'étrange destin de Wangrin ou Les roueries d'un interprète africain* werd met trefwoorden zoals mythe, geheimhouding, onverklaarbaarheid en onoverwinnelijkheid omschreven. Tchicaya U Tam'si's *Les méduses ou Les orties de mer* en Rachid Mimounis *Tombéza* vonden daarentegen hun ingang dankzij het doorzettingsvermogen van de uitgeefredactrice die soms ook tegen gebruikelijke receptiepatronen werkte en uitkeek naar teksten die veel gemeen hadden met het Europese modernisme. Sommige auteurs bereikten hun Oost-Duitse lezers met vertraging. Voor de dichtende Senegalese staatspresident Léopold Sédar Senghor interesseerden de redacteuren zich al vroeg, hij gold echter als de conservatieve vriend van Frankrijk en kon pas in 1984 in de befaamde Weiße Reihe in de DDR verschijnen (Gerlach 158–60).

Zuid-Afrika en het solidariteitsdiscours

De DDR werd achteraf niet zelden gezien als een internationaal geïsoleerd land dat zich politiek vooral op het Oostblok richtte. Toch was de DDR een belangrijke speler in de "transnationale politieke cultuur" van de antiapartheidsbeweging (Thörn, "The Meaning(s) of Solidarity" 427, "Anti-Apartheid" 69). Het lijkt tegenstrijdig. Enerzijds werd de vrijheid opgeëist voor de niet-blanke meerderheid in Zuid-Afrika, anderzijds waren de eigen bevolking fundamentele democratische rechten ontzegd. Desondanks telde voor de DDR-regering de internationale solidariteit (al was het slechts uit imago-overwegingen). In juni 1958 proclameerde Walter Ulbricht op het vijfde partijcongres van de SED de internationale solidariteit tot een verplichte morele norm, in 1974 werd ze zelfs in de grondwet verankerd (Brunner 64). De steun voor de bevrijdingsstrijd door de DDR-regering is ideologisch aan de traditie van de Duitse en internationale arbeidersbeweging opgehangen. Daarmee ging een marxistisch-leninistische geschiedenisopvatting gepaard die de toenmalige ontwikkelingsfase als overgang tussen het kapitalisme en het communisme classificeerde (Schleicher, "Elemente entwicklungspolitischer Zusammenarbeit" 111). Bijgevolg zou de steun verleend moeten worden aan anti-imperialistische krachten zoals

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nationale bevrijdingsbewegingen en jonge nationale staten in hun streven naar onafhankelijkheid en emancipatie. Omdat de term "ontwikkelingshulp" als een kapitalistische kapitaalexport werd gebrandmerkt, koos men eerder voor begrippen zoals "anti-imperialistische solidariteit" of "socialistische hulp" (Engel en Schleicher 91; Van der Heyden, *Zwischen Solidarität und Wirtschaftsinteressen* 71; Graeve 81).

Het buitenlands beleid van de DDR-regering was verregaand ingeperkt door de confrontatie tussen Oost en West ten gevolge van de Koude Oorlog. Het principe waarop het politieke systeem van de Bondsrepubliek sinds 1949 beruste was dat van een absoluut *Alleinvertretungsanspruch*. Het betekende dat de West-Duitse staat (tot de nieuwe *Ostpolitik* van de regering Brandt) zich als de enige rechtmatige erfgenaam beschouwde van het Duitse *Reich* (weliswaar binnen de grenzen van 1937), en weigerde zich neer te leggen bij de staatkundige deling van het land. Door zijn steun aan de strijd van het ANC kon de DDR dus internationaal zijn morele superioriteit tegenover Bonn demonstreren. Zowel de nucleaire en economische samenwerkingen tussen de Bondsrepubliek en Zuid-Afrika, alsook staatsbezoeken van Zuid-Afrikaanse apartheidspolitici aan West-Duitsland werden in de DDR-media breed uitgemeten. Nadat Oost-Duitsland in 1973 lid van de Verenigde Naties was geworden, ondertekende het onmiddellijk de International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid, was (anders dan de Bondsrepubliek) actief in het Special Committee Against Apartheid, en trad in 1974 en 1981 op als gastheer van dit comité in Oost-Berlijn (I. Schleicher en H.-G. Schleicher 248). De Realpolitik was echter minder idealistisch. De DDR was een relatief grondstofarm land en kon zich moeilijk veroorloven om zijn economische banden met Zuid-Afrika volledig te verbreken. Officieel werden deze in 1963 beëindigd, maar in hoeverre de contacten echter door derde landen verder liepen, blijft tot nu toe schemerachtig (Van der Heyden, *GDR International Development*).

In 1960 werd het *Komitee der DDR für die Solidarität mit den Völkern Afrikas* (later bekend als *Solidaritätskomitee der DDR*) gesticht, dat verantwoordelijk was voor de coördinatie en de financiering van hulpmaatregelen. Formeel was het comité een zelfstandige organisatie, in feite bleef het echter onderworpen aan de SED, met als taak de buitenpolitieke doelen van de DDR te verwezenlijken. Terwijl de politieke groeperingen in de Bondsrepubliek voortdurend aan het debatteren waren welk deel van de Zuid-Afrikaanse antiapartheidsbeweging het meest in aanmerking kwam voor ondersteuning, koos de DDR-regering zelf voor het ANC. Doorslaggevend daarbij waren vooral de jarenlange ervaring in de bevrijdingsstrijd en de brede ruggensteun van de eigen bevolking (Schleicher, "Zwischen Herzenswunsch und Kalkül" 14).

Er werd op velerlei manier logistieke en financiële steun aan het ANC verleend. Zo was bijvoorbeeld boekdrukkerij "Erich-Weinert" in Neubrandenburg tussen 1969 en 1990 verantwoordelijk voor de opmaak, de druk en de distributie van het ANC-informatieblad *Sechaba*, in een geheime opleidingskamp voltooiden vanaf 1976 rond duizend leden van Umkhonto weSizwe hun militaire training, en in november 1978 werd in aanwezigheid van de ANC-president Oliver Tambo en de secretaris-generaal van het solidariteitscomité, Kurt Seibt, de eerste ANC-vertegenwoordiging in Oost-Berlijn geopend (Singh 134). Indres Naidoo, de voormalige adjunct-afgevaardigde van het ANC in de DDR, schreef:

> *The friendship, the solidarity, the GDR gave us, was second to none. As far as the ANC is concerned, one of our best friends was the GDR. And, of course, I must make it clear, there was no attempt whatsoever to make us follow the same line politically as the GDR, no. They knew what our policies were, and they let us.* (Schade 37)

South Africa made by Volk & Welt

De antiapartheidsbeweging bediende zich vanaf het begin in de DDR van een omvangrijk kunstrepertoire. Affiches en muziek waren een belangrijk protestmedium: Miriam Makeba trad vanaf de jaren zeventig meerdere malen in Oost-Berlijn op (Bohne 219). De Zuid-Afrikaanse literatuur bij Volk & Welt (naast twintig vertaalde boeken nog drie verhalen van Themba Harry Gwala, Alex La Guma en Ezekiel Mphahlele in een band: *Erkundungen. 27 afrikanische Erzähler*, 1978) was net zo ingebed in het Oost-Duitse solidariteitsdiscours. Op welke gronden werden de Zuid-Afrikaanse werken geselecteerd? Enerzijds bestond er belangstelling voor cultuur- en maatschappijkritische 'protestliteratuur' die het apartheidsregime aan de kaak stelde. De stelling dat uitsluitend om politieke redenen voor deze literatuur werd gekozen gaat echter niet op.

In het geval van het aan censuur onderworpen DDR-uitgeversbedrijf is het antwoord op de vraag naar de selectiecriteria grotendeels te vinden in leesrapporten (*Gutachten*) die externe en interne rapporteurs over literaire werken schreven voordat er toestemming voor publicatie werd gegeven. De leesrapporten werden vervaardigd in het kader van het zogenaamde *Druckgenehmigungsverfahren* voor de *Hauptverwaltung Verlage und Buchhandel* van het

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ministerie van cultuur, geschreven door redacteuren en literaire deskundigen die uiteraard ideologisch betrouwbaar moesten zijn. De bedoeling van wat volgt, is niet om de ontwikkeling van het literaire systeem van de DDR of het mechanisme van de censuur te beschrijven, die al goed in kaart gebracht zijn (Barck, Langermann en Lokatis; Lokatis, *Verantwortliche Redaktion*; Brohm). Er wordt echter duidelijk hoe politieke, maatschappijkritische maar ook literaire opvattingen in leesrapporten de beoordeling van Zuid-Afrikaanse werken en auteurs meestuurden, en met welke argumenten de rapporteurs een boek door de censuur probeerden te krijgen.

In de DDR-uitgeverijen moest altijd rekening worden gehouden met veranderlijke politieke omstandigheden. De uitgave van Peter Abrahams' *The Path of Thunder* (1957, *Reiter der Nacht*) werd vanaf 1953 voorbereid in een tijd toen de *Neue Kurs* werd aangekondigd. Versoepelde censuurrichtlijnen dienden vooral om attractieve amusementslectuur te bevorderen teneinde de brede massa van de bevolking te kunnen bereiken. Abrahams' *The Path of Thunder*—een liefdesroman uit Zuid-Afrika, aldus een interne omschrijving—werd door de redactie welkom geheten: het boek voldeed niet alleen aan de verwachtingen van het ministerie van cultuur, maar ook waren de auteursrechten aanzienlijk goedkoper dan bij boeken van de West-Europese en Amerikaanse markt. In de eerste helft van 1957 was het manuscript printklaar, de beoordelingscriteria bleken echter in de tussentijd verscherpt: met de kernspreuk om "niet alle bloemen te laten bloeien" verkondigde Walter Ulricht een "ideologisch offensief" (Lokatis, "Hauptverwaltung Verlagswesen" 58). De vertaling moest op verzoek van het ministerie herlezen worden door Carola Gärtner-Scholle, een in het literatuurbedrijf gevreesde medewerkster van het censuurapparaat. Hoewel Gärtner-Scholle bekend stond als iemand die de auteurs meestal hinderde bij hun "ingang naar de literatuur" (Lokatis, "Ein Literarisches Quartett" 355–6), wist ze haar oordeel over het boek aan nieuwe richtlijnen aan te passen. Dat het geen politiek manifest was, vond ze juist voordelig, het ging immers om een liefdesroman met een maatschappijkritische achtergrond die tegelijkertijd het racisme en kolonialisme aan de kaak stelde. Met verwijzing naar een jonge Joodse protagonist Isaak deed de rapportrice zelfs een vergelijking met het Duitse/Europese antisemitisme, zodoende stond het boek in de traditie van het in de DDR verordende antifascisme (BArch, DR/3938).

Ook bij Dan Jacobsons *A Dance in the Sun* (1964, *Tanz in der Sonne*) werd apartheid door de rapporteurs minder benadrukt en spraken zij vooral hun waardering uit voor de terughoudende/objectieve vertelstijl, de psychologische opbouw van de personages en de spannende plot. Hoewel de verwantschap met het werk van Nadine Gordimer, Stuart Cloete, Doris Lessing en Harry Bloom werd benadrukt, betekende dit verrassenderwijs geenszins dat Jacobson als protestschrijver werd gezien—na het bloedbad van Sharpeville in 1960, het verbod van het ANC, de arrestaties van ANC-leiders en het daaropvolgende Rivoniaproces lag een politieke interpretatie voor de hand. De rapporten signaleerden daarentegen Jacobsons vermogen om lokale verhoudingen op een hoog literair niveau te presenteren en vergeleken zijn moderne stijlelementen met "*Mitteln moderner amerikanischer Erzähler*" (middelen van de moderne Amerikaanse vertellers) (BArch, DR1/5006).

Dit marktgerichte en esthetische receptiepatroon van de uitgever veranderde vanaf 1966, onder meer met de publicatie van Jack Copes romans. De antiapartheidsbeweging in de DDR, en de politieke banden tussen het ANC en de SED hadden een literaire begeleiding nodig, net als de veelvuldige propagandistische persberichten. De vertaling van Copes historische romance *The Fair House* (1966, *Aufstand der Speere*) werd in een leesrapport als "*ideologische Aufklärungsarbeit*" (ideologisch voorlichtingswerk) aangekondigd (BArch, DR1/2328). Hilda Bernsteins *The World that was Ours* (1970, *Die Männer von Rivonia*) was volgens een rapporteur de zwaarste aanklacht die in de DDR ooit is gepubliceerd. Dat hiermee niet alleen het apartheidsregime werd bedoeld, maakten alle drie leesrapporten duidelijk. Bernsteins berichtgeving over de rechtszaak in 1964 waarbij Mandela en andere ANC-kopstukken werden veroordeeld en die aanleiding was voor sancties tegen Zuid-Afrika, werd door de rapporteurs uitgelegd als een herinnering aan de nationaalsocialistische periode (met zijn officiële mythologie van het antifascisme profileerde zich de DDR als het 'andere', alternatieve Duitsland dat, anders dan de Bondsrepubliek, wel van het verleden had geleerd). Het boek moest worden gelezen als evidente verwijzing naar de 'fascistische methodes' van de West-Duitse *Notstandsgesetze* die in 1968 werden aangenomen en die de regering tijdens de politieke crisis speciale bevoegdheden gaven. (Vakbonden, studenten en intellectuelen zagen dit als aantasting van hun vrijheid, sommige betogingen waren door veiligheidsdiensten van de DDR aangesticht). Om die reden verkreeg de vertaling "*die größte Aktualität für die nächsten Jahre*" (de grootste actualiteit voor de komende jaren) (BArch, DR1/2342).

Ook Alex La Gumas romans werden hoofdzakelijk om cultuurpolitieke redenen voor publicatie geselecteerd. In de DDR was La Guma geen onbekende: hij reisde meermaals door het land als lid van het ANC en de SACP en nam deel aan ontmoetingen met partijfunctionarissen (Van der Heyden en Schade 97). *In the Fog of Season's End*

(1975, *Im Spätsommernebel*) was volgens de rapporteurs een vertoog over de noodzakelijkheid van de militaire strijd tegen het regime, een welkome ontwikkeling ten opzichte van vroegere boeken La Gumas waarin alleen maar op een naturalistische manier de passieve weerstand van de protagonisten zou zijn afgebeeld. Er werd weliswaar bezwaar gemaakt tegen het tekort aan samenwerking tussen communistische groeperingen van verschillende huidskleur, maar het uitblijven van discussies over de gezamenlijke toekomst van de revolutie hebben de rapporteurs ideologisch goedgekeurd (BArch, DR1/2357a). Op grond van cultuurpolitieke overwegingen werd ook La Gumas *Time of the Butcherbird* (1982, *Die Zeit des Würgers*) in het fonds opgenomen, ook al merkten de rapporteurs in beide romans unaniem talrijke stilistische en verteltechnische mankementen op. Vooral Marianne Bretschneider—een redactrice die voor de Engelstalige literatuur uit Afrika medeverantwoordelijk was en de meeste Zuid-Afrikaanse titels begeleidde—beklaagde zich uitvoerig over statische en levenloze personages die slechts in dienst stonden van politieke posities, bekritiseerde de oppervlakkige plot en de schematische opbouw van beide romans. Bretschneider concludeerde:

> *So ist ein gleichsam aus Mosaiksteinen zusammengesetztes Bild südafrikanischen Lebens entstanden, das gewiß nicht zur großen Kunst gezählt werden kann, dem jedoch eine wichtige aufklärerische Funktion zukommt.* (BArch, DR1/2373a)
>
> Zodoende ontstond een uit mozaïeksteentjes samengesteld beeld van het Zuid-Afrikaanse leven dat zeker geen grote kunst is, maar dat wel een belangrijke voorlichtingsfunctie heeft.

La Guma was in feite de laatste Zuid-Afrikaanse auteur bij wie de redactie cultuurpolitieke belangen vooropstelde. Toen in 1975 een bloemlezing met gedichten van Arthur Nortje, Oswald Mtshali, Maziyi Kunene en Dennis Brutus voorbereid werd, ging het om een "*progressive realistische Literatur*" (progressieve realistische literatuur) die echter tegelijkertijd "*intellektuell anspruchsvoll*" (intellectueel ambitieus) moest zijn. Zowel opvallend politieke alsook overtollige symbolische teksten werden niet voor de bloemlezing geselecteerd (BArch, DR1/2357a).

In leesrapporten over Athol Fugards toneelstukken (1975) maakten de rapporteurs weliswaar gebruik van verplichte sleuteltermen zoals "*humanistische Grundhaltung*" (humanistische grondhouding) of "*Entfremdungssymptomen des spätkapitalistischen Apartheidstaates*" (vervreemdingsymptomen van de laatkapitalistische apartheidsstaat), toch focusten ze hun aandacht vooral op verschillende moderne vormelementen en vergeleken Fugard meermaals met Samuel Beckett. Het laatste was geenszins toevallig. Met de Ierse dramaturg hielden de uitgeefredacteuren zich vanaf begin van de jaren zeventig bezig, het censuurapparaat reageerde echter afwijzend en verwees naar het oordeel van Georg Lukács over Becketts vermeende pathologische vervorming van het menselijke beeld (Petzinna 188–90). Het argument van vervreemding als intrinsieke eigenschap van de burgerlijke maatschappij schemerde als reddingformule in alle leesrapporten over Beckett door. Met de liberaal-progressieve Fugard en zijn "*Unverbindlichkeiten der absurden Dramatik*" (vrijblijvende absurde toneelkunst) hoopten de rapporteurs op deze manier een precedent te scheppen voor een potentiële publicatie van Beckett (BArch, DR1/2371a). Hun overwinning op de censuur behaalden ze echter eerst 25 jaar later: toen Becketts *Ausgewählte Erzählungen* (1990) in de vertaling van Elmar Torphoven op de markt kwamen, was het ook met de DDR voorbij.

In de jaren tachtig kwamen bij Volk & Welt de meest bekende Zuid-Afrikaanse auteurs uit: Wilma Stockenström, Elsa Joubert, André Brink en Nadine Gordimer. Het waren geen eigen ontdekkingen, maar (op één boek van Brink na) licenties op vertalingen die al in de Bondsrepubliek en in Zwitserland waren verschenen. Niet oninteressant blijft de interne receptie van de rapporteurs die enerzijds voor de overname van titels in de internationale DDR-canon pleitten, anderzijds niet altijd tevreden waren met hun literaire kwaliteit. Stockenströms *The Expedition to the Baobab Tree* (1988, *Denn der siebte Sinn ist der Schlaf*) kreeg met afstand de meeste lof voor de bewuste verteltechnische afstandelijkheid en de secure, iconische taal. In alle leesrapporten was er unaniem sprake van een "*komprimiert geschriebener Kurzroman*" (gecomprimeerd geschreven korte roman), "*ein Beispiel moderner außereuropäischer Prosa*" (een voorbeeld van modern buiten-Europees proza)—kortom:

> *ein Buch für Leser, die literarische Ansprüche, Bereitschaft zum poetischen Experiment mit dem Interesse an Vorgängen in der 'dritten Welt' verbinden.* (BArch, DR1/2393)
>
> een boek voor lezers die hun literaire ambities en bereidheid tot een poëticaal experiment in verband brengen met belangstelling voor gebeurtenissen in de 'derde wereld'.

De vraag in hoeverre het enthousiasme van de rapporteurs terug te voeren is op de receptie van de Zwitserse eerste uitgave kan op grond van de documenten niet afdoende beantwoord worden. Toch was het voor Volk & Welt niet zonder belang dat het boek "*von keinem geringeren als dem südafrikanischen Schriftsteller J. M. Coetzee*" (door niemand minder dan de Zuid-Afrikaanse schrijver J. M. Coetzee) naar het Engels werd vertaald. Verder verwezen de rapporteurs naar het "*sehr positive*" (heel positieve) nawoord van André Brink dat speciaal voor de Duitstalige première van Stockenström was geschreven. Ook in West-Duitse recensies werd Brinks nawoord uitvoerig aangehaald, waardoor Stockenströms werk als "*ein Wunder an Poesie*" (een wonder van poëzie) gold (Gogolin 5). Brink wist namelijk het boek, dat vanwege de exotische thematiek en de ontbrekende chronologie voor een Duitstalige doorsneelezer wellicht moeilijk was, in verband te brengen met stijlfiguren die "*sowohl Proust als auch Bergson vertraut gewesen wären*" (zowel Proust als Bergson bekend zouden zijn geweest) (Brink 199). Hij bracht de lezer ten slotte stilistische subtiliteiten van zijn landgenote onder het oog:

> *Es ist vielleicht die Art, wie die Erzählung, durch die "weibliche"—und "afrikanische"—Erfahrung bestimmt ist, daß sie so eindrucksvoll ist. Es ist das Buch einer Poetin—vorausgesetzt, daß wir Poesie nicht als bloße Ausschmückung oder Dekoration verstehen, sondern als ganz eigene Spracherfahrung: lyrisch, dramatisch, episch zugleich—, doch es ist Poesie, die entstehen konnte aus der Erfahrung, eine Frau zu sein und um Unterdrückung und Leiden zu wissen, und um die schreckliche Herrlichkeit des Ursprungs. Auch wenn sich die Erzählung wirklich weder offenkundig noch unmittelbar mit dem heutigen Südafrika beschäftigt, so kenne ich nur wenige andere zeitgenössische Romane, in denen genau die "Südafrika-Frage" von heute so beunruhigend, ergreifend und unvergeßlich beleuchtet wird.* (Brink 200)
>
> Misschien is het de manier waarop het verhaal wordt bepaald door "vrouwelijke"—en "Afrikaanse"—ervaring dat het zo indrukwekkend maakt. Het is een boek van een dichteres—op voorwaarde dat we de poëzie niet alleen opvatten als verfraaiing of versiering, maar als een heel eigen taalervaring: lyrisch, dramatisch, episch tegelijk. Maar het is een poëzie die kon voortkomen uit de ervaring van het vrouw-zijn, om onderdrukking en lijden te kennen en de verschrikkelijke glorie van de oorsprong. Zelfs als het verhaal niet duidelijk noch direct betrekking heeft op het huidige Zuid-Afrika, ken ik maar weinig andere Zuid-Afrikaanse romans waarin de "Zuid-Afrikaanse kwestie" van vandaag op zo'n verontrustende, ontroerende en onvergetelijke manier wordt onderzocht.

Bij Elsa Jouberts *Die swerfjare van Poppie Nongena* (1983, *Der lange Weg der Poppie Nongena*) waren de rapporteurs minder enthousiast. Het onderwerp pleitte weliswaar voor een publicatie in de DDR; punten van bezwaar waren daarentegen de vermeende wijdlopigheid, verwarrende overstappen in het vertelperspectief, alsook het gebrek aan stilistische differentiatie en poëtische vormgeving. De vertaling uit het Afrikaans van Karl H. Kosmehl beoordeelden de rapporteurs kritisch en zij stelden daarom voor ook de Engelse editie te raadplegen voor de DDR-uitgave (BArch, DR1/2380).

Dat André Brink "*kein landesseigener*" (geen autochtoon Zuid-Afrikaanse) Thomas Mann was, stond reeds in het leesrapport over *An Instant in the Wind* (1981, *Stimmen im Wind*). De rapporteurs kenden het oordeel van de *New York Times*-recensent Raymond A. Sokolov, die literaire manco's optelde:

> *It would be a pleasure only to say that this book was a brave cry against the murdering, racist society that still rules South Africa today. It is, but novels must be more than political acts of defiance, and it is not enough to fill pages with material that will shock official taste.* […] *It is important, for political reasons that Brink should be published, but doubtful* […] *that he will be read for his art as a writer.* (Sokolov 12)

Sokolovs bedenkingen zijn ook terug te vinden in de latere Angelsaksische receptie van het werk van André Brink. Desalniettemin besloot Volk & Welt de titel over te nemen, wat vooral te danken was aan het feit dat Brink slechts met één boek in de Bondsrepubliek vertegenwoordigd was en sinds 1966 niet meer was uitgegeven. Ondanks de kritisch opgemerkte artistieke tekortkomingen werd een politieke dissident in de gelederen opgenomen, die "*den einfachen Leser nicht überfordert*" (de gewone lezer niet overweldigt) en hem tegelijkertijd dichter bij de "*Absurdität rassistischer Vorurteile und die Inhumanität weißer Überheblichkeit*" (absurditeit van racistische vooroordelen en de onmenselijkheid van blanke arrogantie) brengt (BArch, DR1/2373). Christine Agricola's Volk & Welt-vertaling van *An Instant in the Wind* opende de deur voor Brinks carrière in de West-Duitse literatuurwereld. De vertaling werd noch in hetzelfde jaar overgenomen door het West-Duitse Verlag Steinhausen; de daaropvolgende titels verschenen in het vervolg na een eerste Engelstalige publicatie in de Bondsrepubliek. In West-Duitsland genoot de auteur, anders dan in Engelstalige landen, de reputatie van een "*adäquaten Marques der Buren*" (adequate Marques van de Boeren), die erin slaagt "*einen historischen Splitter zu einem faszinierenden Brennglas zu formen*" (een historische splinter in een fascinerend vergrootglas te veranderen) (Stachura 21). In 1985 bracht Volk & Welt noch één licentie-uitgave van Brink uit, maar de mening van de rapporteurs was niet positiever. Door het onderwerp van *A*

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Chain of Voices (*Die Nilpferdpeitsche*) bewees de auteur een "*humanistischer, für die politische und soziale Gleichberechtigung aller Südafrikaner eintretenden Schriftsteller*" (humanistische schrijver die pleit voor de politieke en sociale gelijkheid van alle Zuid-Afrikanen) te zijn. Men maakte echter bezwaar tegen zijn "*Trivialpsychologie*" (triviale psychologie), "*Mangel an erzählerischer Disziplin*" (gebrek aan narratieve discipline), "*reißerische Elemente und Klischees*" (sensationele elementen en clichés) en "*überstrapazierte Symbole und Bilder*" (uitgemolken symbolen en beelden) (BArch, DR1/2387). Het feit dat Volk & Welt boeken van Brink uitbracht niet per se vanwege hun literaire kwaliteit, maar omdat (delen van) zijn werk in Zuid-Afrika was (waren) verboden, wijst op de transnationale implicaties van censuur (Pöhls 229–30). In het selectieproces gaven de redacteuren voorkeur aan teksten die op de censuurlijst stonden in het literaire systeem van een vijandig regime.

Nadine Gordimer was een andere Zuid-Afrikaanse schrijfster die in literair opzicht weinig indruk maakte op de rapporteurs, maar die vanwege haar positie in de wereldliteratuur en vooral als icoon van de antiapartheidsbeweging niet mocht ontbreken in het fonds van Volk & Welt. Gordimer was sinds 1956 auteur bij de uitgeverij S. Fischer (hoewel enkele boeken werden ook uitgebracht door andere West-Duitse uitgevers). Gordimers West-Duitse eersteling, de roman *The Lying Days* (1956, *Entzauberung*) kreeg uiteenlopende recensies. Men schreef over een "*verheißungsvollen jungen Talent*" (veelbelovend jong talent) voor wie de confrontatie met apartheid

> *niemals Selbstzweck wird, sondern sich zwanglos und wie selbstverständlich aus dem lebendigen Fluß der Erzählung und der Art ergibt, wie die Autorin ihr Thema behandelt.* (Burschell 496)
>
> nooit een doel op zichzelf is, maar eerder terloops en natuurlijk voortkomt uit de levendige stroom van het verhaal en de manier waarop de auteur haar onderwerp behandelt.

Maar er waren ook afkeurende geluiden die spraken over een "*aufregend banales Werk einer aufregend banalen Schriftstellerin*" (opwindend banaal werk van een opwindend banale schrijfster) (Keel 186). De West-Duitse lezers dachten er kennelijk anders over: *Entzauberung* verscheen al snel in meerdere oplagen en de uitgever kocht rechten voor andere titels van Gordimer. De keuze voor nieuwe boeken werd altijd bepaald door Amerikaanse recensies, die—zoals in het S. Fischer-archief (Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach) te zien is—zorgvuldig werden verzameld en gelezen door de redacteuren. In de jaren zeventig nam de belangstelling van de uitgever voor Gordimer aanzienlijk af. Maar nadat de amerikanist Arnulf Conradi—die bevriend was met Gordimer en haar man Reinhold Cassirer—in 1983 overgestapt was naar S. Fischer als hoofdredacteur, werd Gordimer tot één van de belangrijkste auteurs in het fonds.

De inhaalmanoeuvre van S. Fischer met betrekking tot de Zuid-Afrikaanse schrijfster die—zoals Susan Sonntag later opmerkte op het PEN-congres in Hamburg—werd beschouwd als "*die einzige realistische Autorin von Rang in der modernen Weltliteratur*" (de enige realistische auteur van rang in de moderne wereldliteratuur) (Kreimeier 23), kon Volk & Welt niet over het hoofd zien. Als opmaat van een eigen inhaalprogramma werd gekozen voor *Some Monday for Sure* (1980, *Sechs Fuß Erde*), een verhalenbundel die in 1959 voor het eerst in het Duits verscheen, maar nu opnieuw werd vertaald. Het boek verscheen in de prestigieuze reeks Spektrum, waarvan het cultureel-politieke doel als volgt werd gekarakteriseerd:

> *Wir wollen aus dem großen Angebot der internationalen Literatur* […], *Literatur mit aktuellem Stellenwert für den Leser in unserer Republik auswählen, Literatur für sozialistische Zeitgenossen. Wir denken vor allem an drei Elemente, die für die Aufnahme in unserer Reihe Voraussetzung sind. Diese Werke sollten zur Persönlichkeitsentwicklung beitragen, sie sollten der Erweiterung des Horizonts im weitesten Sinne dienen und selbstverständlich der niveauvollen Unterhaltung.* (Tschörtner, "Die Spektrum-Reihe" 55)
>
> Uit de brede scala aan internationale literatuur […] willen we literatuur selecteren met een actueel belang voor de lezer in onze republiek, literatuur voor socialistische tijdgenoten. We denken vooral aan drie elementen die vereist zijn voor opname in onze serie. Deze werken dienen bij te dragen aan persoonlijke ontwikkeling, de horizon in de breedste zin te verbreden en uiteraard moeten zij geschikt zijn voor kwalitatief hoogstaand entertainment.

Gordimers verhalen verschenen naast andere grote namen van dit jaar: de gebroeders Strugazki, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Ingmar Bergman en Paul Nizan. De interne mening bij de uitgeverij week echter aanzienlijk af van de leesrapporten waarover S. Fischer vóór de eerste Duitse publicatie in 1956 beschikte. Destijds was men het erover eens dat de schrijfster in staat was om "*das Wesentliche an gleichsam banalen Umständen*" (het wezenlijke aan de hand van banale omstandigheden) te illustreren en "*exemplarische Ausschnitte aus dem Gesamtdasein*" (voorbeeldige

fragmenten uit het hele bestaan) te halen. De S. Fischer-rapporteur vergeleek haar teksten "*in ihrer Verhaltenheit*" (in hun terughoudendheid) met het werk van Catherine Mansfield, ze doorstonden "*jeden Vergleich mit dem Besten aus, was die Weltliteratur in diesem Genre aufzuweisen hat*" (elke vergelijking met het beste wat de wereldliteratuur in dit genre te bieden heeft). De publicatie werd sterk aanbevolen (DLA, A: Fischer/Gordimer).

Na meer dan twintig jaar lazen de rapporteurs in Oost-Berlijn het boek anders. Als "*sensible Stenogramme aus dem südafrikanischen Alltag*" (aandoenlijke steno's uit het Zuid-Afrikaanse alledaagse leven) vonden ze de verhalen niet oninteressant, maar de literaire uitvoering niet erg overtuigend; ze hebben daarom drie teksten weggelaten ("Is There Nowhere Else Where We Can Meet", "Which New Era Would That Be", "The African Magician"). Aan de ene kant wilden ze Gordimer in de reeks hebben, aan de andere kant zat de ontbrekende "*allgemeingültige Aussage*" (algemene expressie) van haar werk dwars (BArch, DR1/2371). Ook toen de andere drie titels werden overgenomen—*The Conservationist* (1983, *Der Besitzer*), *July's People* (1984, *July's Leute*) en *Burger's Daughter* (1989, *Burgers Tochter*)—gold Gordimer als "*redselig*" (praatgraag), iemand die moeilijk de complexe romanvorm kon bedienen (BArch, DR1/2379). Toch kon de wereldberoemde schrijfster de lezers in de DDR niet onthouden worden. Bij de laatste titel moesten zelfs politieke uitspraken van protagonisten ook nog—enkele maanden voor de val van de Berlijnse Muur—tegenover het censuurapparaat goedgepraat worden:

> *Für problematisch halte ich zum Teil von mir zitierten Äußerungen über den 17. Juni, über Ungarn, die CSSR und vor allem die Sowjetunion. Allerdings handelt es sich in den meisten Fällen um Figurensprache (französische Linksintellektuelle, ein nationalistischer südafrikanischer Politiker, auch Rosa Burger). Zwar werden diese Meinungen weder widerlegt noch aufgehoben, dennoch stellen sie die Integrität der kommunistischen Weltbewegung* […] *nicht ernstlich in Frage. Ihr Roman ist ein Plädoyer für die Bündnispolitik zwischen allen Apartheidgegnern, und als solchen sollten wir ihn veröffentlichen.* (BArch, DR1/2395)

> De aangehaalde opinies over 17. Juni [opstand van DDR-burgers, bloedig neergeslagen door het Sovjetleger], over Hongarije, Tsjecho-Slowakije en vooral over de Sovjetunie zijn volgens mij problematisch. Toch gaat het hierbij in de meeste gevallen om de uitspraken van personages (Franse linkse intellectuelen, nationalistische Zuid-Afrikaanse politici, ook Rosa Burger). Deze oordelen zijn weliswaar noch tegengesproken noch tenietgedaan, toch wordt daardoor de integriteit van de communistische beweging […] niet ernstig op de helling gezet. Haar roman blijft een pleidooi voor een bondgenootschapsbeleid van alle tegenstanders van apartheid. Zo bezien moet het boek door ons worden gepubliceerd.

Nog één kwestie verdient in deze context een bijzondere aandacht: in veel leesrapporten werden de geselecteerde Zuid-Afrikaanse titels als deel van de 'socialistische wereldliteratuur' gezien. Het idee van een socialistische wereldliteratuur verschilde duidelijk van opvattingen over het transnationale in de westerse literatuurwetenschap. De wereldliteratuur à la DDR wilde niets te maken hebben met een transnationaal kosmopolitisme dat in de periode van de vroege socialistische utopie, naar aanleiding van Goethes overwegingen, werd gepostuleerd. Op zijn laatst tegen het einde van de jaren zestig werd in de DDR de veranderlijke waardering van de vroege wereldliteratuur weggeredeneerd. Zo anticipeerde Goethe opeens met zijn uitspraken over de *Weltliteratur* op een historisch proces dat later door Marx en Engels in het *Communistisch Manifest* (1848) ter sprake kwam en van daaruit werd overgebracht naar het wetenschappelijk socialisme. Het gaat daarbij vooral om het internationaal culturele samenleven van de arbeidersklasse, waarop latere concepten van de 'multinationale Sovjetliteratuur' en de 'literatuur van Europese socialistische landen' zijn gebaseerd (Goßens, "Erbkriege" 91–6; Goßens, "Konzepte" 130–1).

Tot de jaren zeventig was de wereldliteratuur in de DDR gebonden aan de leer van het socialistisch realisme. In 1975 organiseerde het *Zentralinstitut für Literaturgeschichte der Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR* in samenwerking met het Maxim Gorki-Instituut voor Wereldliteratuur (Moskou) een congres, "*Verantwortung für die Welt*" (Verantwoordelijkheid voor de Wereld), waar voor het eerst tot een "*Vielfalt der individuellen Schreibweisen*" (diversiteit van individuele schrijfwijzen) voor de internationale socialistische wereldliteratuur werd opgeroepen. Zodoende stonden niet alleen het kritisch realisme, maar ook de als 'burgerlijk' veroordeelde modernistische stromingen zoals expressionisme, symbolisme of surrealisme officieel in dienst van het socialistisch transnationalisme (Müller 516). De organisatoren lieten weliswaar weten dat daarmee geen wereldwijde erkenning van deze late 'burgerlijke' kunstvormen bedoeld was, maar de boodschap was voor de geïnteresseerden duidelijk.

Zuid-Afrikaanse auteurs, die hun werk met de politieke strijd in verband brachten, pasten sowieso bij het model van de socialistische/anti-imperialistische wereldliteratuur. De term "*Weltliteratur*" werd ook in leesrapporten een- en andermaal als sleutelterm ingezet om in formeel/inhoudelijk opzicht innovatieve teksten makkelijker in het literatuursysteem van de DDR te introduceren. Dit gold onder meer voor Nadine Gordimer, als in

haar werken passages voorkwamen die ideologisch niet onproblematisch waren. Met Athol Fugard introduceerde Volk & Welt, met verwijzing naar zijn status in de wereldliteratuur, een avantgardistische toneelschrijver, een plaatsvervanger voor Samuel Beckett die als het ware door zijn afwezigheid schitterde.

Seven Seas Books

De literaire transfer vanuit Zuid-Afrika en vanuit de Zuid-Afrikaanse exil-gemeenschap via Volk & Welt naar de DDR speelde een significante rol in het beleid van de uitgever. Toch moet er nog even worden stilgestaan bij een niet minder opmerkelijke transfer van de Zuid-Afrikaanse literatuur in omgekeerde richting, vanuit de DDR naar het buitenland. Het laatste was mogelijk dankzij de Engelstalige reeks *Seven Seas Books* waarin een internationale linkse canon aan bod kwam.

De reeks was een product van de Koude Oorlog. Het werd in 1953 als Panther Books opgericht door Gertrude Gelbin, de Amerikaanse echtgenote van de schrijver Stefan Heym, met als doel "progressieve literatuur daar naar toe te brengen waar ze verboden was" (Jany "*Seven Seas*" 344; Heym 615). De eerste tien *Panther* Books zijn bij Paul List Verlag in Leipzig verschenen; in 1958 verhuisde de reeks naar Volk & Welt en werd tot *Seven Seas Books* herdoopt. Naast royaltyvrije literaire klassiekers ruimde de reeks plaats in voor linkse schrijvers uit de Verenigde Staten, Canada, Groot-Brittannië, Ierland, Australië, Guyana en Zuid-Afrika. Politieke non-fictie met markante titels, zoals *Unrepentant Aggressors. An Examination of West German Policies*, *A People's History of England* of *With Eisenstein in Hollywood*, werken over de guerrillaoorlog op de Filipijnen, Australische Aborigines, en de apartheid maken duidelijk waarom Erich Wendt, staatssecretaris in het Oost-Berlijnse ministerie van cultuur, de reeks als "psychologisch wapen" in een strijd tegen de "kapitalistische propaganda" financieel steunde (Jany, "*Seven Seas*" 344, *Rewriting as Cultural Politics* 12). Het merendeel van originele Engelstalige uitgaven, maar ook vertalingen van socialistische DDR-klassiekers (Willi Bredel, Louis Fürnberg, Bodo Uhse, Anna Seghers, Johannes R. Becher, Stefan Hermlin) en jongere auteurs (Günter de Bruyn, Christa Wolf) vonden hun afzet onder 'linkse' lezers in het kapitalistische buitenland, maar ook in Oostbloklanden—vooral in de Sovjet-Unie—en Azië. In 1978 werd de reeks stopgezet.

In de reeks verscheen de Zuid-Afrikaanse protestliteratuur, onder meer herdrukken van Jack Cope's *The Fair House* (1961, 1963), Harry Blooms *Transvaal Episode* (1959, 1960), de eerste editie van Richard Rive's *African Songs*, Gertrude Gelbins *Following the Sun: 17 Tales from Australia, India and South Africa* (1960, 1962), La Gumas collectie *Apartheid. A Collection of Writings on South African Racism by South Africans* (1971, 1979) en *Come Back, Africa! Short Stories from South Africa* (1968, 1975), onder redactie van Herbert L. Shore and Megchelina Shore-Bos (McDonald 109–10). Ezekiels Mphahleles autobiografisch boek *Down Second Avenue* (1962, 1965) zorgde weliswaar eerst voor enige commotie: pas nadat Volk & Welt het contract met Faber & Faber had afgesloten, kwamen de verantwoordelijke ambtenaren in het ministerie van buitenlandse zaken te weten dat Mphahlele destijds in Parijs politiek actief was, als vertegenwoordiger van de anticommunistische Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF). Potentiële contractbreuk was om propagandistische redenen niet mogelijk. Het boek kon verschijnen, met een lagere oplage van vijf duizend exemplaren, dankzij een leesrapport van Beatrice Johnson die de "*verrohte Kultur*" (verruwde cultuur) van de apartheid gelijkstelde met het Hitler-Duitsland en "heksenjacht" van McCarthy (BArch, DR1/5042).[2] Een Duitse vertaling volgde een jaar later bij Aufbau-Verlag. De reeks maakte zich ook verdienstelijk voor de eerste edities van Alex La Guma. *And a Threefold Cord* (1964) was de enige roman van La Guma die niet is verschenen in de invloedrijke African Writers Series uitgegeven door Heinemann. Tot de heruitgave bij Kliptown Books in 1988 reisde de tekst alleen in zijn Oost-Duitse versie door de wereld (Cornwell 64). La Gumas *The Stone Country* (1967) debuteerde eveneens bij Volk & Welt en werd pas zeven jaar later door Heinemann herdrukt.

Deze literaire transfer naar de DDR in het kader van de reeks *Seven Seas Books* kan analytisch worden opgevat als een concept van *minor transnationalism*. Françoise Lionnet en Shu-meih Shih wezen erop dat het transnationalisme moet worden onderscheiden van het concept van globalisering:

> The logic of globalization is centripetal and centrifugal at the same time and assumes a universal core or norm, which spreads out across the world while pulling into its vortex other forms of culture to be tested by its norm. It produces a hierarchy of subjects between the so-called universal and particular, with all the attendant problems of Eurocentric universalism. The transnational, on the contrary, can be conceived as a space of exchange and participation wherever processes of hybridization occur and where it is still possible for cultures to be produced and performed without necessary mediation by the center. (Lionet en Shih 5)

Het idee van een *minor transnationalism* biedt een vertrekpunt voor de analyse van bewegingen tussen (semi-) perifere literaire systemen. Zo bezien blijft de transfer van de Zuid-Afrikaanse literatuur naar de DDR-reeks *Seven Seas Books* een interessant geval. Het was een laterale beweging van een perifere literatuur—ondanks het medium van de Engelse taal waren veel auteurs grotendeels onbekend op de centrale literaire markten—naar een literatuursysteem dat qua taal een centrale, maar vanwege de ideologische beperkingen een perifere positie in het Europese literaire veld innam. Het socialistische uitgeversbedrijf, dat slechts in zeer beperkte mate gebonden was aan de markteconomie, produceerde vertalingen en gaf originele teksten uit zonder bemiddeling van het zogenaamde universele centrum (Viljoen 5). De casestudy van *Seven Seas Books* is mede daarom opmerkelijk omdat de zijwaartse beweging door de Oost-Duitse periferie enkele Zuid-Afrikaanse auteurs toegang gaf tot centrale literaire markten. John Cope, Alex La Guma, Ezekiel Mphahlele en Richard Rive waren door *Seven Seas*-uitgaves buiten de DDR te lezen en in veel Oostbloklanden vertaald, vooral in de Sovjet-Unie (Van der Vlies 198). Het culturele internationalisme had dus ook zijn "non-metropolitan dimensions" (Helgesson, Bethlehem en Han 262).

Besluit

De bemoeienissen van Volk & Welt met de Zuid-Afrikaanse literatuur zijn in menig opzicht interessant. Ze laten zien dat de literaire transfer uit Zuid-Afrika naar de DDR telkens ingebed was in het kader van het buitenlands cultuurbeleid. Het cultuurpolitieke karakter van deze literaire productie betekende echter niet dat er geen bewegingsvrijheid bestond voor de acteurs in het culturele veld. Met bepaalde sleuteltermen, zoals de 'socialistische wereldliteratuur', probeerden de rapporteurs de manuscripten door de censuur te krijgen. Ze maakten gebruik van hun insiderkennis en werden zodoende niet zelden tot een bondgenoot van de auteur. De redacteuren en rapporteurs zetten zich enerzijds in voor de protestliteratuur uit Zuid-Afrika, anderzijds bestond er behoefte aan formeel innovatieve teksten en amusementslectuur. (Met de linkse apartheidskritiek kregen de DDR-lezers immers een vleugje exotica). Frappant blijft verder het feit dat de DDR-receptie van sommige Zuid-Afrikaanse schrijvers, onder meer Gordimer en Brink, duidelijk verschilde van de West-Duitse receptiepatronen.

Ten slotte is de literaire transfer uit Zuid-Afrika naar de DDR een interessant voorbeeld van een *minor transnationalism*. Dit geldt vooral voor de besproken reeks *Seven Seas Books*, maar ook voor de vertaling van André Brinks werk. Dankzij de DDR-editie van *An Instant in the Wind* werd André Brink in de Bondsrepubliek herontdekt en als schrijver van internationale statuur gevierd. Volk & Welt biedt zodoende een inzicht in transcontinentale en transnationale verwevenheden van de Zuid-Afrikaanse letterkunde in de tijd van de Koude Oorlog.

Verantwoording

Het onderzoek vond plaats in het kader van het project dat financieel mogelijk werd gemaakt door het National Science Centre Poland (NCN, 2019/33/B/HS2/0017). Mijn dank gaat uit naar twee anonieme reviewers die met hun opbouwend kritische opmerkingen geleid hebben tot een herschreven en hopelijk verbeterde versie. Ik dank ook Camiel Hamans voor zijn correcties. Dank hem kreeg de tekst zijn definitieve vorm.

Noten

1. Indien niet anders opgemerkt, zijn alle citaten uit het Duits door mij [P. Z.] vertaald. Signaturen van alle besproken leesrapporten werden direct in de tekst en niet in de bibliografie aangegeven. De afkorting "BArch" staat voor het Bundesarchiv in Berlin-Lichterfelde, "DLA" voor het Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach.
2. Beatrice Johnson was een Amerikaanse journaliste, correspondent van het blad *Daily World* in Oost-Berlijn. Andere leesrapporten over Zuid-Afrikaanse titels werden voor de reeks *Seven Seas Books* geschreven door onder meer een Britse journalist, John Peet (vanaf 1952 in de DDR), en een Amerikaanse collagekunstenaar, Oliver Harrington (vanaf 1961 als politieke vluchteling in Oost-Berlijn) (Klemm 72).

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Tradition and subjectivities: Warri-related comedians and their art

Tanure Ojaide & Enajite Eseoghene Ojaruega

Tradition and subjectivities: Warri-related comedians and their art

By some coincidence, many Nigerian stand-up comedians were born, raised, live in, or are associated with Warri and its environs. By Warri, as understood in the area, we mean Warri and its surroundings and, to a large extent, what is called the 'core Delta' of Nigeria's Delta State. The comedians include Gordons, I Go Dye, AY and Real Warri Pikin. We investigate what is possibly responsible for the natural talent of these comedians. We relate the success of these comedians to the notion of Warri as 'not coming last', the history of the city of many ethnicities, boma boys, the blues nature of suffering pain and deprivations but laughing them off, and some indigenous traditions such as the Urhobo *udje* oral poetic performance which aims to elicit laughter as a means of maintaining normalcy and preventing anybody from deviating from the communally-established norms. We use multiple concepts such as laughter as a means of regulating people's lives, satire, historicism, culture, and aesthetic considerations to study these Warri-related comedians and their art. We investigate the commonalities, subjectivities, traditions, and individual talents that have made Warri-born, raised, resident, and related comedians so successful—not only in Nigeria, but also in Africa and the world. **Keywords:** tradition, subjectivities, performance, Warri, comedians.

Introduction

Coincidentally, many successful Nigerian stand-up comedians were born or raised in Warri and its environs. In this article we intend to interrogate the sociocultural background of four highly talented comedians whose artistic performances have made them stand out with their peculiar styles despite having features that can be said to be Warri-related: Gordons, I Go Dye, AY and Real Warri Pikin. In other words, we are interested in the evidence of their Warri identity. We will combine a sociological approach and a neo-historicist concept in discussing these four stand-up comedians. We chose this mode of scholarly inquiry because the two concepts relate to how the zeitgeist of a people conditions their artistic productions. The sociocultural background and historical happenings of Warri inform the uniqueness of the stand-up comedians who use their individual experiences and observations in the Warri location as materials for artistic composition and performance.

We are aware of many scholarly works on Nigerian and African stand-up comedies. A sample of such works reveals the diversity of approach to the study of stand-up comedy. In "The Uses of Ridicule: Humour, 'Infrapolitics' and Civil Society in Nigeria" Ebenezer Obadare argues for incorporating humour into the civil society discourse. Moradewun Adejunmobi discusses the ethics of popular performance in Nigeria. In "Discourse Types in Stand-up Comedy Performances: An Example of Nigerian Stand-up Comedy" Ibikun Filani applies discourse theory to Nigerian stand-up comedy. Maik Nwosu devotes a chapter in his *The Comic Imagination in Modern African Literature and Cinema: A Poetics of Laughter* to "Nollywood Cinema and the Semiotics of Laughter". Many scholars have also discussed stand-up comedy as practiced in other African countries. David A. Donkor looks at it from the political angle in "Selling the President: Stand-up Comedy and the Politricks of Indirection in Ghana". In "Comedians, Pastors, and the Miraculous Agency of Charisma in Ghana" Jesse Weaver Shipley directs his scholarship at stand-up comedy and "charismatic preaching". Added to politics and religion, there is attention to jokes aimed at

Tanure Ojaide is the Frank Porter Graham Professor in the Department of Africana Studies at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte, USA.
Email: tojaide@uncc.edu
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6918-2971

Enajite Eseoghene Ojaruega is associate professor in the Department of English and Literary Studies at Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria.
Email: enajiteojaruega@gmail.com
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0887-4899

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ethnicity as the study by Ndonye, Yieke and Onyango on Kenyan stand-up comedy titled "Ethnicity as Discursive Construct in Kenyan Televised Comedy: Humorous Harm?" shows. These studies of stand-up comedy generally relate to one nation or the African continent. But for Warri—one city, a specific location that is not a national capital like Accra or Nairobi or a national commercial centre that is a megacity like Lagos or Johannesburg—to have so much impact on stand-up comedy deserves attention.

In this article we are thus interested in the unusual phenomenon of having so many successful Nigerian stand-up comedians being related to Warri whose location, history, and sociocultural features mark them out even as their individual experiences and styles differ. These Warri-related stand-up comedians no doubt share some of the preoccupations of other Nigerian and African comedians on jokes about politics, religion, and ethnicity. However, we believe our new historicist approach will give insight into the source, nature, kind of humour, and objectives that characterise these specific comedians whose location of origin with its sociocultural and historical background give them a unique identity. We situate the stand-up comedians we are studying in Warri and its environs whose historical and socio-political necessities condition them. We also believe, like Stephen Greenblatt and Hayden White in their respective works, that the production, categorisation, and analysis of texts—here stand-up comedy—are determined by forces of history which, in turn, shape the cultural work itself. It should be noted that we are not glossing over the immediate psychological relief that the Warri comedians proffer to their audiences. Certainly, they do elicit the purgation of emotions in the stressful life of Warri as will be discussed later. However, we are emphasising the Warri identity aspects of the stand-up comedians and how they have adapted their environment into their art to give it a unique style.

Warri: History and socio-economic life

Inescapably, one must start a discussion of Warri-related comedians from the history of Warri and its acquired social manners and identity. Trade in slaves, palm products, and rubber with the Portuguese and later the British made Warri renowned as a commercial centre even before it became the headquarters of Delta Province in colonial Nigeria. Warri is also home to three major ethnic groups—Urhobo, Itsekiri, and Ijaw—who, despite a series of conflicts, continue to live together. Thus, by this multi-ethnic composition and by extension what Dibie and Odey broadly refer to as the multi-lingual nature of the South-South region of Nigeria, the city boasts of a potpourri of people, cultures, and influences. This factor might be mostly responsible for the dominance of pidgin English rather than any of the three main ethnic languages or English, as the language of informal socialisation. Oribhabor describes the Warri type of pidgin English as "an ethnically neutral language whose spread is not only infectious but serves as the ready link between and among these multifarious ethnic/tribal groups" (3). Most often, one's proficiency in the Warri variety of pidgin English qualifies one to be called an 'original Wafarian', a true Warri resident. It is significant that the comedians under discussion all use the Warri variety of pidgin English to such an extent that it has become an identity marker. For example, Tiwa Savage, one of Nigeria's most popular female musicians, describes I Go Dye as one of the great interpreters of the Warri pidgin accent that "cracks everyone up" (Savage). These comedians are marked by the Warri location from which their special pidgin English and Urhobo, a local language, derive. Gordons and AY occasionally infuse pidgin English with a smattering of Urhobo like in the latter's exclamation of "*Oghene me*!" (Oh, my God!). The success of the Warri-related stand-up comedians has promoted the Warri variety of pidgin English which many now associate with the language of Nigerian comedy. It is very suitable for delivering satire and keeping its listeners entertained because it has strong descriptive powers and is prone to dramatic exaggerations, punchy jibes, double entendre, and puns.

Also contributing to Warri's identity and social renown is the town's evolution from the late 1960s into an 'Oil City' with the discovery and exploitation of crude oil in its environs. Many multinational oil companies subsequently established their headquarters there. The attendant prosperity from the oil industry brought many expatriates and other Nigerians to Warri. The oil boom brought about socio-economic disparity in the form of a widened gap between the rich and the poor. The class of economically advantaged included the expatriate staff; majority group officers from outside the area such as Hausa, Yoruba, and Ibo; and a few local workers. The overwhelming majority of locals had their means of livelihood such as fishing and farming destroyed by the exploitation of oil and gas and suffered in the new economic dispensation. Stand-up comedians tap into this inherent economic inequality as a source of humour unique to the environment. The resistance to poverty and faring economically worse than outsiders in their own town gave rise to the saying, '*Warri no dey carry last*!' This determination not to remain down or 'come last' is testimony of the struggle and resilience that characterise Warri

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folks and their effort to prosper at any cost. Later, this habit in the early 21st century will turn into the 'hustling' or 'hammer' disposition promoted by the contemporary generation of Warri boys and girls to succeed in a chosen endeavour despite apparent limitations.

Nostalgia for old Warri days

Warri residents are socially conscious; they possess a jolly spirit and have a light-hearted approach to life's vicissitudes. As they say in Warri, "*After all, man pikin no go fit kill himself*!" when confronted with incredible odds. This statement literally means that one cannot do the impossible to find solutions to life's challenges. An older generation of Warri residents still recall with wistful nostalgia the excitement, conviviality, and camaraderie of the social life when Warri was in vogue in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Divisive oil politics and its associated consequences led to civil strife among ethnic groups. At one point or the other in the 1990s and early 21st century, the major groups of Urhobo, Ijaw, and Itsekiri fought each other, especially over ownership of land. The yearning for the good old days of social gatherings makes the comedians mock the recent social changes which have brought conflicts among people who used to live together happily. But this is not to say that Warri people have lost the sense of communal living as they still maintain some habits nurtured by their Warri affiliations that project them as different from outsiders. They are still known for their dogged determination to fight and survive against all odds. This is what others have come to recognise as their irrepressible nature and as folks who prefer to make light of otherwise serious issues.

The Warri tradition of witty and playful banter, popularly called "*yabis*" or "*stroking*", directed at one or more persons or even at oneself, is significant not only in situating Warri-related comedians but also in establishing their common features. In Warri parlance, *yabis* is a form of verbal abuse or a barb. It could be light-hearted, harmless, or outright cruel, direct or indirect. It employs sarcasm to poke fun or takes an underhand jibe at someone or something. Sometimes, too, it could be self-derisive. That is, one can use it to laugh at one's self based on some perceived personal shortcomings or defects. Warri people are known for not allowing themselves to be outdone in a contest of words or sharp oral exchanges. In fact, the average Warri person has a witty rejoinder ready in his or her verbal arsenal and is not to be outsmarted. Often the person can effortlessly 'answer' a question with a question. The appropriation of *yabis* into the stand-up comedy performance is one of the distinguishing traits of the Warri-related comedians.

Oral poetic performance heritage

One can also note that the Warri-related comedians, especially of Ughievwen, Udu, and Uvwie clans of Urhobo from Ughelli South and Uvwie local government areas of Delta State have inherited the *udje* tradition, an oral poetic performance in which two paired groups yearly sing about their rivals. Many Udu and Ughievwen people came to Warri in the 1950s and 1960s to trade in the Main Market and other parts of the town. There is constant flow of people between Warri and Aladja, a major Udu town. Many Warri residents of Ughievwen and Udu roots often go home during their local festivals of which *udje* performance is an integral part.

By some instinctive craft the comedians of the area have imbibed many attributes of *udje* into their performance. *Udje* composers and performers use words in a special way to elicit laughter towards 'destroying' their opponents or targets of attack. The tradition, through poetic compositions, draws a profile of the person or subject to be ridiculed in such a way as to generate laughter. Through use of caricature, hyperbole, deflation, parody, and other laughter-provoking techniques, the *obo-ile* (composer) paints a devastating image of the butt of the songs. *Udje* in its poetry and performance attempts to make laughter its focal intent. The audience/spectators are the judges of *udje* performances and they carry away indelible images or gestures that provoke laughter the most. In its heyday in the Ughievwen and Udu areas, the performers of *udje* displayed an effigy of the subject of the satiric song so that, even if they used a fictitious name, the audience would know the person being referred to. As happens in performances of Warri-related stand-up comedians, the *udje* song composers and their performers share the same sociocultural milieu with their audience who follow closely those people being satirised.

Though Ojaide and Darah, in their respective *Poetry, Performance, and Art: Udje Dance Songs of the Urhobo People* and *Battles of Songs: Udje Tradition of the Urhobo*, have written on the regulating role *udje* plays in the lives of people, the oral poetic performance genre is mostly an artistic contest meant to show the poetic and verbal dexterity of the composers and performers. The artistic entertainment that *udje* provides in traditional society can be compared

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to what stand-up comedy does today to entertain folks during work-free days or holiday periods. The aesthetic techniques of *udje* outlined above seem to have been absorbed as part of the strategies of the contemporary Warri-related comedians to elicit humour in performance. The sociocultural impulse that propelled the performance of *udje* seems to also inform contemporary stand-up comedy of the Warri-related comedians. Both artistic genres are fed by materials drawn from the contemporary happenings that their respective audiences are familiar with.

Warri-related comedians and their individual and collective upbringings

Though Warri boasts of raising many successful stand-up comedians, our study focuses on four representative Warri-related comedians—Gordons, I Go Dye, AY, and Real Warri Pikin. These four comedians, in their respective performances, exemplify their Warri affiliation that in their experiences make their art unique to them. Warri plays an important role in the art of the stand-up comedians related to it. The city's peculiar culture, society, history, and spatiality are converted into artistic materials that give an identity to the comedians. Invoking Warri in their performance makes Warri itself not only a place but also a character that informs the performance. As products of the Warri society, the comedians understand its worldview and aspirations and so employ multiple concepts of parody, satire, and other aesthetic considerations to elicit laughter and show the extreme nature of their daily realities. They convert the suffering, deprivation, and pain which are integral parts of the Warri experience and reality into raw humour, thereby laughing off and lightening the pain of the prevailing harsh conditions. Their experience of the social climate of their time has informed their art to be Warri-flavoured.

Each of the comedians gives a personal touch to the comedic art, thus giving it an autobiographical appeal. Often the unique talent derives from the Warri upbringing that enables the comic artist to present a highly stimulating performance. It is also significant that the comedians whose respective comic art we are studying are not only products of informal socialisation through their association with Warri but also went to school in the area. It is noteworthy that at no time did the comedians, apart from AY who studied Theatre Arts, undergo any formal training in the art of comedy; the courses they studied are not related to the comic art or entertainment industry. Yet, through a fusion of their individual talents as well as their absorption of Warri values, they are able to creatively and skilfully perform the stand-up comedy at a heightened state.

Gordons and his therapeutic comedy clinics

Godwin Komone uses the stage name Gordons. At the age of twelve he took to fishing to financially assist his poor parents. He studied Integrated Science at Delta State University, Abraka, and had his first formal public appearance as a comedian at a religious programme in Lagos in 2005. In his early days as an entertainer, he was one of the trios of a gospel music group, D. C. Envoy, in Warri. The early influences inform his fusion of music into his comic performances. His religious affiliation forms the primary background and source of materials for his brand of art. In addition to live public performances, he has also created a unique platform through a series of audio compact disc recordings tagged *Gordons' Comedy Clinic* through which he offers laughter as a cure for peoples' ailments. As at the time of this writing, he has completed over six of such 'clinics'.

Gordons has tapped into the spiritual anxieties that afflict many Nigerians. In recent years, globalisation has fuelled the exponential increase of Pentecostal churches, often incorporated, in Nigeria. Gordons situates his comic performance on this current phenomenon of religiosity. He draws materials from practices in the new churches that promise prosperity and defence against witchcraft in an era of economic and social hardship. His individual style has given him an advantage in the profession as many travellers on long journeys in taxis and buses like to listen to these audio CDs with jokes on religious themes. His resourcefulness further has a lot to do with his ability to craft jokes and anecdotes from aspects of his personal life and public experiences as well as some jokes about Christian practices and values in the country. In an interview in 2015, he said: "I have the gift of comedy and it is comely to me" (Gordons, "I am still a Doctor of Comedy"). This statement shows his self-awareness of the specific type of stand-up comedy that he practices.

In spite of the much-touted appellation of being an 'Oil City', Warri has some of the poorest neighbourhoods and slums not only in Delta State but also in Nigeria. Areas such as Iyara, Pessu, McIver, and Sido could pass for ghettos or urban slums. Buildings constructed with planks and corrugated iron sheets, located in unhygienic surroundings lacking essential amenities might have been 'homes' to the likes of Gordons as a young child. However, Gordons does not shy away from the fact that he is a product of such a poor environment as revealed in some jokes he creates from his growing-up experiences in such neighbourhoods. He constructs these jokes around abject

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poverty and strict parental upbringing. The preoccupation with the pain of his early life is a strategy to provide his audiences with details of his life's trajectory as well as showcase, through his personal experience, the resilient and irrepressible character of the Warri person in the face of difficult life encounters. He not only laughs at himself and invites others to do so with him as he shares these experiences but also hopes to inspire his listeners with his rags-to-riches story. Gordons' "Psycho-comedy" is a brand of comedy that not only provokes hearty laughter but also enjoins the listener to think deeply and learn from it. He laughs at suffering but gives his audience hope of overcoming the difficulties they might be facing in their lives as he has successfully done. He becomes a role model for the suffering folks in Nigerian society who someday will laugh, as he now does, over the past pain.

He depicts, in one of his jokes, the sordid state of poverty he lived in as a child by describing the endless pangs of hunger he and his siblings experienced. According to him, food was so scarce for his family that even the rats that lived in the house and depended on crumbs or leftovers for their own survival came out one day carrying placards in protest against the 'stinginess' of these human inhabitants! Another joke dwells on the inconveniences, on both parents and children, of a family living together in a one-bedroom apartment, as is the case in shanty homes. Even when the children are asked to go to sleep long before their bedtime, the parents are frustrated from enjoying private sexual relations because of a restive child (in this case, him) who is unable to sleep or curious to know what the parents are up to and therefore interrupts them at a crucial moment. Of course, he receives some strokes of the cane from his father for such unwelcome interference and learns how to mind his business around 'adult business' next time.

Gordons also recounts an anecdote in which, in the company of his mother, he witnessed a young boy talk rudely back at his parents. After watching this exchange, his own mother turns to him and without him committing any offence or similar provocation, begins to knock him on the head to warn him against any attempt to "try that nonsense" with her. The mother's action bewilders the poor child as he has not done anything wrong. However, since he knows the no-nonsense nature of his mother, he would not even dream of doing what the other boy just got away with ("Gordons Comedy Clinic Ward 6").

The comedian often appropriates and parodies some negative or unsavoury Christian practices by church leaders and members of their congregations. Through comic parallels, he draws attention to similarities in practices between his entertainment profession and the church; hence his constant reference to both as "ministries". One of the titles he has given himself is "the Bishop of the Osusu Ministry". "*Osusu*" literally means "collection". He employs the term to subtly condemn the frequent financial demands in churches under the guise of collecting offerings for the Lord. He creatively deploys formulaic expressions in the church preaching tradition during his performances to reinforce the parallel between the comic industry and the church. Examples are his intermittent use of the exclamations "*Jah*, *Jehovah*, *Eloi*!" and interjections of "*Allelu*!" to which his audience will sometimes chorus "*Alleluyah*!" as is common during church services. He thus reflects Warri's social reality by appropriating the localisation of Pentecostalism to entertain his audiences.

Consciously or unconsciously, Gordons draws from the *udje* oral poetic performance tradition when he uses his art as a humourist to condemn in a satiric manner some unsavoury fads in today's churches. *Udje* has much to do with creating humour out of human follies to serve as deterrence. An instance of this *udje* quality in Gordons' comedy is where leaders of churches assume undue authority or exercise rigid control over members of their congregations. In the name of "deliverance", the act of setting an adherent free from challenges through prayers and other related actions, they often go overboard in their actions. Taking a cue from true life incidents, he calls out some pastors and their churches known for such practices by humorously referring to these acts by the type of discipline in question. Thus, he tags as "fire deliverance" Reverend King who lit up a female member accused of committing fornication, "karate deliverance" for T. B. Joshua because of the aggressive sounds he makes in his deliverance as if fighting martial arts, and "flogging deliverance" as adopted by white garment-wearing churches ("Gordons Comedy").

By making comedy out of what is usually regarded as sacred or off limits, Gordons implements Henri Bergson's theory of the use of humour as a mechanism for bringing the deviant and eccentric back into line by mocking their peculiarities (qtd in Olaseni 5). These jokes are meant to expose the leaders and make them abandon their outlandish religious styles and their fleecing of members through too many collections.

Gordons intersperses his pidgin English with exclamations in Urhobo like "*oghwokoghwoko*!" which often creates a certain mystique in his performance. "*Oghwokoghwoko*" is an Urhobo onomatopoeic expression to designate ebullience, weight, and richness of the subject (person or issue). His focus on the church results from the spread of

Pentecostalism as a result of globalisation. One can thus say that Gordons has local and global influences driving his comic performances. He taps into his Urhobo heritage, the socioeconomic reality of the Warri area, and the general discontent with the brand of Pentecostalism that focuses on economic anxieties. Often, when he criticises the churches or a practice in his Comedy Clinics, cries of "Yeees!" are heard or people are seen nodding their heads in addition to the wild bursts of laughter.

I Go Dye and his yabis *convention*

I Go Dye (Francis Agoda) is another Warri-related humourist who has established a strong voice and brand name in the stand-up comedy tradition in Nigeria. He has explained his stage name as a direct coinage from a mispronunciation of his surname, Agoda (a-go-da / I go dye). The stage name also reflects the unbridled style of comedy he practises. In other words, he realises that the topical issues he addresses through his art are likely to put his life in danger or generate controversy. When performing at Rhythm Unplugged in 2013, I Go Dye underscored the function of the comedian as a social critic and not just an entertainer when he repeatedly proclaimed as he performed on stage "My brother, you talk, you die! If you no talk, you die! So, let's talk and die!"

He is perhaps the Warri-related comedian that most openly displays in his performances his affiliations with Warri. Indeed, his descriptive power sets him apart from the other stand-up comedians. At the onset of his career, he had the penchant for flaunting physical and mental features that clearly reflected his Warri upbringing: a hungry-looking frame, sharp wit, and quick comebacks or rebounds. He says he draws his inspiration from "the unique people of Warri" and reaffirms our earlier portrait of the Warri resident by saying that "if you are from Warri, the spirit of comedy flows in your veins" ("Me and My Top7 Comedians—I Go Dye")

I Go Dye has imaginatively adopted the Warri *yabis* verbal style to spice up his art of comedy. His individual comic performance art is steeped in the Warri *yabis* tradition. In most cases he performs extemporaneously by taking on subjects and themes from his audience's reactions and feedback and effortlessly crafts fresh jokes from them. He does not hurry over his pre-arranged delivery at a live performance. Rather, he accommodates interjections from members of the audience to which he provides sharp and rib-cracking retorts. With this technique, he creates a wonderful rapport with his audience whom he allows to participate actively in the performance and, in so doing, enhances the participatory pleasure derived from his performances on stage. On this style, the comedian makes the following remarks:

> So I have developed a spontaneous approach that allows a steady flow of issues and a simple disposition that creates that realization of our collective responses on ethnic, religious, civil and professional levels. So, that keeps the audience to easily get in touch with the issues surrounding the jokes. (Onikoyi)

He thus seeks the "collective responses" of his audience to better enjoy his jokes irrespective of the subject of his performance.

The comedian's self-*yabis*, the practice of making himself the butt of his jokes, gives great delight to his audiences. This is his way of pre-empting others who might want to take a jab at him by picking on some of his shortcomings. Commenting on his lean frame, he often regales his listeners with anecdotes from his underprivileged childhood days. Generally, in many of such jokes, he employs parallels to portray the class distinction between the rich kid and his poor self. He describes a child from a wealthy background who enjoys all the perks of comfortable living and modern exposure but is not street smart as an "*Ajebutter*" or "*Ajebo*". On the other hand, there is the "*Atutupoyo*" or "*Ajepako*" child who comes from a poor background and whose rugged visage bears the marks of impoverishment and a rough life. He unabashedly identifies himself as belonging to this second category as he says he was born with a "plastic spoon" as opposed to those born with a silver spoon in their mouth. He projects the poor group as ingenious and resilient as they often convert their underprivileged circumstances and street knowledge to their advantage later in life. Ironically, much as he laughs at the truancy of those brought up in poor homes, he shows admiration for folks who have "common sense" or are fast-thinking. This attitude is reflective of Warri residents who are sometimes referred to as "sharp guys" with mixed feelings of admiration and trepidation.

I Go Dye practices the performance tradition of many other Nigerian stand-up comedians who operate a fluid, interactive, and decentred performance stage even as he projects his Warri identity. As already mentioned, Gordons interacts with his audience by repeating "*Allelu*!" to which the audience responds "*Alleluya*!" I Go Dye constantly uses the expression "*Area*!" as his entry or opening line at every performance (see "I Go Dye Killing London with Laugh"). This interactive opening has its functions in his performance. It acts as a rhetorical device

foregrounding his identity as a 'proper Warri boy' as this seems to be the form of popular greeting amongst people in closely-knit social circles in Warri. The dramatic opening also establishes a rapport between the comedian and his audiences, who, by responding to his familiar greeting, will share mutual connections with their Warri association.

He has intentionally or inadvertently borrowed the *ite*, or masking aspect of *udje* oral poetic performance. In his *yabis* or self-ridicule, he takes a cue from great *udje* singer-performers such as Okitiakpe of Ekakpamre, Memerume of Edjophe, Oloya of Iwhrekan, and Vphovphen of Okwagbe. For instance, Memerume sings about his not having a child despite his many wives in a memorable song in which the "childless one" cuddles his child only in dreams. Similarly, Vphophen, after losing a brother, sings about himself before rivals accuse him of witchcraft (see Ojaide, *Poetry, Performance and Art*). By first criticising themselves, the *ite* artists of *udje* and I Go Dye pre-empt their being subjected to derision and steal the thunder from the abuse of others. Self-mockery gives the stand-up comedian the licence to go after others' shortcomings without fear as he has already exposed his 'skeletons' before them. He has a pseudo-serious pattern of constructing his jokes as he takes up pressing national issues and relates them to everyday life even as he analyses them on stage in a humorous manner. Beginning his performances with "*Area*!" is also akin to the opening formula or salutation in *udje* performances. Since *udje* is an oral poetic performance genre, the performer needs a marker to designate the beginning of each of the structural parts of opening, middle, and end of a song. Similarly, I Go Dye uses "*Area*!" to start a new segment of his performance. As the formula has a mnemonic impact on the *obo-ile* (cantor), so does "*Area*!" on I Go Dye.

I Go Dye's comedy entertains as well as fights against social ills and vices. He skilfully uses suspense and surprise endings to enhance the delivery of his jokes. In one instance, he comically exposes the braggart nature of the Warri boy who boastfully claims he is not afraid of any adversaries but takes to his heels at the slightest whiff of a direct confrontation.

AY, the resourceful 'Warri boy'

One of the most accomplished Nigerian stand-up comedians in the industry today is Ayo Richard Makun, popularly known as AY. Though his parents are from Ondo State, he was born and brought up in Warri where he also received his primary and secondary school education. He was quite involved in the world of show business during his undergraduate days in the Theatre Arts Department at Delta State University, Abraka where he graduated in 2003. He received an award for being the first student to direct a convocation production in the annals of his department. AY was once the personal assistant and event manager to Ali Baba, popularly known as the father of Nigerian stand-up comedy. He thus had the opportunity to learn from one of the veterans of Nigeria's stand-up comedy business. Even though he is famous for his stand-up comedy, AY is multi-talented as he writes, directs, acts, and is engaged in other forms of activities related to show business. In all of this, "*I be proper Warri boy!*" is his favourite way of identifying himself and his affiliation with Warri.

AY started out in comedy by simulating on stage some popular mannerisms of some church leaders, especially their penchant for using highfalutin language. Thus, a key feature of his stand-up comedy is parody which he directs at the antics of known personalities in society. Commenting on this type of mimicry, Filani says:

> By mocking whoever the target is, the comics assert their role as contemporary anthropologists by denaturalising the acts or actors being mimicked; they appropriate whatever they mimic within the frame of a collective cultural system, to which the stand-up comedians and their audience belong [...] Their [audience's] laughter is synonymous with corrective criticism which demands that the targets should realign themselves within the right social frame. Mimicry in stand-up performance is an ironic cultural practice that resists and subverts the actions and actors that have been previously accepted or revered. ("The Use of Mimicry in Nigerian Stand-up Comedy" 91)

In order to enhance the delivery of his jokes and spice up his art, AY skilfully blends his professional training as a dramatist with that of a comedian by inserting short drama skits into his stage acts. Although they are hilarious, they also examine pertinent aspects of human and social relationships. The comedian operates on the premise that there is a mutual understanding between him and his audience of the underlying assumptions behind the characters and acts being mimicked or performed on stage as jokes. AY appropriates a shared knowledge with his audience and this becomes the individual talent that specifically marks his comedy. A frequent persona he adopts during his acts is that of a white garment-wearing prophet who engages in prophecies, as is the practice in some Christian religious sects in Nigeria. He takes on role-playing and is referred to as Prophet AY in such instances. In

keeping with the humour expected of comedians, his performances are mock prophecies that are subtle jibes at some perceived human foibles such as greed, corruption, and covetousness.

His opening performance at his *AY Live in Asaba* show affords us a classic example of his art. Garbed in his white garment with a bell in tow and feigning body movements and exclamations as if in a state of spiritual possession, AY moves among his audience and picks at recognised faces one after the other 'prophesying' for them. Considering his audience is usually made up of many celebrities and notable public figures, it is interesting to watch him reduce them to helpless laughter even as he reveals pseudo-serious truths about them. He begins his prophetic utterances with the phrase "The Lord says I should tell you [...]" thereby giving the impression of a divine command that should not be contested but accepted as true. He accuses the governor (then, Emmanuel Uduaghan) who has a daughter of not wanting him to be his son-in-law and therefore preventing him from 'hammering'. In Warri and other parts of Nigeria, the term 'hammer' refers to acquiring immense wealth without necessarily working hard or honestly for it. Here, marrying the governor's daughter implies marrying into wealth with all its attendant economic and social advantages. So, when AY cracks that joke, he is working with the assumption that his audience is conversant with the social disposition of hammering, seeking wealth in an amoral way by any means necessary. This concept of getting rich by exploiting any opportunity that affords it is embraced by many Warri and other Nigerian youths.

In another example, he tells a lady in the audience that the Lord says "I should tell you to let it go! Yes, that wig which you have had on your head for nine months now, for it is not pregnancy!" Evidently, this is a jab meant to mock ladies who are fond of wearing a particular hair add-on or style for long periods of time without thinking of the unhygienic consequences. Of note is the fact that when he delivers these prophecies in the form of a religious dictate, he expects his target to give his 'revelation' a second thought like one would do an utterance coming from a seer in the church.

AY's mini skits during live stage performances are humorous versions or interpretations of prevalent sociocultural issues. They bear testimony to his ingenious creativity and resourceful crafting of jokes out of current issues. Enlisting the assistance of some of his fellow comedians, he takes his audience through rib-cracking re-enactment of some controversial events and human relationships. "Na So We See Am" is the title of a stage play presented during his *AY Live Concert 2016 Lagos Invasion*. Through the verbal bickering between two sets of couples—Falz the Bahd Guy and Chigurl and AY and Princess, who are also comedians—the audience gets an insight into a series of controversial and contemporary issues. Notable celebrities or public figures embroiled in one scandal or another come under attack for their anti-social behaviours. Though the performers do not directly mention the names of their targets, they leave no-one in doubt as to the butts of their jokes (AY, "Na So We See Am"). They achieve this effect through the employment in their performance of mimicry, parody, double entendre, puns, satire, allusions, hyperbole, and ridicule. Coincidentally, AY shares the same techniques that *udje* composers deploy in their songs. AY incorporates into his comic performances mutually-shared knowledge and experience between the comedian and the audience. This art thoroughly thrills the audience as folks easily follow the act because they possess background knowledge of the issues being humorously re-enacted.

The artiste's contribution to the stand-up comedy tradition goes beyond his performances on stage. He is involved in mentoring younger Nigerians in stand-up comedy workshops. There is his AY Open Mic Challenge, a competition which seeks out new talents in the comedy industry and offers them an opportunity to project and develop their potential. He has established a solid reputation of featuring an impressive number of fellow comedians—established and budding ones—on his shows. This is clear evidence of the Warri convivial disposition that he possesses and puts into practice. Recently he has veered into acting, starring in films such as *90 Days in Atlanta* (2014), which by its box office ticket earnings clinched a place in the Guinness Book of World Records; *A Trip to Jamaica* (2016); and *Merry Men I* and *II* (2018 and 2020). In the first two movies, he proudly retains this identity of a Warri boy where he plays the role of adventurous Akpos, a fictional, stereotypical, young and irascible, but harmless, Warri rebel.

Real Warri Pikin and her unabashedly Warri heritage

Although only just recently having gained visibility in the world of Nigerian stand-up comedy, Anita Afoke Alaire Asuoha deserves inclusion among Warri-related stand-up comedians by virtue of her ingenious appropriation of Warri-related speech idioms, mannerisms, and other concepts in her artistic productions. Born and raised in Warri by an Ijaw father and Urhobo mother, she typifies a *bona fide* Warri citizen as she is a product of two of the

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three prominent ethnic groups that dominate Warri. Her adopted stage name, "Real Warri Pikin", underscores her awareness and sense of rootedness in her heritage as it signifies a proud and unabashed declaration of her authentic style ("real") of comedy undergirded by her Warri identity and affinity. She is currently arguably the most popular female comedian from Warri because of her brand of comedy which embodies the language and other mannerisms of her environmental upbringing and influence. In its originality, her comedy continues to appeal to a wide audience as well as increase her fast-growing fan base. While she has not organised a full-fledged personal live performance of her own (her plan towards this, slated for June 2020, was scuttled by the exigencies of the Coronavirus pandemic), she has nevertheless featured as a guest artiste on shows by renowned Nigerian comedians at home and abroad.

A graduate of Political Science and Public Administration from the Benson Idahosa University in Benin City, Real Warri Pikin admits that comedy has always been a part of her, even as she pursued other career choices. However, she inadvertently took up comedy as a profession after her failed suicide attempt when she made and posted a short motivational video about overcoming depression on social media. In several interviews, she talked about how a bad business decision plunged her and her husband into huge debt that ruined their fortunes overnight and made her fall into depression which led her to attempt to take her life as her way out of the problem. Having survived that near-death experience, she decided to reinvent herself by converting that Warri die-hard, hustling spirit of never giving up into art to encourage women, especially, to cope with marital and other social challenges by making funny and uplifting videos.

Real Warri Pikin's response to those critics who feel that she should concentrate more on taking care of her family and leave the public domain of comedy because she is a woman, is that "anybody can be funny, regardless of gender" (Real Warri Pikin, "Depression Pushed me into Comedy—Anita Asuoha (Real Warri Pikin)"). With a heavily-endowed figure, she adopts the *udje* and Warri *yabis* techniques of self-criticism by personally making jokes about this. She joins the audience in laughing at herself when she tells them that one would need a ladder to climb her waist because of its size! In many ways, her person, subject, and style situate Warri subjectivities from a women's perspective within a profession generally regarded by male chauvinists as the exclusive preserve of men. Watching her performances, whether during stage shows or as short video clips, one cannot help but admire her seamless delivery aided by her boisterous and ebullient nature as well as the mellifluous, almost song-like quality of her Warri pidgin. Listening to her is a thrill as she effortlessly delivers on the famous Warri brand of pidgin English heavily laced with expressions unique to the area's local languages (Urhobo and Ijaw), which are now popularly recognised and used beyond the Warri environs. She also lithely intersperses this pidgin with some short terms or expressions in Urhobo that often enhance her delivery and provoke more laughter. What is exceptional about this latter style is her predilection for adopting euphemistic versions or slang of otherwise uncensored or sensitive words in Urhobo. For example, she refers to the act of lovemaking as "*oblorblor*" or "*lalor*". Even for a non-native speaker of Urhobo, her facial expression and the inflection in her voice as she says this gives one an idea of what she means. Her coinage of these onomatopoeic terms thus makes what should have otherwise been too graphic or vulgar funny. She also delivers her pieces of advice in pidgin as figurative wisecracks as when she tells women "*not to carry men matter for head like gala*". "*Gala*" is a popular snack in Nigeria sold by hawkers who pursue car drivers in traffic holdups to make quick sales. Real Warri Pikin thus says that women should not preoccupy themselves with men's issues to their own detriment.

In another counselling piece, she asks women to come to terms with the fact that a "*man's phone is like onions; once you open am, you go begin cry*". Onion is used here as a metaphor for the hurtful discoveries that the contents of the phone could reveal. In admonishing a proud person, she questions why he or she "*dey like to dey spread like virus*?", thus deflating the subject's assumed ego by associating it with a destructive disease. She has a flair for including single words or abbreviations that allow her to say much with little, hence when she tells people to "*use their HQ* (headquarters to mean brain) *as life na PH* (per head to mean strictly personal)", she means they should learn to be discerning by applying wisdom in tackling personal challenges as there is no blanket solution to solving human problems.

As is typical of the style of the male comedians already discussed, Real Warri Pikin also has a signature opening call and response formula which she employs in initiating a special connection with her audience or listeners. Her cry of "*Area! Wetin dey play*?" to which the audience responds "*Nothing dey play*" usually sets the pace for the congenial mood or back and forth banter she skilfully sustains throughout her performance. However, social media, especially on Instagram, is where Real Warri Pikin has succeeded in making the most impact with her brand of

comedy. She has, to her credit, quite an impressive amount of video clips, each of about one minute maximum, through which she delivers salient home truths on a variety of issues on human relationships and lived realities (Real Warri Pikin, "Best of Real Warri Pikin: Funny & Motivational"). In some of these clips, she appropriates the role of the comedian as dramatist. She acts as a female traditional herbalist who uses a laptop, as against the traditional cowries, for divination, implying that this traditional practice has also been affected by globalisation. Many of her videos are inspirational even as she infuses a lot of witticism and other local flavour from her Warri background into addressing serious subject-matter.

Shared Warri commonalities of Nigeria's stand-up comedians

A shared experience of Warri and its environs and specific individual subjectivities thus inform the stand-up comedy genre as practiced by Warri-related performers in Nigeria. The Warri experience involves historical, socio-economic, cultural, and other factors that commingle to define the realities of the lives of the people. What has emerged from our discussion of the four representative stand-up comedians from the area is that there is a peculiar, or rather distinctive, Warri-ness in their language, gestures, response to reality, and total concept and practice of stand-up comedy that makes them unique in Nigeria. Most Nigerian comedians may be interested in the history of their specific hometowns. However, the Warri-related performers set themselves apart in the manner they utilise Warri's history as a city of sailors, *boma* boys, multiplicity of ethnic groups, and a certain proclivity for flamboyance and grand gestures despite often harrowing times. Historical happenings and societal norms possibly condition every comedian in one way or another. There is no doubt that Warri's unique history of growth from a sailor city through the oil boom days, and inter-ethnic strife to contemporary civil politics and changing social lifestyle feed the comedians with an abundance of material for their jokes.

Humour, jokes, and the concept of laughter among a people evolve. In Nigeria jokes are more pointed in periods of democracy, unlike in military dictatorship when jokes tend to be more subtle against the rulers. Nigeria's Third Republic has given stand-up comedians ample freedom to cast jokes at issues, personalities, and events. Warri-related comedians are reaping the dividends of democracy in their performances in which nothing is off bounds. The four comedians discussed were once at the margin economically but managed to struggle out of poverty by making a career out of comedy. They now make self-deprecating jokes of their previous abject position. They have successfully utilised Warri smartness to get out of their poor state through their use of their Warri characteristics and Warri slang, pidgin English, *yabis*, and gestures.

Gordons, I Go Dye, AY, and Real Warri Pikin share technical aspects of other Nigerian stand-up comedians that tap from the larger Nigerian history. However, in their use of interactive strategies, each has a unique trademark to enliven their audiences. While we have compared this strategy to what obtains in the oral poetic performance of *udje*, the contemporary stand-up comedians are fluid as they respond to their individual audience's reactions, quite unlike *udje* that has a text which the performer adheres to.

The comedians use their individual experiences of hardship in Warri to entertain. Together with poverty, there is a ludicrous quality to their lives which these comedians tap from in their performances. Many of the stand-up comedians were born or raised during the austere Structural Adjustment Period in Nigerian history when Nigerians learnt to manage scarce resources. Parody is a major technique used by the comedians who experienced it from the socio-economic realities of the time and their own culture. In Urhobo culture, there is the tendency to make do in a sarcastic way with very scarce resources. If a ritual is to be performed with a goat and the person is too poor to buy a goat, the person substitutes the head or any part of the goat for that ritual. The saying among Warri fishermen that it is better to catch a carp than catch nothing also shows this philosophy of life which the comedians express in their performances. The *howfordo* philosophy has to do with accepting the reality of very little rather than the much that is unattainable.

As already discussed, globalisation has energised Pentecostalism which has spread like wildfire at a critical period in Nigerian history. People have become generally more religious and are susceptible to the preaching of many of the evangelists who promise them prosperity and defence against witchcraft and other evils. However, many pastors have turned their ministries into businesses to make money. Furthermore, many pastors do not only promise their congregation impossibilities but themselves commit indiscretions which the comedians pick on in their performances.

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Conclusion

Nigeria's stand-up comedy is relatively young and continues to evolve. It is informed by socio-political and economic happenings in the country that both the performers and their audiences are familiar with. In the midst of multifarious national and social experiences, comedians with Warri-related experiences have not only continued to blaze the trail in the development of the genre but have also established a distinctive voice and performance art that set them apart. Their uniqueness arises from a confluence of factors that include Warri's history, the sociocultural background of its inhabitants, pidgin English and its associated banter, and, above all, the peculiar poverty or other personal experiences the comedians endured growing up in a supposedly oil-rich city. In the subgenre of Nigerian stand-up comedy, harsh local realities, relentless global onslaught and influences, and individual talents converge to form a vibrant, witty, slapdash humour in their words and gestures that not only make the comedians relive their past to better appreciate their present but also succeed in giving their audiences relief by laughing off their contemporary problems as Warri 'boys' or 'girls'.

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La femme et le mariage: du mot à l'image—*Xala* d'Ousmane Sembene

Maria Vrancken

Women in marriage: from word to image in Ousmane Sembene's *Xala*

Published as a novel in 1973 and released as a film in 1974, Ousmane Sembene's Xala offers his readers as well as his audience the most detailed display of one of his prominent themes: the role of women in marriage. This article examines how Sembene skilfully uses both literature and film to express the same theme and, in so doing, exploits each medium's strong points to complement each other in order to reinforce the message he wishes to convey. Sembene, the modern griot, knows that life is complex, and, in his written work, he includes exceptions and nuances, which he is unable to highlight in his film due to time constraints. In so doing, his novel reflects a more detailed depiction of reality. By contrast, in his cinematic version, he focuses on certain aspects of the novel and amplifies them with the aid of cinematic techniques. As a result, he transcends the abstract and superficial distinctions made between the traditional woman and the westernised woman to create a more nuanced and striking message where not all women are described as being victims of polygamy and some of them go as far as opposing it. He shows the audience the negative as well as the positive aspects of polygamy, thus attaining his aim, which is to educate his people. **Keywords:** Ousmane Sembene, Xala, women, marriage, literary techniques, cinematic techniques.

Introduction

Ousmane Sembene se distingue dans le monde de la littérature africaine de langue française tout autant que dans celui du cinéma en Afrique noire comme l'un des premiers grands champions de la cause de la femme africaine. Selon Mamadou Niang, pour Sembene, "*there can be no progress in Africa if women are left out of account*" (si on n'accorde pas aux femmes la place qui leur revient, il n'y aura pas de libération).[1] Nombre d'obstacles empêchent une grande majorité des femmes africaines de contribuer à la transformation de leur société. Sembene entend éduquer et transformer sa société. Pour atteindre cet objectif, il a cherché à donner dans son œuvre littéraire ainsi que cinématographique, "une place aux femmes en tant que force très importante de la société africaine" (Ortova 71). J'étudierai dans cet article comment, dans son roman *Xala* (1973) et son film éponyme (1974), l'auteur-cinéaste utilise les techniques de transposition d'un médium à l'autre à cette fin dans le contexte du mariage.[2]

Dans l'univers négro-africain musulman, le mariage n'est pas une union fondée sur l'amour entre un homme et une femme, mais un pacte entre deux familles (Trimingham 72). L'amour romantique à l'occidentale est considéré par les musulmans comme une fondation trop incertaine pour un acte aussi sérieux que le mariage (Denny 301).

Dans le mariage musulman, la femme a en théorie les mêmes droits que l'homme. En effet, l'Islam considère la femme comme l'égale de l'homme sur le plan moral, spirituel et intellectuel. La seule différence réside au niveau physique, où la femme est considérée comme étant plus faible que l'homme, et au niveau des affaires familiales où l'autorité finale est investie dans le mari (Nazhat et Khurshid 6, 18). Comme le dit le Coran: "Les femmes ont des droits équivalents à leurs obligations, conformément à la bienséance, mais les hommes ont un degré de préséance sur elles" (Coran sourate 2: 228).

Cette supériorité du mari est indissociable de certaines obligations envers ses femmes. Il doit une dot à la femme (Coran sourate 4:24). L'époux est aussi obligé d'assurer la sécurité matérielle de ses épouses (Coran sourate 2:236) et "[c]ette obligation est plus rigoureuse quand elles vivent ensemble" (Diop 52). Il est enfin contraint à les traiter toutes d'une manière affectueuse: "Comportez-vous envers elles avec bienséance. Si vous éprouvez de l'aversion pour elles, il se peut que vous éprouviez de l'aversion pour quelque chose en quoi Dieu a placé un grand bien" (Coran sourate 4:19).

Maria Vrancken est conférencière et coordonnatrice de la section de français du département de langue et de littérature de l'Université Nelson Mandela à Port Elizabeth en Afrique du Sud.
Email: maria.vrancken@mandela.ac.za
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7576-0328

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Sembene peint dans son roman ainsi que dans son film une société dans une grande mesure différente de la théorie mais très semblable à la réalité. Comme je l'ai dit, le mariage musulman n'est pas normalement basé sur un amour romantique. De la même manière,

> *Sembene's work is devoid of the individualistic love-marriage, or love-triangle focus which makes up the vast body of western prose fiction.* (Case 4)
>
> l'œuvre de Sembene est dépourvue de mariages d'amour ou de triangles amoureux individualistes qui constituent une vaste partie de la fiction occidentale en prose ainsi que du cinéma occidental.

Les complices de la polygamie

Le roman *Xala* est l'œuvre dans laquelle Sembene dépeint le plus minutieusement les coutumes suivies durant les démarches en vue de la conclusion d'un mariage traditionnel.[3] Selon la tradition, l'initiative de marier un enfant appartient dans la plupart des cas à ses parents (Ashbury 67). Ceux-ci, après avoir beaucoup réfléchi, choisissent très souvent avec l'aide d'une marieuse, un époux ou une épouse pour leur descendant.

La femme qu'il s'agit de marier dans *Xala* s'appelle N'Goné, une jeune femme qui a abandonné ses études. Son dernier espoir est donc de trouver un mari en utilisant sa jeunesse et sa beauté comme appâts. C'est Mam Fatou, la mère de N'Goné, qui commence les démarches parce qu'elle ne veut pas que sa fille devienne "fille-mère" (*Xala* 14–5). En effet, N'Goné ne fréquente que des jeunes gens chômeurs de réputation douteuse et se comporte comme une jeune femme légère et mondaine qui fait preuve d'irresponsabilité et de manque de maturité (15–6).

Il y a donc trois raisons qui poussent les parents à marier leur fille. Tout d'abord, la famille cherche un avenir aisé pour la jeune femme ainsi que pour la famille. Deuxièmement, ses parents veulent éviter ce qu'ils considèrent inacceptable: "Jamais, dans notre famille, il n'y a eu de filles-mères" (15). Enfin, tous les personnages assument que, dans la société traditionnelle, "on ne peut pas tolérer une femme qui n'a pas de mari" (Moore 230).

Sembene présente la mère de N'Goné comme une femme pragmatique qui possède beaucoup plus de bon sens que son mari et qui ne partage pas l'attitude fataliste de ce dernier: "Yalla est mon témoin, si notre N'Goné avait un mari, j'en serais très heureux. Mais tout ceci est une question de chance. Yalla seul distille la chance, dit-il avec beaucoup de circonspection" (*Xala* 15).

Cette attitude irrite Mam Fatou: "Yalla! Yalla! Il faut labourer son champ, rétorqu[e] sa femme avec vivacité" (15). Elle est de l'avis qu'ils doivent en tant que parents prendre l'avenir de leur fille en main et intervenir avec l'aide de Yay Bineta, sa belle-sœur.[4] Cette attitude témoigne du caractère dominateur de Mam Fatou. Son époux, le vieux Babacar, admet lui-même que "[l]'emprise de sa femme était sans bornes" et ses compagnons "disaient que chez Babacar, c'était sa femme qui enfourchait les pantalons" (15).

Yay Bineta, la marieuse, n'est pas un personnage sympathique. La manière dont Sembene la dépeint laisse une impression négative sur le lecteur: "[C]ourte sur pattes, forte de croupe, visage noiraud et gras, les yeux pleins de malice" (14). Elle est maligne et fouineuse: "Telle une araignée, laborieusement, [elle] tissait la toile" (19). Les arachnides auxquels elle est comparée n'ont pas de connotation positive: ce sont des créatures assidues comme la marieuse, mais aussi perçues comme agressives et dangereuses. De même que l'araignée, tout le travail qu'elle accomplit est fait dans son propre intérêt: "pour nous, [dit-elle, El Hadji] est un beau parti!" (21). Sembene condamne ici son avidité et son indifférence au bonheur personnel de "sa fille".

N'Goné étant jeune et influençable, Yay Bineta contrôle complètement sa vie. Elle a aussi du pouvoir sur El Hadji puisqu'elle réussit par sa ténacité et son éloquence à manipuler ce dernier pour lui faire accepter une troisième épouse: "Fine stratège, elle conditionne l'homme […] pour pousser sa nièce dans les bras du commerçant" (Tcheuyap 163).

Tout d'abord, "Yay Bineta habille convenablement N'Goné" (*Xala* 16) avant de la présenter à El Hadji qu'elle connaît "de longue date" (17). Ensuite, en "langage ancien, ésotérique" (17), la marieuse et El Hadji discutent la valeur de N'Goné. Cette dernière, "enfant des drapeaux et hymnes nationaux [c'est-à-dire, une fille qui a grandi dans le Sénégal moderne et ne comprend pas les traditions africaines], ne saisi[t] rien de ce dialogue hermétique" (17). On se rend compte ici que N'Goné n'est pas appelée à jouer un rôle dans la recherche de son futur époux. Elle est forcée à s'unir à un homme qui appartient à une autre génération.

Par la suite, Yay Bineta exploite l'orgueil d'El Hadji en le défiant: "Tu as peur de tes femmes! Ce sont tes femmes qui décident, portent les pantalons chez toi? Pourquoi ne viens-tu pas nous voir?" (18). Il tombe dans le

piège: "Jamais, se disait-il, une femme ne lui dicterait sa conduite. Pour prouver qu'il était maître chez lui, il raccompagna la fille chez ses parents" (18).

Yay Bineta a aussi recours au désir de statut social d'El Hadji—"Cette troisième union le hissait au rang de la notabilité traditionnelle, […] c'était une promotion" (12)—ainsi qu'aux mensonges et flatteries: "[N]ous pouvons t'affirmer que notre fille ne voit que par tes yeux, n'entend que par tes oreilles" (19). Elle utilise en outre le prétexte que N'Goné cherche du travail pour que la jeune femme puisse aller le voir souvent. Il s'en suit que "[l]e glissement de l'homme se faisait doucement, [u]ne mutation des sentiments s'opérait" chez le protagoniste (18).

Finalement, Yay Bineta fait appel à la religiosité et à la fierté masculine d'El Hadji quand il a recours à ses deux femmes comme excuse pour ne pas en prendre une troisième: "N'était-il pas musulman? Fils de musulman? Pourquoi repoussait-il ce que Yalla souhaitait? Etait-il un tubab pour consulter ses épouses? Le pays avait-il perdu ses hommes d'hier? Ses hommes valeureux dont le sang coulait dans ses veines?" (20)

La conclusion est inévitable: El Hadji est "harponné par la Badiène" et cède "par faiblesse" (20).

La plupart des détails minutieux dans le roman sont omis dans le film. Sur l'écran, il n'y a aucune mention du passé de N'Goné ainsi que de son désir de danser et d'être avec ceux de sa génération. Elle est soumise et on ne connaît jamais ses sentiments à l'égard du mariage. Elle est simplement présentée comme un trophée qui atteste le statut social d'El Hadji. Délibérément, Sembene ne lui donne pas de voix et, abstraction faite de son rôle de troisième femme, elle n'a pas de caractère ni d'existence propre. Le réalisateur la montre comme "femme-objet" (Pfaff 28) non seulement par son manque de voix et de personnalité, mais aussi en utilisant le symbolisme. Un exemple est le mannequin qui la remplace vers la fin du film. Dans la scène en question, Sembene montre en plan américain un des mendiants portant le diadème de la mariée sur le front. Il prend la place d'El Hadji à côté du mannequin qui porte la perruque et la robe de N'Goné pendant que les mendiants se moquent d'El Hadji. Ensuite, quand ce dernier se trouve torse nu dans le salon, le mendiant met le diadème sur la tête d'El Hadji—une image grotesque et une allusion parfaite aux maigres vestiges de son troisième mariage. Ce symbole n'apparaît pas seulement dans cette séquence. Sembene le montre en effet dans le récit cinématographique. Le scénariste utilise le montage pour rendre évident un concept abstrait. La réitération de ce symbolisme devient un leitmotiv. Chaque fois que Sembene veut souligner le rapport entre la jeune mariée et le fait qu'El Hadji a commis une faute en se mariant une troisième fois, il introduit des images du mannequin. Ce symbole est également présent dans le roman (*Xala* 43, 45, 159 et 162) mais n'a pas la force de frappe des images dans le film. Il y a aussi la photo de N'Goné nue, accrochée au mur de la chambre nuptiale et montrée en arrière-plan pendant que la Badiène lui donne des conseils concernant ses devoirs de bonne épouse. La photo souligne la promesse de ce que le mariage est censé apporter à El Hadji. C'est la N'Goné érotique de la photo qu'il épouse (Murphy 117). Cet objet-symbole n'apparaît pas dans le roman.

Le film omet les rapports entre la Badiène et les parents de N'Goné. Il omet aussi les manœuvres de Yay Bineta pour faire en sorte qu'El Hadji prenne N'Goné comme troisième épouse. Dans le film, on rencontre la marieuse pour la première fois durant les noces lorsqu'elle se vante des cadeaux offerts à la mariée. Tout comme dans le roman, elle est avide d'argent et d'objets de valeur. Elle accueille aussi chaleureusement les deux autres femmes d'El Hadji: "Mes chères, vous n'avez rien pris comme rafraîchissement. Servez-vous. C'est aussi votre maison", leur dit-elle, par hypocrisie plutôt que par gentillesse.

Sembene la montre aussi dans une scène comique où elle essaye de convaincre El Hadji de se conformer à une superstition africaine. Cette dernière exige que le marié s'assoie sur un mortier, le symbole phallique du pilon entre les jambes pour qu'il puisse être à la hauteur le soir de ses noces. Mais El Hadji refuse de suivre ses "conseils".

Plus tard, quand il se rend dans la chambre nuptiale avec sa nouvelle épouse, la Badiène les accompagne et contrôle tout. Le fait que Sembene les filme de dos avec El Hadji suivant sagement les deux femmes en tenant le voile de son épouse est significatif. C'est surtout le cas après la scène précédente où El Hadji se trouve entre ses collègues, se sent tout puissant et déborde de confiance. Le cinéaste utilise le contraste d'atmosphère dans ces deux scènes pour créer la tension dramatique. Après l'atmosphère festive et joviale entre amis, le spectateur ressent la tension nerveuse créée par le silence. Une fois qu'El Hadji se trouve seul entre les deux femmes, il perd sa voix ainsi que sa confiance en lui et ne fait que les suivre. Le roman inclut aussi l'épisode où les collègues d'El Hadji lui offrent des conseils sur des aphrodisiaques. Cependant, le marié ne se montre pas confiant comme il l'est à l'écran puisqu'il ne dit mot. Par contre, le roman n'inclut pas la procession vers la chambre nuptiale.

Après leur entrée dans la chambre, la Badiène envoie El Hadji dans la salle de bains et lui ordonne de se préparer pour passer sa première nuit avec sa nouvelle épouse. Il obéit sans se plaindre. De son côté, la marieuse

déshabille la mariée et la prépare pour sa nuit de noces. Ce faisant, la Badiène avertit la jeune femme: "Tu dois avoir à l'esprit que l'homme n'est pas l'égal de la femme. L'homme est le maître. Tu dois être disponible. Tu ne dois pas élever ta voix. Il faut être soumise".

Passons maintenant du portrait psychologique au portrait physique de la marieuse à l'écran. Sembene ne la montre qu'une fois en gros plan. Contrairement au roman, elle n'est pas dépeinte de manière négative. Son portrait physique se conforme à la convention africaine pour la femme d'âge moyen (Macrae 242). Elle est de forte constitution, robuste, aux traits ni fins ni laids et porte avec des coiffes assorties des boubous larges pour couvrir sa corpulence.

Les victimes de la polygamie

Pour ce qui est de N'Goné, il est intéressant de noter comment Sembene décrit la jeune femme et la nature du désir qu'El Hadji, un homme d'un âge déjà avancé, éprouve pour sa fraîcheur: "N'Goné [...] avait la saveur d'un fruit, que ses femmes avaient perdue depuis longtemps. La chair ferme, lisse, l'haleine fraîche l'attiraient vers elle. Entre ses deux épouses, l'exigence quotidienne de ses affaires, N'Goné était la paisible oasis de la traversée du désert" (*Xala* 18).

Notons les métaphores employées par Sembene dans ce passage. La première tourne autour de la gourmandise. Il compare N'Goné à un fruit qui donne envie d'être mangé. Elle est appétissante, elle est jeune et a la "chair ferme, lisse" comme un beau fruit qu'El Hadji désire avec avidité. Plus tard dans le récit, on lit, quand les mariés se retrouvent dans la chambre nuptiale, que "[l]'homme contemplait ce corps avec une insistance gourmande" (43). Cette comparaison sert aussi à accentuer une fois de plus l'aspect sexuel de leur mariage ainsi que le fait que la jeune femme est traitée et considérée par son époux comme un objet.

La seconde métaphore présente N'Goné comme une "paisible oasis" dans "la traversée du désert" d'El Hadji (*Xala* 18). Cette métaphore est revêtue d'ironie parce qu'on apprend plus loin que N'Goné fut tout sauf une source de calme et de paix dans la vie d'El Hadji. C'est en effet ce troisième mariage qui a transformé sa vie en "désert". Lié à cette image de l'oasis dans le roman est, à l'écran, le nom de la villa de N'Goné inscrit sur une des colonnes de la grille du jardin: "coin de ciel". La caméra le dévoile juste au moment où la vie d'El Hadji est le contraire d'un paradis sur terre. C'est encore un exemple de l'ingéniosité de Sembene cinéaste puisqu'il utilise une petite image filmique pour donner au spectateur beaucoup d'informations. Dans le roman, cette nuance est absente parce que "[c]haque villa avait été baptisée du nom de l'épouse" (24).

La N'Goné de l'écran reflète aussi la convention africaine en ce qui concerne le type physique. Dans le cinéma africain, la femme nubile a tendance à être svelte avec un visage de beauté classique compatible avec les conventions occidentales. Elle est souvent assez grande et porte des vêtements moulants, soit occidentaux soit africains, pour complimenter son corps élancé. Son apparence révèle la beauté de la jeunesse et la vitalité sexuelle (Macrae 242). La caméra la présente en très gros plan derrière son voile de mariée, les cheveux nattés à l'africaine, le visage jeune et joli sans aucun signe de bonheur. Ses lèvres charnues et voluptueuses sont sans sourire. Elle reste, malgré l'attention que la caméra lui porte surtout au début du film, une femme type sans profondeur qui est présente seulement pour plaire à l'homme. Le spectateur ne la voit pas en dehors de son rôle de jeune femme appétissante soit en robe de mariée, soit complètement déshabillée.

Les métaphores à l'écrit sont perdues dans le film, mais Sembene les remplace par d'autres techniques dans la scène de préparation des mariés pour leur nuit de noces. Le montage alterné (Metz 120) a de nouveau un impact saisissant sur le message que Sembene veut transmettre. Afin de montrer au spectateur le désir d'El Hadji envers sa nouvelle épouse, le cinéaste alterne les syntagmes. Les premiers dévoilent soit N'Goné en train d'être déshabillée par sa mère en premier plan, soit une photo de son buste nu et sensuel accroché au mur de la chambre nuptiale. Les seconds, en plan rapproché, montrent El Hadji en train de se préparer pour sa première nuit. Le sens du montage est clair. Avec cette série de syntagmes juxtaposés, Sembene permet au spectateur d'entrer dans les pensées d'El Hadji concentrées sur le beau corps qui l'attend dans la chambre nuptiale.

À l'écran, le couple ne se parle jamais. Leurs relations sont purement sexuelles. Le même message est dans le roman, mais avec quelques nuances. Il y a en effet des conversations. Elles tournent cependant sur des sujets banals (*Xala* 98) parce que les époux n'ont pas d'intérêts communs et qu'il y a entre eux une grande différence d'âge (9, 14).

Quant à la façon dont le mariage est consommé, le roman explique que N'Goné "pleurait" par "pudeur ou timidité" (43) au moment de passer sa nuit de noces. Sa réaction après le lendemain matin—N'Goné "sanglotait"

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(44) et "poussa un cri: un cri d'animal en détresse"—témoigne de la frustration et de la honte que la jeune femme ressent parce que le mariage n'a pas été consommé. Ses sentiments s'expliquent par le fait que, dans la société wolof, comme dans beaucoup d'autres sociétés africaines, la virginité et la défloration de la mariée sont d'une importance capitale.

Dans le film, Sembene fait une critique plus acerbe de l'absurdité de ce type de mariage et emploie l'humour pour la communiquer. Après les espoirs de la veille, les deux mariés sont assis abattus sur leur lit. Tous les deux regardent vers le bas, El Hadji avec sa tête entre les mains. La Badiène, accompagnée d'un autre membre de la famille portant un coq et un couteau, est prête, si nécessaire, à fabriquer l'évidence, le drap tâché du sang de la vierge. La scène avec les cris angoissés du coq qui ponctuent les explications du couple et les récriminations de la Badiène est particulièrement comique.

Les lois coraniques permettent à un homme d'avoir quatre épouses: "Épousez deux, trois ou quatre femmes parmi celles qui vous semblent bonnes" (Coran sourate 4:3). Ceci n'est cependant permis que si l'homme a les moyens de traiter toutes ses épouses de la même façon. Cette condition est seulement de nature morale (Coran sourate 4:3). Il ne s'agit en effet pas d'une restriction légale au droit de l'époux. C'est une des raisons pour lesquelles il existe encore de nombreux mariages polygames (Diop 51). Les dispositions coraniques concernant le statut et la position des femmes dans la famille sont par conséquent tombées en désuétude et ont été largement perdues (Coulson et Hinchcliffe 52).

Aucun personnage ne symbolise mieux cette soumission de la femme qu'Adja Awa Astou, la première femme d'El Hadji. Ijere explique que, dans le texte romanesque:

> [Awa] est fataliste et accepte sa condition de femme négligée par son mari. Elle est tellement détachée et soumise à son époux qu'elle ne réagit même pas quand il ne remplit pas ses devoirs conjugaux. [Elle] cache ses sentiments au fond d'elle-même et il ne lui vient pas à l'idée de se révolter.
>
> Quand elle apprend le troisième mariage de son mari, elle se sent profondément blessée mais réussit à se dominer au nom de la religion. (26)

À l'écran, quand Rama, sa fille, essaye de la convaincre de divorcer, Awa lui répond qu'elle "n'approuve pas ce troisième mariage, ni le deuxième mariage de [s]on père" mais que "devant l'adversité nous devons être patients".

Sembene décrit néanmoins la première épouse d'El Hadji de manière positive. On apprend ainsi dans le roman qu'elle ne s'est pas mariée par devoir, que son père était farouchement catholique et s'était opposé à son mariage avec un musulman, mais qu'elle s'était "apostasiée par amour pour mieux partager les félicités d'une vie conjugale" (*Xala* 24). Les détails de sa vie avant son mariage sont omis dans le film. La seule façon dont Sembene aurait pu les montrer aurait été en ajoutant un retour en arrière. Il a décidé cependant de ne pas le faire parce que le film est déjà long et veut garder sa chronologie aussi linéaire et simple que possible (Wynchank 134).

Le portrait peint dans l'œuvre romanesque décrit Adja Awa Astou comme une femme qui a la quarantaine. Malgré ses six grossesses, elle a "conservé un corps élancé" et a toujours "le teint d'un noir tendre, le front bombé, la ligne du nez délicat, un rien élargi, un visage qu'animaient des sourires retenus [et] le regard candide derrière des yeux en amande". Notre auteur ajoute aussi que, malgré son "apparence fragile", elle avait "une volonté et une ténacité sans bornes" (*Xala* 24). En dépit du fait qu'elle est la plus âgée des trois femmes d'El Hadji, Sembene ne la décrit pas comme une vieille femme qui a perdu son attrait. Il la dépeint comme une femme non seulement attirante physiquement, mais surtout d'un bon tempérament et une épouse exemplaire qui reflète "*quiet dignity [and] patient devotion to the principles of a Muslim marriage*" (une dignité tranquille [et] une dévotion patiente aux principes d'un mariage musulman) (Gugler et Diop 148).

La première fois qu'Adja Awa Astou est introduite dans le film, elle est présentée en premier plan et en plan américain dans une pose digne et sereine manipulant son *sotiou*, un long cure-dents associé à la tradition africaine (Metz 114, 116). Elle est vêtue d'un habit traditionnel composé d'un long boubou ainsi que d'une coiffe et d'un châle assortis qui lui couvrent la tête et le cou. Seun Samb, l'actrice qui la représente, n'est pas aussi jeune et jolie que Dieynaba Dieng qui joue le rôle de N'Goné. Elle a aussi une cicatrice sur son sourcil droit permettant au cinéaste de montrer quelques petits ravages de l'âge. Ce n'est que durant la réception du troisième mariage de son mari et l'humiliation d'El Hadji à la fin du film qu'elle est filmée en gros plan. Ceci est rare dans les films de Sembene où ce sont surtout les plans américains et les plans lointains qui prédominent (Ashbury 89). En effet, le cinéaste réserve les gros plans pour les moments où il est crucial de diminuer la distance psychologique entre le personnage et le spectateur. Dans le premier cas, il veut dévoiler au spectateur le rapport entre les deux premières

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épouses et leurs opinions sur le troisième mariage de leur époux. Ce faisant, Sembene montre un des aspects négatifs de la polygamie. Dans le second cas, Sembene veut faire partager au spectateur la souffrance qui se lit sur le visage trempé de larmes d'Awa pendant qu'elle regarde son mari humilié en public.

L'auteur-cinéaste inclut également une femme moderne dans sa peinture réaliste de la femme. Il s'agit d'Oumi N'Doye, la deuxième épouse d'El Hadji qui ne pense qu'à satisfaire ses propres désirs, ne respecte pas son mari et se moque souvent de lui. Quand il a le *xala*, au lieu de lui témoigner de la compréhension, elle l'insulte: "Je ne suis pas de bois, comme disent les Français. Je te préviens que, moi aussi, je peux aller ailleurs" (*Xala* 103).[5]

À l'écran, lorsque les deux époux sont ensemble dans la chambre d'Oumi, Sembene les montre en plan américain, partageant le cadre des plans. Mais très vite El Hadji devient l'objet silencieux des récriminations d'Oumi. Cette dernière commence à prendre de plus en plus de place sur l'écran quand elle se penche vers lui, insulte Awa et exige qu'il lui donne de l'argent. Elle domine aussi l'espace par sa position au-dessus d'El Hadji. Elle est assise sur un tabouret tandis qu'il est assis sur le lit qui se trouve plus bas. El Hadji essaye de la dompter en se levant et en élevant la voix. Elle n'a toutefois pas peur de ses menaces et le force à se rasseoir. Le spectateur a l'impression que le mari n'a jamais le dessus et que c'est Oumi qui contrôle toujours la situation. Cette impression est confirmée lorsqu'ils sortent de la chambre et qu'elle le pousse sans ménagement vers la porte.

Sembene ne se limite pas au traitement des relations entre co-épouses et leurs époux. Il affronte aussi la délicate question des rapports entre co-épouses.

Comme je l'ai déjà mentionné, le Coran pose comme condition au mariage polygame que toutes les épouses soient traitées sur un pied d'égalité. Sembene montre que tel n'est très souvent pas le cas en pratique et que la nouvelle femme est presque toujours la favorite. Ceci cause jalousie, rivalité et frustration entre les co-épouses. L'usage incorrect de l'institution polygamique semble être la cause dans *Xala* des souffrances de la deuxième femme d'El Hadji lors du troisième mariage de ce dernier.

Dans le film, cette jalousie est montrée de manière frappante. Sembene emploie plusieurs "épisodes" pour souligner cet aspect négatif de la polygamie. Les première et deuxième femmes assistent par devoir aux troisièmes noces de mariage de leur mari. Elles vont s'asseoir dans une autre salle que celle où se passe la réception pour ne pas voir le nouveau couple ensemble. Awa est celle qui souffre le plus de ce mariage. Quant à elle, Oumi est seulement jalouse parce qu'elle n'est plus celle qui va recevoir toutes les attentions sexuelles de son mari. En effet, elle oublie très vite ses problèmes et ne pense qu'à se divertir quand un autre homme s'intéresse à elle. Awa, par contre, se sent mise sur la touche: "Toi et moi, sommes de trop ici", dit-elle à sa co-épouse avant de quitter les festivités. Le contraste entre les deux femmes est beaucoup plus frappant dans le film. La caméra filme d'abord en premier plan le couple formé par Oumi, une grande femme surmontée de sa perruque et à la robe noire décolletée, dansant avec le minuscule Président de la Chambre, les yeux au niveau de la poitrine de sa partenaire. Les intentions satiriques de cette scène sont évidentes. Après cela, la caméra suit Adja Awa Astou qui quitte de manière digne, fière et sereine la propriété de la troisième épouse en passant à côté de la voiture-cadeau à l'entrée de la villa.

Mais la jalousie ne se limite pas aux sentiments que ressentent Adja Awa Astou et Oumi N'Doye envers la jeune co-épouse. Malgré le fait qu'elles se témoignent un minimum de politesse quand elles se rencontrent en public (et ceci se produit très rarement) aucune amitié n'existe entre elles. Il est en fait évident que ces deux femmes ne s'aiment pas. Oumi n'a aucun respect pour Awa, son aînée. Dans le roman, elle dit à la Badiène d'un ton sarcastique sans laisser le temps à sa co-épouse de placer un mot: "N'aie crainte, nous avons l'habitude! Nous sommes une même famille; le même sang coule dans les veines de nos enfants. […] Je prends exemple sur notre aînée, Adja. Je remercie Yalla de me mettre à l'épreuve, afin qu'à mon tour, moi aussi, je puisse prouver que je ne suis ni jalouse, ni égoïste" (*Xala* 33).

Oumi est pourtant très jalouse et ne rate pas une occasion d'extérioriser ce sentiment en présence de leur mari en appelant Awa "une vieille peau de poisson sec" et en la soupçonnant d'être la cause de l'impuissance d'El Hadji.

Awa n'est cependant pas sévère et demeure digne. Elle démontre par ses actes qu'elle est consciente de ses droits et obligations en tant que première épouse (Petty 70). Malgré le fait qu'elle se soumet aux règles d'une société polygame, Sembene montre de manière très subtile qu'elle a du pouvoir. C'est le cas, par exemple, dans la scène où El Hadji se trouve seul avec elle et la prie de sortir de la voiture pour saluer Oumi dans sa villa. Le réalisateur emploie le procédé du champ-contrechamp (Binet 87) pendant leur court échange. Dans chaque champ où apparaît El Hadji hors de la voiture, il se penche vers Awa et reste dans la partie gauche du cadre pendant qu'Awa prend la partie droite du cadre. Les contrechamps avec Awa, en revanche, la montrent centrée

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dans le cadre en plan américain. Sembene lui donne de cette façon une position plus imposante à l'écran d'où elle rappelle avec fermeté à son époux les règles islamiques quant au mariage qui stipulent que c'est Oumi qui doit venir chez elle et pas l'inverse (Petty 70).

Dans le roman, durant la même scène, Sembene peint avec des mots lourds de sens une profondeur d'émotions qu'il n'est pas possible de montrer à l'écran. Les paroles d'Awa sont aussi plus sévères:

> Elle se maîtrisait pour ne pas exploser. Du fin fond d'elle-même, telle des vagues furieuses, sa déception grondait. Sincèrement croyante, elle se dominait, domptait sa fureur, suppliait son Yalla de l'assister. Contrôlant un débit de paroles, elle dit:
>
> —El Hadji, d'avance je te demande pardon! Mais tu sembles oublier que je suis ta AWA. Je ne mettrai pas les pieds dans cette maison. J'attendrai ici. (*Xala* 29)

À l'écran, pendant la réception, Oumi s'adresse à Awa sans enlever ses lunettes de soleil. Awa lui fait comprendre, en baissant les lunettes de cette dernière, qu'elle se rend compte qu'elle souffre aussi, cachée derrière le masque de ses lunettes noires. Les deux femmes apparaissent sur l'écran en gros premier plan, une technique que Sembene utilise quand il veut attirer l'attention du spectateur. Awa montre alors à Oumi que c'est elle qui commande lorsque, après avoir pris une petite gorgée de coca-cola, Awa passe le verre à Oumi pour qu'elle le remette sur la table. Le regard contrarié d'Oumi, montré en gros plan, ainsi que son hésitation, dévoilent clairement ses émotions envers son aînée. Après le départ de Awa,

> *departed in a gale of anger that sweeps from her headgear to rustle the hanging vines, the camera closes in on Oumi as she plucks the miniature effigy of the couple off the wedding cake, and then snaps off the effigy's head just as the camera cuts to the car key.* (Adesokan 64)
>
> partie dans une bourrasque de colère émanant de son couvre-chef pour causer de bruissements dans les vignes suspendues, la caméra se referme sur Oumi arrachant l'effigie miniature du couple hors du gâteau de mariage, avant de couper la tête de l'effigie lorsque la caméra se tourne vers la clé de la voiture.

En raison de ces relations peu satisfaisantes dans les mariages polygames, quelques personnages féminins se rebellent contre leur condition. Rien n'illustre mieux ce point que *Xala* où le sentiment de révolte conduit quelques femmes à quitter leur époux, voire à divorcer. Sembene montre les deux plus jeunes femmes d'El Hadji, mues par l'égoïsme et la rapacité, délaissant leur époux parce qu'il n'est plus capable de leur offrir la vie de confort et de luxe qu'elles attendent: "Le même jour, après avoir quitté El Hadji, Yay Bineta déménageait avec la troisième femme. Les femmes louèrent un camion-taxi, y empilèrent les meubles, la vaisselle, laissèrent les portes grandes ouvertes" (*Xala* 153).

À l'écrit, Sembene consacre quatre pages (155–9) à la demande de divorce faite par la marieuse qui, une fois de plus, fait tout au lieu de N'Goné. Le seul objet qu'elle rend à El Hadji est le diadème et le mannequin habillé de la robe de mariée. En quittant la maison de ses beaux-parents, El Hadji comprend vite pourquoi N'Goné avait eu hâte de divorcer: "À leur rencontre arrivait N'Goné, la main dans la main avec un jeune homme en chemise cintrée; son pantalon bridait ses fesses" (159). La demande de divorce est omise à l'écran. Sembene la remplace par la séquence saisissante et symbolique de la remise du mannequin. On voit le voile de la mariée voler dans le vent hors de la fenêtre de la voiture. Ce voile est symbolique du mariage éphémère qui n'a pas su résister aux obstacles de la vie parce qu'il était seulement fondé sur l'avidité.

Quant à Oumi N'Doye, "sans prévenir son mari, elle alla s'installer chez ses parents dans un quartier populaire avec sa progéniture. […] [E]lle vida, elle aussi, la villa jusqu'aux rideaux, frigidaires, tapis, etc." (154).

À l'écran, Sembene ne montre pas sa destination, mais le cinéaste consacre toute une scène à son départ. Elle fait vider la villa de chaque meuble et de chaque tableau. Sembene souligne ici combien les objets lui sont importants et confirme que le mariage était fondé sur le matérialisme.

La "vieille" Awa (mot arabe qui veut dire: première épouse, nom de la première femme sur terre) (29) ne se comporte pas de cette manière. Elle comprend l'institution polygamique et accepte son rôle traditionnel de soutien de son mari sans se préoccuper de l'argent et du succès. Elle lui reste fidèle pendant ses mésaventures, vend même ses bijoux pour l'aider à payer ses dettes (152) et reste près de lui pendant son humiliation. Le message que Sembene communique indique que la polygamie a été une malédiction pour El Hadji et qu'il aurait pu vivre une vie réussie s'il s'était contenté d'Awa. C'est elle qui, selon Sembene, est la plus importante.

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L'adversaire de la polygamie

En marge des personnages féminins que j'ai étudiés jusqu'ici et qui se trouvent contraints de se conformer aux obligations de la vie conjugale, on rencontre également une femme célibataire qui approche cette institution de l'extérieur. C'est à travers cette femme que Sembene laisse entrevoir les raisons pour lesquelles la plupart des femmes se trouvent prises au piège des abus de la polygamie.

Rama, qui est sans aucun doute le porte-parole de Sembene (Pfaff 30), est la seule à se prononcer suffisamment sur ce sujet dans le film et dans le roman pour que l'on puisse en tirer un certain nombre de conclusions. Ce n'est pas un hasard si Rama fréquente l'université. Sa formation intellectuelle va de pair avec son rejet des traditions et surtout de l'obligation de soumission et de docilité de la femme mariée.[6] Rama ne cache pas à sa mère qu'elle n'est pas d'accord avec le troisième mariage de son père: "Mère, tu ne vas pas nous dire, ici, à Mactar et moi, que tu es d'accord, que ce troisième mariage de père a lieu avec ton consentement! […]—Mère, je ne suis pas une petite fille. J'ai vingt ans. Jamais je ne partagerai mon mari avec une autre femme" (25).

Elle n'hésite pas non plus à faire savoir à son père qu'elle est "foncièrement contre la polygamie" (71): "Je suis contre ce mariage. Un polygame n'est jamais un homme franc" (27).

Malgré le fait que Sembene dépeint Rama comme féministe et radicale, il montre dans le roman qu'elle n'a toutefois pas perdu sa féminité lorsqu'elle parle en plaisantant avec son petit ami, un homme instruit comme elle (72). On apprend qu'ils ont l'intention de se marier, qu'ils se considèrent égaux et qu'il n'est pas question de mariage polygame.

À l'écran, Rama n'a pas de petit ami et elle est aussi une jeune universitaire libérale. Son esprit combatif et son affiliation politique sont reflétés par les signifiants visuels éloquents des posters d'Amilcar Lopes Cabral et de Samory Touré, deux héros de la résistance contre le colonialisme, qui se trouvent accrochés aux murs de sa chambre.

Comme ses posters, les vêtements que Rama porte suggèrent aussi qu'elle ne suit pas aveuglement les cultures étrangères.[7] C'est une femme intelligente à l'esprit équilibré qui est capable de s'approprier les éléments positifs de la culture occidentale sans compromettre son identité africaine. Il est aussi évident que le troisième mariage de son père la révolte, comme le reflètent dès le début du film ses paroles encore plus acerbes que celles prononcées dans le roman: "Jamais je ne partagerai mon mari avec une autre femme! […] Je ne mettrai pas les pieds à la cérémonie! […] Les hommes sont tous des salauds. […] Tout homme qui pratique la polygamie est un menteur".

Ces paroles sont prononcées pendant que le père et la fille sont filmés face à face dans un gros plan qui accentue l'hostilité entre eux. Elle répète ses paroles sans avoir peur des menaces de son père. Elle refuse ainsi d'accepter l'ordre patriarcal représenté par son père et par le système polygamique soutenu par les hommes (Thackway 176). Cependant, comme Sembene, elle a un sens de l'équilibre, elle aime son père et, à la fin du film, le réalisateur montre Rama l'aidant à se racheter une fois qu'il s'est rendu compte des fautes qu'il a commises.

Conclusion

Le griot moderne qu'est Sembene dépeint le rôle de la femme dans le contexte du mariage de manière réaliste et minutieuse. Il sait que la vie est complexe et il la décrit comme telle: une vie remplie d'obstacles auxquels les femmes sont confrontées. Cette peinture révèle les multiples nuances d'un environnement influencé depuis maintes générations par plusieurs facteurs tels l'animisme, l'Islam et le modèle capitaliste occidental. Il en résulte des contradictions qui ne sont cependant qu'apparentes. Par exemple, Sembene ne se contredit pas lorsqu'il présente les personnages féminins incarnant la culture traditionnelle africaine tantôt de manière positive, comme dans le cas d'Adja Astou, tantôt de manière négative, comme dans le cas de la Badienne. Ceci est le cas parce que l'artiste-militant transcende les distinctions abstraites et superficielles, telles que celle qui existe entre la femme traditionnelle africaine et la femme occidentalisée, pour séparer de manière presque chirurgicale ce qu'il considère positif de ce qu'il considère négatif dans le prisme complexe de l'existence des Africaines. Par exemple, Sembene ne décrit pas toutes les femmes comme victimes de la polygamie. Il adopte cette approche parce qu'il plaide pour un amalgame des atouts dont les Africaines disposent, quelles que soient leurs origines. L'étudiante Rama incarne l'idéal de Sembene: Instruite, indépendante, elle ne se soumet pas aux volontés de son père et s'oppose à la polygamie.

L'écrit est le moyen d'expression le plus approprié pour inclure exceptions et nuances en raison des moindres contraintes quant à la longueur. Dans le roman, il introduit donc au lecteur étranger les détails des relations familiales de la bourgeoisie à Dakar et, en ce faisant, "*denounces these* arrivistes *of early postcolonial days*" (dénonce

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les parvenus du début de l'époque postcoloniale) (Gugler et Diop 153). À l'écran, le cinéaste n'a ni les moyens ni souvent le temps d'inclure autant de détails. Il choisit cependant certains aspects de l'écrit et les amplifie à l'aide de la richesse de techniques cinématographiques à sa disposition pour manipuler l'opinion du spectateur sénégalais sur certains sujets, comme le mariage polygame, pour atteindre son but principal qui est d'éduquer son peuple.

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Notes
1. Toutes les traductions sont les miennes.
2. Quoique le roman ait été publié en 1973 et le film soit sorti une année plus tard, c'est le scénario qui a été conçu avant le texte littéraire (Diang'a 146).
3. J'ai classifié ce mariage comme traditionnel quoiqu'il comporte un grand nombre d'imitations des modes occidentales parce que l'écrivain explique que les coutumes et la tradition ont occupé une place importante dans la cérémonie: "Pour ce troisième mariage, la partie traditionaliste se tenait chez les parents de la jeune fille. Ici, la coutume avait été respectée, mieux, on avait ressuscité l'antique règle" (*X* 12).
4. Elle est en effet, selon la tradition africaine, considérée aussi comme la mère de sa nièce (Gugler et Diop 149): "Yay Bineta, tu es connue de tout N'Dakarrou, N'Goné est ta fille" (*X* 16) dit Mam Fatou.
5. El Hadji est atteint d'une impuissance sexuelle, physique, psychologique ainsi qu'économique.
6. Son travail à l'université consiste en traductions du français vers le wolof (Harrow 180).
7. Elle s'habille parfois en jeans et porte parfois un boubou sénégalais.

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Essay

Of libraries, books, and reading: A journey of meaning making

Edwin Smith

Of libraries, books, and reading: A journey of meaning making

In this essay I seek to demonstrate how an iterative reading of Archie L. Dick's *The Hidden History of South Africa's Book and Reading Culture* (2012), read through a life history lens, makes meaning of the lived experiences of South Africans—particularly during the time of the struggle against Apartheid, which is the focus of this essay. Relying on the life history approach to the recounting and exploration of South African history through the library, book, and reading culture of South Africans, I trace the complex and multi-layered experience of South Africa and its peoples as reported in *The Hidden History*. Interwoven with my own experiences with libraries, books, reading, and writing, I unveil the significant making of meaning in Dick's enterprise. As demanded by Dick, I confirm in this essay that South African liberation history must indeed include the roles played by librarians, books, and the experiences of ordinary South Africans in order to provide a fuller appreciation of the various influences and understanding of South Africa's past. **Keywords:** history, books, reading, struggle, apartheid, exile, culture, South Africa.

Introduction

Archie Dick authored *The Hidden History of South Africa's Book and Reading Culture* (2012). Among other things, Dick argues that "the evidence of common reading illuminates the mentalities and world views of ordinary South Africans. Why and how they participated in larger historical developments or refused to do so becomes clearer when we investigate their hidden book and reading cultures" (142). Several reviewers considered Dick's book a "watershed". Among them, Daniel Magaziner references the book as a "slim but revealing volume [in which] Dick analyses the other side of the literary exchange—not the word as written, but its reception, circulation, and life among a variety of reading publics [...] This story adds texture to our understanding of intellectual life across South African history" (1024). Isabel Hofmeyr has high praise for "Dick's marvellous book that draws together the fragmented field of scholarship on books and reading, providing a first book-length study on this topic" (215). Hofmeyr also appreciates "a fascinating chapter on the library at the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College, [which] shows how rank-and-file readers generally escaped the serious political reading their leaders wanted them to consume and instead read lifestyle magazines" (217).

These observations accord well with my reading of *The Hidden History*, enabling an insightful discourse between my life history and Dick's endeavours. Reading Dick's *The Hidden History* iteratively through the lens of my life history with libraries and books has been illuminating about aspects of my growing up in Apartheid South Africa and my life in exile, periods, and experiences that intersect with substantial parts of Dick's treatise, particularly his Chapters 5, 6, and 7. In meditating on Dick's thesis, I have learned, as he intended, to understand the meaning and significance of these experiences and efforts by locating them in the larger story he presents. While I find my personal story embedded in Dick's efforts at unearthing and making sense of our national experience, my life history also unveils remarkable nuances, deepening my appreciation of the valuable contribution of *The Hidden History* in enabling a richer appreciation of the complex South African experience.

Life history as a lens

Life histories are an important source and method in qualitative research. According to Hanne Kirstine Adriansen "a life story is concerned with understanding a person's view and account of their life, the story they tell about their life". As a result, "in life history research, the intention is to understand how the patterns of different life stories can be related to their wider historical, social, environmental, and political context" (41). Life histories assist in making sense of phenomena through personal experience.

Edwin Smith is reading for a master's degree in History in the Department of Historical and Heritage Studies in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa. He is the manager of campus operations at the Mamelodi campus of the same institution.
Email: edwin.smith@up.ac.za
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8318-4137

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While there continues to be debates about the shortcomings in this methodology, its utility and value persists. According to Rachel Slater, "people's life histories" have specific qualities, which enable us "to understand how the impact of social or economic change differs according to the unique qualities of individual women or men" by allowing us "to explore the relationship between individual people's ability to take action (their 'agency'), and the economic, social, and political structures that surround them" (Slater 38). For Dick, "books and reading and writing practices can [...] be woven into the private and public pasts of ordinary South Africans. In the process, long-buried events and personalities are unearthed, their hidden histories revealed", and great insights emerge (7).

Discovering libraries, books, and reading

We did not have a library in our community in Duncan Village in East London. The neighbouring Indian community of Braelyn Heights, which displaced us in the East Bank location in 1970, had a community library at one end of the only shopping complex in that neighbourhood at the time. "Township readers and librarians had poor access to books and information because of racially segregated library services", which in association with "the Group Areas Act, no. 41 of 1950", in terms of which the "allocation of library physical space and book supply in black and Coloured townships was unfair", resulted in "race-sensitive" library spaces (Dick 102–3).

My mother introduced me to the library when she needed to show me where I could spend my afternoons after school, if I did not want to be stuck at home until she returned from work. I was in primary school at the time. With my visits to the library, I was fascinated by a young Indian girl whose father owned the supermarket at the other end of the shopping complex. She worked in her father's shop after school and visited the library when on break, which made me visit the library every day, just so I could lay my eyes on her. While she was working, I read to keep busy. I read all the Afrikaans Konsalik books the library had on its shelves.[1]

It was during these feats of devotion that I discovered the *The Hardy Boys* series that I later learned where written by a group of ghostwriters under the collective pseudonym of Franklin W. Dixon (The Write Editor), and James Hadly Chase's thrillers, as well as John Buchan's *The Thirty Nine Steps*. The library also hosted a chess club, which I joined primarily to blend in with the crowd. This was how "'the books were just the props'. This meant that the books were often incidental to the use of the library" (Dick 106).

In high school, our language arts teacher would, once a week, take us to the library to learn about this resource and encourage us to take books to read at home. Though I do not recall ever taking a book out from our school library, I greatly enjoyed visiting the library because you also got a chance for the teacher to sit next to you to talk about the book you were reading. With her that close, you could smell her perfume and be enchanted by her melodic voice. Such were the pleasures of libraries and books for me then.

While I became politically active in high school and was aware of teachers politicising students in their schools, I did not experience this as dramatically as when "teachers combined academic work with information about changes happening in the country at schools where 'liberation before education' held sway" (Dick 109). My experiences were limited to my Afrikaans teacher, who, unhappy with my performance in his class and believing I could do better if only I could fix my attitude to the language, invited me to his house after school one day, sat me down in his study and showed me one of his Adam Small collections of poetry, *Sê Sjibbolet*. He then explained that Afrikaans was 'our language' and that my rejection of Afrikaans as 'the language of the oppressor' was myopic and reactionary. Adam Small was my initiation to Afrikaans writing by "one of our own people".

However, some of my teachers were sympathetic to my political activity, though they were careful not to publicly display such support given the dire consequences at the time. I appreciated their clandestine support. My accounting teacher lent me her car to distribute underground material and let me hide in her house when the police were hounding me. Then there was the case of two of the ANC's military wing, *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (Spear of the Nation), commanders, Leon Meyer and Clifford Brown, who were students at my school before me. They both died during military operations in the struggle. Clifford Brown was killed in Durban in 1984, following his unit's rocket attack on the Mobil Oil Refinery (Hengeveld & Rodenburg 53–4; Goldstone). Leon Meyer, operating in Lesotho, died in a raid in Maseru in 1985 along with his wife, Jacqueline Quinn (South African History Online). Having been a generation ahead of me, by the time I got to high school, only their names were etched in a paving stone at one end of the administration building.

We did not really have books at home. My father read *The Daily Dispatch*, our local newspaper, religiously. But he never talked about what he had read. Later, he bought the *Reader's Digest Repair Manual: Complete Guide to Home Maintenance*, which I used for all manner of projects around the house. When I took up woodworking in high

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school, this guide became a constant companion. I also visited the central public library in town, particularly during the examination periods, as it was a popular place for students to study during the day. However, and apart from the fact that "between 1984 and 1987, South African Defence Force (SADF) troops occupied townships to quell political resistance [and that] by 1985, there were 35 372 troops in ninety-six townships around the country" (Dick 102), ostensibly making studying in the townships dangerous, I never understood the allure the library in the city had for my peers. For me, the daunting, multi-storied building did not really accord with my study habits.

I was thirteen years old when I was first arrested and tortured at the infamous Cambridge Police Station in my hometown, presumably because I was a terrorist and there had been an armed robbery at our local grocer, even though I had no idea what a terrorist was or how to operate a firearm at the time. During my incarceration, I was offered a Bible. "The Bible was usually the only reading material supplied so that detainees would reflect on the harm done to society and to fulfil the Nationalist government's Christian duty" (Dick 128). I also got tobacco and so after reading the Bible, I would tear a page from the good book and roll a *zol* (a hand rolled cigarette) to smoke. I literally took the word in through reading and then through smoking.

Books, reading, and writing in the underground

I was arrested seven times before I eventually left the country for exile. By then I had also learned to read banned books with a flashlight under my blanket at night at home or in secluded spaces like the nearby bush in our neighbourhood. I also ran an underground printing press in Mthatha during my short stint hiding in the area to avoid further incarceration, or worse, death, at the hands of the security police in East London. This is how I recognise the "incriminating typewriter [that] had to be thrown into the sea to evade the security police because it was used to produce a list of names of ANC members" (Dick 109), as it relates directly to my experiences in Mthatha in the 1980s.

While 'underground' in Mthatha, I worked with the Adult Literacy and Advice Centre (ALAC), under the auspices of the Transkei Council of Churches under Ezra Sigwela, a former Robben Island prisoner and Father Cas Paulsen, then stationed at the Tsolo Catholic parish. It was during this time that I also met my lifelong comrade with whom I would end up going into exile and studying in the US. At ALAC, we partnered with a national NGO, Learn and Teach, which provided literacy programs to South African communities heavily based on Paulo Freire's methodologies articulated in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and his work in Guinea Bissau.

With the aid of a comrade who was a teacher in the area, we broke into the Education Offices in Mount Frere and stole a Gestetner Roneo duplicating machine, ink, stencils, paper, and a manual typewriter—all of which we used to write and type political propaganda on the stencils and print tons of copies for distribution in the dead of night in the Mthatha neighbourhoods like Dick's "students [who] transported the pamphlets in borrowed cars and pick-up trucks, and distributed them from door to door" (Dick 108).

Our printing press, which we hid in the garage of my friend's Fort Gale home in respectable suburban Mthatha, was pointed out by one of our comrades, who the security police had arrested, badly beaten, and broken through brutal torture. I was in Johannesburg at Learn and Teach and Wits University when I was summoned back to the Transkei to attend to this setback. As soon as I arrived in Mthatha the next day, I reconnected with my comrade hiding in a relative's backyard in Norwood. With the help of Father Cas, we were able to get out of the Transkei with me swapping Cas' clerical shirt and tab collar because I could not return to East London without risking arrest. Disguised as a priest in my hometown, we arranged to fly to Johannesburg where we connected with the ANC underground to arrange our exit. We were organised and led out of the country by Peter Mokaba, who later became the president of the ANC Youth League and served as a deputy minister in the Mandela administration.

From reading *The Hidden History*, I recognised that "the library space, like any 'lived space', was one of meaning-making and conflict in the 1980s. It was constantly made and unmade, claimed and disclaimed by communities" (Dick 109), albeit my formative experiences with libraries were as "foreign spaces". These were places I had to learn to navigate and spaces I employed more as "props" than spaces for challenging the political order. Nonetheless, they shaped me in their own ways. Perhaps my age had a lot to do with it as much of my experiences with libraries in South Africa were before I was seventeen years old. Having gone into exile shortly before, I spent my seventeenth birthday in a refugee camp in Dukwe in Botswana.

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Libraries, books, and reading in exile

When I went into exile in the mid-1980s, I learned that "for South Africans who fled the country during the apartheid era, 'the good thing about being away from home [was] that you [could] read pretty much anything you like'" (Dick 112). This commenced with my discovering a library in the Dukwe refugee camp in Francistown in Botswana. After being arrested in Botswana for entering that country illegally, we were kept in 'protective custody' in prison in Pitsane Molopo for three months, transferred to another prison in Gaborone, and eventually to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' camp in Dukwe. While in Dukwe, we were 'processed' by the ANC comrades tasked with this responsibility. With the influx of young South Africans fleeing into exile since the Soweto Uprising in 1976, there was the corresponding threat posed by government agents infiltrating the liberation movements in exile. Security screening was a critical measure to address this ever-present and real danger.

We spent several months in Dukwe. Due to our precarious situation where the South African government agents were all over the place in Botswana, kidnapping and maiming South African exiles, we had to be careful about our movements. The library, being a public space, was better avoided than visited unnecessarily. When not occupied with reading, comrades would pass the time telling stories. My lifetime comrade, with whom I 'skipped' the country, had a remarkable ability to tell stories. This is how I listened to instalment after instalment of S. E. K. Mqhayi's *Ityala lamawele* (The Lawsuit of the Twins), which he had read as a prescribed text while in school at St. John's College in Mthatha. Blurring the lines between oral and written text and emulating the notion of the 'common reader', I can still recall the main thrust of this tale without ever having personally read the book.

Though I don't remember there having been a library in our transit house in Charleston in Lusaka, Zambia, somehow, we had access to books. I remember this particularly since I was accosted by one of our commanders while immersed in *Lloyd's Introduction to Jurisprudence*. My commander seemed distraught about me reading bourgeois literature when I should have been immersed in Marxist-Leninist literature. This is how I came to know that "readers in exile chose material that suited their personal tastes instead of the dictates and ambitions of their political leaders" (Dick 109). Despite being aware that certain books were preferred in our exile community, we had unfettered access to all the books that were available to us.

In Tanzania we were dispatched to Dakawa, the most recent acquisition of land the ANC had secured from the Tanzanian government in 1982. Here we stayed at the Ruth First Education Orientation Centre. All new arrivals were housed at the orientation centre whilst, again, being processed. While the majority of us were *en route* to Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFCO), the school the ANC built in Mazimbu in 1977, 55 kilometres north of Dakawa, to continue our education, others were on their way to Angola for military training.

At the time of our arrival in the late 1980s, Dakawa was a rather drab place. It was still remarkably undeveloped with only a few old farm buildings and some newly built structures the comrades were busy erecting. We lived in tents in the orientation centre. However, we had a library, which was first housed in a tent and then a prefab building where we could borrow books, albeit from a very sparse collection of reading material (Morrow 517). Though things were tough in Dakawa during those days, we had books. It was here where I first encountered the works of South Africa and Africa's iconic writers like Sol Plaatje, Es'kia Mphahlele, Alex La Guma, Richard Rive, Dennis Brutus, Cosmo Pieterse, Peter Abrahams, Todd Matshikiza, Can Themba, Bessie Head, Miriam Tlali, Alfred Hutchinson, Z. K. Matthews, Mazisi Kunene, Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Kofi Awoonor, Sembene Ousmane, Frantz Fanon, and others. Furthermore, being at the orientation centre, we were expected to read and study. Some of us were incredibly pleased to read material other than our second-hand textbooks.

In Dakawa, our days were spent working in our camp and studying. We also worked in teams or 'brigades' as they were called, attending to the various chores that needed doing. I was paired with my friend and cooked for the hordes of comrades at the orientation centre on an open fire in our ramshackle kitchen and dining hall. Given that the orientation center was mainly an education preparation camp, we had classes and were tutored under trees with chalk boards fastened or nailed to trees. Comrades who had been abroad to study and had returned were tasked with instructing us in basic school subjects. We were going to be tested on the traditional school subjects to determine our level of competency for placement in SOMAFCO. Also, SOMAFCO followed the British General Certificate of Education (GCE) curriculum all of us from South Africa needed to adjust to and master. The University of London was the examining body, which issued the certificates that enabled us to pursue university-level study across the globe.

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SOMAFCO had one intake of students a year, ostensibly to avoid disrupting the educational programme. You had to sit for the assessment before the next intake, and depending on when you arrived in Dakawa, you either had good time to prepare or you had to dive in at the deep end and sit for the assessment. Established on a former sisal farm in Mazimbu, which was initially occupied in 1977, SOMAFCO started in 1978 and formally opened in 1979 (Morrow, Brown and Pulumani 10). Unlike SOMAFCO, Dakawa was slated to serve "the need for a place where young people newly arrived from the south might stay until they could be received at SOMAFCO in an orderly way" (499). Dakawa would also, and among other things, provide the growing exile community technical and vocational skills in service of developing the settlement and for use in a liberated South Africa.

At the heart of the SOMAFCO campus was a remarkable library, fully stocked and manned by volunteers from our sympathetic international supporter nations and fellow South Africans. During my time at SOMAFCO, the head librarian was Marjatta Lahti, who the Finnish Library Association (FLA) sent to work in the library in 1985 (Dick 109). Lahti was assisted by other comrades like Maria Feralo (114). Unlike libraries I encountered before, I spent most of my time in the library at SOMAFCO reading books I took from the shelves. I simply enjoyed being in the library, which was contrary to my previous attitude towards libraries. I have often wondered whether this was because this library was 'our library' that it felt comfortable and inviting enough for me to occupy it as often as I could and wished.

I was amazed to discover Afrikaans books at SOMAFCO. From what seemed a long thirst, I devoured all I could lay my hands on in the Afrikaans books that were available. There were Afrikaans titles such as Breyten Breytenbach's *Lewendood*, Gerrit Olivier's *Praat met die ANC*, Dan Roodt's *Twee sinne*, and Pieter Dirk Uys's *Die van aardes van grootoor*, as referenced by Dick (119). The library also offered programming and workshops related to literacy and associated activities. It was here that I had my first writing workshop led by Eddie Dladla, my class teacher who was a poet and who I would also later learn was my mother's cousin, and Keorapetse Willie Kgositsile, who would become the South African Poet Laureate in a free and democratic South Africa. These workshops were instrumental in my writing life, which now spans more than three decades.

"There was a news reading session every evening followed by comments and discussion" (Dick 121) to keep us abreast of developments in the world and in South Africa. We "also had [our] own newspaper on campus called the *Student Journal*, which was 'an important medium for the expression of student views on politics,' and a News and Information Committee of the Student Union [that] collected news" (121). For us, "radio was an important source for news of political developments, but so were newspapers and current affairs magazines" (121). At SOMAFCO, we were taught by teachers from Africa, Europe, the US, Australia, the GDR (the former German Democratic Republic or East Germany), and others. At one point all our physics, chemistry, and biology teachers had PhDs. In addition, Dr. John Pampallis, author of *Foundations of the New South Africa* (1991), taught us history at SOMAFCO (Kearsney College Old Boys). Our primary text was Francis Meli's *South Africa Belongs to Us: A History of the ANC* and Viktor Afanasyev's *Dialectical Materialism* was our text for the Development of Society.

During this time, I also acquired a few books, which included a much-prized collection of poetry by Alexander Pushkin, *Pushkin: Collected Poems 1813–1820*. When I left Zambia for the US to study at Rutgers University in New Jersey in 1990, I had a really small suitcase of clothes and an even smaller box of books I took with me to my new frontier of struggle. I left for the US through Zambia because after 'graduating' at SOMAFCO, my comrades and I went to Zambia where I had a stint working for Dr. Seretse Choabe, the Director of the ANC's Education Department, while organising our means to get to the US. Choabe and I had had a fallout when he came to address us at SOMAFCO. I publicly challenged some aspect of his talk, which displeased him to such an extent he summoned me to the principal's office to dress me down and put me in my place.

Having forfeited the ANC's support, we had to sell our clothes to fund our way to Lusaka. We bartered with the locals in the Morogoro market and raised enough money to fund our trip to Zambia by train from Dar es Salaam via Mbeya. When we got to Lusaka, I visited the Education Department to use their computers to write letters to my uncle and aunt in New York, seeking their assistance with our precarious situation. Choabe walked into the building to find me typing away on an Apple Macintosh desktop computer. I had learned to use computers and to write computer programming language—dBASE at the time—while at SOMAFCO. Due to my writing interests, I had also taken a secretarial typing course on offer to help me with my writing, which enabled me to take the mini manual typewriter we used in class to my room on weekends to write.

Choabe found me touch typing away on the computer and demanded I come work for him. I reminded him about our previous encounter, whereupon he simply acknowledged that he knew I was that cheeky boy from

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SOMAFCO. He hired me on the spot as his Personal Assistant. During my time in the department, I assisted with composing and typing his official statements and reports. I also assisted him with his academic articles and speeches. Choabe had a PhD from Oxford University and led a staff that included the late Duma Nokwe's widow we simply called Ma Nokwe and Freddie Ramaphosa, a historian trained in Moscow who is also the brother of President Cyril Ramaphosa. Through my aunt and her networks in the US, I was able to secure a tuition waiver scholarship at Rutgers University in Camden, New Jersey. I left for the US in 1990 with the promise to organise to have my comrades join me to make up for jeopardising their chances of getting a scholarship through the ANC.

Libraries, books, reading, and writing at university

When I arrived at Rutgers University and saw their massive library, which was also in the heart of the campus, I fell in love all over again. Because I only had a tuition waiver scholarship, I had to raise the rest of the money I needed for my studies in the US and to bring my fellow comrades I had left behind over as promised. I worked the entire time I studied at university to earn the money for my obligations to the university and traversed the tri-state area (New Jersey, Delaware, and Pennsylvania) on speaking engagements to raise the money for my compatriots. My first job at Rutgers was in the library, which I quickly grew attached to. I ended up working with my fellow student leaders in the Black Student Union on campus to rename the library in honour of Paul Robeson, the great American intellectual, political leader, and cultural path-breaker (Editors of Freedomways 3–8). Robeson was a remarkable Rutgers University alum whose life and struggles impressed me greatly and resonated with my experiences.

While I was totally floored by the library on campus, I was startled to discover they did not have the Heinemann African Writers Series collection. I promptly visited the director of the library to ask about this anomaly. Without batting an eye, he asked that I get working on putting together such a collection and provided me with the necessary budget. During my time at Rutgers, where I studied and later worked, I collected books. It was among the stacks at the Paul Robeson library that I first discovered Leonard Thompson's *A History of South Africa* and Allister Spark's *The Mind of South Africa*. Having read Bloke Modisane's work in SOMAFCO, I had been searching for his autobiography, *Blame Me on History*, for almost seven years when I finally found a copy of it in a one-dollar-sales bin in a bookshop in Mount Laurel in South Jersey. Apart from collecting and reading books, I also wrote and published while at Rutgers. I was editor-in-chief of the Rutgers-Camden student newspaper, *The Gleaner*, as well as the *Quintessence*, the student literary magazine. I also published an opinion piece and an article in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and *Philadelphia Inquirer Magazine*, respectively, which in 1993 was the tenth largest newspaper in the US.

Uncle Eddie, who was my class teacher at SOMAFCO, and his wife, Carole, who was my English teacher, were on sabbatical teaching at SOMAFCO as part of their support and contribution to the struggle. During her previous sabbaticals, Carole had also worked in the library at SOMAFCO. It was when I discovered that Uncle Eddie was a relative that I think I set my mind on going to the US. Eddie and Carole had a substantial collection of South African literature in their apartment in Manhattan, which made for endless conversations about literature, South African writers, and the struggle every time I visited them. It was during these visits that I read Eddie's poems in *The Word is Here: Poetry from Modern Africa*.

While I never really intended on having a family, developments in South Africa from 1990 onwards fundamentally changed my prospects. After the release of Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of our political organisations, it did not seem too farfetched that I, too, could have a normal family life. I subsequently met a fellow South African from Soweto in Philadelphia while studying. After graduating, we tied the matrimonial knot and had a son and a daughter. Being married and having a family, we relocated to West Mount Airy in suburban Philadelphia where we spent our weekends visiting Borders Bookshop and other second-hand book dealers. Our son had his own library at home. We never visited a bookshop without finding something for us to read to him as part of our modern family ritual of reading to our children. When his sister came along, she inherited a well-stocked children's library from her brother, which she, unlike him, mostly ravished on her own.

Libraries, books, and reading in a new South Africa

When I returned permanently to South Africa in 1999, I shipped a personal library back home as part of repatriating what I had accumulated in the US over the nine years I spent in that country, which was the longest I had lived in one single place during all my years in exile. Not having stopped buying books, I now have a formidable library of

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a few thousand volumes. I once tried to count the books I had in my library but eventually stopped when I passed the 3,000 mark. I then purchased a computer programme I used to catalogue 2,201 books in my collection. But because I continue to add books to the collection, I have never been able to completely get a handle on precisely how many volumes I own. However, from a more recent attempt, I counted roughly 5,750 books, which includes the three books I bought recently: C. W. de Kiewiet's *The Anatomy of South African Misery*, F. A. van Jaarveld's *'n Inleiding tot die studie van Geskiedenis: Nege voorlesings vir voorgraadse studente*, and Tim Keegan's *Dr. Philip's Empire: One Man's Struggle for Justice in Nineteenth-Century South Africa*.

My personal library provides me great pleasure. Again, this is strange because I had not really considered myself a book lover. I read, yes. But I read to know and not necessarily just for mere pleasure as I imagine a book lover would. When I tried to read for pleasure, I had to consciously buy books that were solely for entertainment like suspense, espionage, or crime novels. For this I collected books by Jack Higgins, Robert Ludlum, Michael Connelly, David Baldacci, John Saul, and Deon Meyer, among others. Subconsciously reflecting my abiding interests, my collection is heavily biased towards history and literature—South African, African, and African American history and literature.

And as if wishing to spread my affliction, I helped build libraries in schools in Mamelodi, Pretoria, the community where the university campus I work on is located. It would not be ostentatious to claim that all the fully stocked libraries in the primary schools in Mamelodi were built and stocked through a UK-based NGO I was associated with. I also used my Rutgers University networks to donate books from the US that we used to stock these libraries. My personal library also proved to be a living resource for me and others. Though I have had several students borrow books from my library for their studies, my greatest pleasure was when my wife, doing her PhD in Town and Regional Planning, used my library for her dissertation. I, too, have used my library for my own study and writing projects.

Conclusion

As I have come to recognise the utility of libraries, books, and reading as Dick reveals in *The Hidden History*, my life history echoes his assertions. Reading Dick's book through the lens of my life history, I locate my own story in the larger story of my people and our journey to the here and now. *The Hidden History* is indeed an unveiling of the varied and layered meanings we made under trying circumstances. As such, Dick is wholly correct in demanding that "township readers and librarians [...] deserve mention in the history of the liberation struggle" (111). Before encountering *The Hidden History*, I would never have described myself as someone who loves libraries and books. As revealed in reading *The Hidden History*, libraries and books have had what I have now come to learn is an instrumental role in my life. Dick has done a remarkable job documenting how books and reading have informed and shaped our sense of being and life from the beginning of our encounter with this technology on our shores and our struggle for our humanity. There are many things I have come to treasure in the life I have traversed thus far. Many of these have augmented me like an adjective modifies a noun as proffered by Charles King. Among these, however, libraries and books are topmost.

Notes

1. According to an obituary in *The New York Times* of 4 October 1999 by The Associated Press, Heinz G. Konsalik was born Heinz Gunther in Cologne, Germany. He was one of the most popular post-war novelists in Germany, whose books have sold more than 80 million copies worldwide. He died at the age of 78, having published his first book in 1953 under his mother's maiden name, Konsalik, and wrote more than 150 novels. His books were translated into 42 languages.

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Tribute

Achmat Dangor (1948—2020)

Hein Willemse

Achmat Dangor, Woodstock, 2018. Photo: Hein Willemse.

The last time I saw Achmat Dangor he looked frail. He stooped and although his gait was slow, he remained steady. His smile was bright, and he had a glint in his eyes. In recent years we had not seen each other regularly. The last time prior to our chance meeting in Cape Town in late 2018 was at the funeral of Chris van Wyk, his chum from their days in Riverlea, Johannesburg in 2014. We listened among others to Oswald Mtshali who on stage, while recounting the "good ol' days" of strive and struggle in the mid-1980s, pulled out an old poster from our Writers' Forum days.

It was at the inaugural meeting of the Writers' Forum in the mid-1980s that Achmat and I met. He, and the organisers of the Writers' Forum, including van Wyk, Colin "Jiggs" Smuts and Dauphine Smuts of the Johannesburg Open School, reached out to Vakalisa, a group of Cape Town writers and artists and invited us to the meeting. We drove through the night in a rented combi without a proper functioning petrol gauge. Somehow, we misjudged its capacity and along the N1 north in the early morning ran out of petrol, with Johannesburg still many hours away. We only arrived by late afternoon when most of the attendees—the writers, the activists and their hangers-on—already had their fill of what we believed was a scrumptious lunch, followed by afternoon tea and cucumber sandwiches. Only the organisers and a conscientious few stayed on, courteously listening to our hastily rescheduled Vakalisa presentations.

That evening I stayed over at the Dangors' house in Riverlea, the first of several subsequent enjoyable stay overs. We spoke mostly English, even though I knew from his poetry collection *Bulldozer* (1983) that he spoke and wrote Afrikaans fluently. It was only afterwards in our conversations that I gathered that his mother tongue was in fact Afrikaans and that through his mother he had a direct linkage to Cape Town, all of it obvious from the descriptions and cadences of his first novella *Waiting for Leila* (1981). However, all his schooling was through English. Yet in his writing, particularly in his prose, the palimpsests of his mother tongue remain every present.

One cannot live in any metropolitan city without realising the multiplicity of voices and varied influences, the hybridity of human existence. Dangor's family history, like those of so many South Africans, is a study in metropolitan hybridity. In several interviews over the years he often recounted their story with subtle humour, recalling their Indian, Dutch, Cape Muslim extractions, its multilingualism of Afrikaans, English and Sotho and a father who was a polyglot speaking thirteen languages. He once told the beguiling story following an overseas trip "where they serve you breakfast one flight upon the other" he took to his hotel's swimming pool and one of the guests alerted her partner to the "French man who's approaching them"!

Most of his writing exhibit traces of various strands of hybridity often recalling our torturous South African histories, whether these are the squalid surroundings of Hillbrow where in *Z-town trilogy* (1990) Muriel and Janey Meraai are coming to grips with their personal states of emergency, the mythical and fantastical in the act of storytelling and the transformational in the key characters in *Kafka's curse* (1998), the long memories of past horrors in *Bitter fruit* (2001) and in his last published novel, *Dikeledi* (2017). In most of his longer prose Dangor explores the lives of women, their positionality within South African patriarchy, their continuing relationships with power and frequently their resilience in the face of social challenges. In his latest writings one gets the impression that Dangor increasingly experienced a sense of disillusionment with the post-1994 South Africa, although much of this awareness is filtered through the experiences and tales of his prose characters.

Hein Willemse is professor of Afrikaans literature and literary theory in the Department of Afrikaans, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa.
Email: hein.willemse@up.ac.za
: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9806-4410

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When we met Achmat was still a manager at the Revlon cosmetics company in Johannesburg. Soon thereafter he moved on to the Kagiso Trust and later the Independent Development Trust. In the late-1990s he became the Executive director of the Nelson Mandela Childrens' Fund, and later a campaign manager at UNAIDS in New York. Achmat's standing with Nelson Mandela was such that the latter apparently personally intervened to entice him back to South Africa to head up the Nelson Mandela Foundation. Prior to his retirement Achmat was involved in the South African chapter of the Ford Foundation. One can barely underestimate the pivotal role he played in securing funding and resources for community organisations throughout the country during his tenure at the various nongovernmental organisations, including the Writers' Forum and later the Congress of South African Writers.

Several of Dangor's books won awards. *Waiting for Leila* won the Mofolo-Plomer Prize in 1980, one of his stories won the Vita Short Story Award in 1993, *Kafka's curse* won the Herman Charles Bosman Prize, and in 2001 *Bitter fruit* was shortlisted for the Booker Prize and the IMPACT Dublin literary award. He received a lifetime award from the South African Literary Awards (SALA) in 2015.

His publications include his poetry collections *Bulldozer* (1983), *Exiles within* (1989) and *Private voices* (1992); his play script, *Majiet* (1986), his prose collections and novels, *Waiting for Leila* (1981), *Z-town trilogy* (1990), *Kafka's curse* (1998), *Bitter fruit* (2001), *Strange pilgrimages* (2013), and *Dikeledi: Child of tears, no more* (2017). These writings represent the teachable trajectory of an important South African writer, from his early musings and convictions as a Black Consciousness adherent in the 1970s, his commitment to nonracialism in the 1980s and 1990s to his incisive explorations of post-liberation disillusionment. Achmat Dangor's oeuvre is worthy of greater attention.

One last personal memory. When we relaunched *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* as a multilingual literary journal I asked him to contribute a story to our launch edition. Unfortunately, in the aftermath of the 911 attacks in New York he could get very little done and only managed to make his contribution, the short story "A reason to love", in the first issue of 2004. He kept his word.

Fare-you-well, my friend.

Kleinkrantz, Wilderness
7 September 2020

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Tribute

Stephen Gray (1941—2020)

Craig MacKenzie

Patrick Mynhardt, Stephen Gray and Lionel Abrahams in 1993 in front of the school where Herman Charles Bosman taught. Photo: Anthony Akerman.

I first met Stephen in 1987 or 1988, soon after I started work at an institution (the National English Literary Museum in Grahamstown) on whose board he served as an expert adviser. And expert he certainly was, but this was mixed with a peculiar perverseness and wilful blindness, as I was later to discover.

From this meeting of novice and expert, we went on to establish a literary partnership that extended from the early 1990s till the early 2010s. In 1991 Stephen hired me as a lecturer at what was then the Rand Afrikaans University (later the University of Johannesburg), where I became his successor as professor and head of department. We were in close contact until a few years ago. I therefore knew him well—or as well as one can ever know a person who will always remain an enigma. His death has left an emptiness in me that I cannot quite explain.

Gray is frequently described as South Africa's foremost literary historiographer, and few would dispute this. From the publication of his doctoral thesis as *Southern African Literature: An Introduction* (1979) to *Freelancers and Literary Biography in South Africa* (1999) and on to biographies of Beatrice Hastings (2004) and Herman Charles Bosman (2005), he was an assiduous chronicler of South Africa's complex literary history.

His anthologies of South African literature were epoch-shaping. Here one thinks of the hugely successful *Writers' Territory* (1973, 1999), *The Penguin Book of South African Verse* (1989), and *The Penguin Book of Contemporary South African Short Stories* (1993), among numerous other anthologies that brought into public view major and emerging writers alike.

His own novels, plays and poetry collections number in the dozens, many of them reflecting his quirkiness as well as keen interest in local history and lore. His academic articles and more popular work (notably for the *Mail & Guardian*) constitute a massive oeuvre of scholarship and literary detective work. In this last role he was pre-eminent. I never met anyone who had spent more time and effort poring over documents in archives in South Africa and all over the world—from Australia to America and dozens of locations in between.

We collaborated for over a decade on the Anniversary Edition of the works of Herman Charles Bosman, a 14-volume set that appeared in pairs from 1998 to 2005, but that required years of preparatory work and led to spin-offs that lasted until *The Complete Voorkamer Stories* (2011), a project of mine, but to which he generously contributed.

I could devote many thousands of words to his massive output but want to pause on a word I have just used that no one would associate with Stephen Gray: generosity. His reputation is quite the opposite. He was often seen as mean-spirited, bitchy, given to fits of spite and feuding. And he was all of these things. But he also offered his time to me very selflessly—guiding me and introducing me to scores of writers and academics in South Africa and abroad.

Craig MacKenzie was Professor of English at the University of Johannesburg until his early retirement at the end of 2017. He was editor of *English in Africa* from 1995 to 2005 and with Stephen Gray edited the Anniversary Edition of the works of Herman Charles Bosman between 1998 and 2005. In 2016 he relocated to Somerset West, where he now works as a freelance editor.
Email: craighughmac@gmail.com
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8723-7550

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He was, to use a phrase characteristic of a bygone era (one in which he happily immersed himself), a 'man of parts.' Generous and petty, funny and humourless, immensely perspicacious and whimsically blind to the obvious, he probably infuriated as many people as he inspired.

I learnt that he often constructed a theory about something and then later sought the facts to fit this fiction. But he could also be devastatingly accurate about detail. So I had to pick my way through this literary minefield with immense care. He could be duplicitous (he hid from me the fact that he was writing a biography of the writer we had both spent decades working on) and vindictive (he tore into me if I collaborated with anyone he regarded as a rival). But he also taught me more about literary research than anyone I have ever met, and he casually tossed me the gift of editing one of the best-known and most-loved works in the entire canon of South African literature—Herman Charles Bosman's *Mafeking Road*.

Why does his death leave me feeling empty? He was not a warm, empathetic person whose passing one mourns in an unambiguous way. The best answer I can come up with is that his death is also the death of an entire era for me—an era in which South African literature was largely uncharted and intoxicatingly open to discovery and adventure.

To the best of my knowledge, Stephen Gray never used a computer or cell phone. The internet and cyberspace in general were utterly unknown to him. His immense achievements were solely the product of energetic legwork, typewriting, posting and receiving mail and, most of all, being on the spot, whether this was visiting an expat South African's residence in the south of France (my first assignment with him was to take some photographs there) or in the dust of the Marico on Bosman's trail. This is how I choose to remember him.

Somerset West
2 November 2020

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Reel Resistance: the Cinema of Jean-Marie Teno.
Melissa Thackway & Jean-Marie Teno.
Melton: James Currey, 2020. 256 pp.
ISBN 9781847012425.

Reel Resistance: the Cinema of Jean-Marie Teno is a timely work highlighting the biography, filmic poetics and anticolonial politics of filmmaker Jean-Marie Teno.

Melissa Thackway, the book's co-author, is a British independent scholar and translator residing in Paris, who has published widely on film in Africa and the diaspora. Her 2003 book *Africa Shoots Back* underlines her postcolonial approach to film analysis.

Jean-Marie Teno is a Cameroonian filmmaker living in France. The hallmarks of his work are creative freedom, disregard for the 'canon', narrative interest in biographies and a focus on the history/politics of dominated nations. Despite his international reputation, Teno has experienced financial and professional hardships.

The title *Reel Resistance* evokes the poetics and politics of African cinema since the 1960s. It uses a metaphor harking back to the pre-digital era, when feature films followed newsreels enunciating colonial master narratives, 'defining' Africans and other subaltern peoples, shaping dominated mindscapes and cartographies.

Some African filmmakers resisted; they deconstructed colonial representations of Africa, filmed their reality, thwarted colonial silence, palimpsest and cliché. In the era of independence, some wielded the camera as a weapon or a pen. Such is the cinema of Jean-Marie Teno—narrating human stories of the present, whilst drawing inspiration from ancestral narratives and aesthetics.

Reel Resistance offers, through dialogue and academic analysis, the biography and filmography of Teno. It tracks his successes, achieved against the odds, and reveals his anticolonial aesthetics. Filming against the grain, his oeuvre imbricates history and story, through the gaze of a collectively-involved "I". The result is documentary redefined.

The epigraph of *Reel Resistance* sets the tone by citing the late Agnès Varda, whose words serve to salute the ongoing oeuvre of Jean-Marie Teno, whilst recognising others like him, "[a]ll the inventive and courageous filmmakers, those who create an original cinema, fiction or documentary, who do not enjoy the limelight, but who continue [nevertheless]".

Teno's preface to this major co-authored volume places his own work within the documentary genre. He underlines the hurdles involved in documentary filmmaking, especially for a minority, African/Cameroonian filmmaker residing in France. Although documentary is finally emerging as a prominent genre in France, acceptance still comes at an exorbitant price: the resisting filmmaker must strenuously (and impecuniously) create alone in a medium which requires both teamwork and funding. But funding and box-office success, Teno believes, often involve submission to sanitised poetics and politics. Willingness to utter politically and culturally valid indignation must be traded off to become "an acceptable and accepted Other". In the spaces in the book dedicated specifically to his voice, Teno questions whether aspects of his aesthetics of "formal resistance" might account for the side-lining of his work by the contemporary African intelligentsia. Is his take on story too simple, he wonders? Is it too different, too far from what is expected?

Melissa Thackway's introduction emphasises the postcolonial need for a focus on *the real*, counteracting the sombre history of colonial lies and betrayal. Thackway's self-confessed subjective glance results from participating in intimate dialogue and, ultimately, collaboration with Jean-Marie Teno as his assistant on his last two films, *Une Feuille dans le vent* (2013) and *Chosen* (2018). Thackway had long been fascinated by the "force and originality" of the work of Teno, whom she describes as an "unorthodox", bold Black male African/Cameroonian filmmaker. For Thackway, Teno's films, such as *Afrique, je te plumerai* (1992), *Clando*, (1996) and the aforementioned *Une Feuille dans le vent* and *Chosen*, "push back boundaries", produce "cinematic pleasure" and form a worthy corpus for academic analysis, due to their provoking of "challenging social, political, intellectual and artistic debate".

However, personal admiration and aesthetic pleasure are not the main justifications Thackway gives for co-authoring *Reel Resistance*. She underlines, instead, the importance of Teno's cinema for Film Studies and African Studies.

Reel Resistance acknowledges the difference and asymmetry of the authors' respective "personalities and positionalities" in a work that brings together a "White British female scholar from the Global North" and a "Black Cameroonian male artist from the global South". I disagree with this forced *décolonial* dichotomy: Teno is a cosmopolitan, widely travelled artist, who has mostly resided in the North, outside his native Cameroon, whilst the influence of French language and culture on Thackway is clear.

The postcolonial concepts Thackway uses are generally on point, however I cannot help taking issue with her comfortable use of the term "subaltern", assuring the reader that not only can the "subaltern" speak (Spivak), but that he or she can also do so "refractorily"; he/she can speak back and shoot back. Unless employed with irony, "subaltern" has a tendency, surely unintended here, of naturalising, of normalising the constructed status of dominated subjects and nations. That said, Thackway's methodology, based on decolonial/postcolonial theories is rigorous, savvy and balanced.

The book is divided into three main sections. Part 1 proposes an "Introduction to Documentary Filmmaking in Africa", which "situates and contextualises Teno's work" within the global and African contexts (chapter 1), while offering "critical insights" into its "salient themes" and aesthetic characteristics. Part 2, titled "In Conversation" gives ample space for Teno to retrace and develop, in his own voice, his "first steps" and "first encounters", his commitment to "filming the real", his documentary practice and experiments, his employment of archives and other assembled audio and visual elements, his African endogenous reinvention of the documentary and his fears and visions for the future of African filmmaking. Here, in Part 2, Thackway, following keen and substantial theoretical analysis and in keeping with her postcolonial approach, effaces herself. She allows Teno room to gather together, in one place, his views and debates with film audiences and students worldwide. Thackway unobtrusively enhances Teno's willingness to address with confidence and candour, historical awareness and critical incisiveness, political engagement and soul-searching, her questions regarding his creative journey. Reaching far beyond the self, Teno delves into problematics of story, history, memory, "decolonizing the cinema", "endogenising film language", transmissions and circulations. Part 3 is devoted to substantial appendices featuring the "Writings of Jean-Marie Teno" and his filmography, respectively.

Reel Resistance is valuable as a pioneering work on Jean-Marie Teno's biography and filmography. The originality of *Reel Resistance* may be highlighted by a comparison with a worthy but altogether different monograph: *Med Hondo: un cinéaste rebel* by Ibrahim Signaté (1994). In *Reel Resistance* the co-authors present and unpack a rich, deep, multifaceted offering which is academically sound, attentive to specific films, helpful regarding the overall corpus of the filmmaker's oeuvre, whilst tackling the more overarching problematics of the documentary genre and colonial history. This is already a feat.

But there is more: in *Reel Resistance* the filmmaker and his oeuvre exist, fully and clearly, in themselves, rather that serving as pretexts and prime materials for scholarly investigation or the performance of knowledge.

Thackway's generosity and critical rigour allow her to pinpoint the international value of Teno's cinema, whilst Teno's bold and brilliant understanding of history and politics makes this work a must for readers, be they scholars or the general public. *Reel Resistance* is a treasure trove for understanding how the colonial past impacts the cultural present and future, in film and society, eliciting a wealth of creative resistance.

Antoinette Tidjani Alou
tidjanialoua@yahoo.fr
Université Abdou Moumouni
Niamey, Niger
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4555-8177

DOI: https://doi.org/10.17159/tl.v57i2.8549

Of Motherhood and Melancholia: Notebook of a Psycho-ethnographer.

Lou-Marié Kruger.
Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2020. 382 pp.
ISBN 9781869144340.

In *Of Motherhood and Melancholia*, psychologist Lou-Marié Kruger sets out to give an account of the complex realities and lived experiences of low-income mothers in post-apartheid South Africa. The book covers two decades of clinical and research encounters in the Dwarsriver Valley, a semi-rural community outside Stellenbosch in the Western Cape. It is organised around the themes of home, labour, love, work, food, pleasure, illness and death (the ordinary aspects of life that "become brutal" [8] in the valley). Instead of a

conventional academic treatise coolly delivering facts and conclusions, the reader finds a text almost literary in form, often fragmented and poetic, filled with anguish and doubt. "Feel my hands—they are always wet" (1) the prologue starts. A work that is birthed with difficulty, questioning its own being-there at every juncture. "I try to write the book. I cannot finish it" (11).

Kruger makes the difficulty of writing this book a central theme of the text, rendering the limitations of her project transparent to the reader (casting off the protective layers of obfuscating academic language and the scientific pretence of objectivity). The cause of her paralysis is far from unique: it is "the problem of white writing" (15). As "yet another white woman trying to write South Africa", a middle class academic attempting to make sense of the slow violence of racialised poverty, Kruger is "[l]ocked into [a] hierarchical position" from where "writing seems to be an impossibility" (15).

In the beautiful and almost haunting style that becomes characteristic of the text, Kruger articulates this problem metaphorically and symbolically when she unpacks the meaning of the name of the Dwarsriver Valley—a valley "across or cross the river" (253). To get there from the affluent, leafy town of Stellenbosch ("that green hell" [15]) where Kruger lives, she must drive through the Bange Kloof, "a tremendous passage", a "valley of fear" (12). "I decide my book is about passages—of pregnancy, of childbirth, of motherhood, of healing, of becoming a psychologist" (13), she writes. A book of liminality, thresholds, and margins. The hierarchies and borderlines that Kruger finds herself locked into and is trying to write across, are not only between white and black, rich and poor. In her clinical encounters and research interviews she also runs up against the rifts between researcher and research subject, mind and body, observation and engagement, self and other, agency and disempowerment, among many others.

From a feminist philosophical perspective Kruger's work on motherhood takes on radical symbolic significance, because of its commitment to the liminal. In her famous rereading of Plato's Cave Myth, French feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray argues that the Western symbolic order is founded on a forgetting or a burial of the (m)other, represented by the cave (the matrix/womb) which the prisoner leaves behind to move toward the Sun/Idea in an erasure of material beginning. The forgetting of the "path that links two 'worlds'" leads to the "founding" or "hardening" of all "dichotomies, [...] all the confrontations of the irreconcilable representations" (Irigaray 247). The result is that difference is constructed as opposition and hierarchy, so that the world is broken up into an endless range of binaries like mind/body, culture/nature, self/other, subject/object, where the second terms are less-than and coded feminine, serving as negative foil for the emergence of the primary terms, coded masculine.

The work of scholars like Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí shows how this sacrificial logic is not only at the basis of patriarchy, but also structures the racial project of colonisation, where blackness (similar to and intersecting with femininity in relation to masculinity), becomes the negative foil for whiteness and where the hierarchical dichotomy of white/black is mapped onto the dichotomies of human/non-human, spirit/matter, present/past etc. Understood in this way, the intersecting work of feminism and decolonisation requires the undoing of the murder of the (m)other through restoring the forgotten relationship or path: "Between ... Between.... Between the intelligible and the sensible. Between good and evil. The One and the many. Between anything you like. All oppositions that assume the *leap* from a worse to a better" (emphasis in original) (Irigaray 47–8).

It is this difficult symbolic work that *Of Motherhood and Melancholia* is engaged in when it commits to thinking in terms of encounter and relation (rather than opposition and hierarchy). Notable here is the book's consistent and creative undermining of what might be the central dichotomy in the discipline of psychology and our established academic processes of knowledge production, namely mind versus body (closely connected to self versus other). "Fuck psychology and fuck research", Kruger thinks when the rules of infant observation prohibit the researcher to hold the baby "as if observing is not a form of interaction" (29).

Especially striking in this regard is the chapter on hunger, which Kruger starts with the question: What does it mean to be hungry? (155). "Psychologists do not know what to do with hungry people" (157). The idea of hunger conjures up "an open mouth, lips, teeth, tongue" and "[a] naked bony body with bones, an anorexic girl, kwashiorkor or an obese man," she writes (157). However, "always, implicit in hunger is also desire (the desire to eat, to be loved, to be nurtured)" (157). When she thinks about this kind of hunger, she is "not only thinking about the too-skinny, blonde, straight-haired girls" that she encounters in the context of her private practice in Stellenbosch, but also about "the desolate women standing in line for the unpalatable mix-up in the soup kitchen, the school kids who are hungry on Mondays, the many young women who crave a baby,

Wilmien Wilders who wants a job, the Wolf Man who dreams of being mouthless, and Dora whose hungry children make her crazy" (173–4).

Kruger's commitment to thresholds and passages leads her to turn to literature, metaphor and narrative as main register or lens through which to approach and give expression to her work in the valley. By foregrounding the narratives of the mothers, interspersed with journal entries as well as fragments of Beckett, Kamfer, Neruda and Szymborska (among many others), the book becomes "an indirect critique of how the poor and the 'slow violence of poverty' have been (mis)represented and systematically obscured in academic writing, albeit inadvertently" (9).

Kruger's own writing is rich, poetic and layered, with some passages so startling in their detail, depth and beauty that the reader pages back, sometimes more than once, to read it again, slowly. Through this turn to narrative, the text holds space for seemingly opposing worlds to exist in relation to one another, for ambiguity and paradox to be generative rather than corrosive of meaning—a defiant gesture against the symbolic matricide at the foundation of the colonial patriarchy that continues to structure our world. In *Motherhood and Melancholia*, the reader encounters not only the (m) others of the valley, but always also and again, herself.

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Azille Coetzee
azille.coetzee@gmail.com
Stellenbosch University
Stellenbosch, South Africa
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3948-1249

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Our Words, Our Worlds: Writing on Black South African Women Poets, 2000–2018.

Makhosazana Xaba (ed.).
Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2019. 315 pp.
ISBN 978-1-86914-412-8.

Makhosazana Xaba's collection *Our Words, Our Worlds: Writing on Black South African Women Poets, 2000–2018* is a timely contribution to literary and gender studies in South Africa. The book challenges the ever-pervasive patriarchal culture which refuses to take Black women's writing seriously. In the first essay of the book, Xaba attributes the growth in the publication of poetry by Black women as driven by a "feminist agenda" (15), a reaction to the fact that publishing in South Africa "has historically been predominantly male and white" (15). This collection shifts the conversation and stretches the imagination of what is possible when Black women's voices are taken seriously.

This collection is in conversation with the past as Xaba dedicates the book to Nontsizi Mgqwetho: a poet from the 1920s who wrote poetry in isiXhosa for the *Abantu-Batho* and *Umteteli waBantu* newspapers in Johannesburg. Xaba describes Mgqwetho as "the vulandlela for South African black women poets"; "vulandlela" refers to one who paves the way for others. This dedication to the pioneer of Black women's published poetry immediately highlights the question of the erasure of Black women's writing as many people have not heard of Mgqwetho and her work in spite of how prolific she was, and even while she was a contemporary of S. E. K. Mqhayi, a more well-known Xhosa poet from the early 20th century. By including a reference to Nontsizi Mgqwetho, Xaba is pointing to a long lineage of Black women writers who resisted the silencing of black women's voices. Nontsizi Mgqwetho and the women who wrote for publications such as *Staffrider*, *Grace* and *Speak* are all part of the heritage of Black women's writing, an archive of which *Our Words, Our Wolds* is now a part.

The collection locates itself through the title which is specific with regards to race, gender and geography. It matters that the collection is dedicated to eighteen years of contributions to poetry by Black women writers. Xaba enumerates this culture by counting 84 titles by 59 poets. She shows that in 2005 and 2018, nine anthologies were published and in 2017, ten anthologies; this is historic. These numbers highlight the need for more research on and teaching of Black women's writing because this collection provides evidence that not only are Black women publishing poetry, but their work warrants attention which is sorely lacking in many schools and universities.

In her introduction, Gabeba Baderoon poses the question "What can poetry do?" (1) and the rest of the collection can be seen as a response to this question. Divided into three sections—"Perspectives", "Journeys" and "Conversations"—this collection maps the layered landscape of Black women's words and worlds. "Perspectives" consists of essays which offer incisive critiques of Black women's writing in order to demonstrate the ways in which literary scholars

take seriously the poetry of Black women. The section "Journeys" looks at the life of poetry beyond publication. The poets share their own personal journeys of how they came to poetry which often meant finding a community of other poets who shared their experiences but also gave them permission to use their poetry to challenge the silencing of Black women in public spaces and cultural production. Finally, "Conversations" is a section where poets think aloud through interviews.

The multiplicity of this collection brings to the fore the ways in which Black women have stretched poetry beyond what exists in anthologies. In the chapter "Feela Sistah! and the Power of Women's Spoken Word", Myesha Jenkins reflects on her contribution to spoken word poetry in South Africa. While this is a growing industry, it has seldom been a place where literary scholars look for poetic innovation and the communities forming around poetry. Maganthrie Pillay offers her reflections as both a filmmaker and poet in "Poetry, Film and Me" highlighting the inflection points in the life of women who choose the creative arts. This reflection is deeply personal as Pillay opens up to the reader about her early life "of holding poetry competitions in my backyard in Chatsworth" (195) which influenced the choices she would make as an adult "caught between creating platforms and being an activist and an artist" (201).

While Pillay chooses film and poetry, Lebo Mashile and Philippa Yaa de Villiers work between and through poetry and theatre. Their contributions highlight the ways in which women have challenged the use of poetry beyond the confines of the page. Mashile begins her chapter by asserting that she deliberately revels "in pushing the boundaries of where and how poetry can be seen and heard. The push and pull between what is possible versus what is acceptable, high-brow versus low-brow, the stage versus the page, insider versus outsider" (219). Mashile's reflection echoes Myesha Jenkin's work in "Feela Sistah!", which taught her "about artistic autonomy and ownership" (222). It is rare for a publication to curate this kind of synergy where chapters respond to each other directly, but the fact that this is the case in *Our Words, Our Worlds* highlights Xaba's innovation in painting a picture of feminist poetry in contemporary South Africa.

Xaba explicitly calls this publication a form of justice, "restorative justice" because it succeeds in "providing evidence of the proliferation of poetry by Black women at the start of the twenty-first century which has, until now, not been shown" (17). The contributions in the book will be useful for researchers working on literature, gender studies and interdisciplinary explorations of Black women's work. In this way, it is also a response to the question of justice in the academy. This collection participates in the making of the Black women's archive as it is a slice of recent history as well as history unfolding through to 2018.

Athambile Masola
athambile.masola@up.ac.za
University of Pretoria
Pretoria, South Africa
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9550-7944

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bientang.
Jolyn Phillips.
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Soek 'n mens op die internet na inligting oor Bientang, vind jy tientalle inskrywings oor die restaurant *Bientang se Grot* op Hermanus, maar weinig oor die vrou na wie dit vernoem is. Beide op die web en in historiese bronne vind 'n mens slegs enkele sinne oor die Khoi-vrou of "strandloper" met die naam Bientang, wat rondom die wending tussen die 18de en die 19de eeu in hierdie grot langs die Hermanus-see gewoon het. Dit is teen hierdie leegte in wat Jolyn Phillips haar verhalende gedig met die titel *bientang* skryf. Die slotgedeelte van die gedig laat blyk in hoe 'n mate dit vir haar 'n persoonlike onderneming eerder as net 'n akademiese oefening is.

Phillips het reeds in haar debuutbundel *radbraak* blyke gegee van die besondere wyse waarop sy die Suid-Kaapse omgewing rondom Gansbaai en Hermanus in haar poësie onder die woord kan bring; *bientang* is nogmaals 'n bevestiging van haar uitsonderlike vermoë om dié landskap te "be-taal" (om een van haar woorde uit *radbraak* te gebruik). Hierdie keer is daar egter ook 'n poging om die ongeskrewe geskiedenis van die Khoi-bewoners van dié streek deur middel van die poëtiese verbeelding op te roep, meer spesifiek die verhaal van Bientang.

Die onderskrif by die titel *bientang* sê dat dit 'n "!*nau*-gedig" is. Dit gaan dus eintlik om een lang gedig, bestaande uit duidelik onderskeibare gedigdele wat lyk soos afsonderlike gedigte. Die grootste porsie van die geheel word beslaan deur gedigdele waarin Bientang die verhaal van haar lewe vertel. 'n Groot deel word egter ook gewy aan gedigdele waarin ander

karakters, stemme en perspektiewe na vore tree. Die dele waarin Bientang aan die woord is, het 'n digte, liriese en ontglippende aard wat die indruk skep van 'n sensuele, sensoriese en affektiewe stroming deur Bientang se bewussyn, verwant aan die stuwing van die see wat so 'n sterk teenwoordigheid in haar lewe is. Om die leser te help, word Bientang se gedigdele tipografies onderskei deurdat hulle regs belyn is, terwyl dié waarin ander stemme praat op die konvensionele wyse links belyn is. Verder word Bientang se verhaal 'onderbreek' deur gedigdele, elk met die titel "//oëdienaar", waarin verskillende stemme kommentaar lewer op of besin oor wat in die verhaal gebeur. Tegelykertyd funksioneer dit as kontemplatiewe ruspunte in die drama van Bientang se verhaal en baken dit verskillende fases in die narratief af.

Na 'n kort inleidende gedigdeel waarin Bientang op 'n forse manier deur die digter staan gemaak word voor haar "klipgatgrot" en voor die oë van die leser, begin haar verhaal met 'n beskrywing van die wyse waarop sy deur afsondering in 'n hut die oorgang van kind na vrou en die inlywing (*!nau*) in die volwasse lewe moet meemaak. Dié proses word in sintuiglike landskapsterme beskryf en eindig met die insig dat vrou-wees jou merk as beskikbaar: "vrougoed maak my aasgoed". Die verhaal gaan voort om te vertel dat sy deur haar broer ("my boetabessie") swanger gemaak word. Dit lei tot 'n nuwe fase van afsondering of *!nau* omdat sy deur haar familie verwerp word. Soos wat die verklaring afgedruk op bladsy 12 aandui, word die persoon wat in 'n staat van *!nau* is, beskou "as in a condition of taboo, dangerous both to himself and to with whom he comes in contact [...] he belongs nowhere but is removed from the solidarity and security of his former position". Dit is waar Bientang haar bevind: sy is taboe, word beskou as gevaarlik en is verwyderd van die veiligheid van die familiekring. 'n Verdere inskrywing wys daarop dat water taboe is vir die *!nau*-persoon. Bientang is egter te verknog aan die see om gehoor te gee aan hierdie vereiste: sy het 'n wil van haar eie en bloed waarin die koue woede kook. Reeds in die inleidende gedigdeel, wat 'n soort manifes is, sê sy:

> Ek staan op die plaat klipgatgrot en die sandberge
> agter my my voete is
> plat my tone uitgesprei oor die skulpgruis wanneer die
> see terugtrek hoor
> ek die ghoera die water is skoon en koud soos my bloed
> ek staan voor my
> en kyk hoe die gety kwaad word (5)

In hierdie situasie word die landskap en die wesens daarin (die see, die walvisse, die fynbos, die voëls) haar familie. Deurdat sy in haar afsondering so sterk identifiseer met die landskap, onder andere met die see, kom dit voor asof sy die vermoë het om die see op te roep om wraak te neem op haar broer: "ek maak 'n storm aan ek por die see aan daar staan hy / vat hom na sy hel toe hy wat my broer is kyk hy staan / met 'n visstok hy is aas vang hom voor jou sluk hom in" (17). Nadat hy weggespoel word deur 'n massiewe golf, word die band met haar familie finaal verbreek en vind sy vir haar plek in die grot wat vandag haar naam dra:

> die see kom klop aan my grot
> se deur maar sy kom nooit in nie
> ek is haar buurvrou sy stuur
> alikrukke en mossels klipkouse visse
> en robbe wat ek na my doodplek vat (20)

Hier slyt Bientang dan haar lewe. Die gedig vertel veral van die ruie innerlike lewe van die vrou wat die vrug van haar swangerskap verloor en in afsondering leef, verwerp deur haar familie. Sy keer uiteindelik terug na hulle met "'n vergifniskaros" waarmee sy hulle wil vra om haar te vergewe (30), maar sy vind by hulle blyplek net reste en beendere wat sy dan met haar saamneem na haar huis in die grot (45).

Die bundel vertel ook die verhaal van Bientang se kennismaking met Lord Montagu en sy Khoi-gids, Klaas. Dit blyk uit die bronverwysings en ander elemente dat Phillips die figuur van Lord Montagu baseer op Francois Le Vaillant, 'n Fransman gebore in Suriname, wat tussen 1781 en 1785 verskeie reise in Suid-Afrika onderneem het en daarna twee hoogs suksesvolle boeke daaroor gepubliseer het in Frankryk. Le Vaillant skryf onder andere hoe hy bekoor is deur 'n jong Khoi-meisie wat hy Narina genoem het omdat hy haar naam nie kon uitspreek nie. Phillips transponeer hierdie gegewe tot Lord Montagu se verliefdheid op Bientang wat weier om aan hom toe te gee.

Heel belangrik van Phillips se aanpassing van die gegewe is dat sy ook die Khoi-gids Klaas aan die woord stel in haar gedig. In 'n lang gedigdeel (34–8) vertel Klaas op 'n veel meer toeganklike manier as Bientang die verhaal van haar swangerskap, haar broer se dood, die vroeg-geboorte van die kind en die verwerping deur haar familie, ook van haar ontmoeting met Lord Montagu. Die invoeging van Lord Montagu in die teks gee Phillips geleentheid om kommentaar te lewer op Europese reisigers en setlaars se letterlike en figuurlike besetting van die inheemse bevolking se ruimtes. Daar word ook verwys na die verdringing van die inheemse mense se tale: die reisigers en setlaars gee nuwe name

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vir plante en diere, hulle verander die inheemse mense se name na iets wat gemaklik in hulle monde sal pas (Bientang se naam is eintlik "ha!ku" [37]) en ignoreer hulle tale (Klaas verwys na "die ou praat / wat al uit my gesweep is / op my reise met Lord Montagu verkwansel is" [37]). Daar word ook gepraat van hulle argelose en vernietigende omgang met die natuur ("mense soos die lord vat by die aarde en ruil dit vir geld", sê Klaas op bladsy 43). 'n Mooi voorbeeld hiervan is die wyse waarop Bientang die verskynsel van walvisjag beskryf. Vanweë haar intieme verhouding met die landskap, die plante, die see, die voëls en visse, identifiseer sy haarself met die noorkapper-walvis wat geslag word vir wins:

> die noorkapper hang aan haar stert 'n omgedopte selfdood
> my mense bid vir die noorkapper my mense kom van die noorkapper
> ek is 'n noorkapper die woede hang vlak trane ek moet die storms roep (48)

Veral bring Lord Montagu (soos ander Europese reisigers en setlaars) 'n bewustheid van ras as bepaling van 'n mens se waarde. Van Lord Montagu sê Bientang na sy vertrek: "jy't my kom kry in my ma se mantel / jy't my 'n kleurlingmeid in die mond van die dorp gelos" (47). Daarom sê Klaas, wat ervaring het van saam met Lord Montagu reis, vir Bientang dat sy haar plek moet ken en moet besef sy is een van dié wat in 'n mindere posisie is omdat sy nie wit is nie (39). 'n Bewustheid wat egter teenwoordig is in beide die inheemse gemeenskap en dié van die Europese setlaars is dat die vrou van minder waarde is as die man en dat haar verhaal nie optekening in die geskiedenis werd is nie. Bientang onthou dit so: "om te sê jy sal nooit kosbaar wees nie jy kos die wêreld te veel / omdat jy 'n vrou is te veel van jou is geheue om geskiedenis te wees" (55). Daarom dring die versorger-figuur Atta in een van die belangrikste "//oëdienaar"-gedigdele by haar aan om wakker te skrik sodat sy vir haar die storie kan vertel "van waar ons almal vandaan kom" voordat "almal van ons vergeet" (23).

Dié indrukwekkende epiese gedig eindig uiteindelik met 'n aantal gedigdele waarin die digter haarself ondervra oor die redes waarom sy Bientang se geskiedenis wou verwoord. Sy is deeglik bewus daarvan dat sy eintlik met 'n onmoontlike taak besig is, dat sy 'n "aag" (agie) en 'n "klikbek" is wat veel moes versin en lieg (58). Die onsekerheid blyk reeds uit die verskillende moontlike betekenisse van die woord "bientang" wat aan die leser voorgelê word. Dit strek vanaf "valse aanklag" in Tagalog (6) en "om uit te sprei" in Maleis (32) tot by "ster" en "noodlot" in Indonesies (42).

Al protesteer die digter se liggaam en raak die skryfproses vir haar byna ondraaglik moeilik, is dit onmoontlik om nié oor Bientang te skryf nie: "in die land van my kop staan die storie / op en skryf sigself klaar" (57). Dit is ook vir haar belangrik om haar voormense te gedenk deur vir hulle 'n grafsteen te maak met haar gedig: "daarom sal ek res van my lewe dieselfde storie / oor en oor skryf omdat in die land / van my kop voorgeslagte dood lê sonder grafstene" (57). Haar gedigte is die "skryfgraaf" waarmee sy die bene van haar voormense wil uitspit uit hierdie ongemerkte grafte. Deur Bientang op te roep in 'n gedig soos hierdie, kan sy ook haarself "in die land van haar kop" opmaak (58). Dit is veral nodig omdat sy self in die land van haar voormense steeds "niks meer as 'n kettingganger in 'n skip" (dus 'n slaaf) is nie (58).

Die laaste deel van hierdie gedig is 'n poëtiese hoogtepunt. Phillips gebruik hier 'n ingewikkelde Javanese digvorm, wat die "kakawin" genoem word, om van Bientang afskeid te neem (60–1). Die digter besef dat sy self moet vrede maak met "haar ironiese vel", moet ophou om deur Bientang "vrybriewe" aan haarself te skryf en ophou om te dink dat sy op dié manier vir haar "'n inheemsgeskiedenis" kan koop. Die elegiese slotstrofes beskryf hoe Bientang haarself losmaak uit die gedig oor haar (sy sny haar arms los uit die kruisrym waarin sy geboei is en ontsnap van die manier waarop sy in die gedig "verstroof" en haar "binnerym uitgehaal" is). Die afskeid van Bientang is roerend:

> ek staan alleen op die plaat
> ek ontheg jou ek kyk terug
> die wind verwelk jou in
> het jy ooit gepraat?

Met *bientang* doen Jolyn Phillips wat Antjie Krog indertyd in haar bundel *Lady Anne* gedoen het. Sy roep 'n voorganger op (Krog s'n was Skots en adellik; Phillips s'n is Khoi en deel van 'n inheemse groep wat "verketting" is) en tree op harstogtelik-betrokke wyse met haar in gesprek om haarself te leer ken. *bientang* is 'n oorrompelende bundel wat ryk is aan intellektuele inhoud en tegelykertyd getuig van 'n diep deurleefdheid. Jolyn Phillips doen met *bientang* in alle opsigte die belofte van haar debuutbundel gestand.

Louise Viljoen
lv@sun.ac.za
Stellenbosch Universiteit
Stellenbosch, Suid-Afrika
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1748-9098

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Agringada: Like a Gringa, Like a Foreigner.
Tariro Ndoro.
Cape Town: Modjadji Books, 2019. 76 pp.
ISBN 978-1-928215-76-9.

Tariro Ndoro's debut poetry collection was released in June 2019, mere months before South Africa was engulfed in widespread xenophobic violence once more. In "Black Easter (reflections)" (63) she is in conversation with a (naïve?) South African:

> Why don't you visit the townships
> my countrymen die there
> It will be okay, that doesn't happen anymore

But, of course, it did happen again (and again). And it happens because "you invented words like kwerekwere / & expected the necklacing not to happen" (63), because "words came before your machetes" (63). Belonging, place and displacement, fear and being feared, erasure and endurance—these themes are prevalent, but perhaps this collection is primarily about words, about language. Fear transmitted through words, erasure through silences, displacement through speaking the incorrect language.

The child in the first poems is not only displaced in white spaces—at her boarding school, where she is one of only two Black girls on the class photo (16)—but also at home with her cousins and grandma. At school, she is put in detention for speaking the wrong language (16, 18); she cannot join the white girls in their obsessions with gymkhana and The Vengaboys. At home she is questioned, mocked, for her syntax; she cannot speak to her family about the detentions. The child has "forgotten the sound of home" (16); she "wear[s] silence", for "[l]anguage does not belong to you" (17). In the epigraph Ndoro quotes Tagore: "*I long for thy song but I have no voice*" (emphasis in original). Belonging is predicated upon language and words, but language is difficult to get a grasp on (58, 66), difficult to contain (69), and sometimes insufficient when speaking of human loss and pain (12, 26).

The girl carries her silence into adulthood, not belonging in her own language and no other language truly belonging to her: "like an epiphyte your roots are grounded in no soil, your / homesickness a perpetual flame that knows no quenching / your tongue does not belong to you" (56–7). There is a deep sense of loss here, one that grows as you continue to read through the collection, the loss or complete deletion of one's soul (60). For the one exiled from home and from language, for the one alienated (or viewed as alien) in a new country, belonging seems impossible. There are moments of refuge in liminal spaces—singing the subtitles to a Bollywood film (60)—and in memories of her mother (51). There are ways to speak without using one's tongue, "with hands, with faces, with song" (69). There is a brief season of joy.

While reading the collection, you become the shadow of this silent girl, later disillusioned woman, following her as she seeks belonging and attempts to reach herself. There is no shortage of people telling her where her place in the world is—we encounter variations of 'go back to where you came from', the voices of white supremacy telling her to not act as if she's from a compound, to be civilised. There is a man who "refuses to be refused" (42), men who silence women with money, with guns, with loyalty (47). And the ultimate marker of our place in the world; the passport, "that offending document" (54) that, for a moment at least, acts as an equaliser as people wait, and wait, and queue, and wait, to cross the border. What becomes clear is that putting someone in 'their place' is an act of displacement, a way to signal that who they are is not a correct way of being.

Yet this displacement brings a unique gift—looking from the outside, the poet describes the places where she has lived but not belonged, the people who shaped her, so evocatively and with a clarity that speaks of a deep attentiveness to the world around her. This attentiveness is in part a result of a life lived watching others carefully (white teachers, men, immigration officials) in order to survive, but the poet also holds a degree in microbiology. One gets a sense of a person open to the world ("*I long to join thy song*"), curious down to the minutiae, despite the ways in which the world denies and erases her. This shines through in the poem "Mbare City Heights" (27–8), where she writes of coming to understand her father and grandfather once she also leaves home for Harare: "You learnt to wash your body with soap in mouth, / Your panty too—otherwise it was stolen"; "You learnt humility—pride made you a target" (27).

Her attentiveness allows her to see what others cannot: "the brutality of binaries" (56). Not only the brutality of a xenophobic and racist state, but also the potential brutality that lies behind the "snubbing [of] those who are not like you in speech and ancestry" (56) of her "homesick brothers" (57). It is not only the place we call home, not only our nationality or tongue that give shape and structure and meaning to our lives. The person denied this limited form of belonging, the exile or the immigrant, the "cultural chimaeras" (16), is not without an identity. We are shaped as much by the

places we belong as by the places we do not—a truth that crystalises towards the end of the collection (66):

> I remember that I too am not from around these parts
> That this city, this town is not my own
> Although I cannot erase it
> From my being

Ndoro finds herself, then, in the realisation that the kind of belonging promised by society is not the belonging she seeks. Her disillusionment is also a moment of promising truth (70):

> *Curse is*
> *you will never fit in*
>
> *Blessing is*
> *you will never want to*

We need to reimagine what it means to belong—beyond the binaries, the borders, the rigidity that seeks to cement belonging but in reality only displaces us and alienates us from the world. What does it mean to be at home in the world? Ndoro's poetry guides us towards a possible answer: to sit with our memories and our longings and our loss, to recognise "all the lines that tether you" (69) but also that geographies can't hold you, to be as attentive to the world in its unjustness (throughout) as we are in childhood (23). To be truly at home in the world and to belong to oneself is to be at odds with the realities of our current world and our current system.

Judy-Ann Cilliers
judy@philosophical.dog
Stellenbosch University
Stellenbosch, South Africa
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3775-3693
DOI: https://doi.org/10.17159/tl.v57i2.8411

Pieter Fourie: Teatermaker—'n huldiging
Fanie Olivier (red.).
Pretoria: Protea Boekhuis, 2019. 291 pp.
ISBN 9781485310815.

Die Akademieraad van die Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns het 'n Hertzogprys-publikasiereeks van stapel gestuur, met as koördineerder, prof. Jacques van der Elst. Die doel is om Hertzogpryswenners in hierdie reeks te huldig. Tot dusver het reeds ses publikasies in die reeks verskyn waarvan die eerste in 2017: *Adam Small: Denker, digter, dramaturg* (Jacques van der Elst); *P. G. du Plessis: Hy was 'n rukkie pagter hier* (Heilna du Plooy); *Pieter Fourie: Teatermaker* (Fanie Olivier); *breyten breytenbach: woordenaar, woordnar* (Francis Galloway); *Johann de Lange 60: 'n Huldiging* (Daniel Hugo) en *Reza de Wet: Die dramaturg as dromer* (Temple Hauptfleisch en Marisa Keuris). Die volgende publikasies in die reeks is in produksie: huldigingsbundels oor Elsa Joubert, Antjie Krog, Bartho Smit, Anna M. Louw, Ina Rousseau en Wilma Stockenström.

In die 21ste eeu is daar 'n merkwaardige toename in die belangrikheid van pryse in die letterkunde en die kunste. Wat die Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns se literêre toekennings betref, het die dramatoekennings van meet af aan telkens swaar gedra aan omstredenheid.

Talle polemieke en debatte rondom prys-toekennings, asook die kom en gaan van pryse deur die jare, dui daarop dat literêre toekennings nooit outonoom kan funksioneer nie. Dit staan altyd in verhouding tot opvattings oor waardeoordeel, smaak en literatuuropvattings, asook magsverhoudings op 'n bepaalde tydstip.

Vele voorbeelde uit die verlede getuig hiervan. So is daar in 1966 uiteindelik geen Hertzogprys toegeken nie, weens die groot polemiek nadat Uys Krige daarvoor genomineer is. Hy ontvang wel in 1985 die Hertzogprys vir sy volledige drama-oeuvre. Name wat deurgaans in dieselfde asem as Krige genoem word, as skrywers wat nooit, of té laat bekroon is, is onder andere Jan Rabie en Abraham H. de Vries, wat nooit die prys ontvang het nie, en Adam Small wat eers in 2012 bekroon is vir sy volledige drama-oeuvre tot en met 1983. Telkens is daar met genoemde skrywers gereken dat politieke voorbehoude deurslaggewend was. Deur dekades word die dramatoekennings gekenmerk, nie net deur polemiek oor wie bekroningswaardig sou wees nie, maar ook in ekstreme gevalle oor of die toekenning enigsins oorweeg moes word, al dan nie. In sekere jare word daar ook weliswaar geen toekennings gemaak nie (Van Jaarsveld 390).

Die Hertzogprys is die oudste literêre prys in Afrikaans—106 jaar oud, in 2020. Hierdie prys, wat die eerste prys was wat deur die Akademie toegeken is, is reeds in 1914 ingestel en vanaf 1916 jaarliks vir toekennings oorweeg. Buiten in 1984, met die viering van die Akademie se 75ste bestaansjaar, roteer die drie genres, prosa, poësie en drama, en slegs publikasies van die vorige drie jaar kwalifiseer vir bekroning. Hierdie rotasie begin vanaf 1928 in werking tree (Smuts 12). Tot en met 2016 is die Hertzogprys 28 keer toegeken vir poësie, 33 keer vir prosa en net 20 keer vir drama. Werke wat vir die 1988-Dramaprys in aanmerking kon

kom, en uiteindelik nooit die erkenning gekry het wat hulle waarskynlik reeds toe verdien het nie, is onder andere: Reza de Wet met *Diepe grond* (1986) wat moes wag tot 1994 vir die bekroning van *Vrystaat Trilogie* en *Trits*, Pieter Fourie met *Ek, Anna van Wyk* (1986) wat tot 2003 moes wag vir 'n bekroning, en Deon Opperman vir *Môre is 'n lang dag* en *Die teken* (1986) wat moes wag tot 2006 vir die bekroning van sy drama-oeuvre tot en met 2005. Geen toekenning is egter in 1988 gemaak nie (Carstens 686). Veral Pieter Fourie gaan gebuk onder polities-georiënteerde weerstand, terwyl hy seker die mees prominente dramaturg van die tagtigerjare is. Gegewe die voorafgaande, sou 'n mens dus sonder twyfel kon sê dat skrywers en die werk wat hulle lewer, die produk word van literêre oordeel en evaluasie op grond van onder meer pryse wat aan hulle toegeken word.

In 2003 verower Pieter Fourie die Hertzogprys vir al sy gepubliseerde dramatiese werk tot op daardie stadium, te wete *Faan se trein*, *Faan se stasie*, *Die joiner*, *Die koggelaar*, *Ek, Anna van Wyk*, *Donderdag se mense*, *Die groot wit roos*, *Naelstring*, *Die plaasvervangers*, *Die proponentjie*, *Tsjaka* en *Vat hom Flaffie*. Fourie is een van die mees bekroonde en bekendste teatermakers in Afrikaans. Benewens dramaturg is hy ook 'n ervare akteur, regisseur en toneelbestuurder, vervaardiger en digter: Alles elemente wat aan bod kom in hierdie huldigingsbundel met 'n verskeidenheid bydraes saamgestel deur Fanie Olivier. Daar is in totaal 14 bydraes. Dit is egter jammer dat baie van die bydraes vassteek by 'n veilige bestekopname van Fourie se prestasies en deelname aan toneel in Suid-Afrika. Die insluiting van Daniel Hugo se Commendatio vir die Hertzogprys in 2003 en Nico Luwes se Commendatio vir 'n Eredoktorsgraad in Drama- en Teaterkuns aan die Universiteit van die Vrystaat (UV), bly byvoorbeeld as gevolg van hul aard net huldeblyke wat nie in wese bydra tot die regmatige wetenskaplike debat rondom hierdie enigmatiese teatermaker nie. Die daaropvolgende vier bydraes verwoord 'n uitgebreide inleiding tot en beskouing van Fourie se lewe en werk, insluitend 'n outobiografiese bydrae "Die einste hy" deur Fourie self.

Die bydrae deur Temple Hauptfleisch, bied 'n veel meer indiepte kyk na die invloed wat Fourie op die Afrikaanse drama- en toneelsisteem gehad het, terwyl die bydrae van die historikus Fransjohan Pretorius indringend kyk na die geskiedkundige temas waarvan Fourie se werk vol is. Die ondersoek na byvoorbeeld sy volksdramas as "onvervreembare eiendom van die massas" (Blaise) en die terugkerende temas soos Afrikaner-politiek, die verhouding tot sy grond, sy kerk, die beheptheid met die nageslag, misbruik van mag en rassisme, kom aan bod onder die gemene deler—witheerskappy—en wys subtiel op Fourie se vernuftige spel met dialoog, sy suksesvolle karakterdramas en eksperimentering met opvoeringsaspekte. Die volgende ses akademiese bydraes oor verskeie aspekte van Fourie se oeuvre is ook meer substansieel en ontlok interessante argumente ten opsigte van Fourie se onortodokse en vindingryke aanslag, sy onkonvensionele teaterstyl en sy verbintenis tot die sosiopolitieke temas in Suid-Afrika. Maritha Snyman se bydrae oor Fourie se kinderdramas is van besondere belang, aangesien die klem in die stuk val op die kenmerkende volksaard daarvan, maar ook die soms onkonvensionele andersoortige aard daarvan. Sekerlik die belangrikste bydrae in die bundel is díe deur Thys Human oor die metadramatiese elemente in Fourie se vierluik plaastragedies. Hier word gefokus op die dramatiese vernuf wat Fourie tentoonstel in sy belangrikste werke. Indringend word gekyk na die voorkoms van metadramatiese aspekte, die tegnies-strukturele surrealisme, asook die irreële elemente in sy dramas.

Eweneens is die bydrae deur Marisa Keuris van belang juis as gevolg van die wetenskaplike besinning oor die *Faan*-stukke en die filmverwerking daarvan, met spesifieke verwysing na Fourie se skep van ironiese ruimte. Sy eindig met 'n insiggewende gedeelte oor 'n derde teks, getiteld *Die mankind: Faan*, wat nooit opgevoer of gepubliseer is nie.

In die bydrae deur Joan Hambidge, wat fokus op die twee digbundels, *Knapsekêrels* en *Bidsnoer*, plaas sy Fourie se digkuns ook binne die konteks van sy kenmerkende volkstematiek. In die laaste bydrae deur Nico Luwes word daar bespiegel oor die betekenis van *Post mortem* binne die werk van Fourie, as sluitstuk tot sy omvattende drama-oeuvre. Die bundel word afgesluit met 'n poging tot 'n bibliografiese oorsig van Fourie se tekste (eerste opvoerdatums en publikasie), gepubliseerde werke, ongepubliseerde tekste, artikels en studies oor Fourie, asook berigte, resensies en onderhoude. Dit bly egter bloot 'n handige register aangesien die volledigheid daarvan reeds in die inleiding aangetas word.

Hierdie bundel word 'n inklusiewe studie van 'n verskeidenheid aspekte van Fourie se lewe en sy oeuvre. Dit toon 'n toeganklike en informatiewe gerigtheid; is wat enkele bydraes betref, akademies en analiserend; en uiteindelik is dit 'n dokument wat Fourie se literêre nalatenskap binne konteks plaas en só reg laat geskied aan hierdie buitengewone teatermeester.

Ná die *Boetman is die bliksem in!*-debakel van 2000, skryf Francois Griebenow (8): "Die drama gee nie 'n

boodskap nie, maar bied die geleentheid vir verskillende menings om gehoor te word". Hierdie bundel is die weerklank van so 'n geleentheid.

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Anthea van Jaarsveld
vjaarsa@ufs.ac.za
Universiteit van die Vrystaat
Bloemfontein, Suid-Afrika
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2360-0239

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Bos.
Malan Steyn.
Pretoria: Protea Boekhuis, 2019. 80 pp.
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Malan Steyn se drama, *Bos*, is verlede jaar (2019) deur Protea Boekhuis gepubliseer en is 'n waardevolle toevoeging tot die dramagenre in Afrikaans. Die teks verleen sig nie net tot 'n hoogs uitvoerbare drama nie, maar bied ook aan die leser vinnige intrige, skerp dialoog en karakterisering van formaat. *Bos* is die eerste keer onder leiding van Marthinus Basson tydens die KKNK van 2012 opgevoer. Die produksie het ook tydens die US Woordfees van 2013 gespeel. Steyn se vorige dramas sluit in *Bok-bok staan styf* (2002), *Jan en Jorie* (2003) en die bekroonde *Eet alles* (2004) wat as *Johnny is nie dood nie* (2011) uitgegee is en wat later deur Christiaan Olwagen tot die bekroonde gelyknamige film van 2016 verwerk is.

In *Bos* word 'n groep tieners tydens Kamp Koershou, 'n oorlewingskamp in hul Graad 11-jaar, nie net gekonfronteer met die tipiese uitdagings van grootword in die moderne wêreld nie, maar word hulle ook in 'n ruimte geplaas waar die vervulling van hulle basiese fisiese behoeftes hulle dompel in 'n oorlewingstryd. Die onvoorspelbare argetipiese ruimte van die bos dra by tot die spanning, aangesien dit die speelveld is waar al die karakters (die tieners én hul paramilitêre instrukteur, die Meneer) hulself moet konfronteer, hul grootste swakhede in die gesig staar en hul sienings oor die wêreld en wie hul eintlik is, bevraagteken. Dit is 'n ongenaakbare plek waar die onderwyser die tieners probeer lei om hulle "weerbaar—paraat!—die grens na volwassenheid [te help] oorsteek". Van die Middeleeue af word die bos of woud geassosieer met 'n veranderende, onheilspellende en transformatiewe plek waar karakters in feëverhale en sprokies hulself en hul eie noodlot beproef. Tydens Kamp Koershou moet die tieners in die bos, weg van hul bekende, gemaklike omgewing die verskeie rituele navigeer.

Die oorgangsfase waarin die groep jongmense hulself bevind, betrek die belangrikste tema, naamlik deurgangsrites of 'Rites of passage'. Steyn sê in die skrywersnota die volgende oor deurgangsrites: "[dit is] kulturele praktyke wat die oorgang tussen jou kinderjare en jou inlywing as 'n volwaardige, volwasse lid van 'n stam of sosiale groepering bewerkstellig. Binne die populêre sielkunde word die deurgangsrites van sogenaamde tradisionele kulture dikwels as model gebruik vir moderne rites wat kwansuis die oorgang tussen puberteit en volwassenheid moet vergemaklik".

In die teks word daar verskeie inisiasierituele betrek. Die Meneer word beskryf as "steeds verlore in 'n oorlog wat hy vrees hy dalk verloor het" (8). Hy is 'n oud-soldaat met 'n hartseer verlede en onopgeloste probleme wat sy eie deurgangsrites in die weermag ondergaan het. Die Meneer se diensplig-opleiding word as basis gebruik vir sy eie benadering tot die oorlewingskamp en die eise wat hy aan die jongmense stel.

Aan die begin van sommige tonele word die vierde muur deur die Meneer gebreek en hy verduidelik in die proloog dat die bedoeling van inisiasiepraktyke tog goed is: "Om die kind te help om die grens tussen sy sorgelose jeug en die pyn van volwassenheid oor te steek" (9). Die kamp se oorlewingstrategieë word dan 'n 'kompas' vir die res van die tieners se lewens. Die vaardighede wat die tieners by Kamp Koershou moet baasraak, is onder andere kaartwerk, spoorsny, wippe stel, vuurmaak en jag. Hierdie vaardighede dien ook as titels van sommige van die tonele.

Die groep by Kamp Koershou is egter nie die enigste mense in die bos nie. Daar is ook 'n jong seun, Umkwhetha, wat die inisiasiepraktyke van die Xhosa-kultuur betrek. Dit is interessant om te

merk dat "Umkhwetha" 'die geïnisieerde' beteken en nie 'n eienaam is nie. Die karakter word dus verteenwoordigend van 'n kollektiewe ervaring. Die geheimsinnige praktyke rondom die Xhosa-kultuur se inisiasierituele word telkens (in Engels) aan die gehoor bekendgestel. Volgens Steyn (7) is die monoloë van Umkhwetha meestal ontleen aan 'n artikel getiteld: "The making of a man" deur 'n anonieme skrywer in die *Mail & Guardian* (19 Julie 2002). Die fisiese verandering (besnyding), verpligte isolasie en die groot eise wat dit fisies en emosioneel aan die jong seuns stel, word gekontrasteer met die Afrikaanse tieners en hul ervarings. Hierdie jukstaponering van die verskillende kulturele praktyke word slim uitgespeel en die belangrike plek wat dit in elke kultuur beklee, word vooropgestel, bevraagteken en uitgedaag. Die geweld onderliggend aan hierdie praktyke word dikwels verromantiseer, maar in *Bos* word moeilike vrae aan die gehoor en/of lesers gestel: "[...] hoe help die rituele jou om jou pad as volwassene te vind: Is daar plek vir individualiteit en verskille binne die groep? Wie word uiteindelik uitgesluit om die samehorigheid van die groep te verseker? Hoekom speel geweld en (seksuele) vernedering dikwels so 'n belangrike rol in inisiasiepraktyke? En wat is die prys wat 'n mens betaal as jy nie aan die groep kan (of wil) behoort nie?" (6)

Wat intertekstuele verwysings betref, kan daar parallelle getrek word met die boek *Lord of the Flies* (1954) deur die Nobelpryswenner William Golding waar 'n groep seuns op 'n eiland gestrand word en op hulself aangewese is vir oorlewing. In *Bos* herinner die karakter Org aan die karakter van Piggy in *Lord of the Flies*, aangesien beide seuns geboelie en verneder word omdat hulle as swakkelinge gesien word deur sommiges in die groep.

Dit is opmerklik dat die karakterlys aan die begin van die drama net die Meneer en "tien graad 11-leerders" noem. Dit veroorsaak dat die eerste tonele waar die karakters verskyn, as eksposisie dien. Die skerpsinnige leser sal dalk besef dat daar eintlik net nege graad 11-leerders op die kamp gaan en dat die karakter van Umkhwetha die tiende leerder is. Hy tree egter op as tipe verteller en aan die einde van die drama word dit duidelik dat hy eintlik 'n spookagtige figuur is wat tydens sy inisiasie in 2010 oorlede is: "Sixty-two abakwhetha died during the initiations of 2010. I was one of them" (78).

Die taalgebruik en dialoog in die teks is natuurlik en eg. Daar is goeie voorbeelde van aktuele slengtaal deur die tieners, kreatiewe vloeke van die Meneer, sowel as die gebruik van Engels en isiXhosa deur Umkhwetha.

Bos is 'n teks wat die leser nog lank sal bybly. Dit is relevant, spannend en universeel. Alles wat 'n dramateks behoort te wees.

Mathilda Smit
SmitM1@ufs.ac.za
Universiteit van die Vrystaat
Bloemfontein, Suid-Afrika
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5207-3784
DOI: https://doi.org/10.17159/tl.v57i2.8413

Die nuwe Afrikaanse prosaboek.
Sonja Loots & Steward van Wyk (reds.).
Kaapstad: Human & Rousseau, 2019. 688 pp.
ISBN 978-0-7981-7808-2.

"Hierdie versameling wil 'n viering van verskeidenheid wees", skryf die samestellers in die inleiding tot hierdie belangwekkende boek. Wanneer 'n mens na die inhoudsopgawe kyk, is dit duidelik dat die beskrywing gepas is. Die bundel bevat 'n seleksie van prosastukke deur 'n wye verskeidenheid van skrywers: van Anna M. Louw, T. T. Cloete en Nathan Trantraal, tot Dana Snyman, Nataniël en Fransi Phillips. Langs volledig gekanoniseerde werke, verskyn tekste deur heel nuwe prosaïste soos Sisca Julius en Maruanda Wynne. Verder word doelbewus genoegsame bladspasie toegeken aan skrywers wat voorheen gemarginaliseer is, soos vroue, queer-skrywers en skrywers wat in die verskillende omgangsvariëteite van Afrikaans skryf. Die samestellers het hulle ook nie laat inperk deur genrebeskrywings (soos 'die kortverhaal') nie, aangesien die tekste wat opgeneem is die breë beskrywing van 'prosas' dra. Dit blyk dus dat verskeidenheid inderdaad die belangrikste rigtinggewende oorweging vir die samestellers was; verskeidenheid wat nuwe weë baan en opwindende moontlikhede oopmaak.

Die keuse om so 'n versameling byeen te bring en dit die sterk titel, *Die nuwe Afrikaanse prosaboek* te gee, is veelseggend. Die titel plaas die bundel naamlik onvermydelik en direk in gesprek met *Die Afrikaanse Kortverhaalboek* van Abraham H. De Vries, wat reeds sy sewende, hersiene uitgawe beleef. 'n Mens kan kwalik hierdie boek optel sonder om te wonder hoe dit ooreenstem en tot hoe 'n mate dit verskil van De Vries se versameling. Alhoewel die verhale in *Die nuwe Afrikaanse prosaboek* nie (soos in De Vries) chronologies rangskik is nie, aktiveer die woord "nuwe" in die titel tog iets van tyd. Sou die woord "nuwe" in die titel verwys daarna dat al die verhale wat ingesluit is, dateer vanaf 1956

(die jaar waarin Jan Rabie se *21* verskyn), en daarom in 'n sekere sin as 'nuut' of kontemporêr bestempel kan word? Moet "nuwe" verstaan word as 'n direkte uitdaging, en 'n oproep om vernuwing? Of moet 'n mens "nuwe" dalk verstaan in terme van die modernistiese? Die struktuur van die versameling word immers gerig deur 'n seleksie uit die modernistiese 'prosas' in Rabie se invloedryke bundel *21*. Die samestellers tree nie in hierdie verband voorskriftelik op nie, maar verduidelik dat die rangskikking van die verhale eerder 'n proses van "nuuskierig(e) nadink" (11) behels oor hoe *21* steeds 'n baken en gespreksgenoot van die Afrikaanse verhaalkuns is.

Een so 'n "nadink" kan wees om noukeurig na te speur hoe die verhale in elkeen van die afdelings nie net tematies nie, maar ook literêr-teoreties in gesprek tree met Rabie se 'prosas'. My gevoel is dat 'n mens interessante post-postmodernistiese afleidings sal kan maak wat verhelderend kan wees ten opsigte van die proses van bundelsamestelling, maar ook wat betref individuele verhale se interaksies met die Rabie-tekste. Rabie se modernistiese skryfwyse word naamlik in hierdie bundel herwaardeer te midde van die post-postmodernistiese tydsgees waarin dierestudies, queerstudies en posthumanistiese uitgangspunte beklemtoon word. Die uitgangspunt is nie 'n siniese en afwysende ingesteldheid ten opsigte van "ou" verhale uit die 1950's nie, maar 'n geleentheid waartydens nuwe en jong stemme konstruktief in gesprek tree met Rabie se verhale. So word die invloed van Rabie se bundel op die Afrikaanse literêre tradisie opnuut in erns ondersoek. Die gesprek rondom die invloed van die modernisme op die Afrikaanse literatuur is duidelik nog lank nie klaar nie.

Die nuwe Afrikaanse prosaboek se bydrae tot die gekompliseerde en betwiste proses van kanonisering is spesifiek interessant. Volledig gekanoniseerde verhale (alhoewel opvallend min) van gevestigde en bekende kortverhaalskrywers soos Abraham H. De Vries, Hennie Aucamp en Koos Prinsloo verskyn saam met nuwe stemme. Daarmee saam is kortverhale, sketse, essays en prosagedigte betrek, en die lengte van verhale het die keuse om insluiting daarvan nie negatief beïnvloed nie. Die seleksie sluit byvoorbeeld langer kortverhale in deur Marlene van Niekerk, S. J. Naudé en Nicole Jaekel Strauss. Die insluiting van verhale wat 'n volkse gevoel skep, soos dié van Dana Snyman en Nataniël, is verfrissend en sorg ook vir 'n breër leserskorps. Die feit dat die verhale tot 'n groot mate tematies saam gegroepeer is, vergemaklik die leeservaring nog verder. Dit is moontlik om al die verhale in 'n afdeling op een slag te lees, en die duidelike ooreenkomste sowel as die interessante en onverwagse verskille daarin raak te sien en te waardeer. Die beskrywing van die seleksie as 'n padkaart is in hierdie opsig paslik. Die samestellers verduidelik egter dat dit 'n "tentatiewe" en "verskuiwende" (14) padkaart is, wat daarop dui dat hulle hierdie versameling nie beskou as 'n standpuntinname wat betref kanonisering nie. Kanonisering is immers nooit 'n afgehandelde proses nie. *Die nuwe Afrikaanse prosaboek* is myns insiens 'n belangrike uitdaging van die kanon, maar nie met die doel om dit wat bekend en geliefd is te ondermyn nie. Dit is eerder 'n byvoeging en 'n verbreding. Dit is 'n poging om iets heel *anders* toe te voeg.

Die 'geslaagdheid' van hierdie strategie-van-verskeidenheid kan uit die aard van die saak uit verskillende invalshoeke bevraagteken word, en 'n mens kan jou ook afvra of al die verhale wat ingesluit is noodwendig ewe goed buite die konteks van hierdie boek sal kan funksioneer. Waarin die versameling duidelik slaag is om die uiteenlopendheid van die Afrikaanse verhaalkuns ten toon te stel. Die proses om in die konteks van hierdie versameling aktief 'n ruimte te skep waar 'n verskeidenheid stemme as gespreksgenote met mekaar kan optree, is prysenswaardig en broodnodig. Die ideaal sal wees dat daar in die toekoms nog soortgelyke 'nuwe' versamelings verhale (of 'prosas') sal verskyn wat hierdie proses voortsit, sodat die speelveld voortdurend vergroot kan word.

Die nuwe Afrikaanse Prosaboek is 'n lywige boek wat met sy helderpienk buiteblad daarop aandring om raakgesien te word. Dit is die moeite werd om ag te slaan, en die veelheid van stemme en narratiewe toe te laat om nuwe, verrassende en miskien selfs ongemaklike assosiasies te laat gedy.

Janien Linde
Janien.Linde@nwu.ac.za
Noordwes-Universiteit
Potchefstroom, Suid-Afrika
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2361-8957

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Vervleg.
Petro Hansen.
Pretoria: Protea Boekhuis, 2019. 205 pp.
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Die 96 rubrieke in Petro Hansen se versamelbundel, *Vervleg*, is 'n keur uit haar rubrieke vir *Die Burger* en *Beeld* wat vanaf 2012 gepubliseer is. Met 'n inskrywing op

haar Facebookblad oor 'n oom en tannie wat vakansie hou by Klein-Kariba in hulle karavaan genaamd Bederf, begin Hansen se rubriekskrywery vir *Die Burger*. Hierdie Facebookinskrywing word raakgesien deur Willem Jordaan en daar gaan die deur vir haar oop.

In 2018 word Hansen vereer met die Orde van die Beiteltjie van die Afrikaanse Woordkunsakademie deur die Cordis-trust vir haar uitsonderlike bydrae tot Afrikaans. Keurige Afrikaans wat beelde van liefde, familie en verlange oproep, dra by tot 'n ryk versameling sketse wat by die leser 'n klokhelder oomblik voor die geestesoog oproep.

Herinnering, nostalgie, melankolie en heimwee is temas wat in die rubrieke verken word. Vir sekere Suid-Afrikaanse lesers sal Hansen se bundel telkens bekende beelde oproep van *roadtrips* (maar hier met 'n melankoliese kinkel van haar pa wat nie meer bel om te hoor waar trek hulle nie) in "'n Brief vir Pa", stop by 'n padstal vol verrassings in "Die aand van die padstal", die verlange na haar afgestorwe pa op Klein-Brak in "Die dood maak 'n stom hart praat", en ou films wat die hartsnare roer in die herinnering aan die laaste film wat sy en haar pa saam gekyk het in "Ek, Pa en Pablo". Hulle kyk *Il Postino*, die pragtige film wat handel oor 'n eenvoudige posman se verhouding met die digter Pablo Neruda, wat die fokus op die poësie plaas. So baie poësie word by die sketse ingeweef: van Pablo Neruda tot Ingrid Jonker en die onverwagte herinnering aan Johannes Kerkorrel se Hillbrow. Die straat voor 'n boekwinkel word poëties beskryf as 'n verwaarloosde kind: vuil en bemors.

Boeke, woorde en stories word die draadjie deur die bundel. Van Dominique Botha se *Valsrivier* wat langs Hansen se pa se bed lê na sy afsterwe tot die onverwagte fonds van 'n Afrikaanse digbundel van Ingrid Jonker tussen al die Engelse boeke in 'n boekwinkel in Johannesburg, wat maak dat sy "skielik [...] tuis[voel] in dié omgewing." Dit is asof elke boek 'n baken in die landskap van herinnerings is.

Maar, 'n vraag wat telkens by hierdie leser opgekom het, is wat die doel van so 'n versameling is? 'n Rubriek is 'n weeklikse of maandelikse opiniestuk of artikel wat in 'n koerant of tydskrif gepubliseer word. Dit gee gewoonlik die opinie of standpunt van die skrywer weer. Op sig beurt sluit dit aan by die essay of kunsopstel waarin die skrywer dikwels kommentaar lewer op 'n aktuele probleem, verskynsel of rariteit waaroor hulle besin. Party essays het ten doel om die leser van 'n bepaalde standpunt te oortuig of om 'n gesprek of debat te stimuleer. Wat laasgenoemde betref, vind die rubrieke of essays van Sonja Loots byvoorbeeld veel meer aanklank by hierdie leser. Haar kritiese blik op aktuele hebbelikhede laat die leser altyd met iets tot nadenke. Óf uit gedeelde irritasie, óf omdat jy glad nie met die skrywer saamstem nie.

Ander rubrieke wil slegs 'n storie vertel of op humoristiese wyse 'n herinnering by die leser oproep. Dit is in hierdie kategorie waarin Hansen se bundel val. Soos Dana Snyman op *Vervleg* se voorblad beweer: "Petro Hansen kyk met genadige oë na die land en skryf aangrypend oor gewone dinge. Haar vertellings is heerlik geanker in die hede."

'n Voorbeeld van 'n humoristiese vertelling kan gesien word in "Die inhoud van 'n vrou se handsak kan 'n nasie red!" Die handsak word beskryf as 'n Pandora se boks waaruit skatte onder die mees desperate omstandighede te voorskyn gebring kan word. Amper nes die pa by die krieketwedstryd wat rondry met 'n sak "noodgeval"-houtskool in die bak van sy kar—net ingeval hy skielik lus is om te braai!

Hansen beskryf haarself as die kind van 'n matroos. Haar pa was in die vloot en sy het grootgeword in 'n weermaghuis vol liefde en dit is hierdie liefde wat sy as kind in oorvloed in haar huis beleef het, wat haar die woorde gegee het waarmee sy toor. Met 'n liefde vir die bosveld, maar met soutwater wat deur haar are vloei, speel landskap 'n groot rol in haar onthou.

Dit kom egter by tye voor of dit die landskap is van 'n wit, middelklas vrou wat swaarkry en seerkry van 'n afstand af beskou. Daar word gepoog om om te gaan met moeiliker temas, soos 'n ouer wie se kind in die tronk is of te besin oor die motiewe van 'n sinnelose daad ("Agter tralies bly hy steeds my kind" en "Hoekom, Henri?"), maar dit voel of dit altyd geskied vanuit die gemak van "my Bosveldtuin". In "Joy het nooit gegroet nie" skyf Hansen oor haarself, "Geseënd is die kinders wat in huise grootgeword het waar mense nie op velkleur getipeer is nie. Kinders soos ek." Dit laat die kritiese leser 'n wenkbrou lig. In "Koerantverkoper, waar kom jou lag vandaan" vra sy tog selfondersoekend, "So, Edward, jy met die dun baadjie om jou skouers, sê my net asseblief, hoekom is ek die een wat swaar oor die lewe sug en jy die een met die alewige vrolike glimlag op jou gesig?"

Die skep van emosie gebeur by Hansen nie net deur woorde nie. Sy is ook 'n kunsfotograaf. Dit is dus nie net deur haar rubrieke wat sy iets wil vertel nie, maar ook deur die fotografiese beelde wat sy skep. Die voorbladfoto is een van haar eie en deel van hierdie jarelange passie waar sy veral hou van die interpretasiemoontlikhede wat deur die kyker self geskep word. Betekenisgewing en betekenismoontlikhede is dus vryer in haar foto's as wat sy regkry met haar rubrieke. Dit sou vir hierdie leser interessant wees om haar fotografie te vergelyk

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met haar skryfwerk. Ek vermoed 'n rouer eerlikheid sou dalk na vore tree.

Die titel van die bundel kom van 'n gedig wat Hansen op 'n jong ouderdom vir haar ma geskryf het. Dit gaan oor haar ma se liefde vir hulle wat deur al haar kinders se lewens vervleg is. As mens is emosie en liefde ook deur jou lewe vervleg. Dit is hierdie raakvat van emosie en die eerlikheid waarmee Hansen dit verwoord, wat haar rubrieke leesbaar, maar ook eg en tog herkenbaar maak vir die lesersmark waarvoor die bedoel is.

Die rubrieke sal aanklank vind by 'n wye leesgehoor. Die akademiese leser sal miskien die intertekstuele verwysings geniet wat toelaat dat herinnering en letterkunde, kuns en landskap saamvloei en 'n dieperliggende betekenis aktiveer. Dit het egter by tye 'n gevoel van *name dropping*, veral as 'n bekende akademikus se blote teenwoordigheid die stilte in 'n lesingsaal met sy gesag vul.

Ilse de Korte
ilse.dekorte@nwu.ac.za
Noordwes-Universiteit
Vanderbijlpark, Suid-Afrika
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9643-3390
DOI: https://doi.org/10.17159/tl.v57i2.8534

Township Girls: The Cross-Over Generation.
Nomsa Mwamuka, Farai Mpisaunga Mpofu & Wadzanai Garwe (eds.).
Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2019. 280 pp.
ISBN 978-1779223258.

The award-winning author Panashe Chigumadzi, born in Zimbabwe and raised in South Africa, reviewed this book for the *Johannesburg Review of Books*. Her coda: "*Township Girls*, then, provides a significant first step in documenting some of the good, bad and ugly wrapped up in the under-explored social and cultural histories of Zimbabwe's transition. The more we document these stories, the greater our ability to reflect on, and demand more of, our world-views in the past, present and future."

I agree. I want to add the worth-repeating-though-obvious point that "these stories" ought to focus more and more on the lives of women for obvious reasons. Often when countries undergo major political transitions as Zimbabwe and South Africa have in the recent past, the voices, ideas and stories of women tend to sit in the periphery and sometimes are erased altogether as the male leaders, heroes and later stalwarts occupy the largest space in books, documentaries and archives.

Moyo writes in the foreword to the book that the contributors to *Township Girls* are "lawyers, doctors, businesswomen and other professionals [...]. [M]any were hitherto unpublished authors [...]". This then is the ultimate value of this book—bringing into the world voices that have been hitherto unheard. Discourses on life narratives as genre are mired in fascinating debates and conversations as those of us keen on this type of own-storytelling have come to learn: "[...] the historically situated practices of self-representation may take many guises as narrators *selectively* engage their lived experience and situate their social identities through personal storytelling" (emphasis in original).

What then have the contributors to *Township Girls* selected to share and in what form? There are 32 contributors whose brief biographies appear on pages ix–xvii of the book. Emelda (Emmy) Musariri's name and biography appears on page xiv as a continuation of Wynne Musabayana's biography, and is therefore easy to miss. This is an unfortunate mistake because Emelda happens to be the only contributor who has died (1963–2014) and her name is mentioned in the dedication. There are 31 titles listed numerically on the contents page. "With these hands", a poem by Chiyedza Nyahuye, is mentioned on the contents page below "Introduction" but does not appear anywhere in the book. Contributor Tsitsi Elaine Tsopotsa's story is numbered 15 and entitled "British Africans" on the contents page. The story appears on pages 140–7, but her biography is missing from the biography section of the book. The names of the people in the photographs are not cited, let alone the photographers. The publishers declare: "Although every precaution has been taken in the preparation of this book, the publisher and editors assume no responsibility for *errors or omissions*" (emphasis in original).

I noticed the errors and omissions as I was navigating my way through the book, reviewer-style. For instance, I read each contributor's biography after reading their story. That was my flow. The missing poem "With these hands" was a disappointment because I rushed to find it after reading the title in the contents page, because my first collection of poetry is called *These hands* (2005 and 2017). It is my sincere hope that for the next edition the publisher and editors will address these errors and omissions.

I now comment on some of the categories of the book. In the poetry category there are three poems: "Raging silence" by Nyasha P. Katedza, "Township Girl

Made Good" by Farayi Mangwende and "19 & 39: A mother and daughter remember" by Nyarai Majuru and Manyara Matambanadzo. The mother and daughter poem is unique for the reason that it tells two stories in one poem. The story in this poem is presented with unusual creativity wherein the mother-daughter bond is not only referred to but also shown in the flow of the poem.

The power in the poem "Raging silence" sits in the language used as it keeps shifting between the loudness of war and the silence demanded of children by their parents. The poem brings to life the reality of war in the ordinary lives of people. The poem ends with a crescendo that makes palpable the impact of war on this family's life.

The second category is a welcome contribution entitled "Kunaka Kunonakira Anoda Zvonaka Nemworo Chigariro", written predominantly in Shona by Tambudzai Muzenda. The minimal English I could read introduced war into the narrative, like the others: "We started hearing of violence, the war in Somalia, hunger, Nelson Mandela, mabhunu down south—trying to silence the voice of Africa, Vietnam, Pope and his obsession about sexuality, and talk against female genital mutilation". Here is an international political potjiekos in one paragraph!

Another category uses the motivational mode throughout the 'story' by Geraldine Chengetai Matchab called "My Grinding Truths" in which she shares her four truths about life. A fair number of contributions are written in that direct motivational style, particularly in their last paragraphs. See for instance Runyararo Bertha Faranisi's "Embrace your idiosyncrasies and enjoy your journey, only you have a deep understanding of where you are now and where you want to be". Cathrine Chitiyo ends by encouraging everyone not only to record their memories, "but also those of your parents and relatives".

An interesting category of carefully selected slices of girlhood consists of contributions in which writers choose to focus on one or very few memorable event(s) of their girlhood, as in Spiwe Kachidza-Mapfunos' "My Life Story: Still Standing", wherein she remembers Father Giovanni, an Italian Roman Catholic Priest who had a life-changing impact on her.

Other stories go beyond girlhood by sweeping the narration over to adulthood so that instead of reading about one small window into a life you feel that you are reading a broad-strokes summary of a whole life. One story that does this exquisitely is "From Mbaresburg to the BAFTAS" by Xoliswa Sithole.

Township Girls also shores up class issues among Black Zimbabweans. It is indeed a welcome read.

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Makhosazana Xaba
makhosazana.xaba@gmail.com
University of the Witwatersrand
Johannesburg, South Africa
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7282-2113

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Asleep Awake Asleep.
Jo-Ann Bekker.
Cape Town: Modjaji Books, 2019. 146 pp.
ISBN 978 1 928215 78 3.

Asleep Awake Asleep is a collection of 39 stories divided into six sections. Although one could read the individual stories each on their own, there is the suggestion of a narrative thread underpinning the collection as if part of a novella focusing on the life span of a particular character. The central character's lifeline as a child, student, mother and writer is presented to us as the collection progresses. The choice of name, Rip (short for Ripple), not only calls to mind the mythical Rip van Winkle, but also a ripple effect on a surface, suggesting the making of small waves, which the author intends to do with her writing.

The stories deal with childhood experiences, her experiences as a journalist, marital life and the final story, "Embers" (in section 6) engages with aspects of the opening story, "Dolphins left a chocolate in the fridge" (in section 1). The title alludes to the experiences of the main character and ties in with some of the stories that read like recollected dream experiences. The different phases of life are also linked to a particular city and landscape, colouring the milieu and contributing to the meaning of the story.

The female subject in the respective stories reflects on her life in the turbulent years before the release of Mandela and often intersperses her experiences with a historical or political event. As a liberal journalist, she is an outsider in her community and is seen as a

traitor (72) by her husband's colleagues. In this regard, the final paragraph of "Peripheral" (65) is an example of self-undermining introspection: "She changes quotes so the voteless speak Standard English, because she cannot interview people in their mother tongues. She doesn't see she is ignoring the way English is changing, that she is casually eclipsing voices herself."

Hers is a world peopled by security police, lascivious men who grope young women, men in khaki who love wild animals and a younger son who is into meditation, forming part of a group of dolphins. Bekker joins a long gallery of authors in her depiction of the colonel of the security police and other sympathizers of the apartheid state apparatus. Her unwillingness to collaborate results in the stabbing of her car tyres and receiving a note telling her that as a "commie bastard" she is going to die (47).

Although I have appreciation for Bekker's collection, I want to point out two issues: The one is the almost formulaic way in which the stories open and the second is the use of a type of staccato reportage, similar to journalese. Examples of the formulaic are the opening lines of a few stories: "Just before she sailed home on a mail ship, a woman met a younger man" (10); "Belinda was different after Mr Marais kissed me in the art room" (18), "A British oboe player came to the City of Roses" (22). The formula gives us a clear indication of the main plot of the story.

Not all Bekker's tales are formulaic but eventually it becomes predictable. This contrasts with her use of understatement and condensed way of telling a story. The journalistic style almost reads like a series of instructions: she did this, then this, then went there, then that. Perhaps Sarah Blackman's assessment on the last page of the text explains this better: "In fairy tales and elegies, flash-bulb bright vignettes and elegant absurdities, *Asleep Awake Asleep* imagines the world as a response to the dream of self." As a reader, I am more drawn to well-planned short stories than to "flash-bulb bright vignettes".

What I find inventive in Bekker's collection, is the way in which she intertwines historical and fictional material; the juxtaposition of Mandela's victory walk with the birth of her child and the final confrontation with the Cradock Four in a gallery dedicated to them: "A humble shed in the museum's yard. The curator unlocked the door. Large full-body photographs of the men walked towards her from four pillars… In the photograph Matthew, Fort and two comrades are walking towards the camera, towards Rip" (132).

The character of Ripple was apparently present when the photograph was taken, and she is like a latter-day Rip van Winkle in a postcolonial environment. Equally inventive is "The Good Housekeeping Magazine Quiz" (118) presenting the plot in a series of multiple-choice questions.

I concur with Bridget Hilton-Barber, quoted in the blurb on the book's back cover, that Bekker's writing is "lyrical, tactile and sensual." I hope she develops one of the stories into a longer novel.

Marius Crous
Marius.Crous@mandela.ac.za
Nelson Mandela University
Port Elizabeth, South Africa
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0753-7700
DOI: https://doi.org/10.17159/tl.v57i2.8552

If You Keep Digging.
Keletso Mopai.
Sunnyside: BlackBird Books, 2019. 168 pp.
ISBN 978-1-928337-81-2.

Keletso Mopai is a South African writer who was born and raised in Lenyenye Township, Limpopo. *If You Keep Digging* is her first short story collection. The collection is both brave and ambitious, covering pertinent themes of race, racism, class, migration, domestic violence and sexuality, among others. The book sets its thematic tone with a quote from the Egyptian radical feminist, Nawal El Saadawi: "Nothing is more perilous than truth in a world that lies". Right from the outset, Mopai's intentions are clear—it is to follow in the footsteps of Nawal El Saadawi and venture into the dangerous territory of telling the truth to a lying world. One wonders if, through the twelve stories collected in this book, Mopai succeeds at uncovering these hidden "truths". The title *If You Keep Digging*, is tantalizing to the reader and leaves him/her in a state of suspension, curious, and looking forward to 'uncovering' something if they keep on digging. The central aim of these stories is to illustrate what we can uncover if we dig beneath the surface of narrative.

The stories, all set after 1990, offer the reader a post-1994 reflection of the state of South African political, social and cultural landscapes. Although *If You Keep Digging* is a collection of short stories, it is interwoven with themes that flow into each other from one story to the other. The opening story, "Madness", sets a tone of disorder that becomes an underlying thematic refrain. It literally and metaphorically fictionalises the madness of the postcolony, which can be understood

as having "specifically a given historical trajectory—that of societies recently emerging from experience of colonialization and the violence which the colonial relationship involves" (Mbembe 102). South Africa is one country exhibiting the madness of the postcolony, one among many. "Madness" opens with the funeral of a character named Lucky who has succumbed to death in unknown circumstances. It is narrated by his younger sister, Dikeledi. We are told that Lucky is fortunate in death because he "doesn't have to deal with this ugly world anymore" (1). Indeed, the events in the story are ugly: Dikeledi is raped and impregnated by an unknown man when she goes out one night to look for her brother in the streets. Lucky's funeral coincides with another funeral—that of a four-year-old boy who "died in a fire" (3). Madness in its literal sense is similarly experienced by other characters in the story. Aus Thembi "shows up at people's homes demanding a plate of food" (2), and Dishembe spends his life drunk and "pissing on himself" (2) and dies "after drinking paraffin confusing it with alcohol" (2).

The acrimonious theme of the re-distribution of land or what has become known as 'the land question' is explored in "Monkeys". Although the narrative is multi-layered and offers glimpses of the social and class differences between Blacks and Whites in post-apartheid South Africa, the issue of the unequal distribution of land is delicately weaved through the thematic fabric of the story. The father of the protagonist, a farmer and owner of the land he inherited, agonises over the changing political milieu, saying, "they want the land, they want the mines, and now they want our farms" (15). This is juxtaposed with the Black community that lives in shanty towns where the "roads are a mess!" (21) and kids wear "ripped [clothes] full of holes" (21). Although the Balobedu people who live in this area remember that "their ancestors lived here a long, long time ago" (15) they continue to live in crowded townships. Through the divergent views and positions of the speaking subjects, the reader gets a glimpse of the racialised politics of land and ownership. The story "In Papa's Name" shifts the focus to the violent heritage of Apartheid through the truth-seeking innocence of the child's view narration. The child characters lament the sad fate of their father who died "fighting Apartheid" (25). It is ironic that although the father is a struggle hero, his children do not have anything valuable in their lives to show for his heroic deeds. One of the children laments how she "should be rich [and] living in a mansion" (29) instead of sharing a two-roomed house with her aunt and five cousins. Although "Papa has a street named after him" in memory of his sacrifices, his children, like the majority of Black children in South Africa, live in "house[s] of hunger" (26), where they "sleep on empty stomachs" (27).

"Hair Tales" successfully transports the reader into the ways in which race and language play a role in identity-making in South Africa. Three Black girls, separated by three decades, struggle to belong to predominantly white post-apartheid spaces dominated by aesthetics of hair and the politics of language. The author sets three short stories within one short story to illustrate how structures of domination are maintained in the society through bodily aesthetics such as hair. It is 1998 (four years after the official demise of apartheid) and Tshepo's teacher, Mrs van der Walt, writes a letter to her mother asking the child to comb her afro, claiming it is "untidy [and] against school policy" (57). In 2007, Rosina, a teenager is told by her school principal that her natural Black hair is "destructive" (61) and, thus, implores her mother to resort to relaxing her hair into a ponytail using chemicals in efforts to make her belong to a school that refuses to transform. Decades after the end of apartheid, the school continues to teach only in English and Afrikaans. Set in 2018, Lisakhanya's story dialogues with the previous stories by exploring how institutionalised racism functions. Armed with her Master's degree, Lisakhanyo attends an interview at a company where the potential employer expresses skepticism that she "might not fit in here" (70) "with [her] rough dreadlocks and non-Afrikaans speaking tongue" (70). In this way, the author makes a point about the prevalence of covert and overt forms of racism in 'post-apartheid' South Africa.

The theme of marginal identities comes out strongly in "Growing Caterpillars" and "Blood Filth" where Mopai grapples with issues of sexuality and the challenges facing the LGBTQ+ community. In "Growing Caterpillars", Thuso is engaged to Keke although he is romantically and sexually involved with another man. Thuso chooses to live a lie because his "mother would [...] detest [him]" (101) if she knew of his queer sexuality. His mother's death becomes "freedom" (101) as it empowers him to break off the engagement with Keke. In "Blood Filth", the horrific gang rape of a lesbian named Tebogo, which ultimately makes her commit suicide, is a fictionalisation of the constant fear and violence that haunts the South African LGBTQ+ community, as national statistics and news headlines constantly show skyrocketing rates of femicide and homophobia. The narrator tellingly concludes: "there is no justice. Not in this country" (157).

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Nonki Motahane
mnonkiy@yahoo.com
University of the Free State
Qwaqwa, South Africa
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5858-4203

DOI: https://doi.org/10.17159/tl.v57i2.8551

Are you two sisters? A memoir.
Hester van der Walt.
Cape Town: Modjaji Books, 2019. 127 pp.
ISBN 9781928215745.

Hester is short, fragile and sickly, the eldest of seven siblings of a poor Afrikaner mine worker family. Lies is thin and tall, coming from a refined family of Dutch missionaries. They meet during their nurse training at a hospital in Bloemfontein and go on to spend the rest of their lives together, as friends, partners and comrades.

Hester van der Walt's memoir is equally the coming-of-age story of the author, the story of the relationship between Hester and Lies and the story of the freedom struggle in South Africa. The 127 pages span more than fifty years from early 1960's until 2016 and cover much more than the love story of an Afrikaans and a Dutch woman—a relationship so impossible to grasp at that time that they were asked if they are sisters. Each of these aspects (the coming-of-age story, the love story and the story of the struggle) would provide enough material for a much larger book, but Van der Walt somehow manages to intertwine them in a manner that is easy and exciting to read.

Van der Walt's poems were included in a few collections of poetry and she also wrote *Hester's Book of Bread* (2012; earlier published in Afrikaans as *Hester se brood*, 2009). *Are You Two Sisters*? was published simultaneously in English and Afrikaans. Her writing is subtle and humble, absolutely missing the grandiosity one sometimes associates with memoirs. The form of *Are You Two Sisters*? is also quite unusual for a memoir. The author is present in the stream of memories that make up the narrative, but does not dominate it. Multiple chapters start with a poem or a poetic excerpt from Van der Walt's writing. Song lyrics and work by other poets such as Breyten Breytenbach (68) are also quoted.

"How does awakening begin? In small steps, I think now, looking back on my life, at the young girl with the asthmatic chest dragging herself up the steep slopes of District Six?" It was in the middle of Cape Town's District Six with its diverse multicultural population that Hester got to know other South African cultures and learned to appreciate the country's heterogeneity. But it was at the Siloam hospital in Venda that both Hester and Lies became increasingly conscious of social inequalities in South Africa, the systemic oppressions of apartheid, but also of the sexism and racism within their own church. At the same time, the stay at the missionary hospital marks the moment when their love for each other takes a concrete, verbalised form. From then on, discreetly, they would live as a couple. Hester and Lies, perceived by many as "two white Afrikaans girls in search of truth and justice and convinced that apartheid was wrong" (59–60), started more and more to question the system in which they grew up, as well as their church.

Their search for truth, justice and acceptance (for themselves and others) lead them to various places, and various jobs, with Hester branching out from nursing and then switching completely to social work. As they were taking a more and more active part in the struggle while managing to keep paying jobs, in the late 1970's their Cape Town home became "a temporary refuge for friends who dare not stay at their own homes" (68). Hester and Lies's social activism lead to Hester being incarcerated in Pollsmoor. Even though she was released after two weeks, her detention had a great impact on her and on Lies and it took them years to process: "Self-censorship. They succeeded in that. That is why I am writing about it now, so that everybody who wants to know will know, today and in the future, how ridiculous and petty oppression is, how many layers of oppression there were, and how even the tiniest little cog like me experienced it" (104).

This memoir can undoubtedly be read as an act of activism and social engagement. The motivation for writing this memoir does not lie in the urge to celebrate and/or preserve the author's legacy, but in her striving to support and initiate positive social change. *Are You Two Sisters*?, is a thin, unpresumptuous book. However, this humble publication carries the humane message that every single person can (and should!) make a difference. "If I think back to that time, I can see I chose jobs I hoped would make a difference to the lives of people who were suffering," (70) Van der Walt writes. Her memoir speaks of a selfless choosing for the sake of the Other, of undying hope and of helping no matter the costs. Hester van der Walt and Lies Hoogendoorn finally found their place in the world in the village of McGregor where they play an active role in the local

community: "And suddenly I see that all my dreams have come true. On their own. This is how it feels to be part of a village, to belong. Warm around the heart" (127).

Martina Vitackova
m.vitackova@gmail.com
Ghent University
Ghent, Belgium
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4082-2140
DOI: https://doi.org/10.17159/tl.v57i2.8724

Season of Crimson Blossoms.
Abubakar Adam Ibrahim.
Abuja: Cassava Republic, 2016. 313pp.
ISBN 978-1-911115-00-7.

In this phenomenal debut novel, Abubakar Adam Ibrahim paints an engaging, intricate, and cleverly layered portrait of the human condition. The narrative is set in the ultra-conservative Hausa Muslim society of northern Nigeria and revolves around the subversive relationship between a fifty-year-old widow, Hajiya Binta, and Reza, a twenty-five-year-old drug peddler and political thug. With the deftness of an expert wordsmith, Ibrahim weaves the threads of the narrative into a tapestry against the canvas of the tragic aftermaths of interreligious and socio-political upheavals, violence, and despicable corruption on the psycho-social fabric of individual, familial, and communal existence.

At its core, the narrative is about the quest for love and healing amidst the grimness of an immense sense of loss, unresolved grief, filial abandonment, repressed emotions and sexual desires, unspeakable trauma, and societal disillusionment. Each of the central characters grapples with existential angst. For example, after enduring a loveless and sexually deprived marriage as an underage bride, Binta also bears the grief of the sudden loss of her first son, Yaro, with whom she is denied maternal connection, and the subsequent loss of her husband to interreligious violence. Similarly, her young niece, Fa'iza, suffers severe post-traumatic stress disorder (mistaken as demon possession requiring an exorcism) after witnessing the gruesome murder of her parents and younger brother by her maths teacher who leaves their "bright, red blood, warm and sticky, splashed across Fa'iza's face" (77). Reza, meanwhile, manifests what could be defined as the symptoms of the primal wound. This makes the novel excellent material for a psychoanalytic reading.

The captivating narrative opens with Binta's dramatic encounter with Reza during a burglary at her home: "Hajiya Binta Zubairu was finally born at fifty five when a dark-lipped rogue with short, spiky hair, like a field of miniscule anthills, scaled her fence and landed boots and all, in the puddle that was her heart" (9). While Reza shuffles around with Binta, a dagger held closely to her throat, "the friction of her rear against his jeans made his crotch bulge and push hard against her" (14), she realizes "in the muted terror of the moment, that this was the closest she had been to any man since her husband's death ten years before" (13). Reza takes her things and leaves, "having sown in her the seed of awakening that will eventually sprout into a corpse flower, the stench of which would resonate far beyond her imagining" (14). This chance meeting rekindles the dormant embers of Binta's unrequited desires and repressed sexuality. By their second meeting, "the little spark of concupiscence deep within her had burst into a flame" (55), and swiftly flares into a fiery affair, one that does not only defy rigid religious regulations and stifling patriarchal dictates, but also significantly alters the trajectories of their lives. Unsurprisingly, Binta's quest for self-redemption is met with repugnance. She ponders the sheer hypocrisy of society and bemoans the lack of empathy from "people including her niece, who had no inkling of the lifetime of deprivation she had endured", but "looked at her with eyes that gleamed with accusations" (284). Ultimately, Binta realises that for countless women living in patriarchal contexts like herself, the dream of being and living freely "can be dainty and beautiful, like butterflies, and just as fragile" (310).

Season of Crimson Blossoms provides valuable insight into the socio-cultural context of northern Nigeria, which serves as a microcosm for most Islamic and patriarchal African societies. It scrutinises the corrupt Nigerian society where the youth are deprived of requisite opportunities to excel. Instead, they are deployed by unscrupulous politicians to "get in the gutters and do dirty jobs" (303), while their own children study at prestigious universities abroad and lead extravagant lifestyles. For insatiable and power-thirsty politicians like Senator Buba Maikudi, "there are no permanent friends in politics but permanent interests" (301). Therefore, regardless of their loyalty, fellow politicians, corrupt police officers, and street mercenaries such as Reza, Gattuso, and the other boys at San Siro are merely expendable pawns in the political game of chess.

However, the most pertinent crux of the novel lies in its feminist engagement. The novel highlights the plight of women in the Hausa society under the weight of institutionalised patriarchy and overzealous religion. Ibrahim particularly excoriates the irrationality of discriminatory cultural strictures such as the practice of *Kunya* (Yusuf 11–2) or sense of propriety, which works primarily to suppress sexuality and inhibit a woman's expression of love and affection towards her first son or children. The novel further explores feminist issues such as forced and underage marriages, polygamy, ageism, and the desexualisation of older women by patriarchy.

The richness of the novel lies not only in its modest prose and alluring lyricism, but also in the subtlety with which the author enunciates the social issues that encumber his society without being overly didactic. With the proficiency of an African folklorist, Ibrahim begins each chapter with a proverb that foreshadows the events that follow. For example, the proverb at the beginning of the second chapter reads: "*A butterfly thinks itself a bird because it can fly*" (23). The narrative is enriched by sparse sprinklings of magic realism exemplified by the "the pungent smell of roaches" (23) that often presage "something inauspicious" (9), and "the cat with its white-tipped tail and gleaming eyes" (119) that always prances the fence whenever Binta's suitor and nemesis, Mallam Haruna, visits.

In conclusion, *Season of Crimson Blossoms* explores what Chimamanda Adichie refers to in her article entitled "African 'Authenticity' and the Biafran Experience" as the "*grittiness* of being human" (emphasis in original) (50), and the "idea of a common humanity" (46). The novel is indisputably a daring and fresh addition to the contemporary African literary canon.

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Susan Adaora Okpala
adaorasusan@gmail.com
North-West University
Potchefstroom, South Africa
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2885-939X

DOI: https://doi.org/10.17159/tl.v57i2.7829

A Tree for the Birds.
Vernon R. L. Head.
Johannesburg: Jacana, 2018. 346 pp.
ISBN 978-1-4314-2565-5.

Vernon Head's novel *A Tree for the Birds* (2018) focuses on the childhood and adolescence of a young boy, Chrisnelt Malotika, in a city in West Africa. The most significant event for the protagonist is the sudden death of his close childhood friend, who is killed when lightning strikes a tree they are both climbing. This leaves an indelible mark on the young protagonist. His emotional state declines and he develops an almost feverish obsession with both reading books and growing a new tree in his garden. The young protagonist believes that a new tree will bring his lost friend back to him. His investment in the anthropomorphic sentience of the birds and of inanimate objects such as rocks are powerfully demonstrative of a desperate search for meaning in a world bereft. The character comes to exhibit what might be called a certain form of madness. The first four chapters of the book create a simultaneous sense of both urgency and purposelessness and are certainly the strongest part of the novel. At its best, the novel offers a searing and devastating account of the effects of trauma and unbearable loss on a young child.

Over the course of the novel, however, the protagonist's obsession with growing a tree intensifies and becomes a rather uninspired and belaboured thread that links together a series of events and nominal characters. These events—which might otherwise be called vignettes if only they were not so repetitive and wearisome for the reader—include a journey alongside the tropical figure of a wise sage through the forest in search for a fabled tree, unfocused interactions with the Japanese neighbours, and didactic conversations with an Icelandic internet salesman. The protagonist, who has earned the title "Chrisnelt, the Gardener of Dee Dee Street" (184), is later employed by a corrupt religious minister to take care of his garden. It is this employment that results in the protagonist travelling up the Congo River on a boat in order to uproot and transport a massive tree that is revered by a "tribe up the river, in the heart of the forest" (91)—a journey that is itself a rather obvious reworking of Joseph Conrad's figure of Marlow.

The novel is also burdened with overwrought statements that are wrapped in the language of insight but, on reflection, are really thin appropriations of depth. He writes, for example, that "[a] gardener is a privileged person, who fashions bridges of leaves between people" (224), later writing that "[w]e have

always existed as unitary emanations of water and its dust" (330). In another instance, Head writes the following:

> It is those very low, old leaves that reveal the past; some hang stained with dust, and the spattering of dry mud, like blood, held long after rain. They are the leaves of memory. They will stay behind, because they belong to the ground; a world that lives further and further away from the sun because of the gift of rain, as the new tree grows onward and upward and becomes sanctified. (257)

While these statements suggest a deep investment in environmentalism, the novel never quite moves this beyond the cliché. This didacticism is similarly evident in the protagonist's sense of disillusionment about corrupt structures of government and neo-colonial cultural imperialism—which is captured, of course, in the recurring image of the Coca Cola can. This is similarly evident in an exaggerated sense of devastation at seeing a Christmas tree in the city. The protagonist reflects that "[Africa] *is* a Christmas tree [...] a white, plastic, imported Christmas tree that has replaced a living tree that once burst with the purest green" (emphasis in original) (90). While the novel's attempts to engage with the intersections between corruption, globalisation and environmentalism at the beginning of the twenty-first century could have been powerfully developed, it is all just too obvious to really gain any traction.

While the lyrical, meandering and unfocused nature of the writing in the novel's early chapters is effective in giving us insight into the emotional distress of the protagonist, it fails to carry the weight of the rest of the novel. Head's prose is dense, and contains innumerable figures of speech and an unrestrained lyricism that simply demands too much from its reader over the course of 330 pages. Nouns are inexplicably forced to carry the burden of conceited adjectives, such as when the narrator describes an "extemporaneous tongue" (60), "phantasmal greenness" (63), "loquacious eyes" (200), a "lugubrious shadow" (212), an "epiphanic thought" (222), and even a "propitious hand-spade" (257). In a more extended example of the author's densely poetic writing, the third-person narrator describes the images that the protagonist has drawn:

> The drawings had taken many hours, each one carved with a pen of memories into the green paint, the blue ink tattooing the surface with fine-lined revelations. The astounding detail was botanically accurate, revealing the true nature of each leaf: primary veins, secondary veins, capillary veins, midrib, petiole, stem. The density, size and distribution of stomata were shown, dotted and patterned, giving the leaves breath. Bristling skeletons, bowing to the world of grace. Leaf after leaf was a tombstone to him, planted in memoriam. Every leaf had been a friend, observed alive, delicate, stretching. Each leaf said 'Tata?' on an edge somewhere. Each leaf was framed by radiating lines of verse, telling of an individual life—No's life. Scratched words, pondered words, like the winding tracks through a forest." (174–5)

The density of Head's prose here is representative of much of his writing throughout the novel. Head's description of the internet is similarly laborious:

> The internet, it seemed to Chrisnelt, was the distant future, on the very edge of evolutionary boundaries, illuminating the other side of the walls of perdition: all the way back, long before Belief, walking along a spoor-line, to where everyone began on the plains, at the extremity of the first forests of birds, dancing with the grass. A canopy of pixels, a new roof for the brilliant world of thoughts on the far side of the City. A roof of windows in that red box on the dusty street. A digital sky; the smiling new mask of No. (191)

The novel evidences Head's obvious mastery of poetry as a genre, but the writing appears impenetrably dense when reproduced in prose form. This is a novel in which nothing of any interest really happens; it fails to move beyond the most basic arrangement of plot and static characters. It is perhaps the author's acknowledgements at the end of the book that offers the most prescient insight into the unresolved weakness in the novel when he thanks two people "for gently elucidating on the merits of story" (332). But a story itself remains only faintly visible and the loose arrangement of events and characters ultimately serves as a mere backdrop onto which the author projects his densely poetic prose.

Andy Carolin
andyc@uj.ac.za
University of Johannesburg
Johannesburg, South Africa
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5869-8876

DOI: https://doi.org/10.17159/tl.v57i2.8418

London Cape Town Joburg.
Zukiswa Wanner.
Cape Town: Kwela, 2014, 224 pp.
ISBN 9780795706301.

Published in 2014, Zukiswa Wanner's *London Cape Town Joburg* depicts the harrowing consequences of alienation arising from the cultural mix typical of migration in the contemporary globalised world. Racial and cultural mixing is facilitated by both colonialism and characters' migration from London (1994–1998) to Cape Town (1998–2008) and lastly to Johannesburg (2008–2011). These three cities and timeframes constitute the three parts of the novel. Wanner's main objective in the novel is to highlight the fragmentation that results from the othering that stems from cultural mixing and globalisation. According to Frantz Fanon (182), being othered causes the collapse of people's psyches and this leads to fragmentation. It is this fragmentation that is represented in *London Cape Town Joburg*. In short, *London Cape Town Joburg* is a story of marginalised people who exist in a binary opposition with dominant groups. Their subsequent feeling of otherness results in fragmented states such as depression, cultural confusion and suicidal ideation.

The three major settings in which the marginalised characters exist each have dominant groups that relegate the protagonists of the novel to 'others' and, in so doing, ignite self-fragmentation in these characters. Martin, the hero of the novel, is adopted and raised by an Irish foster father after the divorce of his biological father and mother. While strolling in London with his adoptive father, a white man refers to Martin as a "monkey" (139). When he matures, Martin marries Germaine and they are blessed with a son, Zuko. Martin migrates to South Africa to protect Zuko from racial othering. In Cape Town, Black people are favoured over so-called coloured people. While Black people are given greater responsibilities, "[b]iracial persons are assumed to benefit from affirmative action" (182) and they are therefore not selected for promotion. In Johannesburg, Liam, Martin's elder brother, tells Germaine that in the city, "race is everything" (125). When Germaine counsels her friend Victoria against blaming her worker, Noma, for her liaison with Victoria's husband, she gets infuriated and describes her as a "self-righteous posh British bint" (205). Germaine wonders how her race factors into the altercation.

Wanner circumvents linear plot and uses flashbacks. The novel starts with the demise of Zuko, Martin and Germaine's only child. Zuko commits suicide and as the readers seek to understand the cause, they are taken through a long drawn-out flashback to arrive at it. Christopher Ball and Jennifer Little (175) observe that through flashbacks, traumatised people relive the ways in which their lives have been disrupted. It is therefore appropriate that Wanner uses narrative flashbacks to explore how the different characters, Zuko, Martin and Germaine's lives have been disrupted. The flashbacks in the novel suggest that being othered have disrupted Martin and Germaine's lives. This includes them being othered in terms of class by Martin's brother, Liam. Aware that he is richer and more influential than they are, Liam takes advantage and sexually molests their son, Zuko (332). Martin and Germaine feel helpless and the present of the novel is interrupted by flashbacks to this traumatic event.

The different characters in the novel exhibit the fragmentation of the self through depression, cultural confusion and suicide stemming from diverse states of being othered. Richard Gray defines a fragmented self as a self "in turmoil," a "fractured self" (264). Martin reports that while in London, Liam got into "numerous fights" with white children and that teachers described him as "aggressive and angry" (140). Apart from the relationship between Martin and Liam, class othering is also evident when Liam's wife, Jenny, leaves him for a richer man (155). As previously mentioned, Martin migrates to South Africa in an an attempt to protect him from racism, but in so doing he delivers Zuko into the hands of a sex predator—Liam.

Martin's biological father neglected him and is deeply hurt to learn that he is alive. When he reconciles with him, he cons him out of all his savings and this also contributes to Martin's psychological fragmentation (313). Germaine is othered because of her gender in her marriage, as Martin relegates her and his mother to inferior positions in the household because they are women (318). When the novel begins, Germaine avoids her husband's company and cries a lot by herself (9), possibly because she reckons that her husband's male acquaintances have led to Zuko's death.

Zuko is othered because of his age and class. His parents migrate to South Africa without consulting him and he loses friends (240); he can only give expression to his melancholy through writing in his personal journals.

Wanner uses different stylistic devices to express the characters' fragmented psyches, including private journals, first-person narration, lexical deviation and illeism. Zuko writes a number of passages in his private journals as an outlet for his disturbed mind. In one

journal, he reveals that he is haunted by xenophobic attacks in South Africa. He is traumatised by the picture of an immigrant being lynched on television (239). His last journal entry relays his harrowing defilement at the hands of his uncle Liam (332–3). The first-person narration takes the form of monologues in which characters express their traumatic experiences.

In conclusion, Wanner's *London Cape Town Joburg* focuses on the psychological challenges marginal groups face in their interaction with dominant groups. Immigrant characters experience cultural alienation and confusion while women and children become bitter because of how they are othered due to their age and gender, respectively.

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Andrew Nyongesa
nyongesa55.andrew@gmail.com
Kenyatta University
Nairobi, Kenya
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3926-1585

DOI: https://doi.org/10.17159/tl.v57i2.8506

Asylum.

Marcus Low.
Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2017. 207 pp.
ISBN 978-1-77010-513-3.

Marcus Low might be known to some for his involvement with the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) as its erstwhile policy director. The important work of this organisation in ending the South African government's intransigence in establishing and maintaining effective public-treatment campaigns for HIV and Aids during especially the early 2000's is well known. *Asylum* is Low's debut novel and it is a text clearly marked by the work he would have been involved in during his time with the TAC.

Within the context of climate breakdown and, recently, the breakout and rapid global spread of the coronavirus COVID-19, Low's novel seems to have been hauntingly prescient about the kinds of horrors the future might hold for humanity—especially since it was first published in 2017, a number of years before the incontrovertible truth about climate disaster and the unavoidable health threat of the coronavirus had become the stuff of persistent daily news coverage, and, moreover, lived experiences. *Asylum* would thus certainly fall into the subgenre of the dystopian novel, though it seems in some ways almost uninterested in bombarding the reader with the establishment of its antiutopian setting, unlike many other novels in this genre. It follows the character of Barry James, a man interned in a hospital in the Great Karoo, as a consequence of being infected with what is known as "pulmonary nodulosis". The disease slowly destroys the lungs of its host (the processes of which the reader sees in some detail throughout the course of the narrative) and is incurable. And it is not without reason that the Pearson quarantine facility where Barry lives, is in the Karoo. The novel is set in a very near future wherein the South African government has determined that the best way to deal with those afflicted by this terrible disease is to simply quarantine them far away from society. Ostensibly, this is to give them full-time care, but really, as becomes apparent to the reader, it is simply a convenient place to let sick human beings die, away from the eyes of the public.

It is impossible to read this novel right now without drawing comparisons with the global health crisis faced globally due to the spread of COVID-19. Indeed, while the intended parallel was clearly to be between *Asylum*'s fictional disease and the very real HIV/Aids epidemic, the novel attains a kind of horrible (while of course unintentional, but nonetheless interesting) new dimension when viewed in relation to the coronavirus. So, for instance, appears the involvement of the premier of the Eastern Cape province, who visits the quarantine facility—as seen from a distance by Barry and another inmate—and speaks to the doctor in charge, Dr Von Hansmeyer: "Von Hansmeyer walked straight to a plump, bespectacled man who held out a hand for him to shake. They talked for a few minutes, Von Hansmeyer gesticulating toward the hospital. And then, quite suddenly, the visitors climbed back into their cars and drove back up the hill, out of sight, back to the outside world" (31). Musing that the premier could not have seen much of the "freak show," Barry's companion observes something chillingly familiar to those who remember the lacklustre and obstinate position of South Africa's initial real response to HIV/Aids: "No, sirree, but he can tell his fat-cat buddies that he's been here and seen what things are like. We'll probably read about it in tomorrow's paper" (31). This assertion is

proven true, unsurprisingly, in the political rhetoric employed by the premier in a subsequent briefing to the media regarding his visit: "Premier Nkonyeni denied allegations that the province will soon be incapable of paying the wages of health workers. […] He also reasserted the province's dedication to containing the outbreak of pulmonary nodulosis and denied suggestions that economic difficulties would make the continued implementation of the national strategic plan an impossibility in the region" (43–4). So far, so dystopian.

Yet, while the political satire is certainly present throughout most of the novel, and the reader is invited to join in a cynical acceptance of the vacuity of modern-day politics, the author succeeds in keeping the narrative focus on the lived experiences of the protagonist too. It is the complexity and unreliability of Barry's subjectivity and personal history that will confound the reader who might be looking for a narrative that presents the diseased as only victim and saint. This is achieved through the use of the narrative technique of the rediscovered journal containing the personal reflections of a character, framed and pieced together as a story for the reader by fictional researchers, quite similar to the structure of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and its sequel, *The Testaments* (2019). It is in some of these writings by Barry where Low's prose truly shines.

In one section of the "marginalia" that at times precedes some of Barry's journal entries, the researchers comment on the character's writing: "One of the most striking stylistic features of Mr James' journals is the way in which the text vacillates between vivid, descriptive narrative and stark, terse writing. Although he writes mostly with a relatively clear and distinct voice, there are indications that he is experimenting with both style and content" (59). This layering of the narration invites the reader to consider the histories and historicisation of disease and illness in a way that also implicates the author and the reader in these processes. Subsequently, it broaches again the enduring question around illnesses: How are we to write and read them?

Asylum offers, through its depiction of a dystopic world, a view on how very wrong things can go when societies have to grapple with diseases that threaten the very existence of our species. It does so, however, with an admirably careful and steady hand, and the story seldom gives in to the excesses of dystopian imagining. Consequently, the world of Low's novel is calmly but unsettlingly believable, and it is a thought-provoking read—particularly so during a real global pandemic. This is a strong debut and a welcome addition to dystopic South African fiction.

Reinhardt Fourie
fourir@unisa.ac.za
University of South Africa
Pretoria, South Africa
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1292-8140
DOI: https://doi.org/10.17159/tl.v.57i2.8412

Die biblioteek aan die einde van die wêreld.
Etienne van Heerden.
Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 2019. 640 pp.
ISBN 978-0-624-08921-6.

Die geskiedenis is altyd teenwoordig, lui die gesegde. Ook in die Afrikaanse letterkunde is hierdie sentiment te vinde. Etienne van Heerden se jongste roman, *Die biblioteek aan die einde van die wêreld* (2019), delf in die resente geskiedenis om te wys dat ons nie van tyd en van ons verledes kan ontsnap nie. Die gevolg is 'n vuishou in die maag, 'n kruisboogpyl in die skouer.

Dit is 'n tyd van groot onrus in Suid-Afrika. Die Rhodes Must Fall- en Fees Must Fall-bewegings skud die land se universiteitskampusse. Denke oor dekolonisering, identiteit en agentskap word opnuut vanuit ons eie hoekie in die Globale Suide uitgedaag. Tot watter mate is ons verwesters én hoekom enigsins? Tot watter mate moet vir die verlede se sondes betaal word? Wie is daarvoor verantwoordelik en hoe maak ons diegene daarvan bewus? Sodanig lees die roman as 'n tydsdokument van die jare 2016–2018.

Hierdie gegewens vorm die basiese uitleg van die verhaal, maar hier word met die geskiedenis gepeuter. In die nawoord skryf Van Heerden dat die teks 'n ideeroman is, wat met historiese feite smous (640). Hierdie fiksionalisering van die geskiedenis word uit die perspektief van drie karakters vertel.

Ian Brand, "kick-ass lawyer" (30), weerspieël aanvanklik één idee van die moderne Suid-Afrikaanse wit man. 'n Blink, rooi Alfa, 'n kantoor wat oor Kaapstad uitkyk en 'n hart vir kuns, kennis en idees. Met eerste ontmoeting blyk Ian 'n liberalis te wees wat teen die denke van sy vader se generasie skop, maar wat dalk te gretig is om ander van sy oortuigings te oorreed. Ian loop 'n vertaalkursus aan die Universiteit van Kaapstad, waar hy sy liefde vir en kommer oor Afrikaans graag met sy klasmaats en ruggraatlose, liberale Engelse dosent deel. Terwyl hy nog vasgevang is in sy eie verlede met

gruwel-herinneringe van die Grensoorlog wat by hom spook, is hy bekommerd oor 'n toekoms waar Afrikaans se waarde as estetiese taal geminag word. As 'n ingeligte, hou hy sy vinger op die pols van die tydsgees so goed hy kan. As gevolg hiervan nader 'n groep regse besigheidsmanne hom om die regsimplikasies van gesigsherkenningstelsels vir sekuriteitslandgoedere—"[d]ie moderne ekwivalent van die ossewalaer" (35–6)—te ondersoek. Kunsmatige intelligensie as beskermer én kapitaal—"[d]ata is die nuwe olie" (71), argumenteer Ian. Kwessies rondom kunsmatige intelligensie en die vierde industriële revolusie word so verken. Etiek en moraliteit betreffende Orwell-agtige sisteme van dophou word realiteit met die lees van die roman te midde die koronaviruspandemie. Dit bou ook op temas wat gereeld in Van Heerden se oeuvre gevind word, insluitende identiteit, dekolonisering en globalisering.

In 'n oomblik van frustrasie stuur Ian 'n twiet die kuberruim in—'n twiet wat sy lewe verander en sy identiteit as oopkop-Afrikaner op die weegskaal plaas. Die vae lyn tussen die kuberwêreld en ons eie kom ook hiermee tot lig, wat kwessies rondom tegnologiese vooruitgang, vryheid van spraak en anonimiteit in sosiale media inlei.

Teenoor Ian staan Thuli Khumalo, dogter van 'n struggle-ikoon, wat haar kinderjare in Londen deurgebring het waar haar pa vir die ANC-tak gewerk het. Sy is struggle-adel, en as 'n uitgesproke leier van die Fees Must Fall-beweging is sy bekend as die nuwe Winnie Mandela. Sy is intelligent, hardegat, onverskillig en soms onberouvol (veral teenoor Ian, saam met wie sy in die vertaalklas is, as verteenwoordiger van alle wit mans), maar sy glo bowenal in vryheid. Vryheid vir 'n generasie nuwe Suid-Afrikaners wat die juk van kolonisering wil afgooi, asook vryheid van leuens en bedrog, al beteken dit vaderverraad. Te danke aan haar agterdogtige vasbeslotenheid kom sy agter dat haar pa—eens 'n kampvegter vir vryheid—by 'n korrupte komplot betrokke is. Gretig vir die waarheid, onderneem sy 'n reis na China waar sy skyn besig is met navorsing vir 'n skryfprojek, maar eintlik die korrupsieplot ondersoek. Kort voor lank word sy daarin vasgevang.

Haar wêreld van politiese stryd op universiteitskampusse is een waar 'safe spaces' begeer word, waar ruimtes van intellektuele debat met 'trigger warnings' gepaard moet gaan. Teenoor dit staan Ian se droom van 'n biblioteek aan die einde van 'n grondpad en 'n ruimte wat idees sonder skroom uitstal, waar taboes, sondes en verskille jou konfronteer.

Ian en Thuli blyk teenpole van mekaar te wees, wie se paaie onwaarskynlik in 'n nie-fiksionele wêreld sou kruis. Fiksie bied wel die moontlikheid om te sê (of te doen) wat anders nie gesê sou word nie. Hulle antagonistiese verhouding verleen 'n dualistiese balans tot die verhaal, waarin teenstrydige idees ondersoek word en wat die kontemporêre tydsgees onder die loep neem. Ten spyte van hulle verskille, dryf hulle mekaar, en dit verleen 'n byna kosmologiese ondertoon aan die roman.

Jerome Maarman, 'n arm bruin student, wat saam met Ian en Thuli in die vertaalklas sit, word weens sy sosio-ekonomiese omstandighede kwaadaardig by die Fees Must Fall-beweging betrek. Tog vind hy nie heeltemal 'n tuiste in Thuli se kamp nie, maar nog minder in Ian s'n. Sy stryd is meer emosioneel en hy word as 'n liminale figuur uitgebeeld. Hoewel die passasies wat aan Jerome toegeken is, minder is as die van die ander twee fokalisators, is syne die enigste eerstepersoonvertelstem. Anders as Ian en Thuli kan hy nie so maklik as 'n tipe saamgevat word nie—wat hom die mees interessante karakter van die drie maak. Sy verhaal voel wel nog onvolledig, maar die roman se oop einde kan dalk nog moontlikhede hiervoor inhou.

Rassespanning, witheid, kollektiewe en individuele skuld is verdere temas wat, soos in die res van die Van Heerden-oeuvre, ook hier benader word. Met die Black Lives Matter-betogings van Junie 2020 in die VSA en Engeland, bied die teks vele outentieke parallelle met die werklikheid.

Die roman bring ook die outeur se groter fiksionele spel tog lig, met die verskyning van Snaar Windvogel, oorspronklik uit *In stede van die liefde* (2005) en later *Klimtol* (2013). Dan word daar ook vlugtig in suggestie na Tian Kilian se manuskrip verwys wat metafiksioneel *Die wêreld van Charlie Oeng* (2017) word. So ook word China (nes in *Die wêreld van Charlie Oeng*) jukstaposisioneel teenoor Suid-Afrikaanse ruimtes geplaas, terwyl die Karoo weereens as mitiese ruimte aangebied word.

Van Heerden bewys dat fiksie 'n politiese daad is, dat dit taboes kan oopskryf en dat dit empatie aanwakker. In 'n post-feit samelewing argumenteer hierdie roman dat fiksie waarhede kan vasvang.

Hoewel uiters kreatief, vind ek hierdie nie Van Heerden se boeiendste roman nie, maar tog die roman met die meeste erns. Dit oortuig! Hierdie boek is definitief Van Heerden se gevaarlikste roman.

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Adean van Dyk
adean.vandyk@spu.ac.za
Sol Plaatje Universiteit
Kimberley, Suid-Afrika
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0082-8129
DOI: https://doi.org/10.17159/tl.v57i2.8466

Brand.
Fanie Viljoen.
Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 2019. 170 pp.
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In die wêreld van kinder- en jeugliteratuur het Fanie Viljoen geen bekendstelling nodig nie. Een treffer na die ander verskyn uit dié bekroonde skrywer se pen. Nie alleen is *Onderwêreld* (2008) sedert 2017 voorgeskryf vir matriekleerlinge wat Afrikaans as huistaal neem nie, maar lesers sit tans op hete kole en wag vir dié roman se opvolg, *Donker web*, wat in Junie 2020 verskyn. Viljoen het al met onder meer die MER-prys en die Sanlamprys vir jeuglektuur (goud) vir sy eerste jeugroman, *BreinBliksem* (2005), weggestap. Vir *Onderwêreld* verwerf Viljoen weer die Sanlamprys vir jeuglektuur, asook 'n ATKV-Kinderboektoekenning. In 2019 verskyn die jeugroman *Brand* by Tafelberg en weereens laat Viljoen die leesgierigheid van jong lesers vlam vat.

Kortom sentreer die verhaal in *Brand* rondom twee Graad 11's, Arian en Estie, en die obsessies wat hulle elkeen koester. Ander belangrike temas wat ontgin word, is sosiale media, vriendskap, eensaamheid en veral buitestanderskap. Hierdie temas word aangebied op 'n manier wat met jong lesers praat, maar ook die volwasse leser enduit boei. Elke tienerleser weet hoe dit voel om op een of ander stadium van sy/haar lewe soos 'n buitestander te voel en elke volwasse leser kan maar alte goed onthou hoe moeilik dit was om as tiener êrens in te pas. Die begeerte na begrip, vriendskap en liefde is deel van elke mens se daaglikse bestaan. Daarom wérk hierdie roman op soveel vlakke.

Die roman skop af met twee motto's, deur onderskeidelik Vincent van Gogh en Charles Bukowski: "There may be great fire in our soul, yet no one ever comes to warm himself at it, and the passers-by see only a wisp of smoke" (Van Gogh) en "what matters most is how well you walk through the fire" (Bukowski). Beide hierdie motto's handel oor die pynlikheid daaraan verbonde om nie raakgesien te word nie. Die gevoel dat 'n mens nie verstaan of aanvaar word nie, die moeilike paadjie wat 'n buitestander moet stap en wat dit kos om aan die ander kant uit te kom. Die motto's is duidelik met sorg uitgekies en stel saam met die romantitel reeds die prominente vuurmotief op die voorgrond.

Die verhaal word aangebied deur middel van wisselende perspektiewe. Die leser beleef die gebeure deur die oë van Estie, Arian en die eksterne verteller. Dié aanwending van fokalisasie het voordele en nadele (later meer oor laasgenoemde), maar werk veral uitstekend om bepaalde temas uit te beeld deur die perspektief van twéé hoofkarakters te gebruik: Arian die piromaniak en Estie die voyeur. Die wisselende perspektief kom knap bymekaar wanneer dit duidelik word dat dié twee karakters dalk verskillende obsessies het, maar dat gedeelde buitestanderskap die basis word van die band wat hulle smee.

Arian is die middelkind, die een wat voel dat hy nie inpas by sy gesin nie. Hy hoor een aand sy pa sê: "Daar is iets nie lekker met daai kind nie" (21) en dink dan "[s]y pa was nie die eerste een wat dit gesê het nie." Arian is 'n misterieuse, interessante en komplekse karakter. Die leser kom gou agter dat hy besonder intelligent is, maar dat die mense in sy lewe hom nie aanvaar vir wie hy is nie: "*Abnormaal*. *Verkeerd*. Dis die flippen etikette wat hulle op hom plak. Almal het 'n etiket vir hom" (klem in oorspronklike teks) (65). Sy obsessie met vuur setel in sy ingesteldheid dat hy met vuur kan identifiseer: "Sy bakhand vou om die vlam. Vuur het nie 'n skaduwee nie. Dis een van daardie vreemde feite van die natuur, maar tog soek hy na die skadu in sy palm. Hy soek na iets wat hy weet nie bestaan nie. Soos die ding wat mens 'n alien maak." Arian se intelligensie kom ook tot uiting in sy sarkastiese sin vir humor—'n lekker aanwins vir die leser wat dié tipe humorsin geniet—en dit word mettertyd uitgewys as iets waaragter Arian skuil en wat mense op 'n afstand hou: "Niemand ken my nie. Dit laat hom tegelyk skuldig voel en soos iemand wat iewers op die oop see aan die verdrink is sonder dat 'n siel daarvan weet" (42). Wanneer Arian egter vir Estie leer ken, kom hy agter dat daar dalk iemand kan wees wat hom verstaan, iemand wat iets diep in hom kan raak—soos wat net vuur nog kon doen.

Estie se troos en toevlug is sosiale media. In 'n poging om haar eensaamheid te stil en die seer van haar verlede te verwerk, lewe sy deur haar sosialemediaprofiel. Wanneer die skuldgevoel begin knaag omdat sy (meestal) vreemdelinge se persoonlike ruimtes binnedring, troos sy haarself telkens met woorde soos "Almal doen mos Facebook stalking" (13) en "Sy kan maar net kyk wat hy aanvang. Dis mos niks nie" (44). Talle kwessies rondom sosiale media word aangespreek deur Estie se verhaal. Sosiale media maak voyeuristiese gedrag moontlik, en maak dit ook

moontlik om in 'n alternatiewe werklikheid te lewe en sodoende jou konkrete werklikheid te vermy. Sosiale media kan 'n obsessie word, soos wat dit duidelik vir Estie geword het—sy het reeds "[t]weeduisend negehonderd en twaalf vriende" (25) en meeste daarvan is vreemdelinge, aangesien sy nie werklik vriende buite sosiale media het nie. In Estie se werklikheid wonder sy "gaan iemand ooit flippen lief wees vir jou? Almal leef net so vir hulleself" (36), maar op sosiale media is dit makliker om jouself te verdiep in die lewe van ander en sodoende 'n intimiteit te verbeel.

Die wisselende perspektief laat die leser toe om albei hierdie karakters se innerlike en uiterlike wêreld goed te leer ken. Die nadeel hiervan lê egter in dié roman se gebruik van die eksterne verteller as 'n derde fokalisator. Die taalgebruik van die verteller as fokalisator is steurend, omdat dit te dikwels ongeloofwaardig voorkom vir die tienerwêreld waarin Arian en Estie bestaan. 'n Ander kwessie rondom taalgebruik is die gebruik van Engelse woorde, al dan nie. Taalvermenging word tot 'n minimum beperk, en alhoewel dit ongewoon is vir 'n kontemporêre jeugroman, is die inkonsekwentheid van taalvermenging egter dít wat steur. Wanneer 'n Engelse woord wel gebruik word, laat dit die leser dadelik wonder, hoekom juis dié woord in Engels? Hoekom word verwys na "bands" en "stuff", maar na "vreetkyk", en "duimnaelfoto's"?

'n Ander punt van kritiek is dat oorsaak en gevolg nie altyd ooreenkom nie: Daar kan meer gedoen word om seker aspekte van die verhaal te regverdig, soos waarom Arian 'n skoolsielkundige moet sien, of waarom vreemdelinge telkens Estie op sosiale media sal bevriend. 'n Belangrike motoriese moment is ook ongeloofwaardig, wanneer Estie inkriminerende foto's op Arian se rekenaar vind, maar daar geen aanduiding gegee word van hoekom Arian nie sy rekenaar sou sluit nie. Verdere kritiek kan uitgespreek word teenoor die hantering van genderstereotipering. Dit word terloops voorgestel deur van die volwasse karakters se dialoog, maar word deur niemand in die verhaal krities beskou nie. Ten spyte van hierdie kwellinge, is die oorhoofse ervaring van die roman tóg positief en prysenswaardig. Die binne- en buitewêreld van twee tieners word realisties weergegee en die reis waarop hulle gaan om hulleself en mekaar te ontdek is grotendeels ontneem van soetsappigheid en geforseerde lessies. En alhoewel sommige verwysings in die teks effens verouderd is (vergelyk byvoorbeeld *Heidi*), sorg die musiekverwysings en die wêreld van sosiale media vir 'n eietydse verhaal, wat danksy goeie karakteruitbeelding ook tydloos kan word.

Ihette Senekal
ihettej@gmail.com
Universiteit van Suid-Afrika
Pretoria, Suid-Afrika
ORCID: orcid.org/0000-0001-9258-8689

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The Secret of the Purple Lake.
Yaba Badoe.
Abuja: Cassava Republic Press, 2017. 132 pp.
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This collection of short stories aimed at teen readers by renowned film maker Yaba Badoe is an exciting melding of narrative styles and storytelling traditions that traverses the world and multiple cultures. This interesting merging of worlds is carried over into the relationship between humans and animals that progressively moves from co-mingling, to an overlap and eventually ends with some of the characters becoming sēmiferis.

The transformation of characters from human to partial animal is part of a transcendental process. Even in "The Fish-Man of Purple Lake", where Musa is transformed into a monstrous half-man half-fish it serves the purpose of being educative thus giving him the opportunity to repent and beg for forgiveness in order to return to his human form as a more enlightened, but humble, man. The humans thus-altered are imbued with power and magical qualities possible only in these combination beings. For example, Whale, Ajuba's friend and constant companion throughout the remainder of the book, tells her, shortly after her legs are replaced with a fish tail, that she has the best of both worlds. Only with animal features, and therefore qualities, are the characters able to attain certain powers beyond that which is human. Badoe uses this positive depiction of human-animal hybrids to engage with the flawed nature of humans by making it such that only through animals and an affinity with nature can any form of life-affirming power be realised. This point is further illustrated by the fact that all changes that occur within the collection are from human to animal, not vice versa.

One of the coruscating features of this collection is that each of the stories can be read as a stand-alone story, but the characters and storylines are also seamlessly interwoven into other narratives within the collection, such that the text ends up as a combination of a short story collection and novella. Badoe's use of

language is elegant and contributes significantly to crafting the interchanging worlds of her stories that are at once transposable yet distinct and unique. While it is the language that brings her worlds together, it is her attention to the details of the geography, customs, music, food and drink that distinguishes each culture and each world through which the narrative flows.

The book opens with "The Fishman's Daughter", a story, set in Ghana, about Ajuba who is driven out her village after the death of her father while fishing in the ocean and is forced to live out her days in the ocean also. She re-emerges later in the book as the mermaid-love of a Norseland viking, Prince Leo, who is himself transformed from a prince, to a walrus and finally to a merman in "The Walrus Prince". Whilst the "The Fishman's Daughter" is written in the narrative style of an African tale replete with West African undertones, the following stories are written in the convention of the Western fairy tale starting with "The Wild Princesses of Orkney", within which the setting of Scotland is evident in the scenery and traditions woven into the story. The fairy tale aspect of this story is concretised by the princesses searching for husbands, *à la* the Grimm Brothers. It is in this story that we are first introduced to Prince Leo who is drowned in this story and resurrected in "The Walrus Prince" where Badoe transports the reader to Norseland, again through the subtleties of details like the representation of foods and beliefs. Although "Romilly The Golden Eagle" is the prequel to "The Wild Princesses of Orkney", giving us insight into the princesses' parents and the deterioration of their relationship, and an understanding of how they find themselves with an absent mother who can transform into an eagle, and forced into marriage by their father; the majority of the story is set in the Middle East. The narration is consistent with the location. Aspects of Western fairy tales are again present, with Romilly playing the role of the fairy god mother and granting her daughter good fortune in marriage. The final story in the collection, "The Fish-man of the Purple Lake", can be read as the closing of the circle. Not only is the story set back in Ghana, but we also learn how the fish-man, who we first meet in "The Fishman's Daughter", came to meet the terrible fate of loneliness and an inability to make friends. Illustrating her narration skills, Badoe credibly brings Romilly back into the narrative not only in the role of the fairy god mother, but also as the Musa's long deceased ancestor.

There are instances of slightly untidy editing, particularly in "The Wild Princesses of Orkney" where there is an abruptness in the narrative that is somewhat jarring, and a clumsy introduction to the youngest princess Jewel, after several pages having lapsed in which Jael was proclaimed the youngest of the siblings, hence her elevation to the status of boy-child. However, what I found to be one of the greatest let-downs of this collection was the author's failure to more clearly problematise the gendered roles and stereotypes that make up both the Western and African fairy tale form in which she wrote her book. Whilst it is possible for the collection to be read against the grain and there is a tongue-in-cheek reading possible, it is not likely that this will be a skill or ability that her implied reader will be in possession of. The other disappointment in the book is the illustrations—they lack the sophistication necessitated by the narrative and indeed detract from the overall loveliness of the collection.

However, Badoe is to be congratulated on her collection for its thought-provoking conflation of worlds, both human and animal, cultures and storytelling traditions to produce a collection of stories that are obviously set in very different locations and cultures, yet manage not only to be part of the same collection, but are also cleverly interwoven without it seeming contrived or incredible. This book is an ideal offering in our current push towards a global amalgamation of languages, cultures and universally accepted modes of conduct and a way to show future generations possibilities for peaceful co-existing.

Silindiwe Sibanda
silindiwe.sibanda@up.ac.za
University of Pretoria
Pretoria, South Africa
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7078-1234

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