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FROM ORALITY TO LITERACY: THE INTELLECTUAL TRADITIONS OF BLACK SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN

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By

SANDRA CAROLE DICKINSON
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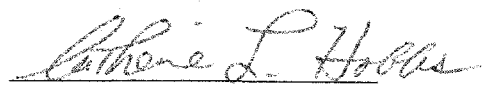
A Dissertation
APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

BY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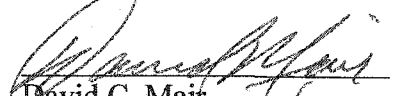
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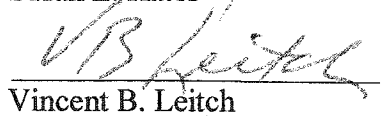
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The genesis of this project occurred in a discussion on the exclusion of women from the Western rhetorical tradition in Kathleen Welch's classical rhetoric seminar. I began to think about my native South Africa and my complete lack of knowledge about black women's writing. Despite having left South Africa in the early 1970s, I still feel deeply connected to this beautiful country with its troubled past.

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ABSTRACT

Black women in South Africa have a long history of intellectualism as evidenced by their expertise as oral performers, rehearsing and revitalizing vibrant storytelling traditions that have been inherited by matrilineal right for centuries. This ancient rhetorical tradition has played an integral role in their emergence as aspiring writers in the aftermath of the Soweto rebellion of 1976. While their arrival on the literary scene is typically characterized as a breaking of the silence, their expertise as social commentators and community activists has roots in African patriarchal organization in which private and public spheres are delineated along gendered lines. Black women's growing public presence in the Black Consciousness Movement that launched an orchestrated assault on apartheid is less a result of their incorporation in mass education and Western epistemology than a resourceful return to their rhetorical roots.

Chapter one explores the oral traditions as sites of resistance to patriarchy and the provision of opportunities for claiming agency and individual identities, strategies that have been essential for anti-apartheid activism when learning to write. Chapter two considers the impact that literacy has had on black women, beginning with its introduction by missionaries in the nineteenth century and continuing through the apartheid era. Reasons for black women's late arrival on the literary scene are discussed in relation to pedagogical practices and philosophical positions concerning the role of black women in a white dominated society. Chapter three examines a

century of composition and grammar instruction in South Africa by analyzing a selection of textbooks used in schools from the standpoint of current composition and rhetorical theories. Chapter four investigates the role of Freirean literacy initiatives in the black community as surreptitiously deployed in apartheid-era South Africa. The lack of information on literacy groups is addressed by textual analyses of reading material produced in literacy classes by black women learners for other students. Chapter five considers the crucial yet dubious role of white sponsorship in assisting black women writers to reach a wider, predominantly Western audience.

Introduction

In South Africa, a land historically divided along racial, ethnic, linguistic, and gendered lines, Western culture was until recently perforce the dominant culture, achieving its hegemonic status as a result of colonialism and the imposition of the colonizer's culture on the colonized. Rich and complex African oral traditions that have been cherished and nurtured for centuries could not compete in status with the literate culture of the Westerners. And, inevitably, the proliferation and promotion of Western culture in the colonies has been overwhelmingly slanted to reflect the deeds, duties, and desires of white men, for the colonial mentality is manifestly predicated on masculine ideals and challenges, that is, on the military, economic, political, social, cultural, and religious conquest of an indigenous population and the taming of an exotic and frequently inhospitable terrain.

The presence of white women in the colonies has always been a necessary, although decidedly secondary, function of the "civilizing" mission. Anne McClintock points out that while "European men, by the close of the nineteenth century, owned and managed 85 percent of the earth's surface, the crucial but concealed relation between gender and imperialism has, until very recently, been unacknowledged or shrugged off as a fait accompli of nature" (5-6).[1] White women, if not exactly

[1] Surprisingly, it was a white South African woman, Olive Schreiner, who attempted to raise awareness of the "parasitic" role of white women in the colonial context. While not referring specifically to her native country in *Woman and Labor* (a feminist tract that became the bible of the women's movement in Britain soon after its publication in 1911), she condemned the practice of the "extensive employment of the labor of slaves, or of subject races or classes" by the "dominant race or class" to the extent that the "physical toil on the part of its own female members has become unnecessary." By not contributing in

contented with their allotted supporting roles in the colonial context, have been largely complicit and complacent with this arrangement. Complacency inevitably enables and encourages silence, for the apathy it fosters removes the key ingredient of personal motivation and excuses the enabled from exercising a keen sense of civic duty and the development and deployment of a critical conscience.[2] As McClintock insists, "white women were not the hapless onlookers of empire, but were ambiguously complicit both as colonizers and colonized, privileged and restricted, acted upon and acting" (6).[3]

Unlike white women, who had the luxury of selectively ignoring, overlooking, or condoning the mounting abuses of white privilege they witnessed from their protected position, black women in South Africa have not consciously elected to

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any meaningful manner to society, these spoiled women emerge as the "effete wife, concubine or prostitute . . . waited on and tended by the labor of others" (78-80).

[2] The ceremonial burial of Sarah Bartmann in South Africa on August 9, 2002, International Women's Day, is emblematic of the treatment of black women by white men in the colonial conflict. Bartmann, known as the "Hottentot Venus," was strutted around England and France as a sexual freak due to the size of her buttocks and genitalia. As Charlotte Bauer writes, "Alive, she was a stomach-turning symbol of Enlightenment science's obsession with the idea of classifying human beings in descending order of superiority." Upon her death in Paris in 1816 at the approximate age of twenty-six, George Cuvier dissected her body, and her skeleton and organs remained on display at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris until 1976, when an increasing number of complaints and a "sense of shame among post-war Europeans about colonisation and the barbaric consequences of 'Master Race' pseudo-science as expressed by Nazi Germany" led to the Bartmann exhibit being removed from public view (8). Lengthy negotiations between Paris and Pretoria finally yielded Bartmann's remains for burial, and her nationally televised funeral attended by President Thabo Mbeke will likely stimulate an extended dialogue and academic research on the fate of black women under white colonial rule in South Africa.

[3] The subordination of Afrikaner women to the ideology of the white tribe is reflected in their dedication to motherhood and matrimony, having been vigorously dissuaded by propaganda from the pulpit, from parliament, and by paternal opposition from actively participating in the political forum. They have benefited profusely from their sheltered and sanctified position in society. This assigned supporting role is outlined in a booklet entitled "Women Our Silent Soldiers," which was written by wives of members of the Cabinet and published in 1978-79 by the Federal Council of the Nationalist Party of South Africa, intended for distribution to white women as a morale booster and as edification of their duties when civil unrest erupted in the country following the Soweto riots of 1976. White women are described as the "indispensable 'soldiers' within our country's borders and their spiritual power is South Africa's invisible weapon." Prime Minister John Vorster's address to the Congress of the South African Federation of Women in 1975 is quoted in the same booklet: "If ever there was a woman in the world's history who was called upon to serve, inspire and support her husband and her

remain silent in order to accrue benefits that their complicity and complacency might secure. The absence of their voices from the public sphere has roots in traditional African social organization and cultural conditioning: participation in the public arena has usually been reserved for men, and female entry to this male discourse community has not been permitted, neither philosophically nor physically. Beginning with the arrival of the first group of white settlers in 1652, dispatched by the Dutch East India Company to establish a supply station for ships plying the Cape of Good Hope sea route, the already limited sphere of influence accrued by black women has gradually and systematically been eroded until very recently. This pattern of controlling and containing black women reached its apex under the white supremacist regime of the National Party, leading to the enactment of increasingly repressive legislation to enforce the institutionalized silencing of black women as a means of facilitating the government's ever-tightening controls on the black (male) labor market.

The burgeoning white-controlled economy, sustained by the considerable output of the gold and diamond mining industry, depended heavily on a steady supply of black male labor for its continued vigor. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, workers starting streaming to the cities and towns, having been forced to seek employment in part by the government's imposition of a hut tax for each dwelling owned by a black man, a heavy burden in a polygamous culture. Additionally, white encroachment on black-owned farming areas rendered countless families homeless and starving. This migration lead to the enactment of a series of laws aimed at controlling the influx from rural areas of dependants who required housing,

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child, her nation and her country, then her name is: Woman of South Africa" (qtd. in Goodwin 223-24). There is the tacit assumption that "woman" refers only to white women.

employment, education, and medical care. By restricting their ability to join their husbands employed in white industry, by limiting their access to education and good jobs, and by disenfranchising the black population, white authorities have left few outlets for black women's civic participation, intellectual enhancement, or creative endeavors. Needless to say, this deliberate attempt to excise black women and their achievements from the official (white) version of history is not without precedent, for the downplaying and denial of the existence of a sustained and flourishing black women's intellectual tradition in South Africa is by no means a unique phenomenon in world history.

Women of all races in South Africa have been decidedly silent throughout South Africa's conflicted history, even during the relatively enlightened years of British interest and intervention in the country. The absence of female voices of all races has been "deafening" as Liz Gunner notes: "South African history, in all its multiple strands, is thick with the names of men, some honorable and some dishonorable, but of women—even the women of honorable/dishonorable men—much, much less is known: their stories have not been told" (*Zulu* 199). While there are notable exceptions to the general absence of women from active participation in South African civic affairs as political and social commentators, a handful of white women refused to be silent or silenced by the predominately male-oriented cultural climate. Writers such as Olive Schreiner and Nadine Gordimer represent a small but select tradition of white women who have dared, or even expressed the desire, to critique the ramifications of the colonization of South Africa and the perversions of a

white culture dedicated to its own material privilege, economic superiority, military prestige, and political hegemony.

An enduring characteristic of rhetorical traditions worldwide is their canonization of men's contributions, their exclusion of women's voices, and their biased view of social relations, historical conditions, and cultural contributions. This is inevitable when only half the population is considered qualified to warrant admission to the intellectual life of a society, and those contributions that are accounted for are accredited to men. Although an occasional woman orator of note does exist in the historical record, the canonization of women orators and rhetoricians is the exception, and while their inclusion in rhetorical traditions should be celebrated, it must be regarded as an anomaly. Our increasing knowledge of those women rhetoricians and theorists, traditionally excluded from the Western rhetorical canon, has resulted from the persistent efforts and painstaking excavatory work of dedicated feminist scholars who instinctively knew that the continuing canonization of male rhetoricians was grounded in a system of selection based on blatant social discrimination which denied women the opportunity for civic participation, decided not on aptitude or ability, but on gender alone. Cheryl Glenn contends in *Rhetoric Retold: Regendering the Tradition from Antiquity Through the Renaissance* that

> Rhetoric always inscribes the relation of language and power at a particular moment (including who may speak, who may listen or who will agree to listen, and what can be said); therefore, canonical rhetorical history has represented the experience of males, powerful males, with no provision or allowance for females. In short, rhetorical

> history has replicated the power politics of gender, with men in the highest cultural role and social rank. And our view of rhetoric has remained one of a gendered landscape, with no female rhetoricians (theoreticians) clearly in sight. (2)

As most scholarship is initiated, financed, undertaken, and published in the West, the rhetorical practices of women in developing countries have received substantially less attention. The public silencing of black women in South Africa is yet another painful reminder that official histories of rhetoric are, with depressing monotony, characterized by their exclusion of women from civic discourse. Insufficient attention has been paid to women in former colonized countries who have vigorously opposed the imported prejudices and practices of colonial regimes, as well as protesting and resisting homegrown oppression arising from traditional patriarchal social structures. The intellectual traditions of black women in South Africa have suffered a fate similar to that of women in societies around the world who have been denied the opportunity to participate in the formulation and shaping of literary and rhetorical traditions as theorists, commentators, and practitioners. Lauretta Ngcobo maintains that

> Women have always played vital roles in our oral literature, but the written form has tended to ignore the women . . . . For many, the African woman writer creature does not exist. One shudders to think what happens to all those born artists among African women—what bottled lives they must suffer, and what talents lie wasting within. ("African" 81)

Although the silencing of the colonized woman has a precedent that precedes colonial intervention, colonization provides a convenient platform for further oppression.[4] As McClintock confirms, "Colonized women, before the intrusions of imperial rule, were invariably disadvantaged within their societies . . . colonized women had to negotiate not only the imbalances of their relations with their own men but also the baroque and violent array of hierarchical rules and restrictions that structured their relations with imperial men and women" (6). Entrenched homegrown patriarchal institutions and practices, widespread during the pre-colonial period, were layered with the imposition of foreign-bred patriarchal privileges and prejudices imported as part of the package deal of colonialism.

While the downgrading of the colonized woman was most apparent in terms of economic, political, and social marginalization, a byproduct of rendering these women invisible has been to secure and sanction their silencing, both institutionally and socially. The colonized man was at the outset a vital component of the colonial enterprise, for harnessing the economic value of his physical labor demanded that the colonizer had to enter a dialogue, however restricted and elementary, with this essential human commodity. The role of the colonized woman has always been ambiguous and their control informally handed over to white women who found a way to rein-in their labor potential by putting them to work as domestic servants, child-minders, and girl-Fridays, thus securing their own leisure and luxury.

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[4] We must, of course, recognize that not all Third World women warrant being classified as subalterns in Gayatri Spivak's sense. There has been a tendency in the West to lump all Third World women in this category, regardless of their class, caste, race, or tribal affiliation, thereby ignoring the attendant privileges and/or penalties inherent in these political/socioeconomic groupings.

A full accounting of the history of colonialism will continue to suffer from gaps, omissions, and distortions as long as a sizeable segment of the population who witnessed, experienced, and suffered under colonial domination is not actively consulted or provided with forums for documenting their perceptions and perspectives on an historical era that continues to have major ramifications in charting global policies in the twenty-first century. Removing the barriers to participating in local, national, and international dialogue requires that we attempt to understand the complex dynamics of the silencing of oppressed peoples—complex because each encounter between an indigenous population and a colonial intruder produced myriad forms of communication due to the commingling and cross-fertilization of preexisting and imported rhetorical traditions.

Although we have rightly come to view the colonial enterprise as a reprehensible and ill-conceived ideology which has had devastating effects on the culture and society of the colonized, the rhetorical practices that have emerged as a result of the unequal fusion of two disparate cultures, and the intermingling of oral and literate traditions, provide what Edward Said describes as "renewable, almost sporty discontinuities of intellectual and secular impurities—mixed genres, unexpected combinations of tradition and novelty, political experiences based on communities of effort and interpretation . . ." (335). Yet, in this uneven match between a colonizing force bolstered and invigorated by the certainty of Enlightenment ideals of rational thought, the marvels of science and technology, and the values of individualism, local cultures were bedeviled in the eyes of the colonizer by myths of multiple gods,

ancestor worship, clinging to outmoded traditions, and a social organization that stubbornly adhered to communalism.

Needless to say, local cultures struggled to survive the overwhelming effects of the "colonization of consciousness" as Jean and John Comaroff have termed this totalizing mission in which the colonizer attempts to "gain control over both the material and semantic practices . . . no habit being too humble, no sign too insignificant to be implicated in the battle" (268). And, predictably, the less visible though no less insidious cultural battle mapped along gendered lines reflects the primary struggle between expansionist, land-hungry, controlling white males and resisting, rebelling black males whose defensive and defiant posture made them targets of suspicion and fear. The curtailment of women's speaking roles, already limited by patriarchal prerogative but nevertheless approved and accepted as culturally beneficial, inherited with pride, and practiced with fervor, withered under the onslaught of colonial administrations geared to the expansion of empire primarily through economic exploitation. The colonials imported their own cultural traditions, packing their trunks with the artifacts of Western civilization, the literary masterpieces of what have since been referred to disparagingly as the DWM tradition, Dead White Males.[5] Disregarding the intellectual capacities of their own women, white men in the colonies paid, moreover, no attention to black women other than as slaves, concubines, and curiosities.

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[5] When an African elite composed literary works under the auspices of European imperialists, such as missionaries, these "producers signify by the very fact of writing in the language of the dominant culture that they have temporarily or permanently entered a specific and privileged class endowed with the language, education, and leisure necessary to produce such works" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 5).

Jacqueline Jones Royster, in an important article titled "Perspectives on the Intellectual Tradition of Black Women Writers," comments: "Worth noting is the rarity of encountering the words *intellectual* and *black women* in the same sentence" (103, emphasis in original). She makes it clear that the blame for this unhappy state of affairs does not lie at the feet of black women, for it is the outcome of "interlocking systems of oppression." The well-documented case of the poet Phyllis Wheatley illustrates the extraordinary ordeal she encountered in eighteenth-century America in her attempt to have her intellectualism recognized. Henry Louis Gates reminds us that Wheatley had to undergo a rigorous oral examination in 1772 by "eighteen of Boston's most notable citizens" in order to secure a signed statement of authenticity that would serve as the preface to her book of poems; without such a certificate it is highly unlikely that a (white) publisher could be enticed to consider her work. As it is, she left Boston without finding a publisher willing to undertake the financial and literary risk of publishing the work of a black woman. After sailing to England with her master, she finally secured the aristocratic sponsorship of the Countess of Huntington and the Earl of Dartmouth, and her *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* appeared in London in 1773 (ix).

The unorthodox methods of verification that Wheatley was subjected to by the Boston white male elite in her attempt to publish her work are characteristic of similar discriminatory treatment that black South African women writers have endured in their attempts to have white-dominated publishing houses consider their work. They also have had to undergo undue scrutiny and a sustained critique of the literary merits of their fledgling work. Just as Wheatley had to overcome doubts that "an African

could possibly have written poetry all by herself" (ix), a new generation of black women in South Africa are still fighting the same prejudices and doubts about their intellectual capacities two centuries later.

Reflecting upon the plight of black women in the United States, Alice Walker painfully ponders how their creativity survived deliberate attempts to smother it through the physical brutality of slavery and the legislative denial of literacy instruction to slaves (234). Parallels can be drawn between the experiences of black women in the United States and their struggle to become literate in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles and the plight of black women in South Africa; both groups have endured racism, political disenfranchisement, economic deprivation, and gender inequality. As Royster states: "African American women have been persistently subjected to measures of value and achievement that have been set and monitored by others, who have not had their interests or potential in mind and who have been free historically to discount, ignore, and disempower them" (*Traces* 4). Despite these similarities, the prejudicial treatment of black women in South Africa has been enforced systematically as part of an audacious attempt by a ruthless white minority to compartmentalize races in an extreme form of segregation.

My project in tracing the rhetorical traditions of black women in South Africa from their roots in oral culture to their continuation in written form after the introduction of literacy seems to be a natural extension of research that traces the history of writing instruction from its grounding in classical rhetoric. Typically, when treatises in Western rhetoric are exported to the colonies, deployed in the segregated schoolrooms of the colonized, only to reappear in modified form by merging with

preexisting oral traditions, the hybrid that emerges is regarded as tainted and its authenticity compromised. As colonial education systems were replicas of the models being exercised in the metropole, many Third World women who were exposed to Western-style education have reflected on this alien and alienating experience. Through the examples promoted in European literary models that were required reading, schoolgirls in the colonies were taught that to be heard one had to be male, white, eloquent, articulate, logical, rational, and that rhetorical prowess was a Western invention. Inheriting orally and informally a rich history of rhetoric through one's matrilineal line of descent was denigrated to that of quaint custom, an innocuous amusement to calm and control young children until they were old enough to attend school proper.

In the introduction to the 1990 anthology *Raising the Blinds: A Century of South African Women's Stories*, Annemarié van Niekerk describes the obstacles that have deterred black women from writing. Within a tangled web of oppression, she draws attention to the lack of access to education that is part of the "general discrimination against women's intellects, knowledge, and experience in male dominated societies." In the South African context, it is the "menace" of the Bantu Education system that has been so devastating to black women's literary output as the "[e]ducational deprivation within this intricate tissue of political oppression and economical exploitation has lead to racialistically distorted conceptions of the intellectual potential of black women" (15). And M.J. Daymond et al, in their anthology *Women Writing Africa: The Southern Region*, note that "education and literacy had major impact on the history of gender" (14).

What has not been adequately examined is the nature of the discrimination that women have been exposed to in schools. In the United States, composition classes have increasingly become productive sites of investigation into identity formation, the interrogation of discourses of power, and the privileging of students' experiences and unique voices. In South Africa, the politics of writing instruction has not escaped the nexus of racism, sexism, and Eurocentricism as articulated through apartheid ideology. In arguing for a more informed critique of black women's writing in the United States, Barbara Smith contends that "Any discussion of Afro-American writers can rightfully begin with the fact that for most of the time we have been in this country we have been categorically denied not only literacy but the most minimal possibility of a decent human life." Smith calls for a "nonhostile and perceptive analysis of works written by persons outside the 'mainstream' of white/male cultural rule . . ." (4-5).

While the rapidly expanding volume of scholarship on black women's writing in South Africa is gratifying, their burgeoning literary production is frequently found to be lacking in aesthetic merit when held up to exacting Western standards, criteria that ignore the materiality of black women's literacy. In white-controlled South Africa, the quality of education available was dictated by one's official racial classification. For black women, the "menace" of Bantu Education doomed them to the attainment of functional literacy. Ngcobo describes the writing of African woman as a "fledgling literature, fighting for its survival at all levels. Not only do we have to contend with the problems of writing, but we have problems communicating with publishers, with critics, and even with the institutions of learning . . . ." She considered that for her a career as a writer was "not possible and that no one would have any interest at all in

what I could say—not the men, not the white people, and not even the other women . . . ." Ngcobo mentions several "articles and half-finished books" that she burned over the years ("African" 81-82). My study of the methods for teaching composition and literature in black schools in South Africa, as well as the racist and sexist ideology that informs this pedagogy, seeks to provide an alternative perspective from which to assess the contributions of women to the black literary tradition.

By examining the far-reaching results of this global extension of the European male's monopoly on the structure, style, and content of public speech and the allocation of speaking rights, we enrich the feminist project of revisionist rhetorical history, and new and insightful foci come into view. Gayatri Spivak contends: "Paradoxically, the retrieval of the history of the margin can be a lesson not only to the writing of woman's history triumphant, but also to the writing of the most hegemonic historical account" (239). This she sees as the "strongest sense of rhetoric, which works at the silences between bits of language to see what will work as meaning, to ward off a silence filled with nothing but noise." The dissemination of Western rhetorical concepts and practices in former colonized countries has infiltrated and displaced local rhetorical traditions at all levels through the suffocating and swamping overlay of colonial governing mechanisms, of which education plays a key, though not exclusive, role. We need to recognize the historical and cultural significance for the indigenous population when their rhetorical traditions, which have evolved to satisfy the communicative needs of the people, have been denigrated, disrupted, and dismantled by the intrusion and imposition of the imported Western model.

Anne Kelk Mager notes that "social histories of South Africa remain largely gender-blind, almost entirely overlooking women as historical subjects and ignoring feminist concerns" (7). Although this gender-bias is being eliminated through a growing volume of feminist scholarship, the persisting problem is that the historical record has to be mined for occasional snippets of information that could prove fruitful and open to reinterpretation. When women did speak, it was invariably in gender-segregated settings. Attempts to enter male-dominated discourse communities have encountered resistance, derision, and deliberate attempts to silence women by intimidation and recourse to overt sexism. Researching the history of writing instruction in South Africa is similarly frustrating. As writing instruction has been subsumed under layers of grammar, comprehension, and précis exercises, rarely do writers, black or white, talk about their experiences in English classes, for the formulaic approach to composition has been accepted as an unquestionable given, and it therefore avoids scrutiny.

However, the teaching of writing, the sponsorship of writing, and the critique of writing produced by Africans in colonial and postcolonial settings inevitably raises important ethical questions. Homi Bhabha notes the currency of critical theories given to "those who have suffered the sentence of history—subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement," for it is from them that "we learn our most enduring lessons of living and thinking" (172). In the postmodern era in which overarching grand narratives, such as colonialism, have come under sustained assault, leading to their devaluation and in some cases disintegration, Bhabha asks whether we "need to rethink the terms in which we conceive of community, citizenship, nationality, and the

ethics of social affiliation?" (174). Black women's writing in South Africa, emerging as it has under the "sentence of history," offers alternative visions of writing, reading, and speaking. McClintock draws attention to a sense of identity in African society that is "experienced as communal, dynamic and shifting, rather than as fractured, immobile and solitary" (317).

South Africa's dramatic transformation from international pariah during the apartheid period to rainbow nation in the post-apartheid era has resulted in the adoption of a progressive constitution that has technically eliminated gender discrimination. Without the active participation of black women and white women in the constitutional negotiations that began during the transfer of power from white minority to black majority government, it is doubtful if this groundbreaking move to address gender imbalances would even have gained a foothold in the intense national dialogue. Black women were determined to speak up and ensure that the birth of a new nation entailed a complete break with the sexism of the past. This unprecedented visibility in public affairs may not have become a reality had it not been for the tragedy of the Soweto Uprising in June, 1976, a watershed in recent South African history.

In the political tempest that erupted in the black community after countless black children were killed, wounded, or imprisoned by paramilitary units for their role in staging a peaceful protest for school reform, black women's participation in demonstrations, strikes, political meetings, and resistance culture increased dramatically. Becoming vocal (and violent if necessary) to protest the excesses of the hated white minority government was infused with urgency. While mastering literacy

became an important vehicle for activism in consciousness-raising, political empowerment, social protest, and cultural regeneration, their involvement in anti-apartheid agitation was decidedly not a break with tradition. As expert cultural commentators and social critiquers, skills honed in the practice and perfection of the oral traditions, women needed no prodding to participate in the escalating campaign of defiance against the oppressive Nationalist government. In fact, black women experienced something akin to a renaissance in the aftermath of the schism created by the massacre of Soweto school children, for this pivotal event unleashed a pent-up urge to shatter the apartheid state and the perpetual subjugation of their people.

CHAPTER ONE

The Intellectual Legacy of the Oral Traditions

The oral traditions, as rich sites of intellectualism for women, have become a valid and vibrant resource to draw upon for inspiration when investing in literacy. In this chapter, I examine aspects of black women's rhetorical practices that underwrite their communicative competence when transferring their talents to writing. I discuss the politics of the private and public spheres and how the marginality of women's oral traditions has provided a safe forum in the midst of a patriarchal milieu for launching incisive social critiques. I also explore the effects of missionary settlement on women's intellectual traditions and the impact that the introduction of literacy has had on these traditions. Christianity has had unintended consequences by allowing for the invention of a rhetorical (and dissenting) space for women. I also consider the effects of apartheid-induced cultural decimation and the surprising reinvention of the oral traditions in anti-apartheid protests.

The Gendered Rhetorical Culture of Pre-Colonial South Africa

The Politics of Place: Subversive Practice in the Domestic Sphere

The public display of black women's intellectualism in South Africa has long been silenced by what Gunner calls the "collusive patriarchies" of black males and white males (*Zulu* 205). Muting the voices of women in the public sphere is a tradition that has been in existence long before white settlement began in South Africa in the

mid-seventeenth century. The patriarchal basis of African social organization has forced women to assume a subordinate role, one that has discounted and discredited their cultural contributions and denied their participation in the politics of the tribe.

Traditional rural settlements kept women tied to the land, living under male patronage in extended family units. This fragmented social arrangement militated against women organizing mass rallies to protest their living/working/marital conditions. But, despite their relative isolation, women in these households functioned as female-centered communities acutely aware of inequities in their station in the kraal, conscious of the privileges men accorded themselves, yet unable to overturn this patriarchal power base.[1] We know, for instance, through stories passed down in the oral traditions, that women resisted the practice of polygamy, exposing the discord and divisiveness it created among co-wives, as polygamy features as a persistent *topoi*. As sites of fertile resistance, the oral traditions offer valuable insights into how women made sense of their position within the hierarchy of the kraal; how they used language to empower themselves and to ridicule schemes that reveal male excesses; and how they carved out areas of influence for themselves.

Black women in South Africa can trace their oral traditions to pre-colonial times. "When those of us in my generation awakened to earliest consciousness," expert storyteller Nongenile Masithathu Zenani reveals, "we were born into a tradition that was already flourishing. Narratives were being composed by adults in a tradition that had been established long before we were born" (3). Yet, despite being the enthusiastic inheritors of an ancient and thriving intellectual tradition, black women

[1] A kraal is the enclave of huts that house extended family units. Within this enclosure is a cattle kraal in which the valuable livestock are contained.

have not been accorded the respect that this achievement warrants. Subsumed within the genealogies of male lines in which they played their part as bearers of children, their personal and communal contributions to the cultural wealth of the tribe have gone largely unrecognized and unacknowledged as a result of patriarchal practices. Male discourse has been foregrounded, conducted in the public sphere of official tribal business in which the observance of rituals, the display of loyalty to the chief, the managerial functions of the kraal, and the resolution of inter- and intra-tribal disputes necessitated formal rhetorical conventions suited to the political functions of the public sphere.

The politics of place function as an important contributory factor in the relegation of women's oral traditions to that of second-class cultural products. In traditional African society, the typical polygamous family unit is divided along gendered lines that parallel economic organization. As cattle are the chief commodity that can be traded in order to secure a bride, a man's worth is measured in terms of the number of cattle he owns, and as wealth is accumulated through expanding the size of the herd, this enables him to acquire additional wives through the payment of *lobolo*, or bride price, to the woman's father.[2] Tending the valuable cattle, the core of a man's social standing, thus becomes the exclusive responsibility of men, while the women are relegated to the more mundane task of crop cultivation, laboring in the fields in the

[2] Missionaries strongly disapproved of the payment of *lobolo*, and this transaction continues to come under attack by whites to this day, although many black women regard it as a legitimate practice that is not demeaning to a woman. Harriet Ngubane argues that the traditional practice of *lobolo* in rural areas is beneficial to women by "providing a direct economic asset" as well as being a "means of generating kinship categories or units which are a basic source of security for women and their children" (173). In fact, the transfer of property from the groom to the father of the bride has an ancient pedigree. In Greece the payment of bridewealth or *hedna* during marriage negotiations was customary, and during the Homeric period, the gifts provided by the prospective groom were "the most significant element in these transactions" (Blundell 67).

scorching sun to produce sufficient food for their children, husbands, and sundry dependents of the extended family. Women are, therefore, part of a productive cycle in which surplus cattle are "exchanged for a woman's productive capacity in agriculture and her reproductive capacity to create future labourers, cattle, power" (Guy 40). This productive and reproductive capacity causes women to generate but not control the wealth of the family group, and, as a result, their husbands, fathers, and brothers inevitably regard them as chattel. While harnessing their labor as both mothers and workers, women accrue value in similar fashion to slaves who were purchased for both their physical labor and their capacity to produce future slaves. But, as Guy points out, women do earn a measure of "social standing and social integrity" (46) because of the economic value of their labor.[3]

During the era of slavery, if a slave escaped, great efforts were exerted to recapture this human investment; similarly, if a woman decides for whatever reason to leave her husband and return to the home of her father, brother, or other male relative (virtually the only option open to her), the deserted husband is entitled to seek repayment of the *lobolo* from the wife's father to compensate for the loss of his investment. Under the terms of this social/economic contract, the father could reasonably be expected to exert considerable pressure on his errant daughter/sister/ niece to return to the home of her husband in order to avert the subsequent financial hardship that her flight would visit on the unfortunate father. In pragmatic terms, her

3 This status was retained, even in the face of conflict between white settlers and local tribes. For instance, in a dispute over water rights in 1823, the Reverend Hamilton, a missionary who had settled at the Kuruman River, reports that the chief refused to overrule the rights of his women to utilize the land and the water as they saw fit, despite the inconvenience this caused the mission station whose vegetable garden was deprived of access to water from a local spring (qtd. in Comaroff 273). The women worked the land while the men tended the cattle, and each retained control over their respective labors.

refusal to obey the prescriptions of the social code causes a loss of social standing for the male relative and a probable disruption of peaceful, productive, political relations that exist between the two households as a result of contractual obligations. In the case of the husband of a rebellious wife, her departure from his kraal undermines his prestige as he has ultimate authority over his wives; this public humiliation reveals that the husband is incapable of restraining and retaining his wife as is his culturally sanctioned right and obligation.

Cast in the subordinate role as laborers with minimal bargaining rights, women in rural areas have traditionally been allocated a restricted area of operation, and within the kraal, "there were clearly demarcated spaces for men and women" (Hofmeyr, *Spend* 28). With the chief overseeing the proceedings, the men claimed the courtyard in the center of the cluster of huts as their physical space for conducting daily management functions and settling disputes, meeting with representatives of neighboring settlements to discuss items such as the arrangement of marriage contracts, administering legal issues, and conducting ceremonial functions. In Zenani's commentary on "Marriage in Early Times," the arrival of a group of men from a neighboring homestead heralded important business as "They sat in the courtyard. They did not enter the house. Anyone could see that they were there on some kind of business, an important matter, for they were sitting in the courtyard." The selected venue is a cue for everyone else to remain at a distance: "[n]o one went near during the discussions that had taken place in the courtyard among the older people" (272-73). The visitors, we learn, have come to negotiate a marriage, devising a scheme with the father of the selected girl to kidnap her (including the customary beating to force

her acquiescence) and spirit her away to her new home. The mother of the handpicked bride-to-be is merely told that "our daughter has been seen by a certain person. I have accepted him because I like him. I have asked for dowry—cattle. You must prepare the proper things for the young woman's departure" (274).

In contrast to the public visibility of the civic center, women go about their domestic duties in the proverbial wings. The huts in which the women live with their children tend to be situated at a distance from the central courtyard; thus the domestic functions of the women's daily routine form a non-distracting backdrop to the wheeling and dealing taking place among the key players on center stage. This practice of segregating men and women establishes physical boundaries that foster discursive borders. Margaret Kinsman notes in her study of Southern Tswana women in the nineteenth century, that prohibiting women by custom from the tribal courts meant they had no political pull and were dependent upon male relatives to represent their interests in disputes. Disenfranchising women had the effect of limiting them to "articulating opinions and fulfilling ambitions in the domestic sphere." The intended message conveyed is that "She must mind her work and leave the mahuku ('words') to men alone" (50-51). The uninvited intrusion of women on this male-claimed territory is considered a rupture of a cultural more whose ingrained observance and unquestioning acceptance constitutes social etiquette. As cultural expert Zenani makes clear: "The woman's normal role is to keep a distance from the courtyard . . . that is how it is; that is Xhosa custom" (380). It is hardly surprising that traditional African rhetorical culture in South Africa should have evolved along gendered lines considering that the delineation of a physical space for rhetorical performances from

which women are excluded is a characteristic of the global development of the public/private spheres that has served to isolate women, a form of gender apartheid.

The Western concept of allocating private and public spaces based on gender has its origins in ancient Greece. Women's place was determined to be in the *oikos*, the household, and "male domination of the *oikos* was regarded as a key element in the maintenance of social and political stability" (Blundell 76). Thus, a man's control as "unlimited master of an *oikos*" provided the basis for establishing his status in the *polis*, and "The reproduction of life, the labor of the slaves, and the service of the women went on under the aegis of the master's domination" (Habermas 3). Even at home, women were segregated in the *gynaikeion*, the women's quarters, while the men entertained their friends in the *andron*, the men's dining room. The only female presence deemed appropriate at the *symposium* or party was that of entertainers—flute-girls, acrobats, and prostitutes—and participation in the stimulating philosophical discussions that characterize this social occasion (of which Plato's *Symposium* is an idealized version) is restricted to men. The private space of the *andron* serves as an extension of the public sphere of the polis.

In ancient Greece, the development of two distinct and unequal spheres of influence using gender as the dividing line has cast a long shadow on the Western rhetorical tradition, a model of gender discrimination. Commenting on this sexist legacy, Cheryl Glenn remarks:

> Men have acted in the polis, in the public light of rhetorical discourse, determining philosophic truth, civic good, the literary canon, and the theories and praxes of rhetoric. Meanwhile, women have been the

> circumscribed within the seldom-examined *idios*, the private domain; women have been designated *idiots* who sustain family, friendships, and their public-discoursing men from within the *oikos*, the household. (1, emphasis in original)

Glenn's analysis of the gendered status quo of the Western rhetorical tradition, until its challenge under feminist initiatives (and contested also by the paradigm shift brought about by anti-colonial discourse and the collapse of colonialism), has resonance in the existence of gendered oral traditions in African culture in South Africa that have distinct biases based on generic conventions, public prestige, and performance venues.

Public performances depend on the presence of a live and responsive audience; the allocation of a physical space is a prerequisite to an event, and staging areas inherently mirror the political pecking order. Although shut out from the limelight, women claim their own bragging rights, albeit in the shadows of the very public courtyards. Performing mainly for other women and the children within the confines of the domestic domain, the privacy afforded by this informal setting, out of the censorial range of the chief and tribal elders, encourages the development of a less rigid, less formal, and less politically correct genre. Although denied the approbation of male patronage, this maginalization has had important social consequences. The stability and stature of generic conventions and established and endorsed *topoi*, conceptual places where one can draw material for arguments, are far less likely to be tinkered with or tested in the censorial presence of the male leadership hierarchy. Formal male oral traditions are vested with ceremonial decorum and charged with the weight of preserving tradition and prescribing social etiquette.

Relegated to the cooking/cleaning/cultivation/conjugal duties of the kraal, women nevertheless secure a degree of autonomy and anonymity by creating spaces to speak out in the supportive environment and relative obscurity of the domestic areas, free from the withering glances and scathing rebukes of the men. As Graham Furniss claims, "marginality is akin to flexibility and, as in many other forms pushed to the margins, it provides a destabilising comment on the seemingly strong centre" (16). By developing separate oral traditions, women have established their own discourse communities within which they can comment on, criticize, and parody male authority. They have become adept at satirizing and ridiculing those self-aggrandizing aspects of patriarchal culture that particularly irk them and that stand in the way of their attempts to achieve a measure of control over their lives.

Nancy Fraser, in her feminist critique of Habermas's theory of the public sphere, expresses "serious doubts about a conception of the public sphere that purports to bracket rather than to eliminate, structural social inequalities" (207). Referring to recent revisionist research, she argues instead that "members of subordinated social groups . . . have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics." Drawing upon Spivak's concept of "subaltern" and Rita Felski's "counterpublic," Fraser coins the term

> *subaltern counterpublics* so as to signal that they are parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs . . . subaltern counterpublics have a dual character. On the one hand, they

> also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics. It is precisely in the dialectic between these two functions that their emancipatory potential resides. This dialectic enables subaltern counterpublics partially to offset, although not wholly to eradicate, the unjust participatory privileges enjoyed by members of dominant social groups in stratified societies. (210-11, emphasis in original)

Although subordinated to the more visible and venerated male traditions, African women's oral traditions, despite their second-class or subaltern counterpublic status, have conferred unique opportunities on performers. Given "this distance from the overt centres of patriarchy," when women tell a story or perform a praise poem, it frequently has "a cutting edge, a subverting thrust which it might otherwise lack." It also affords women the opportunity to "fill out for themselves a completely different identity, an answer, even a challenge which undercuts the dominant discourse relating to images of power and the status of men and women" (Gunner, "Clashes" 192).

When performing for a group comprised exclusively of women, it is not necessary to censor the topic, nor the images and figures of speech, nor the word choices for possible infractions of communal (male) standards of decorum. Women, thus, can exercise considerable artistic license in their performances. This allows them to utilize this forum to vent their emotions by verbalizing their discontent and their dissatisfaction with a wide range of social issues in a supportive female environment without fear of a hostile reaction or possible retaliation from a censorious male presence. In women's narratives, it is possible to hear "the criss-cross of community

voices often resonant with commentary on urban and rural life, free from any need to reinforce status and thus free from the inscriptions of power and authority" (Furniss 16). Unrestricted by the specter of male disapproval, virtually any aspect of social relations within the community is fair game for critique. Segregated in the domestic areas, women can take advantage of the relative obscurity and anonymity of this safe zone for disclosing the inevitable disputes, animosity, and antagonism that erupt between women who must interact with each other as competitors, vying for the attention of a shared husband.

Participation in storytelling traditions is a democratic process with the opportunity to perform being part of one's inheritance; there are no professional storytellers, although talented performers are more likely to attract regular, attentive audiences. Commenting on Xhosa and Zulu performers, Harold Scheub notes that "Everyone is a potential creator of the vivid images . . . .These narrative images, taken as a group, form the educational system of these oral societies, and in such communities the artist is the intellectual, the teacher" (*Tongue* 55). Instruction in the art of storytelling is acquired not through formal study under the guidance and direction of a professionally trained teacher, but rather through trial and error with a child learning to perform "at the same time that she learns to speak" (*Xhosa* 19). Beginning an apprenticeship in childhood by observing a variety of performers—grandmothers, aunts, mothers, sisters, fathers, neighbors—children learn through observation as members of the audience, taking careful mental note of the core images and stylistic techniques that have personal appeal for the learner and that are obviously effective by generating lively audience participation. Scheub reveals in detail the

complex process of apprenticeship in order to become an accomplished performer, noting that parents initially help the child by coaching and advising, but "when a young creator reaches a certain level of competency, the parents move into the background, become members of the critical audience, and the child is on her own" (*Xhosa* 21).

Those novice performers who simply cannot muster sufficient skill to present even a mediocre rendition of a tale seem likely to suffer from a loss of self-esteem by being unable to take advantage of this limited opportunity for individual enhancement. Aspiring storytellers must be keen observers, self-motivated learners, and have good memories to absorb and rehearse the complex formulae and the generic conventions (although the narratives are not learned by rote), and the range of delivery techniques. In the audience are critical competitors and seasoned performers; thus being critiqued by a group of peers is the most effective and immediate means of gaining feedback about one's ability to educate and entertain.

Respecting and adhering to the generic conventions of storytelling is an important element of oral traditions, for the conformity and predictability of these conventions provides stability, coherence, and utility. Part of the attraction for the audience is the lively interaction that takes place between the performer and her listeners, for the audience is a vital element to a successful rendition. The stories have a "predictability and a familiarity that enable the members of the audience to enter them with facility and without confusion." Lulled by the rehearsal of familiar formulae, the audience soon allows itself to fall under the mesmerizing spell of the storyteller who, sensing this surrender to her rhetorical powers, skillfully and subtly

proceeds to massage and manipulate the emotional enjoyment of her captive listeners, thereby enhancing the dramatic tension of the story (Zenani 3).

The audience gathered to hear a woman perform provides her with instantaneous feedback. By repeating key phrases, responding to her prompts, joining in a song, providing sound effects or, in the event that they are bored, either falling asleep or simply leaving, the audience provides the performer signals that must be promptly acted upon if the listeners are to be retained. Due to the wide range of age groups they entertain in a single performance, versatility and quick thinking characterize an engaging and sought after storyteller. Expert performers earn their reputations because they have perfected the skill of being able to simultaneously maintain the interest level of impressionable young children, skeptical adults, or critical, seasoned competitors. If she manages her audience adeptly, the performer succeeds in bringing "the attention and imagination of the audience into total involvement in the production." As Scheub claims, "Few performers of any art must contend with such crushing demands . . . " (*Xhosa* 13-14).

Successfully composing an oral narrative requires that the performer be well versed in the *topoi konoi*, that familiar stockpile of themes from which the audience expects the narrator to draw. By revealing the topic early in the performance, the participation and enjoyment of the members of the audience will be maximized by allowing them to anticipate the conventions—thematic, stylistic, and performative—for that particular genre. In rural areas, women tell stories that reflect routine domestic issues of the kraal: acrimonious relations with co-wives, arrogant and insensitive husbands, overbearing mothers-in-law, and the complications of rearing children in

polygamous marriages.[4] On a less personal, painful, and pressing level, women analyze and critique labor relations in the fields and in the kraal, as well as discuss farming technology and agrarian issues such as crop production, wildlife, farm implements, weather, and rainfall. Women are keenly interested in expanding their restrictive female sphere of influence and have much to say about the masculine realm of kraal business: managerial, economic, labor, ceremonial, and diplomatic.

Women's Genres: Marginality and Generic Freedom

Male rhetorical traditions are invested with prestige accrued through their status as official organs of patriarchy, functioning as a "discourse of power," inculcating "male and martial" values (Gunner, "Clashes" 186). But, as Gunner emphasizes, not all male praise poetry is invested with official sanction, for males of lower status who do not recite official praises lauding warriors, chiefs, leaders, and other heroes have "no clear connection with power, status or authority," although their performances are still "couched in the language of patriarchy" (188-89). Official performances, however, alone manifest the intellectual investment and philosophical positioning of tribal culture in its public representation. Charged with recounting the historical record of the tribe as received from the ancestors, male performers are cognizant of the responsibility invested in this duty and the dignity that comes with participating in and perpetuating the ceremonial functions associated with cementing

[4] In *Woman and Labor*, Olive Schreiner recounts a conversation she had in her youth with a "Kafir woman still in her untouched primitive condition" who expressed her personal suffering as a wife in a polygamous relationship in "language more eloquent and intense that I have even heard from the lips of any other woman" (6). Schreiner uses "eloquent" not in the sense of stylistic language but as forceful language that unashamedly employs an intensity of emotion, thereby claiming for women their own history of language.

tribal institutions. Women, on the other hand, are taught as girls when they attend traditional initiation schools to become dutiful and obedient wives, and this submission is "also reflected in their virtual exclusion from political and legal forums, from which they were often barred or only permitted as spectators." Subordinated economically by being denied the right to own cattle, the chief source of capital accumulation, women have been "equally cut off from controlling the major intellectual resources and media of their society" (Hofmeyr, *Spend* 27).

While women were decidedly limited in the options available to them to lead fulfilling lives, Hofmeyr contends that their confinement was particularly apparent when it came to cultural activities; despite their participation in "storytelling, praising, dancing and singing," they did not have equal access to the entire range of rhetorical practices in the communal repertoire (*Spend* 27). Despite being pushed to the margins, denied the veneration accorded to male performers, women resolutely built up an impressive tradition as storytellers, as well as composers and performers of praise poems in recognition of their children and women in the community. Although men's oral repertoires included storytelling, theirs "belonged to the glamorous world of public male power." The strength of this institutional patronage supported a climate in which men's performances "basked in a kind of reflected glory that outshone the substantially similar storytelling of women" (30-31).

The Xhosa *intsomi* and Zulu *nganekwane*, the storytelling genre within which women work, is composed of a cliché such as a "song, chant, or saying" which functions as its "stable element" and is based on a broad theme of maintaining harmony in human relationships. This stabilizing cliché is then "developed, expanded,

detailed, and dramatized." Within the confines of this overarching theme, the performer has considerable artistic license, relying on the "traditional core-images, the contemporary milieu, and her audience" to hold listeners spellbound (Scheub, *Xhosa* 3-4). Scheub, who began travelling throughout South Africa in the 1960s to record the oral traditions, notes that most performers of *intsomi* are women. A rural Xhosa woman's capacity for hard work in the fields, in constructing and maintaining her home, and in feeding and caring for her children is matched by her ability as a "sensitive and highly talented artist," who "[w]ith no materials save her own body and voice . . . transforms a hackneyed plot into a complex performance, bringing into tension and balance every stylistic device she commands—mime, music, vocal dramatics. Combining imagination, intellectual insight, and a quest for originality, she transmutes ancient core-images into vigorous works of art" (5-6). Scheub remarks that the *intsomi* is "essentially private," with performances taking place within the intimacy of the home, thus assisting the performer in establishing an informal relationship with her friends and family. This cozy domestic venue, however, naturally robs the storyteller of the power and prestige accorded performers in the public sphere of official culture.

The Southern Sotho narrative "The Child With A Moon on His Chest" analyzes polygamy from a woman's perspective by highlighting the prejudicial aspects of a practice that rewards women for their fertility while ostracizing those women who are unable to bear children. In this tale, the chief has two wives, one of whom "was very much loved by Bulane; it is the one who had children. He ill-treated the one who was without children" (van Niekerk 38). After Bulane's childless wife conceives, and

is assisted in childbirth by the favorite wife, she delivers a son marked with the father's symbol of a moon on his chest. Driven by insecurity because the second wife has now achieved motherhood, the midwife conceals the newborn child while the mother is unconscious and informs the father that the pregnancy has resulted in the birth of a dog. Relating the series of dastardly schemes concocted by the first wife as she becomes increasingly desperate to destroy the seemingly indestructible child, the narrator effectively deconstructs the practice of polygamy by demonstrating that not only can wives be motivated by jealousy to commit outrageous deeds, but that the man and his offspring are liable to become pawns in a web of deceit and conspiracy. In the denouement, the status of the wives is reversed, and the senior wife is declared a "wicked person, molotsana. She was given her belongings, thepa, and it was said she must leave and return to her original home" (38-40). The existence of this narrative, one among many on this topic, substantiates African women's opposition to patriarchy in pre-colonial days and provides evidence of a robust female culture of contestation and resistance. Using their first-hand experience and witnessing each other's distress, they reveal the dilemma facing women as they were pitted against each other by manipulative husbands, fathers, uncles, and brothers, intent on preserving their privileges at the expense of women.

Women also claim authority and agency by composing and performing praise poems, an important genre in the oral traditions that is dominated by men who publicly perform elaborate poems in honor of kings, warriors, and chiefs on ceremonial occasions. These praise poems, known as *izibongo* in Zulu, are begun in infancy, and autobiographical details are added throughout the life of the owner of the

poem. *Izibongo* composed by women "reflect the facets of life important to women, while displaying at the same time the sharp-eyed concern with individual identity that characterizes all Zulu praise poetry" (Gunner, "Songs" 14). Gunner comments that women who have praise poems are normally not associated with mission stations and are usually traditional women in polygamous relationships. For this reason, *izibongo* serve an important social role in a competitive environment, functioning as vehicles for regulating interpersonal relationships by acknowledging an individual's social standing and contributions to the community, while also providing a critique that can be quite withering in its directness.

It is perfectly acceptable to publicly remonstrate with a co-wife or a mother-in-law, and this is done in eloquent and powerful performances, rendered in colorful metaphors and similes, woven into complex structures that reveal the performers' artistry and expertise with language. Rhetorical conventions call for limits to be placed on how much dirty linen can be aired in public by allowing for specific personal details to be alluded to as long as the allusions are not so obscure as to exclude the audience from understanding their significance. Exercising such restraint is certainly "not considered a mark of inferior composition" (Gunner, "Songs" 13), and could be considered a feminine sensibility by allowing some semblance of a private space in communal living conditions by respecting the rights and the dignity of women to cordon off areas of their lives from complete public exposure, commentary, and ridicule.

Women have put their own unique stamp on the genre of *izibongo*, utilizing it to express themselves in a decidedly personal and cathartic fashion. As the audience is

usually composed only of women, an esprit de corps has arisen during performances, even though the "question of licence in *izibongo* may at times cause raised voices and heated argument . . ." (Gunner, "Songs" 25). Rather than letting disputes fester, the women air their grievances in a generally supportive environment, regulated by the rules of engagement. For example, poems that are entirely sexual in nature are considered to be "in poor taste and to be inferior compositions," but references to male and female sexuality are acceptable, even in an *izangelo*, a praise poem composed for an infant by her mother, as the following excerpt from the *izangelo* written for Princess Magogo (sister of Solomon, the uncrowned king of the Zulus) by her mother and recited by the daughter, demonstrates:

> Sensitive one, easily moved.
> I wonder, father, if the deceitful creature over there hears my words?
> The broad-lipped woman pursued me unmercifully, the one with labia like a puff adder. (Lockett, *Breaking* 222)

The incorporation of structural devices such as parallelism and the inclusion of well-worn lines that are familiar to audiences guide the composition of *izibongo*. Similar to the narration of *intsomi*, the performances of praise poems provide ample opportunity for a woman to display her artistry, acquired after becoming very familiar with the genre through attending numerous performances and then using the core features to craft her own unique poem.

While the "complaint motif" (Gunner, "Songs" 16) is typically included, the principal motivation is not to cause internal strife in the homestead, but to assert a woman's individual identity and to record those achievements that establish her

uniqueness. Majele of Hlabisa, third wife of a chief, establishes her pre-marriage reputation thus:

> I am she who cuts across the game reserve
>
> That no girl crosses
>
> I am the boldest of the bold, outfacer of wizards.
>
> Obstinate perseverer,
>
> The nation swore at me and ate their words.
>
> She cold shoulders kings and despises mere commoners. (Lockett, *Breaking* 224)

Women's appropriation of the genres of *intsomi* and *izibongo* and their feminization of these genres showcase their creativity and their eloquence. Mary DeShazer views *izibongo* "as a means of conflating the public and the private spheres and resisting the conventional taboos on women's anger, competition, and defiance" (180). Through their considerable cultural output, black women demonstrate their persistent resistance to patriarchy, revealing through words and deeds that their biting tongues, novel rhetorical strategies, and burgeoning critical consciousness undermine their outward obedience to the rigid rules dictated by male dominance. A refreshing reevaluation and reinstatement of the artistry, eloquence, and intricacy of oral traditions, to which credit must be given to Ruth Finnegan in particular for her groundbreaking research on African oral traditions, has caused these rhetorical forms to be revalidated as repositories of philosophical theorizing, communal wisdom, historical knowledge, and cultural forms, the residual effects of which have been carried over to literacy.

Oral Traditions under Assault: Colonialism and Cultural Collision

Beyond the Pale: Women and the "School of Lies"

A fascinating glimpse into the daily workings of polygamy and its impact on the lives of black women is revealed in Rebecca Hourwhich Reyher's *The Life Story of Christina Sibiya*, a biography of the first wife of Solomon, the uncrowned king of the Zulus, published in 1948. Reyher gleaned her information from a series of extended interviews with Sibiya after she had left the royal kraal, intent on divorcing the king, a stunning claim of independence. Solomon's attitude toward women's oral performances is particularly insightful. Despite his royal rank and the constant threat of activating his despotic tendencies, he is forced to acknowledge that women have the upper hand when it comes to language. His inability to dictate and regulate all language uses poses a threat to his absolute power, for the domestic areas of the kraal are potential sites for dissent, disobedience, and even the breeding ground for divorce proceedings.

When introducing Christina, his first and principal wife, to the mothers upon his arrival at Mahashini kraal, Solomon realizes that he is powerless to prevent the other women from initiating her into the irrepressible counterculture of his female entourage. As a product of missionary school tutelage, Christina has been thoroughly educated in the proper demeanor of a Europeanized wife: obedience, respect, and reverence; part of her allure for Solomon is that she has been indoctrinated by the missionaries. However, in the kraal Christina cannot attend to her wifely duties, requiring her to cater to Solomon's every whim, without access to the women's work areas. This logistical arrangement presents a real dilemma for Solomon, as he cannot

prevent Christina from being party to the women's storytelling rituals while attending to his physical needs. He admonishes her: "You have always spoken the truth. I know that here you have arrived at the source and school of lies. It is here they are nourished, and it is here they flourish!" (Reyher 73). This limited autonomy troubles Solomon because he chooses to believe that he enjoys the benefits of Christian's unsullied dependence upon and devotion to himself as king, husband, and father.

Although women were defined by their primary role as child bearers and thus vital contributors to male lineages, their composition and performance of *izibongo* gave them "access to a coded art form that allowed them some means of self-affirmation and self-remembrance." As Gunner claims, Christina would have had "access to a genre that allowed for self-expression, self-defense, and self-validation . . . ." When Solomon warns Christina about the culture of lies she is about to enter, and tries to deter her from giving credence to the stories she will hear from the women, this admonishment serves as "both an acknowledgement of the practice of such domestic eloquence—of the power of his wives and mothers to disrupt through words—and an arrogant downgrading of such words" (*Zulu* 203).[5]

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[5] Women's capacity for and facility with language is noted by A.T. Bryant in the preface to his *Zulu-English Dictionary* that appeared in 1905. While seeking new words for his dictionary, he noticed that the "Zulu language is in the keeping of the female sex. I can affirm without exaggeration that fully 19,000 of the words entered in this Dictionary, were known and their meanings understood by an intelligent, though absolutely uneducated adult girl, who was a member of my 'court of inquiry' in Zululand to whom all words were submitted for verification or correction previous to entry" (8). This quote was selected by D. McK Malcolm, a longtime inspector with the Natal Department of Education and then lecturer in Zulu at the University of Natal in his article "An Outline of Zulu Literature." His discussion of (male) Zulu literature is preceded by a brief discussion of the oral traditions that are being "seriously interfered with" due to the dominance of European culture. Beginning with the "great national legends" that are transmitted across the generations by men, we then come to the "fairy stories told for the amusement of children by the grandmothers of the race," followed by a transcription of one of the "less creepy ones—the story of the greedy mother-in law" (45). Malcolm's interpretation of women's oral traditions as babysitting duty viewed from his 1950s standpoint is an indication of the degree to which women's cultural contributions have been downgraded and stripped of their social significance that began with their mischaracterization by missionaries in the nineteenth century.

It is apparent from Solomon's presumptuous characterization of women's communications in the privacy of their quarters as a cesspool of deception and disruption that his female subjects' refusal to be silenced in their sphere of domestic operations is an assault on his wide-ranging authority. He knows full well that he is powerless to command and contain women's words uttered in their own restricted space, and this severely undercuts his royal omnipotence. This thriving female counterculture allows women to claim a limited degree of agency and essentially provides them with an outlet to contest and refuse their subordinate status in the hierarchy of the male-dominated kraal.

Of particular interest to feminist scholars is the (anecdotal) evidence Reyher's study provides of a vibrant subaltern counterpublic that existed among the women in the royal kraals, one that encouraged dissent and resistance among the many wives of Solomon. These acts of rebelliousness had the effect of chipping away at Solomon's perceived aura of omnipotence; several of his wives succeeded in escaping from the kraal (even if only temporarily). Despite the king's wide sphere of influence, which extended to metropolitan Durban, and his power to dispatch emissaries to track down and bring back errant wives, he could not enforce the total submission of his disgruntled wives. Solomon's nagging fear of the damage that could be done to his reputation in the "school of lies" was well placed. The testimony of Christina, his first wife and a product of a Lutheran missionary education, as told to Reyher has recorded for posterity the truth about the treatment of women in the royal court; thus, it "brushes 'against the grain' of history, as Walter Benjamin has put it, and presses the reader to reconfigure both past and present" (Gunner, *Zulu* 203).

Rhetorics of Resistance: Exploiting Cracks in the Patriarchal Framework

Jealously guarding their cultural capital, to use Pierre Bourdieu's term, women resisted the chipping away of their spheres of influence when colonial cultures began to collide with and alter indigenous cultures, and the introduction of "literacy," a novel technology, had the effect of diminishing the revered status of oral culture. Although the exposure to Christian values in mission schools did indeed weaken traditional African society, the practice of polygamy had never rested comfortably with black women in pre-colonial times as the rancor exhibited in the female oral traditions to this institution is a central and persistent theme. Lauretta Ngcobo poignantly reveals that her great grandmother "was one of many wives and the least loved." Her unhappiness at her predicament as the least favored wife was ameliorated to some extent by lovingly composing praise poems in honor of her four children that expose in "achingly beautiful words the depths of her pain and her desperate loneliness" ("Life" 84). Working with words and crafting verbal gems that speak to women's unique suffering under polygamous social organization has special significance for women as it affords them the satisfaction of engaging in an intellectual activity that cannot be controlled or censored, as well as providing a measure of catharsis.

Black women found an unexpected ally in opposing the centuries old tradition of polygamy in the African community when missionaries began to make their presence felt in the countryside. Reyher comments that "The mission station, strategically located in every native neighborhood is apt to be the only friendly bridge between the two races. Missionaries tend the native sick, educate them, try to improve their immediate circumstances, and mostly preach Christianity only on Sunday. The

rest of the week they try to practice it" (12). The intervention of missionaries in undermining the institution of polygamy through their outspoken condemnation of this practice served a vital role by providing those women who wished to escape with a supportive audience for airing and documenting their grievances. Writing about Lovedale Institution in 1902, Robert Young in a chapter entitled "Female Degradation and Elevation," regarded African women as "practically slaves to the other sex, and in very many cases are subject to much persecution" (123). Women had virtually no opportunity for arguing their cases when brought before the chief who would dictate a resolution (invariably opposed to the woman's charge) in consultation with his circle of advisors. An escape route from polygamy and arranged marriage became possible through the intervention of missionaries; preaching against the evils of this practice, missionaries offered sanctuary to women who wanted to escape from polygamous husbands and matchmaking fathers. And, with women being for the most part "more degraded than males," the chance of salvation was greater. Women demonstrated "greater readiness to receive instruction. They show, too, on the whole, more docility and proficiency than the male scholars" (128).

Women's apparent readiness to accept Christian teachings has provided them with a vital and viable public rhetorical space. Paul Stuart Landau, in *The Realm of the Word: Language, Gender, and Christianity in a Southern African Kingdom*, traces how Christianity was Africanized by the Tswana, thereby producing a "political realm of power." Women were instrumental in this process through their evangelical work, maintaining a level of visibility than enabled them to recreate through the church "a new forum for reproducing the body politic" that extended to "permeat[ing] the

Tswana town's male political space (the *kgotla*)" (xvii). Landau notes that "Women's evangelical messages were fraught with the tension of inequality [and] some among them alluded to a new strength and whispered: are we not also now the cattle-owners?" (159).

Regular churchgoing has played an increasing role in providing women with a measure of independence, which has included a public role as prayer leaders and evangelists. Deborah Gaitskell states that African women who became active in church groups, known as *manyanos* or unions, "came together explicitly as *mothers*. Particularly in the eyes of missionary supervisors, such organizations had a vital part to play in safeguarding female chastity, marital fidelity, and maternal and domestic responsibilities" ("Devout" 251, emphasis in original). Enthusiastically participating in *manyanos* in increasing numbers, these prayer unions began to emerge as subversive sites as women used this female support group to gain a measure of autonomy, volunteering for leadership roles and, in doing so, causing concern among the black male clergy and missionaries. Gaitskell contends that women were eager to preach, although there are few references to this in the records, arguing further that the "appeal of praying and preaching" should be seen as an outcome of women's robust oral traditions. Rhetorical skills fine-tuned in this medium naturally transferred to active participation in prayer groups as "They did not need to be able to read or have formal educational qualifications to contribute. Their own eloquence and fervour could give them enough authority . . ." (267).

Further evidence is provided by Carol Muller, who describes the public speaking opportunities of women in the Church of the Nazarite. Founded in 1911 by

Isaiah Shembe in the Native Reserve of Inanda near Durban, Muller reports that initial membership was almost exclusively women and children who were mostly the "socially marginalized and economically destitute: widows, orphans, and those who did not wish to engage in customary Nguni marriages" (157). This community has continued to prosper, providing women opportunities in the apartheid era to deliver sermons that "foster critiques of the effects of both official State power and traditional patriarchal structures on their individual and collective selves as women." As a result, these women have "constructed themselves as subjects and placed those selves into the historical moment" (156).

The role of Christianity in South Africa and the dissemination of its teachings by missionaries, although problematic in that it imposed Eurocentric epistemology on indigenous religions, has reshaped the notion of public space for aspiring women rhetors. As fertile sites of resistance to patriarchy and the power of the State, the opportunities for public speaking carved out by women in religious communities have allowed women to become speaking subjects, providing "metacommentaries" that reflect the "collective experiences of millions of women" in South Africa who exist on the periphery (Muller 160).

Holding on to a Cherished Tradition: The Threat of Literacy

The downgrading of women's storytelling traditions as vital cultural practices in Africa occurred during the colonial era due to a mischaracterization of this art form by Westerners, in particular missionaries who were the prime disseminators of literacy instruction, a key component of their evangelizing outreach. While these zealous

missionaries foresaw only positive outcomes from their efforts, they had in actuality set in motion the first steps that led to the disruption, destabilization, and demise of the venerated oral traditions. Women were particularly affected by the arrival of missionaries in their rural communities; with the marvels of literacy and the introduction of a print culture, written stories introduced in a formal school setting began to compete with oral stories told informally around the fire. Walter Ong views this introduction of a new technology as threatening for, "by storing knowledge outside of the mind, writing and, even more, print downgrade the figures of the wise old man and the wise old woman, repeaters of the past, in favor of younger discoverers of something new" (41). Literacy became a source of generational conflict as the young had access to a skill that was rewarded in school, a sign that they had begun the process of becoming civilized and Christianized in the eyes of the missionaries.

As literacy was introduced to their children in mission schools, women began to experience the unsettling feeling that part of their traditional sphere of influence in the household was eroding before their eyes. Women have always basked in the recognition that their expertise as storytellers has led to the accrual of valuable "cultural capital" even though their oral traditions have traditionally been devoid of the power and prestige of male oratory. But, as Hofmeyr contends, "Its second-class status notwithstanding, women's storytelling remained a cherished skill. As one of the few public-speaking venues open to women, it probably represented a form of limited cultural power that could attract recognition and status, particularly to those regarded as expert performers" (*Spend* 31).

In the role of storyteller, "the artist is a teacher, a moralizer, finding truth in the conjunction of the real and the imaginative, and imbuing the audience with that truth. Truth, meaning, occurs in the nexus of history and the imaginative tradition" (Scheub, *Tongue* 55). The influence of Christian tenets and texts represented a knowable and unchanging truth; after this exposure to Western epistemology, children questioned their mothers and grandmothers and expressed impatience with the fanciful, fantastic stories of old. Attending the mission school had the effect of conditioning children to a "much more mundane, non-fantastic and ultimately realistic view of the world " (Hofmeyr, *Spend* 54), and it thus becomes increasingly difficult to suspend this newfound appraisal of the world. Stories that had always enchanted them before now seemed "implausible and ridiculous" (55).

Although the Bible served as the central text, missionaries produced and printed readers to incorporate in literacy classes, establishing a trend that was continued when the National government centralized African education after taking office in 1948.[6] Stories told to children by women (and some men), which are known as *dinonwane*, were transcribed to be used in school, a move that dismayed some women who "felt that their secret store would be stolen or at least diluted" (Hofmeyr, *Spend* 33). Clearly, these women saw this development as an encroachment on their intellectual property, and missionaries did indeed "dilute" or censor the *dinonwane* which as a genre are "fantastic, grotesque, humourously scatalogical (sic) and powerfully erotic," in addition to having the potential to be a "source of subtle

[6] In H.J. van Zyl's *A Practical Guide for Bantu Teachers*, a list of suitable books for primary schools includes the *Padisô* series. Hofmeyr notes that this series was produced initially by German missionaries in the Northern Transvaal and "most probably modelled on German school and children's

subversion through which women could articulate and comment on their social position" (35).

As an educational and an entertainment medium, storytelling provided women with a limited yet gratifying opportunity to exercise a measure of power and authority. While virtually everyone can tell stories, to gain a reputation as an expert and spellbinding storyteller "was an essential grace to possess if one was to be considered well-educated, cultured and good-mannered" (Hofmeyr, *Spend* 33). This time-honored skill began to lose its currency when missionaries assiduously worked to create orthographies and dictionaries of African languages, as coupled with their desire to compile and classify collections of local stories in keeping with the Western practice of situating material in generic compartments and assigning criteria and functions to the cultural productions they encountered. *Dinonwane* became associated with the nursery due to their didactic purpose as aids in socializing young children into the habits, routines, and rituals of the tribe. Women, however, were dismayed that the ancient art of rhetoric they had inherited from their mothers and grandmothers, nurtured and preserved, could be dismissed as child's play, for they took pride in their legacy as language users, language teachers, and language artists.

> The tale-teller is the person who most regularly and persuasively touches every member of the community. This creator moves behind the facts of history, and clarifies, defines, and elucidates the experiences of the people. She thereby sustains the society's traditions,

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literature as well as primers that had already been produced by Lutheran missionaries in Tanganyika . . ." (*Spend* 52).

those institutions that give context and meaning to daily life. (Scheub, *Tongue* 149)

With the children gathered around her in the domestic quarters of the kraal, the storyteller is the teacher, socializing her charges to the moral values and the social conventions of the tribe, employing her captivating tales for didactic and entertainment purposes. But, after the school is constructed and the missionaries have convinced the reluctant chief to allow the local children to attend, the women soon find themselves in competition with the newcomers for the minds of their children. In the alien environment of structured, formal schooling, the mission school serves as a public space staffed with intimidating white people in charge, and the physical removal of young children from the familiarity and security of the home for educational purposes reduces a sphere of influence that women valued and valorized.

Becoming literate under the tutelage of the missionaries did not necessarily mean that students were always swayed completely by their newfound knowledge and were ready to denigrate their own cultural heritage in favor of books. Solomon's wife, Christina, for instance, has a clear conception of what constitutes narrative structure in the oral tradition and feels that European literary conventions have "no life, no color or action; they were a lot of moralisms, flimsily strung together and hypocritically labeled a story" (Reyher 18). When engaging in traditional women's after-supper activities such as sewing, knitting, crocheting, or embroidering with the missionary's wife and children and the European teacher, Christina "seldom listened" when turns were taken to read aloud to the assembled group of females. As an experienced and able reader herself, she was well versed in European narrative and Western culture

through her continuous residence with the missionary's family, and, despite her elevated status as a teacher in the community, Christina chooses the liveliness and immediacy of oral storytelling with its enthusiastic interaction between performer and audience rather than the reserved and restrained taking of turns as the book was passed around the room, requiring a respectful silence and dutiful listening from the assembled group.

For women, this rapid loss of their traditional sphere of influence under the onslaught of whites entering their territory was disconcerting, disorienting and most likely disabling for women who for generations had cherished their intellectual inheritance and the social status accrued through the passing down of a storehouse of tales, morals, riddles, and history from grandmother to mother to daughter. The appearance of "literacy" on their doorsteps was troubling when there were strong indications that the centrality of storytelling in the routine of the household was being displaced and replaced. This sense of facing obsolescence is expressed by a woman who proudly maintained that she could still "hold on to stories . . . I have only got a little education so it cannot conceal those stories . . . the little education I have of writing cannot conceal these stories" (Hofmeyr, *Spend* 56). Her distrust of writing is reminiscent of Plato's concern that the act of permanently committing words to paper will lead to an atrophying of the memory. As Socrates says to Phaedrus:

> The fact is that this invention will produce forgetfulness in the souls of those who have learned it. They will not need to exercise their memories, being able to rely on what is written, calling things to mind no longer from within themselves by their own unaided powers, but

under the stimulus of external marks that are alien to themselves. (275)

Women in particular expressed concern that the introduction of a print culture had the propensity for "leeching off" the veneration for storytelling, and, without the frequent rehearsal and repetition of this fragile medium, there was a very real threat to its survival by "rendering it marginal and silent" (Hofmeyr, *Spend* 56).

A Shrinking Inheritance: Apartheid and Cultural Decimation

During his travels, Scheub has encountered several highly gifted female performers who have maintained their oral traditions, coexisting as they do with literacy in urban and rural areas, and he has interviewed, recorded, and filmed oral performers from many parts of the country. Although he does not discuss the literate experiences of these performers, undoubtedly some of them must have been literate, if only marginally, yet still able to produce a rendition characterized by "tension and fragile beauty, its existence short-lived, its impact lasting" (*Tongues* 57).[7] Scheub's observation of the mesmerizing effects of these performances contradicts Ong's claim that "Oral cultures indeed produce powerful and beautiful verbal performances of high artistic and human worth, which are no longer even possible once writing has taken possession of the psyche" (14). Ong's claim of the progressive nature of literacy, displacing the naturalness of orality, is certainly not borne out by the observations of

[7] In Zenani's autobiography "And So I Grew Up," taped by Scheub in 1972 as it was told to an audience of five Xhosa women, she recounts that in the rural community in which she was raised by her maternal grandmother, "School was not at all important to these people. Actually, nothing among my mother's parents' people required a school. It was not valued in any way. So I did not attend school." Upon returning to her parents to escape a traditional arranged marriage, she attended a missionary school where she was "taught much. They began to teach me the Xhosa language so that I would be able to know a hymn, so that I would be able to see it to the extent that it spoke." Her immersion in the Xhosa language resulted in her being able to gain some "ability to identify words. I became accustomed to words, and could identify a hymn" (21).

many researchers. The interplay of orality and literacy in African literature has received a great deal of attention in recent years as revisionist history in the wake of decolonization has lead to an elevation of oral literature to its former status of artistry.

Scheub was particularly drawn to the work of Zenani, whom he describes in the introduction to her work as a "gifted intellectual and artist" (xi). Over a period of several years, he taped and filmed "her repertory of imaginative tales, along with autobiographical and ethnographic material." Upon completion of a performance, Scheub would engage Zenani in conversations during which she analyzed in considerable detail the composition of her narratives. Her aptitude for literary and rhetorical analysis demonstrates her intellectualism, her appreciation for generic conventions and the limitations of genre, her awareness of the practical application of the persuasive appeals—ethos, pathos, and logos—and her skill for exploiting the possibilities and potential for creativity and artistic freedom.[8]

On one occasion in 1975, this extraordinary Gcaleka artist from the Transkei performed the story of Mityi, a Xhosa heroine, for a group of intimate friends. It took her seventeen consecutive days for an average of six or seven hours a day to complete the epic, which Scheub describes as a "Xhosa Cinderella story." Zenani, we are told,

> produced a unified narrative that ultimately totalled a staggering one hundred hours, a narrative that imaginatively incorporates Xhosa origins, with such ethnographic data as fully detailed marriages, circumcision ceremonies, and women's purification rituals . . . . She

> introduced images from the ancient art tradition, exploring three generations of characters, each with a woman at the center, developing their activities against a single traditional narrative which she boldly and competently incised, so that a large number of Xhosa narratives and narratives segments could be worked in and locked to the basic core of images. The performance was never allowed to become a mere series of loosely connected stories. (*Tongue* 59)

As a result of the collaboration between Scheub, a white American scholar, and Zenani, a rural African woman from the Transkei, a five-hundred-page volume has been published containing the wealth and breadth of her astute observations on the social practices and cultural conventions of the Xhosa people, together with her vast repertoire of fictional tales that draw their inspiration and insights from the orally received history of her tribe.

Zenani's repertoire reflects the ongoing resentment for a social practice that served women poorly in their attempts to create a measure of stability in their lives and the respect they deserved. In stories entitled, "A Mother Who Had No Son," "The Jealous Co-Wife," and "The Child with the Star on his Forehead," the women's perspective on polygamy reveals the sense of betrayal experienced by the first wife when her husband arbitrarily announces that he intends to introduce another wife into the household. In "The Jealous Co-Wife," the junior wife who has recently given birth is the favorite, causing the anguished senior wife to solicit the advice of several people, asking, "What can I do with this woman? I want her dead! My husband loves

[8] Zenani, at the time of her first encounter with Scheub, was a fifty-five year old woman who resided in the rural Transkei. It is apparent from the collection of photographs taken of her during these

her, and I cannot bear it!" Her brother instructs her through various permutations of selecting the right pumpkin to poison her adversary, all to no avail for the junior wife continues to thrive, leaving the senior wife bitter and disillusioned. Zenani draws the story to its inevitable irresolution, remarking that the senior wife

> gave up hope because whenever she tried to do anything, it came to nothing. Whenever she tried to do anything, she failed. She became a sulky person, despairing, at a loss as to what she might do. The young mother continued to be loved very much by her husband, as she had been formerly. (402-08)

During his routine post-performance analysis of Zenani's *intsomi*, Scheub discusses in detail with her the structural and technical aspects of the traditional stories, but does not ask her to respond to sensitive cultural questions, such as the negative aspects of polygamy on women. Zenani's analysis reveals that "The Jealous Co-Wife" centers on the "necessity for harmonious relationships among co-wives," with the moral being that jealousy is a destructive and unproductive emotion as evidenced by the senior wife's "ridiculously futile efforts" to regain her husband's affections (402).

Considering Zenani's frequent critiques of the occupation of her country by white intruders and its affect on African culture and society in her conversations with Scheub, her pithy statements may have extended to the gendered power imbalances of polygamy, but unfortunately, we are not privy to her thoughts on the status of women in traditional marriages. She does narrate a series of commentaries to her audience documenting the traditional gendered division of labor in rural areas. Her accounts are neutral as she lays out the responsibilities of the man and the woman in constructing

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performances attended by Scheub that she eked out a meagre existence in a barren landscape.

the homestead, organizing the home, working in the field, and entertaining guests. Despite Zenani's impartiality, she paints a bleak picture of the onerous responsibilities that fall to the woman, who frequently is at the mercy of her husband's benevolence in assisting her. For instance, in thatching the homestead, "[i]f the man feels like it, he will take an axe and help her to trim the grass. But this is entirely voluntary: it is woman's work" (377). Her refrain, "All of this is the work of the woman," in describing the backbreaking duties and rituals for which the woman is responsible makes it even more impressive that women had the energy to sit by the fireside at night with alert minds and expressive physical movements entertaining a critical audience.

Scheub documents the make-up of the audience for each *intsomi* that Zenani performs. Women and children constitute the majority in most cases; however, when he recorded her performances in the 1960s and 1970s, stepped-up migrant labor policies had the effect of draining many of the able-bodied men from rural areas to the industrial areas, leaving women and children to fend for themselves in the Bantustans.[9] The men in attendance may well have been elderly. Zenani's considerable oeuvre and expertise are attributable in part to her continued residence in the rural Transkei and her relative isolation from white society and its cultural influences. Born in 1906, she represents a tradition that has come under the onslaught of capitalism, literacy, and the attendant social, political, and cultural upheaval of colonialism. Zenai, the exceptional oral storyteller, seems likely to be one of the last great

[9] Since the nineteenth century, certain areas of South Africa have been set aside as homelands or Native Reserves. Under the Nationalist government, these areas were called Bantustans, and the Bantu Homelands Citizenship Act of 1970 proclaimed that every black person in South Africa was a member

performers; although the atrophying art of oral performance is unlikely to die out in South Africa, increasing competition from electronic media will continue to chip away at this traditional art form.[10]

The deep penetration of the oral traditions in black women's psyche is very apparent by the repeated references to this intellectual wellspring in interviews with writers, in panel discussions, and in their autobiographies. The first question posed in the edited version of the "Workshop on Black Women's Writing and Reading," sponsored by the journal *Current Writing* in participation with the Congress of South African Writers in 1990, concerns the oral traditions. In response to the question: "Are women today keeping the traditional storytelling alive?" a variety of replies from the panelists ranged from commenting that the traditional stories are less relevant to today's (urban) lifestyle to mention of writer Gcina Mhlophe who performs praise songs in order to demonstrate that they do indeed have relevance in today's sophisticated society. But, as Boitumelo Mofokeng noted, "We used to sit with my own mother to listen, we had the time, but I am worried about us—professional, modern women—who pursue our own interests and concentrate on developing and improving ourselves." Lebohang Sikwe added, we "forget about our own kind of culture. We forget what we are working for, we Africans. To tell stories to our brothers and sisters, to our children—it's not part of the new world" (Daymond, "Workshop" 107-08).

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of a particular homeland. The homelands comprised roughly 13% of the country, and much of the land is infertile and over-utilized.

[10] When television was introduced to South Africa in 1976, Mark Mathabane reports that the children in his family "became so enamored of the television that each time Granny or my mother attempted to entertain them with folktales, as they had done when I was growing up, no one had the patience to listen." One of the grandchildren told her grandmother that "Your stories are old-fashioned . . . .We see better stories on television. Why should we listen to your boring ones?" (*African* 317).

In Transit: The New World of Writing and the Oral Legacy

My contention is that any study of the emergence of black women's authorship must take into account the substantial history of their intellectualism as evidenced by their vibrant storytelling rituals, inherited proudly by matrilineal right, cherished, nurtured, and handed down lovingly to new generations of girls. "Storytelling," as Trinh Minh-ha observes, is "the oldest form of building historical consciousness in community . . . whose values have regained all importance recently, especially in the context of writing by women of color" (148). The extent to which this oral inheritance figures prominently in the psyche of South African black women is evidenced by repeated references to this treasure trove in poems, short stories, autobiographies, essays, interviews, panel discussions—in fact in any medium in which these women reminisce about their role as producers and purveyors of culture.

The establishment of a writing tradition which gets in full swing in the 1980s can be seen as a realignment and reappraisal of resources, a growing awareness of the potentially large audiences that can be reached through the production and dissemination of written material, and a realization that the kairotic moment had arrived, the opportune moment to insert women in a rapidly evolving dialectic in a reconstituted South Africa. The rules for civic participation were no longer clear cut as emerging fissures were eagerly exploited during the period referred to by Nadine Gordimer as the interregnum—roughly the period beginning with the Soweto riots in 1976 to the first democratic election in 1994, during which time the Nationalist government increasingly became a lame duck administration as it struggled to maintain the upper hand.

John Poulakos observes that three critical factors are necessary to facilitate the emergence of new cultural movements. Although Poulakos is referring specifically to the transformation of the political climate in ancient Greece that facilitated the arrival of the sophists, his argument is helpful in understanding the factors that allow for a repositioning of public forums and changing parameters for participation. Poulakos contends that

> First, intellectual movements are born not *in vacuo,* but in the midst of a set of cultural givens of practice and thought already in motion. Second, they spring up not simply as a result of a conducive climate but in order to address particular circumstances and to fulfill certain societal needs. Third, they inadvertently grow alongside some established cultural practices and against others, producing innovative results despite the resistance of the tradition or the potential risks of criticisms that may eliminate them. (12)

Black women, who might never have considered themselves writers, were propelled into print as a result of the opportunities created for "cultural workers," as the banned African National Congress named these volunteers for the liberation cause. Caught up in the turbulent wake of the student riots that spread around the country after exploding in Soweto in 1976 (which I will discuss in chapter two), their emotions were ragged and raw as they grieved for the children massacred by the trigger-happy white paramilitary forces in the townships.

While the impetus to write was indeed cathartic during this traumatic period, repeatedly we see that their responses to white brutality are constructed as persuasive

and cogent arguments, exhibiting a keen awareness of their multiple audiences, and frequently demonstrating skilful and original manipulation of language, usually written in English, a foreign tongue, and clearly not the work of rank amateurs. Demonstrations of their skillfully cutting social critiques and their obvious flair for and familiarity with narrative conventions suggests that they had indeed not suddenly burst upon the scene, but usefully tapped into their rhetorical legacy inherited from their female ancestors. As Minh-ha contends, in the African context, a woman had to work at "un-learning the dominant language of 'civilized' missionaries . . . to learn how to un-write and write anew . . . by re-establishing the contact with her foremothers . . . what is understood as the Past continues to provide the link for the Present and the Future" (148-49).

Although an historic opportunity presented itself for launching women into the agora of anti-apartheid discourse, a major impediment to their entry was the inhospitable sexist culture that permeated South African society. Jeff Opland has commented in regard to the poet Nontsizi Mgqwetho, who achieved notoriety with the ninety poems she had published in the weekly newspaper *Umteteli wa Bantu* between 1920-1929, that although women "are prominent participants in the tradition of *intsomi*, the Xhosa folktale . . .the *imbongi,* the court poet, is always a male" ("Nontsizi" 162). Mgqwetho, an urban transplant, daringly appropriates the traditional rural male role of the *imbongi*, a coup that while demonstrating her voice as "powerful, outspoken, urgent and engaged . . . reflects . . . a deeply torn marginal personality" (164). Unrepentant at crashing male territory, Mgqwetho chastises the politically impotent chiefs and blacks who have not mounted an effective stand against

white colonization:

> Today you're a stranger in Africa,
>
> You go about clutching at straws:
>
> Repair your shield, the land of your fathers
>
> Is now the playground of strangers. (170)

A similar assault on male-dominated rhetorical spaces occurred in 1970 when the trade union movement in South Africa became an effective site of black worker resistance, a situation explored in some depth by Anthony O'Brien in *Against Normalization: Writing Radical Democracy in South Africa*. O'Brien focuses on the poet Nise Malange who was active in the workers' movement in KwaZulu/Natal, a province that experienced an escalating series of worker protests that resulted in a wave of general strikes in Durban in 1973, setting the mood and modus operandi for trade union protests throughout the country.

Grassroots trade union organizing inspired and supported a movement of cultural production, but opportunities for women workers to participate were few as a result of an overwhelmingly sexist worker culture. Women's determination to establish a vocal presence by inserting themselves in the workers' cultural production movement is groundbreaking. As O'Brien claims, "With increasing literacies for women, Malange's example will undoubtedly be seen as a founding movement, a crucial coming to voice of women in workers' culture." O'Brien notes that in South Africa the "mutual relevance of feminist aesthetics and workers' culture," has generated very little attention, even though the "convergence of political feminism and radical black unionism is potentially the most transformative impulse in the making of

radical-democratic culture in South Africa" (178). Malange's work is highly evocative of the oral traditions, but she distances herself from traditional storytelling in which "women were like shadows who could only be heard during the night whispering the stories to their children or grandchildren . . . . In traditional culture women were only seen as objects who have to bring up the kids and be ululating whilst the praise poet is praising the Chief or Induna" (20). For urban black women, many of whom are independent, raising children alone without financial assistance from the fathers of their children, traditional rural culture is viewed as increasingly irrelevant.

In Malange's poem, *Nightshift Mother*, her biting commentary on the working conditions of mothers who staff the nightshift cleaning office buildings, only to return home to the townships in the early hours of the morning to face the day caring for their children, raises the plight of black mothers to unprecedented scrutiny. Reflecting the rhythms and repetitions of oral performance, Malange claims a collective agency as she states:

> And I am forced to take on nightshift cleaning
>
> because I have no other training
>
> And I feel forced because I am a single mother
>
> with no place to place my children in the day.

After detailing the extent of the cleaners' victimization, a silent army of women toiling away in the deserted city center, the endless cycle of poverty and oppression shows signs of rupturing:

> We are
>
> cleaning and cleaning

lift each other off our knees

and fight our exploitation. (van Niekerk 342)

Malange's poems are intended for oral performance, encompassing vocal range, body movements, and facial gestures, and were performed with great effect at trade union meetings and mass rallies, eliciting powerful emotional connections with her live audience.

Reflecting on her work as a member of the cultural committee of the Congress of Trade Unions, Malange talks of "smear pamphlets attacking women" and "jeering from men." Discouraged by the negative attitudes of male chauvinists, women have been reluctant to participate in cultural production, but Malange urges them to persevere "because in performance culture they have a platform for expressing their anger, their perspective and they conscientise their audience" (*Buang* 13).

Urban women who are removed physically and philosophically from the traditional culture of the rural areas may feel that urban adaptation and cultural dislocation has been acquired at the expense of their intellectual legacy. However, referring to and reminiscing about the oral traditions is a persistent theme in their writing. Sindiwe Magona, in the first volume of her two-part autobiography, *To My Children's Children*, begins chapter one, "Early Days," with the following inscription:

> Child of the Child of My Child
>
> As ours is an oral tradition I would like you to hear from my own lips what it was like living in the 1940s onwards. What it was like in the time of your great-grandmother, me.

> However, my people no longer live long lives. Generations no longer set eyes on one another. Therefore, I fear I may not live long enough to do my duty to you, to let you know who you are and whence you are. So, I will keep, for you, my words in this manner. (1)

At the conclusion of volume two, *Forced to Grow*, Magona wants her great-grandchildren to "forget that I am sitting on a four-legged chair instead of a goatskin or a grass mat. Forget that we meet through your eyes instead of your ears. Listen, for my spirit, if not my flesh, is there with you" (232).

In similar fashion, Margaret McCord, who recorded Katie Makanya's story in *The Calling of Katie Makanya: A Memoir of South Africa*, notes that Katie has a "prodigious memory, for she seldom forgot a name, a face, an event, or the circumstances surrounding a particular individual." This she attributes to the development of a coping mechanism for the uncorrected vision problem that had hindered Katie's progress at school. Her incredible memory is complemented by an "instinctive sense of drama which enabled her to conjure up events long past and by the use of body language and dialogue give them a sense of immediacy, a quality which I inevitably picked up when working with the transcripts of taped recollections" (vii). I would suggest that Makanya's incredible memory is due in large part to her continued practice of storytelling rather than a practical compensation for poor eyesight. Bringing the stories to life through the use of dramatic gestures and vocal nuances is also part of her performance repertoire. Scheub observes that oral performances are multi-faceted, incorporating "the nuance of the hand, the movement of a hip, the subtlety of the face, the range and variety of human sounds, the rhythmic

use of language; it includes physical touch, a sudden and fleeting bit of mime, a dancing-in-place . . . the music of the word that occasionally flows into song" (*Xhosa* 14-15).

McCord begins her first chapter with the description of a recording session that is interrupted by her young son's arrival home from school, throwing himself at Katie's feet before greeting his mother, and reminding Katie that she had promised to tell him a story about her old ancestor. As Katie begins the story for McCord's son, the mother "Lulled by the cadence of her voice . . . lean[t] back against the sofa, listening to a story I have heard so many times I can almost repeat it word for word" (4). And at the conclusion of Makanya's life story, McCord ends her narrative with the old lady reassuring her great-granddaughter, "Don't be frightened, little one. I'm not a witch. I'm just your old, old ancestor, and tonight, after we've eaten, I'll tell you a story . . ." (252).

It would seem unlikely that this prominent and persistent reference to their expertise as storytellers is simply nostalgia, a yearning for a way of life that has virtually disappeared. Placed in the emphatic position and framing their narratives, these conspicuous references to storytelling would appear to invoke the powers of the muse, drawing upon resources that are vitally important to the act of writing. Invention is eased when the writer has a stockpile of time-tested *topoi* to draw upon, unlike novice writers who struggle for inspiration in the absence of ideas.

The Oral Holdover: Residual Effects in Women's Writing

Ong has contended that "Oral cultures today value their oral traditions and agonize over the loss of these traditions, but I have never encountered or heard of an oral culture that does not want to achieve literacy as soon as possible. (Some individuals of course do resist literacy, but they are mostly soon lost sight of)" (175). In reality, the introduction of literacy by missionaries was not necessarily eagerly anticipated and accepted by the indigenous population, for the strange markings on the page were alien symbols that carried no meaning for people for whom they had little significance, possessing as they did an abundant oral reservoir of riddles, fables, stories, historical narratives, poems, and epics.

The ingrained belief that the introduction of literacy to a culture that has previously only experienced oral communication is an eagerly anticipated event, resisted only by a few holdouts (most likely the old storytellers Ong referred to), is a prime example of the Eurocentricism that characterized literacy research in the 1960s and early 1970s. This bias is common among Great-Divide proponents (among which Ong is usually situated, together with Jack Goody, Ian Watt, and David Olson) who typically posit that the supposed cognitive changes that accompany the spread of literacy cause a chasm that separates the literates from the preliterates. Although this position initially was accorded credibility because technology causes human consciousness to evolve, adapting as it does to the demands of new cognitive maps and neural stimuli, a mounting body of ethnographic research undertaken by scholars such as Brian Street, Sylvia Schribner, Michael Cole, Shirley Heath, and Deborah

Brandt has devalued, discredited, and deconstructed the wisdom of this great-rift theory.

An unfailing and unflagging exhortation of the positive cognitive consequences attributed to literacy has led Deborah Brandt to apply the label "strong text" to believers of this persuasion. Ong adopts a technological determinist stance, for he makes the claim that "without writing, human consciousness cannot achieve its fuller potentials, cannot produce other beautiful and powerful creations. In this sense, orality needs to produce and is destined to produce writing" (*Involvement* 14-15). To Ong, writing is an indispensable technological innovation that is a requisite for producing the degree of intellectual maturation that signals higher order thinking that must take place to be considered fully human. The development of a literate culture is a desirable and necessary step toward achieving this goal.

For those cultures that continue to respect and revere the strong oral residue inherent in their traditions, the notion that the advent of literacy signals a Great-Divide is dismissed consistently. Alice Walker, for example, alludes to the dynamism of the oral traditions when discussing the literary heritage of black women in the United States, depicting the poet Phyllis Wheatley as a woman who "still struggled to sing the song that was your gift," a talent she brought with her to North America as a child stolen from Africa (237). Walker speculates that Wheatley's mother was probably an artist who "wove the most stunning mats or told the most ingenious stories of all the village storytellers. Perhaps she was herself a poet—though only her daughter's name is signed to the poems that we know" (243). Wheatley is prevented from acknowledg-

ing the ghosts and the gifts of her female African ancestors by a Western tradition of assigning individual authorship to a literary text.

Situated historically as Wheatley was during an era when whites questioned if black people were even capable of creating literature (and long before oral traditions were considered to be literature in their own right), she was subjected to a Great-Divide inspired inquisition. She learned firsthand that literacy was a double-edged sword for African-Americans, a tool of oppression because whites went to such lengths to prevent her people from acquiring literacy yet, once mastered, it allowed for the rehabilitation and revitalization of their African cultural heritage. Walker sets the record straight, tracing Wheatley's artistic ability to her African roots, thereby discrediting the notion that the poet had merely learned her lessons well by emulating a Western poetic style and had drawn her creativity from studying the masters of the European canon. The scrutiny Wheatley had to endure when seeking publication of her work and the refusal by whites to acknowledge her cultural inheritance, preferring to credit her accomplishment solely to her acculturation to the Western literary tradition through the auspices of her white master, points to a similar mindset that continues to bedevil African writers.

Margaret Daymond, in her analysis of Magona's autobiography and short stories *Women at Work*, contends that "attention to the sustained and sustaining presence of orature in stories such as these poses some important challenges to current assumptions and focuses in postcolonial theory." As Daymond argues, the blending of oral and written elements in Magona's work functions as "complementary oral and narrative conventions," and should cause us to reevaluate "certain currently powerful

assumptions in postcolonial criticism, which arise from its almost exclusive focus on writing" ("Complementary" 331-32). Hofmeyr contends that "oral literature and globalisation [are] a pair of issues which are seldom put alongside each other, since oral literature is generally confined to the airless space of local tradition." Noting the "hidden imperial assumptions" of literate forms, she argues that the impact of oral traditions on literary conventions are rarely taken into account because they exist on the periphery, at least from the viewpoint of Westerners. Hofmeyr asks that we not isolate oral forms in some "'traditional' space, but in a contemporary globalized world in which oral forms compete with, circulate alongside, and mutate with other cultural forms" (*Magic* 88-89).

The cordoning of oral traditions in a pre-modern space is prevalent in postcolonial theory. For instance, the catchy title of Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin's short (and influential) study of postcolonial literatures, "*The Empire Writes Back*," situates postcolonial cultures in the modern era of literacy and literary traditions, noting that "[i]t is through an appropriation of the power invested in writing" (78) that cultures marginalized by colonialism can strike back. Control of the communication channels "is always manifested by the imposed authority of a system of *writing*, whether writing already exists in the colonized culture or not" (79, emphasis in original). At least in the South African context, the continuing coexistence of ancient African oral traditions with an imported writing tradition that is only three-and-a-half centuries old means that "[f]ar from being subordinated to writing, Southern African orality functions outside, alongside, and in interaction with the written " (Daymond, *Women* 21).

Edward Kamau Brathwaite, writing in the context of Caribbean literature, lauds oral influences for their "*total expression,*" the lively making of meaning that takes place communally between performer and audience. The oral traditions emanate from a history of poverty, living in the open air, forcing people to "rely on their very *breath* rather than on paraphernalia like books and museums and machines. They had to depend on *immanence*, the power within themselves, rather than the technology outside themselves" (18, emphasis in original). Seeking to reestablish a sense of identity as a recovery from the devastating effects of colonial oppression by connecting with the knowledge, the history, and the myth of the oral traditions is a liberating experience for Brathwaite, who berates the academy for its resistance to validating orality and its privileging of text-bound literature. Our conception of the oral traditions has evolved due to a move away from purely structural analyses to an investigation of orality as a complex rhetorical activity that can be viewed as a

> dynamic discourse about society and about the relationships between individuals, groups and classes in society. In particular, this perspective sees oral literature not merely as folksy, domestic entertainment but as a domain in which individuals in a variety of social roles articulate a commentary upon power relations in society and indeed create knowledge about society. (Furniss and Gunner 1)

While the interweaving of both oral and written techniques not only forces us to reevaluate assumptions about these literary conventions, their complementarity points to a continuing and cohesive intellectual tradition that offers valuable insights into the

production and presentation of black women's expanding and expansive literary tradition.

It is, however, important to take note of Hofmeyr's caution that we should not think of women as the "passive recipients of tradition," nor should we uncritically "assume that oral literature tends to flow smoothly and unproblematically into written forms . . . as part of an ongoing stream." Urban women writers do not necessarily tap directly into the oral reservoir, for having been removed from rural culture and the roots of the oral traditions, they "often have not done a serious oral-storytelling apprenticeship." Instead many women writers are involved in a practice of "manipulating . . . the politics of tradition." This strategy has actually worked to their advantage, for women can "claim a publishing space, since it is after all 'traditional' for women to tell—and hence publish—stories" (*Magic* 89-90).

Both Ellen Kuzwayo and Miriam Tlali, the first authors to break through the publishing in English barrier, chose to write a collection of stories for their second books. Kuzwayo penned *Sit Down and Listen* in 1990, dedicating the collection to her six grandchildren. On the cover of her book, she is photographed comfortably seated in a cane chair as though she were about to tell a story. Kuzwayo claims intellectual property, noting that "for so many years now, we have owned our stories while owning so little else," whilst also recognizing that without being able to "trap some of them on paper" they would have "vanished for ever." In the introduction, she reminisces on the atmosphere at night when everyone, young and old, gathered around the storyteller seated near the fire, and the expectations and the excitement as "Having coaxed her listeners into attention, the narrator would fall silent for a moment and

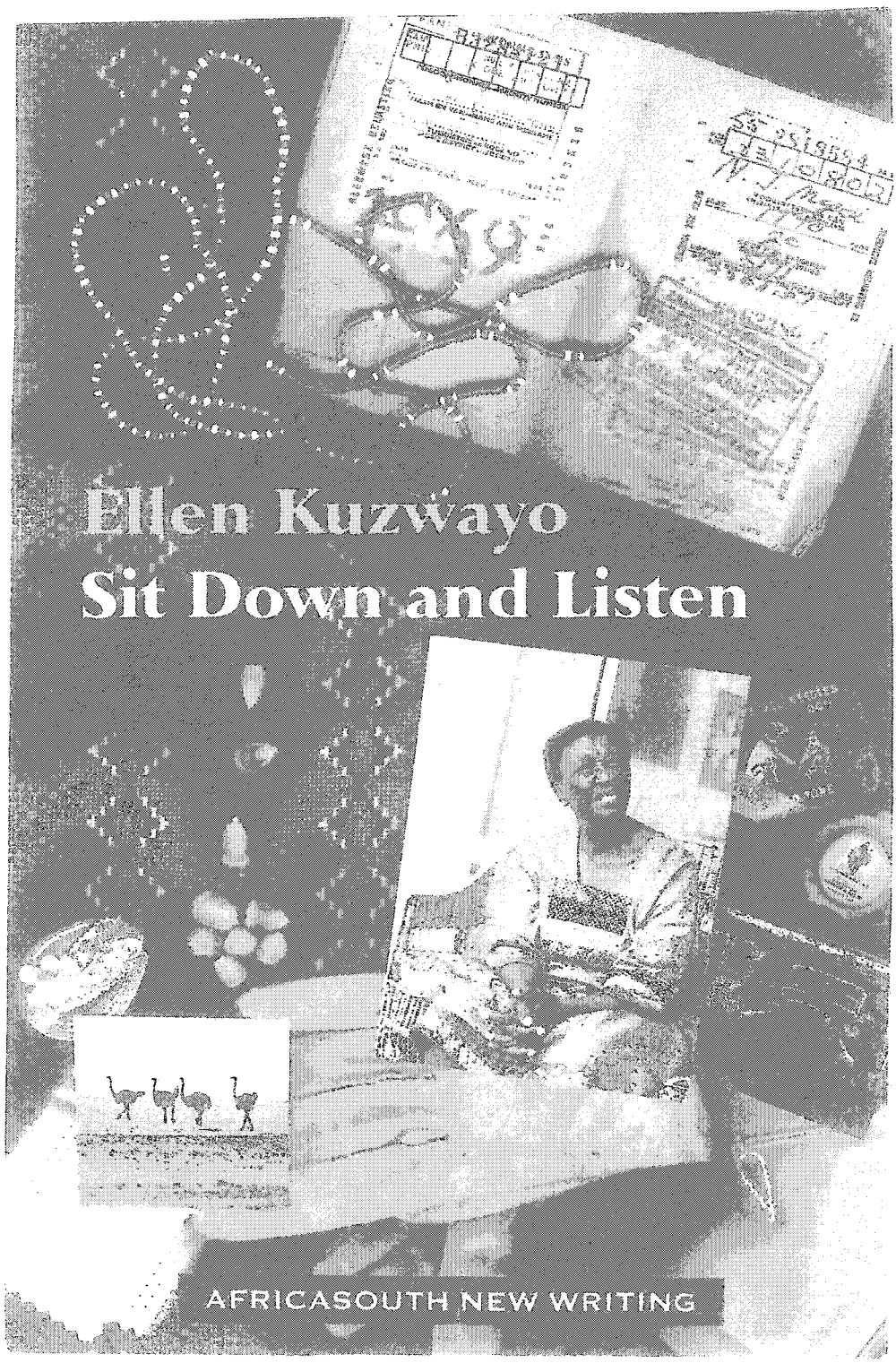

Fig. 1. Ellen Kuzwayo. *Sit Down and Listen*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1990.

adjust her position slightly, moving her stool forward and back." Kuzwayo was born and raised on a farm, and her claim to be a traditional storyteller is legitimate. While Tlali's *Soweto Stories* are set in the heart of the ghetto, portraying the desperate conditions and the decay of relationships in this violent and destructive urban environment, in her introduction, Ngcobo describes Tlali as having "her feet deeply planted in the city, [while] her eyes look back on the last warp of tradition, hankering after a lost way of life" (xviii).

In tracing the intellectual history of African-American women, Royster argues that in order to "see and understand the tradition of black women's intellectualism, we must enrich our definitions of *tradition*, *literacy*, and *intellectualism*, and then we must use this enriched vision to look again at the historical evidence of the ways in which black women have used their literacy" ("Perspectives" 105, emphasis in original). In the South African context, I have interpreted "tradition" as being the rich reservoir of oral rhetorical practices, which expands and complicates the conventional definition of "literacy." Without being sufficiently aware of the complex and contested history of these intellectual traditions as practiced by black women since the beginning of what Zenani calls "first consciousness," we cannot fully appreciate the continuity and development of black women's intellectualism and literacy.

CHAPTER TWO

Between a Rock and a Hard Place: The Struggle for Literacy

As the potential powerhouse of social and economic advancement, literacy—which some believe is a neutral, value-free asset—is everywhere controlled by hegemonic forces. When access to literacy is harnessed in the quest for empowerment, enfranchisement, and entitlement, it is nervously but rightly interpreted as a radical undertaking, one that poses a decided threat to the stability and preservation of the status quo. When the acquisition and application of literacy is sooner or later promoted as a stepping-stone to demands for wider political participation and economic enrichment, access to literacy is often quickly reevaluated, restricted, and rationed. The right to literacy continues to invite strife, particularly when race factors into the equation.

Literacy operates at the crossroads of culture, politics, economics, and society. Its dissemination is uneven and unequal, particularly in the colonial context which underwrites the subjugation of a traditional society by a technologically advanced colonizer. If we are to meaningfully examine the reasons why black women in South Africa have been consistently marginalized, excluded, ignored, and silenced, we must explore the grid of intersections as literacy crisscrosses the social fabric, serving as the conduit of complex interactions and reactions. While African women succeeded in carving out a space to practice their oral traditions, a private space that escaped the

sanctions and the structure of the public sphere, the layering of a new alien medium for communication presented additional obstacles and hurdles.

Teaching slaves to read and write was prohibited by law in the southern United States in the early nineteenth century and reinforced by practice, although an enlightened minority (often white women) disregarded the ban. During the civil rights movement a century later, equal access to educational resources continued to provoke violent responses, causing Governor George Wallace to physically bar the entry of a black man and woman to the hallowed halls of the University of Alabama, a bastion of white privilege. The history of black literacy in South Africa has followed a similar trajectory as evidenced by the notorious Bantu Education Act introduced in 1953 by the National Party government as a cornerstone of its apartheid ideology. Within the racial hierarchy established in South Africa, the education of blacks took the least precedence, leading to the violent confrontation between black schoolchildren and paramilitary units in Soweto in 1976.

Literacy has functioned as the most effective, efficient, and essential Western invention that could be used to accomplish the mission of civilizing the indigenous inhabitants encountered in the depths of darkest Africa, and its introduction has had profound ramifications for the colonized. Countless teams of porters have struggled through dense and steamy vegetation with weighty trunks packed with printed matter that the white owners intended expressly for the purpose of colonizing the consciousness of local communities. Eric Havelock maintains that when white explorers came upon settlements in the New World, inevitably they had to wonder: "Could they read and write? If not, what comparative value does this negative fact

place on writing . . . what positive value on its absence?" (35). In the estimation of the exploring Europeans, encountering a local culture that was purely oral indicated that they had entered a cultural backwater, for literacy served as a convenient benchmark for registering the Great Divide, the primitive/civilized test.

One can imagine that in ancient Greece the introduction of literacy to an oral culture occurred at a snail's pace, slowly infiltrating the local culture in fits and starts. This transition occurred over several centuries as the ability to read and write became part of an evolving consciousness as people heard about, then observed, and gradually became familiar with seeing the letters of the alphabet being used to transcribe the spoken word onto papyri, and then reconstituted as speech. Literacy introduced as part of a civilizing mission is a radical undertaking that occurs fairly abruptly, purveyed by white-skinned foreigners who speak an alien language, who have strange mannerisms, dress, and behavior, and who are altogether "other." Not surprisingly, the whole concept of a written language presented in this fashion gives rise to myths, mystery, and mistrust on the part of the indigenous inhabitants. Jeff Opland has demonstrated by quoting from numerous oral poems that "Gun and book are associated at the very dawn of literacy among the Xhosa" . . . ("Image" 98), with both weapon and book appearing as "image[s] of destruction" (96) associated with the dispossession of land and culture, the imposition of taxes, and the waging of war fought with the superior weapons of Western science.

Since the arrival of white settlers three hundred and fifty years ago, literacy in South Africa has been destined to serve very specific and highly suspect social uses. Needless to say, black women in South Africa, the most economically disadvantaged

and politically dispossessed group in the country, have struggled the most to gain access to literacy instruction and to harness this much touted skill for achieving personal satisfaction, social advancement, and political empowerment. Literacy has served as the "master's tool" since its inception as a sorting mechanism in the Greek polis, favoring the education of aristocrats' sons, while promoting a seeming indifference to the necessity of teaching girls to read and write.[1] When the sophists appeared on the scene, not only were they regarded with suspicion and scorn for expanding literacy as a socially useful tool for protecting one's economic rights, but their status as aliens, not home-grown Athenians, rendered their pedagogy and their practice suspect. Our heightened awareness of the depths of the historical masculine dominance of language and literacy is in no small measure due to Audre Lorde's now famous aphorism: "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House." Speaking as a black woman, Lorde refers in particular to the role played by entrenched patriarchal practices that have been exported globally by colonial administrations and that have exacerbated racial divisions and tensions, impacting in particular the lives of women of color.

In the hands of the colonized, literacy transformed from a tool of oppression and subjugation in the control of the colonizer to a weapon of empowerment and self-realization, reflected in Salmon Rushdie's term "the Empire writes back to the Centre." This highly effective campaign of answering back to epistemologically flawed Western-oriented arguments and reinventing and revitalizing suppressed local

[1] Leonard Shlain offers a fascinating thesis that the oppression of women has its roots in the introduction of literacy, promoting as it does the linearity and masculinity of the left brain over the image-centered femininity of the right brain. He argues that alphabetic literacy is responsible for a

cultures has been achieved through appropriating and adapting the master's tools. The institutional entrenchment of literacy precludes the total destruction of the master's house, yet mastering literacy and directing this proficiency to destabilizing the master's house can fatally weaken the sturdiest of foundations, as the collapse of the house of apartheid has demonstrated. The complicated and conflicted history of literacy in South Africa from its introduction to the African community as an accompaniment to religious conversion by European missionaries in the nineteenth century to its co-option by the apartheid government in the middle of the twentieth century as an administrative tool for implementing its racist ideology is a fascinating, yet deeply disturbing subject. Literacy, the white man's gift or curse, depending on one's perspective, has been the site of struggle far more enduring than colonialism itself, leaving behind a permanent legacy.

In this chapter, I begin by discussing what André Brink calls the "silenced landscapes," those "territories of experience" ("Stories" 32) that have remained largely unexamined in South African history—the virtual absence of black women's voices in print. I then move to an exploration of the activities of missionaries in their efforts to teach literacy to the locals and, in particular, the gendered nature of their instruction, directed as it was to spreading Christianity in the African bush. Next, I discuss the ramifications for literacy instruction when the major shift to a centralized education system for blacks in South Africa, known as Bantu Education, took effect in 1953. This was the cornerstone of the Nationalist government's political platform to wrest control of black education from missionary schools. Twenty years after the

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subsequent decline in the influence of women, goddesses, and images, an imbalance that has only begun to be corrected with the rise of visual media in the twentieth-century.

Bantu Education Act came into effect, and after sustained objections against this inferior system being voiced by parents and teachers, the black schoolchildren of Soweto took matters into their own hands by organizing a peaceful protest on June 16th, 1976. This event, the harbinger of an extended period of unprecedented political turmoil in South Africa, is the final focus of this chapter, for out of this rebellion emerged a (revitalized) literary tradition among black women.

Written Out of History: Accounting for Gaps in the Black Literary Tradition

When Mothobi Mutloatse asks in a postscript to his introduction to *Forced Landing* (1980), a collection of contemporary writings from South Africa, "Why are you so silent, Sisters and Mothers of Africa?" (7), he raises a pressing issue that must be acknowledged, addressed, and investigated. Understanding why women have historically been almost entirely absent from the black literary tradition until their emergence in the late 1970s and early 1980s requires an examination of a complex web of issues: education policies, gender politics, cultural mores, social structures, employment opportunities, and racial rationales. The existence of a black male literary tradition in South Africa, appearing in the nineteenth century under the mentorship and the material support of missionaries, obviously raises the question of gender. If the men were writing, why not the women?

Black women have exhibited a dogged determination in white controlled South Africa, craving an education for themselves and their children, remaining undaunted by the intense politicization of literacy that was particularly apparent during the apartheid era. As the government sought to restrict access to literacy by

creating barriers to its dissemination and utility, parceling it out in different amounts according to one's official racial classification, the quest for literacy in the black population became ever more desirable the more the government sought to ration it.

At home and internationally, the black literary tradition in South Africa has been coded thoroughly male through cultural convention, ingrained practice, and popular (mis)perception. It has been customary to characterize the country's black literary tradition as being almost exclusively male, as Ursula Barnett does in her influential *A Vision of Order: A Study of Black South African Literature in English (1914-1980)*. Barnett does not discuss the conditions that favored the development of a male canon of black writing in South Africa and the sustained exclusion of women's literary contributions. It is disconcerting to find her referring repeatedly to the black man's experience, thereby totally erasing not only the suffering of black women under apartheid, but also their participation in their culture as producers and purveyors of oral storytelling traditions and as emerging writers. Remarks such as, "the black man's image of himself" (29) and the "conditions under which the black man lived" (31), regrettably prolong the eliding of black women's lived experience and their institutionalized silencing at the behest of African men and white men (particularly Afrikaner males), steeped as they were in anachronistic and antagonistic gender politics befitting the nineteenth century.

Reinforcing the impression that the South African black literary tradition is an exclusively male achievement is also communicated through the design of book covers. For example, on the front cover of *Soweto Poetry*, edited by Michael Chapman, photographs of four black male poets are prominently displayed grid-like

in the center. Turning to the title page, one views another photograph of a male poet, this time with microphone in hand. And gracing the cover of Jacques Alvarez-Péreyre's *The Poetry of Commitment in South Africa* is a lone, defiant black man. As Susan Hilligoss notes in *Visual Communication: A Writer's Guide*, "Reader's take in a document's visual design immediately," forming long-lasting memories of the images contained in a text. The choice of graphics and the visual design should be carefully considered because it "affects readers' first impressions of genre, interest, and importance" (8).

While the protest poetry from Soweto was undoubtedly dominated by men due to longstanding cultural and rhetorical conventions that established men as the official orators, academics and critics (white and black) continue to perpetuate and reinforce the impression that the women merely stand on the sidelines, ululating as the male poets perform. Cecily Lockett comments in her introduction to *Breaking the Silence: A Century of South African Women's Poetry* that "One of the most exciting developments of the late 1970s and 1980s has been the increase in the number of black women writing poetry" (34). Lockett also points out that "black women poets have been given minimal representation" in anthologies such as *The Return of the Amazi Bird, Voices from Within, One Day in June*, and the tenth anniversary edition of *Staffrider* magazine (36). The first impression that the reader gains from looking at the cover of Chapman's *Soweto Poetry* is that the rebellion brewing in the townships and finally exploding with the student riots in June 1976 was stage-managed exclusively by males who vented their rage at the white government by performing their poetry at numerous venues in the townships. Women and girls were equally

involved in the riots, dying and being imprisoned and tortured for their courage, a horrifying fact that sparked many of the survivors to document their personal experiences.

An interesting cover to juxtapose with Chapman's is that of editors Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford. Placed strategically across the middle of the cover of *On Shifting Sands: New Art and Literature from South Africa* is a photograph by Paul Weinberg of a black woman carrying a shopping bag and wearing the traditional beret, standing outside what appears to be a government building, being confronted by riot police in full gear, one pointing his assault rifle inches from her head. Superimposed above her head are the words " So give me / Pen and paper / I will write verses / In the midst / Of torture." These lines are excerpted from Mlungisi Mkhize's poem "Just Before Embracing Dawn" which appears in the same volume (44). The dramatic effect of this woman, who could be a domestic servant, holding her ground against the intimidation of the white police, is somewhat diffused upon discovering that Mkhize is a male poet, a fact that continues to reiterate the "women are silent" theme.

The absence of black women from public forums has rarely been raised, although a notable exception to the uncritical acceptance of their silence is the pre-World War II comments of Benedict Wallet Vilakazi, the Zulu poet and Professor of African Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand. Pondering the lack of women's voices in the black newspaper, *Ilanga Lase Natal*, in a 1933 article Vilakazi asks: "Why can't our educated women . . . express their views and exchange ideas? . . . . To be a writer does not mean much, nor does it cost money. We want the

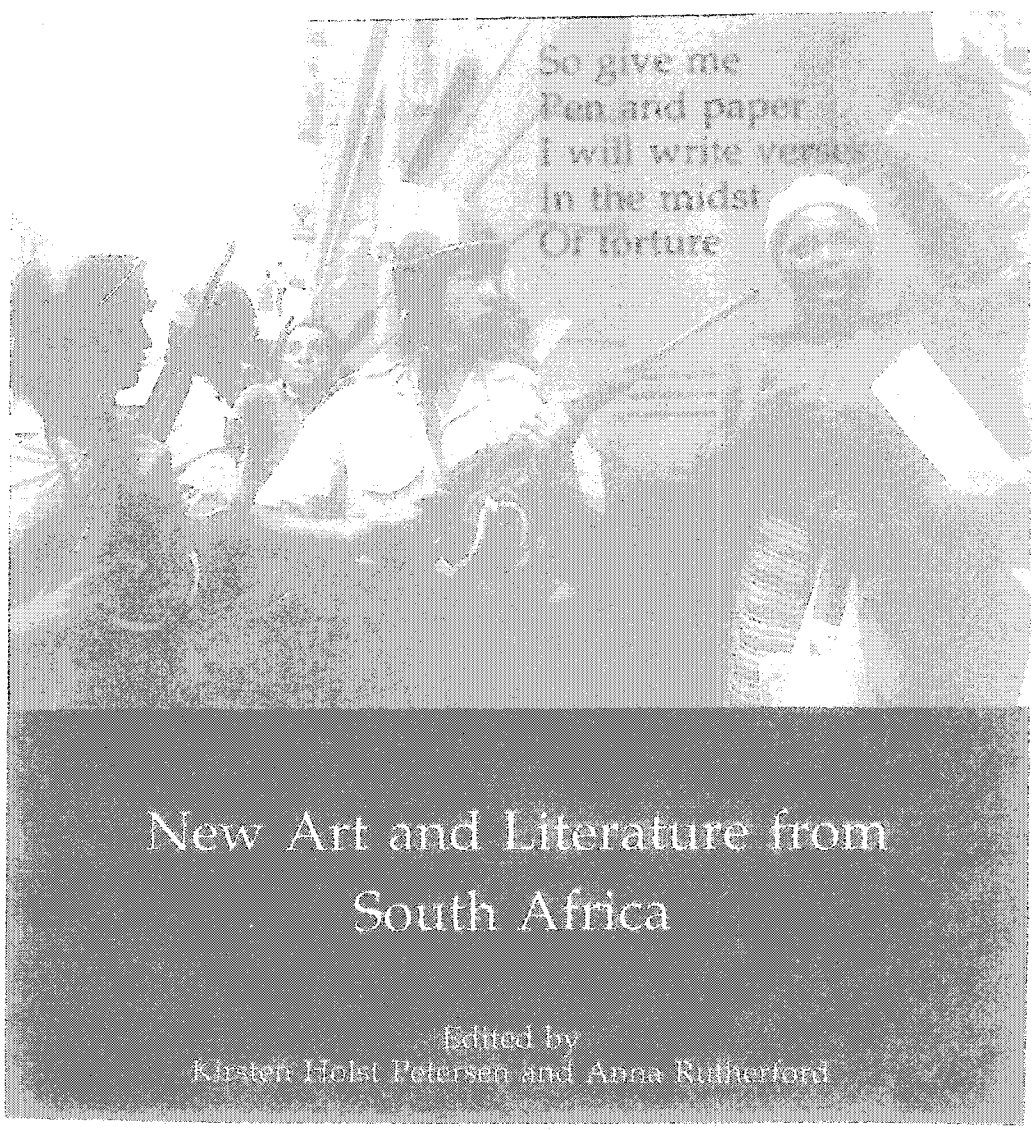

Fig. 2. *On Shifting Sands: New Art and Literature from South Africa.* Ed. Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford. Portsmouth, NH: Dangeroo, 2001.

wisdom of their heads" (97). Vilakazi's remarks are quoted in Tim Couzens' article on the fate and fortunes of black newspapers in South Africa in which he notes that the "editress" of the women's pages of the *Bantu World* was none other than the well-known black male author Rolfes Dhlomo writing under a pseudonym.[2]

Perhaps black women were reluctant to engage in a dialogue with the newspaper because traditionally women had been excluded from offering public commentary by cultural fiat. Also, as Couzens reveals, "The women's pages tended to confirm the women's peculiar and subordinate role, concentrating on topics such as how to behave at English-style tea parties, and emphasizing religious ideas on the acceptance of suffering" (97). It appears that Dhlomo had sufficiently absorbed and appropriated his mission school education for him to believe that the notion of "true womanhood" resided in the European model, one that should be emulated by black women who aspired to become ladies.

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[2] The practice of hiding one's identity by assuming pseudonyms enabled a few male writers to dominate the editorial pages of the newspaper with their views and opinions, duping unsuspecting readers who imagined that the newspaper represented a much wider range of positions. Writing under a pseudonym has complicated the retrieval of black women's authorship for, as Chapman notes, the influential *Drum* magazine that made its appearance in 1951 showcasing established and emerging black writers, published stories "written exclusively by men (a few 'true confessions' used female pseudonyms), and often depict women as fickle temptresses, shebeen queens or models of dull domesticity" (*Drum* 225). An example of the confusion that this can cause is evidenced by a contribution in the anthology *Raising the Blinds: A Century of South African Women's Stories*, edited by Annemarié van Niekerk. The story "I Broke Their Hearts," attributed to Doris Sello, originally appeared in *Drum* in September, 1953 and fits Chapman's mold of the "fickle temptress." It begins: "My story is, in a way, a wicked one. But I hope you will understand what led me to it—and be happy with me for not having totally ruined my life and the lives of the men I took my revenge out on" (65). Margaret Daymond, in her article "Gender and 'History': 1980s South African Women's Stories in English" comments that "*Drum*, which launched most of the male writers of the 1950s, received very few submissions from women." She observes that van Niekerk erroneously includes the story by Doris Sello in her anthology of women's writing and quotes van Niekerk who, in her introduction to the anthology, states that Sello was "one of the few women writers who had a story published in *Drum* magazine during the 1950s" (271). In the 2003 anthology, *Women Writing Africa: The Southern Region*, Daymond et al note in footnote 62 that the "fictional stories that appeared under the signatures of 'Doris Sello,' 'Rita Sefora,' and 'Joan Mokwena' were written by male journalists (a few others were by non-Southern African women" (63).

By passing on tips culled from his exposure to the western literature curriculum and the culture of mission schools on how a lady was supposed to behave, Dhlomo must have imagined that black women would eagerly scour his pages for expert advice on the social etiquette, the preferred mannerisms, and the high couture that Erna Brodber identifies as the stereotype of ideal womanhood, the passive white lady "in a fine castle." It is significant that a man of Vilakazi's stature extended black women a rare invitation to create a rhetorical space for themselves in order to express their "wisdom," an acknowledgment of black women's traditional role as cultural producers and educators. However, even the few women who progressed beyond the elementary classes and who gained more than a basic knowledge of reading and writing in mission schools would have been similarly indoctrinated in colonial gender roles, for, as Brodber contends, "These models . . . were internalized as 'right' if not as 'possible' . . ." (55).

In *Traces of a Stream: Literacy and Social Change Among African-American Women*, Jacqueline Jones Royster argues that becoming literate was "a dynamic moment in the lives of African-American women, as people with desires for agency and authority in the use of written language" (5). By acquiring literacy despite numerous obstacles aimed to discourage them, these women interpreted this accomplishment as far more than simply having gained the ability to decode and encode written texts; they pressed their newly-gained skill into action as a weapon to be strategically deployed in enlightening and uplifting their race in the struggle to counter racism and overcome oppression. After the Civil War, with the prohibition against teaching literacy having been lifted, African-American women took

advantage of available educational opportunities, directing their rhetorical skills to speaking and writing in the public area "about their desires and aspirations, and about the forces and systems that constrained them and thereby stood in the way of the progress and achievement of the community" (178). Black women in South Africa have exhibited a very similar resolve to acquiring literacy and deploying it for political empowerment and the improvement of their people, an accomplishment that is belied by their virtual exclusion from the black literary tradition until the last quarter of the twentieth century.

The Missionary Method: Literacy and the Native Woman

Missionary societies representing numerous European and North American religious denominations flocked to South Africa in the nineteenth century, lured by visions of heathen hordes on the Dark Continent, a vast untapped source of potential converts, and the prospect of foreign adventure and employment opportunities unavailable in their home countries. The proselytizing mission dominated their contacts with the local Africans among whom they settled. According to R.H.W. Shepherd, chaplain, principal, and historian of Lovedale–a venture of the Glasgow Missionary Society and South Africa's premier mission school—the Reverend Dr. James Stewart, a former principal, firmly believed that "to civilize could never be the primary aim of the missionary. Civilisation without Christianity among a primitive people was a mere matter of clothes and white-wash" (*South* 37).[3]

[3] For most of the nineteenth century, mission schools were integrated, particularly in the lower grades. White, Colored, and African children could be found attending the same schools. However, toward the end of the century, schools exclusively for white children were increasingly the norm. By 1910, the year of Union, school attendance was compulsory for white children in all four provinces.

As sponsors of literacy, the instructional methods and materials of missionaries were aimed at promoting the reading of scripture; reading and writing were not disseminated as pleasurable activities to expand the intellectual horizon of the local community by encouraging its members to "read the world" in Paulo Freire's terminology. The introduction of a curriculum centered on teaching the elementary skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic to the local African community became an essential task for accomplishing their goal. "Schooling," David Johnson observes, "was the corner-stone of Christian initiatives, and functional literacy which would enable converts to read the Bible, the goal" (16).

Missionaries went about teaching the three R's by replicating the pedagogy of their home country; it is not surprising to find literacy lessons in the bush being undertaken in similar fashion to that in classrooms across Europe. As Johnson points out, members of evangelical societies in the British Isles embarked on most of the missionary work in South Africa, and these societies attracted members of the "laboring, artisan, and peasant classes in Britain" (15) looking to expand their horizons abroad. They reproduced the monitorial method whereby older students helped teach younger pupils through rote learning "in an atmosphere of strict rules of reward and punishment" (16). Guided by a desire to train African converts to go out and spread the Word, learning to read had a clearly defined purpose if Christianity was to succeed in crowding out local religions. Although white missionaries must be credited with introducing literacy to the African population, their instruction was oriented to teaching learners to read scriptural texts and to sing hymns and psalms. As Jane Sales remarks, "The ability to read meant the ability to read the Bible. Nothing

else was available" (42). By endeavoring to enlighten and educate the "natives," this restrictive application of literacy was well suited to reading by rote and the repetition and memorizing of religious materials.

Andrea Fishman's account of how the Amish become literate gives us insights into how literacy operates in a restricted environment in which reading materials are carefully screened by the parents before the children have access to them in order to ensure adherence to the religious doctrines practiced by the Amish. Participation in family literacy events is mandatory, even for pre-schoolers who are taught how to imitate literate behavior by observing other members of the community, copying their actions, and repeating phrases, thus enabling pre-literate children to participate in rote exercises. The definition of literacy in the Amish community differs from main-stream interpretations as Fishman observes in that critical applications are non-existent and "Literary appreciation, too, is both irrelevant and absent because the study of text-as-object is moot . . . . Text, whether biblical or secular, is perceived not as an object but as a force acting in the world, and it is the impact of that force that counts" (36).

Fishman's interpretation of the ideology that structures and sustains literacy in a strict religious community can be applied broadly to the intent and the content of literacy sponsored by missionaries. Conflicts arising between missionaries and the African graduates of their schools over the accepted applications of literacy were not uncommon, as Lauretta Ngcobo notes in her introduction to Miriam Tlali's *Soweto Stories*: "Right from the start the African literary experience was fraught with difficulties. Acquiring literacy from the missionaries was both a help and a

hindrance." Depending upon the sponsorship of missionaries to print their manuscripts, African writers quickly discovered that this patronage came at a steep price, for the central theme of their writing was expected to be religious in nature as African writing was seen as an ongoing evangelical mission, providing suitable reading material for newly literate Africans. Tackling sensitive and controversial political and social issues was not exactly what most missionaries had in mind, and "conflict inevitably developed" (ix-x). Ngcobo adds that "There are innumerable accounts of religious censorship in the past," based not on questions about the literary merit of local productions, but motivated by attempts to clamp down on controversy by controlling content. In many respects, missionaries were cohorts of the colonizers, representing the spiritual realm, while their fellow colonists shored up the secular.

European missionaries functioned not only as evangelists but also as members of the colonizing class, imparting their values, traditions, and biases to the African community. Unfortunately for black women who came under their influence, Western gender roles and racial stereotyping contaminated this pastoral relationship. Paul Landau provides a glimpse of this aspect in his discussion of *First Steps in English for Becwana Scholars*, a text compiled by missionary A.J. Wookey, published in London circa 1915. Landau reproduces the frontispiece, a photo of an African woman dressed in the typical attire of a maid, holding in one arm a black baby and in the other a white one. The photo is titled simply "Black and White." As Landau observes, "The image epitomizes the way missionaries coupled reminders of social inequality (the woman can only be read as a servant) with assertions of extrasocietal, incipient equality" (77).

With the lower socioeconomic classes being over-represented among missionaries in South Africa, this group was more likely to reenact the working-class codes instilled in them by Britain's harsh nineteenth century industrial and class conscious environment. Restrictions placed on women's roles both socially and economically in the home country would have been instilled in those Africans attending school, and together with the masculine bias of the British education system, black schoolgirls would have found their activities and interests curtailed by curricula design. In Jacklyn Cock's important and insightful 1980 study, *Maids and Madams: A Study in the Politics of Exploitation* (that has inspired a growing literature on domestic service), she details how mission schools in the eastern Cape provided black girls with an "Education for Domesticity." Her thesis is borne out by Shepherd who, in his history of Lovedale, notes with pride that under Jane Waterston's guidance, many African girls were enrolled in the school (sixty-five boarders by 1873) and were "trained for all kinds of domestic work" (*South* 113). Waterston's intention was to instill in the girls an appreciation for the home (a home in the Westernized, Christian sense); consequently, the domestic staff was kept to a minimum at the school in order to give the girls practical housekeeping experience which, incidentally, would have conveniently reduced operating costs. Mission schools were invariably short of funds, receiving little financial support from provincial administrations other than subsidies for teachers' salaries.

Replicating the vocational oriented schooling geared to the working class in Britain, this imported track was further delineated along gender lines. While boys received industrial education that prepared them for a variety of trade and clerical

occupations, "industrial education for girls institutionalised the dominant European female gender role which equated femininity with domesticity. The effect was largely to locate black women in domestic roles—either in their own or in the colonisers' households" (Cock 292). In a displacement of their traditional roles as the cultivators of the crops that provided the mainstay of the extended family's diet, women were barred from agricultural courses, now reserved exclusively for male students. As Cock has detailed, there was a pattern in mission schools in the eastern Cape of teaching home economics subjects such as sewing, cookery, laundry, and household management to girls. A mastery of these skills prepared African women to become Christian wives and to obtain employment outside the home as domestic servants in white homes.[4]

If the mission of educating African girls at Lovedale was to prepare them to marry suitably—often to the male graduates of the institution—and to fulfill their roles as Christian wives, it is not surprising that when Shepherd updates the fortunes of Lovedale in the 1930s in a special section comprising three short paragraphs entitled "Education of Women and Girls," he reports the following: "One of the sidelines was instruction aimed at enabling the African girl to make the most of her slender resources. The preparation of cheap and wholesome meals, the making of simple equipment from waste material, the cutting of small boys' suits from dyed flour bags at a cost of a shilling a suit were instances" (*South* 113). And, he continues, in "an attempt to exert direct influence on the African home through the older

[4] It is important to note that the number of African girls who would have been able to take advantage of formal schooling was very small indeed. Thus, as Deborah Gaitskell cautions, when discussing the provision of education to African girls by mission schools, the effects of these programs had a

woman," provision was made for these women to attend special four-month residential courses at Lovedale during which they studied a variety of domestic science courses, including childcare and hygiene.

Despite the emphasis on courses that prepared girls for a life as a Christian wife or as a domestic servant, African girls were exposed to an academic curriculum that was superior to that which many white girls had access, a fact that perturbed the education authorities and led to difficulties for Lovedale and other institutions in their attempts to continue accepting a racially mixed student body. Even though Lovedale was geared to preparing boys for vocational or professional careers, girls did benefit from their academic conditioning. Ellen Kuzwayo, the first African woman to publish her autobiography in South Africa, *Call Me Woman*, attended Lovedale in the 1930s. As a serious student, Kuzwayo remembers that she was "immediately taken into a group of three girls who were ranked as the cream of the class," on condition that she abide by the rules set by the group, such as arriving promptly for the self-appointed study time, consistently giving one's best effort on tests and exams, and ranking in the first four positions of the class (93).

For nine months in 1936, Kuzwayo and her study partners consistently placed in the top four positions in the class by maintaining their self-imposed discipline. When the rankings were announced "we would simultaneously exclaim after each of the names, 'Obvious!'" Clearly, the girls did not feel inferior to the boys in the class as Kuzwayo states that her three friends "developed their potential to the fullest, and demonstrated their determination to study and to challenge male students" (*Call* 94).

"miniscule impact" ("Race" 9). Thus, literacy rates for African women are inevitably lower than for men.

The group successfully subverted the gender stereotyping at Lovedale that Shepherd so proudly articulates, eschewing the training for domesticity reserved for girls by taking it upon itself to compete with the boys in the academic stakes. Unfortunately, Kuzwayo does not reflect on the attitude of the teachers, male or female, to this overt display of female braininess and intellectual dominance of the class.

Having the opportunity to gain experience and confidence in public speaking by joining the debating society is another avenue that prepared Kuzwayo for her stellar career in public life.[5] In 1932, as a student at Adams College in Amanzimtoti, a town south of Durban, Kuzwayo joined the debating society, considering it one of the "important features of college life." Interclass debates as well as competitions between schools and occasionally the teacher training college were a regular feature of the group. Kuzwayo comments: "When the society was scheduled to compete with another college, there would usually be several male students—and Ellen Merafe. The other girls did not seem to take an interest" (*Call* 84). As a researcher, I wish that Kuzwayo had expanded on her observation that she alone among the girls relished public speaking. It may not have necessarily been a lack of interest that prevented other female students from participating but rather a consequence of cultural conditioning, relegated as women were to private speaking opportunities and learning as children that public speaking was a man's affair. When Kuzwayo enters Lovedale in 1936, she mentions receiving "direct coaching" in public speaking from Miss

[5] Kuzwayo became a member of the Committee of Ten, founded in the wake of the Soweto riots to negotiate tenant complaints with the white authorities. As a result of her involvement with the committee, she was imprisoned without trial for five months at the Johannesburg Fort in 1977-78. Among her many achievements in the public sphere, Kuzwayo became the first president of the Black Consumer Union and was elected to parliament as a member of the African National Congress in the first democratic election in South Africa in 1994, serving one term before retiring in her 80s.

Schindler, her English teacher, learning to present timed speeches, both impromptu and prepared (94). While Kuzwayo's feminism is muted in keeping with many African women who were conflicted by what Bessie Head describes in her foreword to *Call Me Woman* as a "two-fold role, to liberate themselves from a traditional heritage of inferiority and to support the men on issues of national liberation" (xiv), Kuzwayo allows her latent feminism to break through when the oppressors are whites:

> Looking back, it seems that in the 1920 and 1930s boys had many more professional outlets than girls, who were restricted to teaching. Later, some went into nursing. In those early years girls seemed scared by the science subjects. The likelihood is that they were scared not because they were stupid but because they had been told over and over again that women students had no aptitude in this field. (87)

It is revealing, and refreshing, to place student Kuzwayo's memories of attending Lovedale alongside that of Shepherd's history of the highlights of girls' education at this institution during the 1930s, for Kuzwayo chooses to foreground the academic training she received. Although she attended the school for only one year, reluctantly leaving after her disappointment at not being admitted to the matriculation class, it is the academic rigor and the opportunities to participate with the boys in sporting activities that Kuzwayo chooses to remember and reflect on forty-five years later when writing her autobiography as a seventy-year-old woman.

By emphasizing training for traditional women's professions—nursing and teaching—and providing a heavy dose of domestic science (home economics),

mission schools such as Lovedale were tracking students according to gender, and in the process denying and dismissing any ambitions that African girls might have harbored outside of this restrictive sphere. Caught in a cultural vice in which the expenditure of time and money on educating girls was considered an unwise investment for girls who would in all likelihood opt for early marriage and motherhood, and compounded with Western perceptions of women's place in the home, African girls did not for the most part have a support system in place that actively encouraged them to train for careers outside the home.[6]

Bantu Education: Pedagogy for the Dispossessed

The degree to which mission schools succeeded in imparting literacy to African children is questionable. In 1862, after inspecting the mission schools in his territory, the Superintendent-General of Education in the Cape Province concluded that a mere five percent of the African students enrolled in these institutions had acquired sufficient knowledge of the three R's to be useful (Horrell, *African* 11-12). In spite of concerns raised by the educational authorities about the standard of literacy instruction in mission schools and the alien European values that were being imparted to African children causing them to come in conflict with local customs, these institutions served an important role in training a black male elite.

From among this elite emerged a generation of African leaders and writers, such as Chief Albert Luthuli, Nelson Mandela, Sol Plaatje, B.W. Vilakazi, Ezekiel

[6] Kuzwayo was fortunate in that her "maternal grandfather, father, step-father, aunt, cousins and other relatives" had attended Lovedale, thus paving the way for her to continue the family tradition (91). Her maternal grandparents had owned a prosperous 60,000-acre dairy farm in the Orange Free State that

Mphahlele, H.I.E. Dhlomo, Alex La Guma, and Peter Abrahams, all of whom graduated from mission schools and embarked upon successful careers until the apartheid government took fright at this display of black intellect and sought every means at its disposal to diminish their achievements and dismantle their power base. In addition to establishing a black male elite, a mission school education paved the way for a small number of literate black women to enter the nursing and teaching professions, a move that Kuzwayo claims in her autobiography "laid a foundation for the remarkable achievements of black women witnessed today." Despite the denigration of traditional African culture by missionaries, overall, "education through these mission schools came as a physical, psychological and emotional liberation to black women as they began to discover their potential and identity, even if to a very small degree" (*Call* 252).

The future of mission schools as providers of education to the black community was placed in jeopardy after the election of 1948 when the National Party came to power, ousting the predominantly English-speaking United Party. And, as invariably happens when governments declare that a reform of education policy is a pressing matter of national concern, some type of literacy crisis has been identified, manufactured, or misinterpreted. The ideological implications and underpinnings of literacy, imbued as it is with the imagination, the images, and the ideals of a nation's culture and history and its future aspirations, deny literacy the role of a neutral, impartial technology. With the incoming Afrikaner government, the days of mission schools providing the mainstay of literacy education to the African population were

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they acquired in the 1880s. In 1974, the government designated the area for whites only and white farmers took over the farm, rendering the family homeless and landless.

numbered, for the free flow of literacy between racial groups in society had to be stemmed in order to facilitate the geographic and philosophic separation of the races as mandated by apartheid ideology.

Proposed changes announced early in the life of the new government would have a dramatic and damning effect on the future viability of mission schools, for the government's attention soon turned to taking up the reins and regulating what had previously been a haphazard system of delivering education to a racially, linguistically, and culturally complex populace. [7] When the reorganization of education took effect, mission schools discovered that they had lost their semi-independence as they were now required to obtain a permit to operate. This meant not only handing over their institutions to official oversight in curriculum design, staffing decisions, admittance policies, and pedagogical practices, but also eliminating interracial tolerance fostered by these Christian institutions.

As the mounting atrocities of the apartheid era in South Africa placed the country in the international spotlight, Bantu Education, the draconian system of black schooling instituted by the Nationalist government after it came to power in 1948, gained notoriety for its blatant discriminatory policies. With the express intention of producing a steady stream of functionally literate black laborers, clerks, and domestics to stock the cheap labor pool essential for white economic expansion, the newly-elected government announced that it intended to sponsor literacy on a national scale through its centralization of black education. Tightly controlling access

[7] A.L. Behr states that by the end of the first quarter of the twentieth century, there were 2,702 mission schools in South Africa providing an education for black children with a total enrollment of 215,956 students. By comparison, during the same period there were 68 state schools for blacks with 7,710 students enrolled ("Bantu" 79-90).

to literacy as a means of establishing its racist agenda, the victorious National Party, the political core of the Afrikaner *volk* or people, provides stunning evidence of a perversion of the spirit of sponsorship. Mean-spirited and miserly, the incoming Afrikaner government sought to downgrade, depress, and deprive the African population's thirst for formal education, blaming on missionaries this misplaced desire for encouraging blacks to believe that by striving for higher levels of literacy, the benefits of capitalism would materialize. As European missionaries were responsible for introducing literacy to the indigenous inhabitants of South Africa, they were singled out for censure, being accused of leading blacks down a blind alley.

In taking the reins of power, educational reform was a key plank of the party's political platform, for if apartheid was to be the law of the land, systems had to be set up to administer unequal opportunities. In 1950, the Eiselen Commission was charged with producing a plan for education based on a separation of the races. Black teachers who testified before the commission expressed concern for the proposed Bantu Education Act, an educational policy implemented according to racial classification, divisive because distinctions were based upon the home language, the cultural traditions, and social organization of Africans, all of which were marshaled as excuses for economic exclusion and job restrictions.

Proof that the concerns of the black community were based on solid evidence was buttressed by no less a figure than Dr. Hendrick Verwoerd, Minister of Education, whose notorious place in history as the architect of apartheid has been assured. Assigned broad powers as Minister of Education, Verwoerd exposed the ideological foundations of the apartheid state when he addressed the Senate on June

7th, 1954. His deliberately crafted words have rendered this speech infamous, often quoted, and unceasingly outrageous, providing confirmation of the elaborate structure being designed by the Afrikaner people, whose interests were solidly safeguarded by the Nationalist government, to write the black South African out of economic opportunity, freedom of movement, and a satisfying and fulfilling life.[8] Referring to the African, Verwoerd contended that

> There is no place for him in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour . . . . Until now he has been subjected to a school system which drew him away from his own community and misled him by showing him the green pastures of European society in which he was not allowed to graze. This attitude is not only uneconomic because money is spent for an education which has no specific aim but it is also dishonest to continue it. It is abundantly clear that unplanned education creates many problems, disrupting the community life of the Bantu and endangering the community life of the European. (qtd. in Rose and Tunmer 266)

This particular excerpt provides a revealing glimpse of the anachronistic ideology upon which the "future heaven" of the Afrikaner *volk* was to be based, to borrow Fanon's term to describe the Algerian nation's disenchantment with the promises of

[8] Although Peter Kallaway claims that Verwoerd's statements are quoted "*ad nauseam* as proof of the evil intent" of Bantu Education (38) and Michael Ashley calls Verwoerd's remarks "extremely unfortunate" because of their colonial "characteristics" (19), the Minister of Education's language encapsulates Afrikaner mythology that served to justify apartheid ideology. Kallaway dilutes the force of Verwoerd's words on the grounds that he was playing to the gallery by trying to "impress a specific audience." Nationalist racist ideology was relentlessly impressed upon the African population, until the students in Soweto ultimately retaliated with their own choice words. Verwoerd's verbiage cannot, therefore, be watered down as his official remarks delivered formally in the Senate remain a classic statement of callous racial prejudice.

French colonialism. Despite the "dying colonialism" on the African continent that emerged in the post-World War II era, Afrikaners clung to their fervent belief in a divinely inspired mission to rule the natives, the "hazy and phantasy-ridden imaginations" (30) that typify settler colonies.

Bantu Education was to function as a vehicle of containment, geared to supplying the burgeoning economy with a large pool of unskilled labor. Literacy became the ultimate demarcation line, a continuum that on one end enhanced the upward mobility of whites and on the other ensured the permanent indenture of blacks. By declaring its intention to reorganize African education under state control, outlining concomitant issues such as labor policy, fiscal control, and educational efficiency, the government swiftly moved to install education as a "dominant ideological state apparatus." Louis Althusser contends that all ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) advance the same goal: "the reproduction of the relations of production, i.e. of capitalist relations of exploitation." And it is in schools that the "relations of exploited to exploiters and exploiters to exploited, are largely reproduced." In the colonial setting, "exploiters and exploited" can be substituted by the more fitting "colonized and colonizers," terms that Albert Memmi has rigorously examined for the full extent of their psychological impact. Thus, in a capitalist society, education functions are the supreme ISA, "although," as Althusser declares, "hardly anyone lends an ear to its music: it is so silent!" In Verwoerd's speech, he takes no pains to camouflage the ideological imperatives of the National Party, although Althusser claims that the vital role education plays in reproducing the

capitalist state is "naturally covered up and concealed," seeking to create instead a "neutral environment purged of ideology" (154-56).

Liberals, claims Peter Kallaway, have attacked Bantu Education as being "evil/bad/immoral/ irrational/bizarre/backward/outdated . . . ." He argues that in many respects Bantu Education was similar to first-world mass education programs which are designed to educate the future workers of capitalist economies. And, indeed, school enrollment did increase dramatically after the government centralized African education, with many more children obtaining at least a few years of education who might have been bereft of any opportunity to obtain a minimal education under the previous loosely organized system (27).

In a widely anthologized article "From Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work," Jean Anyon has compellingly demonstrated that mass education in industrial countries serves very different interests. Through a study of five elementary schools in New Jersey, Anyon set out to empirically confirm the thesis of Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis and others that social class dictates pedagogical practices. Anyon's study reveals that in working-class schools rote learning predominates, rules are followed unquestioningly, and that connections between assignments or subject areas are rarely discussed. In language arts, students were immersed in what is termed in the United States the "current-traditional paradigm" in composition studies with mechanics, in particular punctuation, being emphasized, as well as the "four kinds of sentences." Creative writing, Anyon observes, was not part of composition instruction in working-class schools. The writing portion of language arts required students to respond to set questions on a

ditto; even for an autobiographical writing assignment, students were programmed to answer questions that the teacher deemed to be important, such as "What is your favorite animal?" (529). By comparison, in the "affluent professional school" attended by students whose parents are professionals and executives, "Work involves individual thought and expressiveness, expansion and illustration of ideas, and choice of appropriate method and material" (533). Creative writing is a focus of language arts class with essays, plays, editorials, and stories being privileged over repetitive grammar drills (exercises being assigned when necessary for review purposes and to enhance students' own writing abilities). No textbook was assigned in the class in order to encourage creativity.

South Africa's racially segregated education system functioned in similar ways to the class-differentiated system that Anyon examined at the local level in New Jersey. Kallaway's claim that "Bantu Education, far from being a unique form of schooling, was simply a locally specific form of mass schooling under capitalism that had the eccentric feature of identifying working class children by the colour of their skin" (47) is true in many respects. However, the concept of Bantu Education was not merely "eccentric," with its connotation of being odd or unconventional, for it remains a uniquely discriminatory and prejudicial system in the annals of educational history, deeply intertwined with the government's policies to police the movement of the black population between rural and urban areas, and in particular to restrict black women's freedom of movement, considered inessential labor in a capitalist economy that depended on black manpower. Discussing their persistent disadvantage in gaining access to more than a basic education and their consequent economic

marginalization is a recurring theme in the writing of black women, contradicting Kallaway's assertion that as an educational system it was "remarkably successful–through its hidden curriculum as much as its overt content–in ensuring the commitment of black South Africans to capitalist society and ideology . . ." (48).

African education was undoubtedly in a woeful state halfway through the twentieth century, as the data produced by the 1946 census confirmed.[9] This situation was further substantiated by a 1949 report issued by the Native Education Commission that provided additional evidence of the already deeply entrenched racist nature of education in South Africa before the National Party took office.[10] The new government, however, had no intention of addressing current inequalities in the education system, serving only to greatly compound the disproportionate disadvantages of Africans through legislative measures. The underlying reasons for the failure of so many black children to acquire the fundamentals of literacy and numeracy under the Bantu Education Act can be attributed to the perpetual state of chaos in this newly centralized and overhauled system: severely overcrowded classrooms, irregular attendance patterns, chronically unqualified teachers, unrealistic language requirements, and inadequate supplies were endemic, compounded by a deliberately under-funded budget and a lack of concern for the quality of education.

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[9] According to the 1946 census, only 27 percent of Africans could read and write in an African language, while just 10.5 percent possessed these same skills in English, and 4.6 percent in Afrikaans. With 69 percent of blacks indicating that they were unable to read or write in an African language, this percentage rose to 86.5 for English, and 92.5 for Afrikaans (Horrell, *African* 68).

[10] Black children clearly lagged considerably behind white children in educational access and attainment: the median African child entered school approximately 2.3 years later than a white child, and roughly half of African children took three years to complete the first two years of schooling. In addition, one third of black children in the first grade (Sub-Standard A) were over ten years of age, and nearly half of those in the second grade (Sub-Standard B) were over eleven. Many African children never reached the third grade (Standard 1), and the average length of their school careers was four years (Horrell, *African* 54).

Needless to say, even the children rapidly became disillusioned with the whole idea of going to school and submitting to the discipline of learning when basic instructional materials were in short supply or simply unavailable. The entire educational environment was dismal, dreary, and depressing, and many black schools were "thoroughly unattractive places, with little to stimulate the pupils' desire to attend" (Horrell, *African* 54).

Upon revealing his plans to the Senate, Verwoerd stated: "I have in mind education in Sub-standards A and B and probably up to Standard II, including reading, writing and arithmetic, through mother-tongue instruction, as well as a knowledge of English and Afrikaans, and the cardinal principles of the Christian religion" (qtd. in Rose and Tunmer 262). The Afrikaner educational ideology was based on Christian National Education, a Calvinist outlook that "holds as the ultimate aim of education the knowledge, service and love of God," thus endorsing the idea of separate schools in order for different denominations to practice their particular theological doctrines without interference and restraint (118). The Nationalists took the separation theory to extreme ends, justifying the provision of four years of schooling for all Africans, considering this period time enough to achieve sufficient knowledge of the 3 R's to be employable in the unskilled or semi-skilled occupations reserved for blacks.

In reality, there were many students who had attended school for longer periods who could not be classified as even functionally literate because the minimal skills they acquired in their fourth-rate, segregated schools were simply insufficient to interface with the complex demands of the technologically sophisticated white

economy.[11] As Cornelia Ellis claims: "In South Africa with its plural society the problem [of defining literacy] is made worse by the fact that a person could be fully literate within one social context and totally illiterate in another" (17). Here, social context could be substituted by "racial category," a deliberate strategy confirmed by Verwoerd in his Senate speech when he denounced the creation of a black, educated class, a "class which has learnt to believe that it is above its own people and feels that its spiritual, economic and political home is among the civilized community of South Africa, i.e. the Europeans, and feels frustrated because its wishes have not been realized" (qtd. in Rose and Tunmer 264). Astonishingly, the government felt so confident of the moral rightness of its policies as articulated by Verwoerd that it clearly felt it was expedient to boldly and belligerently advance its racist agenda, bringing to an end an attitude and approach to education that the Minister of Education said "By blindly producing pupils trained on a European model, the vain hope was created among Natives that they could occupy posts within the European community despite the country's policy of 'apartheid'" (261). No longer was the acquisition of literacy to be promoted as a resource to enlighten, encourage, and elevate Africans in their quest for economic and political advancement.

Children were now enrolled in schools that catered to their home language. Of the two official white languages, one was normally introduced as a second language in the first year of school, with the second following six months later; as a result, a child in the second year of school was studying three languages. There was considerable opposition to the government's decision to use the home language as the

[11] For the fiscal year 1977-78, the government spent R54 per capita on the education of a black child compared to R551 for a white child (L. Gordon 485-523).

medium of instruction in primary schools because many Africans interpreted this as a policy to "cut children off deliberately and violently from access to outside influences and ideas—and the heritage of much of the civilized world" (Luthuli 49). As the lingua franca of the commercial sector and as an international language, English was preferred by the majority of black parents as the medium of instruction in schools, a fact that irked Afrikaners who had long fought British imperialism and resented and resisted the universality of the English language.[12]

The policy of automatically promoting black students for the first four years of schooling if their attendance record was sufficient ended with the completion of the fourth year as the government would only fund additional education for those students who passed the mandated gatekeeping test. Students who failed the test were allowed to repeat the fourth year, but if they failed the test a second time, expulsion followed, unless the student could prove extenuating circumstances. This unnecessarily harsh policy was condemned by Chief Luthuli who argued: "The effect of entirely discarding children who fail examinations twice is to deny to slow starters all access to literacy—for life" (48).

Terry Eagleton has remarked that "Literary production and consumption presuppose certain levels of literacy, physical and mental well-being, leisure and material affluence; the material conditions for writing and reading include economic resources, shelter, lighting and privacy" (49). These essential attributes are all too

[12] Originating mainly from elements of Dutch, German, French, and Malay, Afrikaans became recognized as an official language after the Anglo-Boer War, a move reluctantly tolerated by the British as necessary to unify the defeated and dispersed band of Boers who had suffered severe hardship at the hands of the British. Approximately 20,000 Boer women and children died in internment when the British instituted a scorched earth policy during the war in order to flush out Boer fighters.

easily taken for granted in the affluent West, but are key factors in hindering literary production in Third World countries. In the economic extremes that exist side-by-side in South Africa, aspiring black authors are hampered by the appalling living conditions endemic to the townships, physically segregated from white towns and cities. Constructed to Spartan government specifications, the small, box-like houses, minus electricity, running water, or sanitation, were typically in extreme short supply and severely overcrowded as many families offered shelter to members of their extended family or friends who could not find any type of accommodation in urban areas. Without a quiet area in which to study, and without adequate lighting or a surface upon which to write, homework had to be completed in competition with a steady stream of activity. Sleep deprivation undoubtedly contributed to inattention in school; sharing a bed in cramped and crowded quarters was compounded by adults and older siblings rising well before dawn to join the stampede for the dirty and over-crowded trains, buses, or taxis that transported the black population to their jobs in the white areas. Many children were responsible for getting themselves out of bed, dressed, and fed (if indeed food were available), and had to walk to school; older children had to assume the added responsibility of readying their younger siblings. As Bantu Education was the only system that did not require compulsory attendance, parents were often unaware when their children played truant and were also unable to keep track of their whereabouts after school.

The limited literacy instruction available was offered so that the African "could be a better servant who could understand simple instructions and read simple messages. The African could not be allowed to develop reading and writing skills

beyond these basic demands . . . . The result was that the African masses were effectively alienated from the written word" (Ndebele, *South* 91). This sense of intense alienation from the restricted and racist education made available by the Nationalist government is angrily articulated by Mzwakhe Mbuli in a poem called "Education Hijack," delivered at the conclusion of the 1988 Congress of South African Writers' conference on women and writing. Describing Bantu Education as "psychological academic poison," Mbuli's poem is a challenge to the government and a call to action to the conference participants:

> In 1963 Dr Verwoerd
> In 1963 Dr Esselen [sic]
> introduced Bantu education
> and this was the brainchild
> of the regime in power
> disguised through these
> philosophies
>
> In terms of toxicology
> the science of poison
> this system was poisonous
> like "F" diet for Africans in prison
> this system was for Africans only

. . . . . .

Like an airplane hijack

drama took place

minds of millions held captive

in a well orchestrated mission

minds kept in subjugation

like hostages on guard

The hijackers demanded separate education

Barbed wire education for Africans

And superior education for whites

Hewers of wood and drawers of

water

is what the bantu should become

declared Verwoerd,

the chief commander of the hijack (*Buang* 62)

. . . . . .

Reading and writing as the government decreed it should be taught in black schools was intended to equip children with the most fundamental skills to enslave them to the labor demands of the white economy, and the utilization of literacy as an aesthetic medium for the articulation and advancement of African culture was regarded with a paranoid distrust by the authorities. In black schools, teaching methods were regimented and dogmatic, and instruction was by rote.

The activities of teachers were closely monitored, both inside and outside the classroom, and some of the most experienced teachers resigned their positions when Bantu Education was enacted because they refused to submit to a system that required "our teachers to help *enslave* the hearts and minds of our children" (Luthuli 52, emphasis in original).[13] Any attempt to deviate from the rigid syllabus or to experiment with alternative teaching methods resulted in swift intervention by school inspectors who routinely scrutinized classrooms for any policy violations or political activity.

Writing during the apartheid era, Njabulo Ndebele claimed that "the written word has never been allowed to become an essential ingredient of modern African mass culture" (*South* 91). To allow this to happen would have been "dishonest" according to Verwoerd's reckoning, for the mass of Africans would have had no need of a literary culture when destined to a life of servitude. When not gainfully employed in white businesses and homes, blacks would be sent "home" to the Bantustans to eke out a subsistence in the overcrowded tribal homelands from which they derived "citizenship," being denied South African citizenship despite having being born in the country.

[13] The rigorous education to which Kuzwayo had access in her youth abruptly ceased to be available as an option when Bantu Education was imposed on the black community in 1953 and mission schools were forced out of operation. Kuzwayo refuses to allow the memory of her superior educational experiences to "be buried quietly and safely in the past. How can I remain quiet when I see the choices open to the younger generation constantly restricted, their hopes fading into dreams, and the dreams becoming nightmares?" (*Call* 91).

Gender and Bantu Education: African Women Reflect

Mark Mathabane, in *African Women: Three Generations*, gives a sense of the struggle endured by his sister Florah during the Bantu Education period. Having completed her third year of school "against great odds," she witnessed many of her fellow students having to drop out for reasons that were all too common in the black community: "they had no money for school fees, books, or uniforms; or their families were being deported back to the homelands because they had no permits to live in the city; or their parents had lost their menial jobs; or they had to stay home baby-sitting younger siblings because their mothers need to work" (234). Girls, in particular, often found their education expendable when younger siblings had to be taken care of while their mothers worked; sporadic school attendance by girls was frequently caused by the birth of additional siblings.

The problem of intermittent school attendance invariably crops up in autobiographies written by black women. In the case of Poppie Nongena, a pseudonym for a poor black woman whose life story was told by white author Elsa Joubert, frequent interruptions in her schooling occurred every few months when she was shunted around between relatives while her mother sought employment. Nongena, who was born in 1936, spent her early years in a rural area and intermittently attended a series of missionary schools. At the age of nine, she was forced once again to leave school, this time a Dutch Reformed mission school she had been attending. For four years she did not attend school in order to look after her stepsiblings while her brothers continued their education. Despite the enforced break in her schooling, "she never stopped reading," reading all her bother Mosie's

textbooks and eagerly learning the songs he had learned at school. Poppie "sang them as she went about her work, carrying a child on her back." When family circumstances forced her to leave the mission school she attended, Nongena recounts how she continued to indulge her love of reading. Although deprived of the intellectual stimulation she enjoyed in the classroom, she regularly bought a copy of the weekly Afrikaans children's newspaper, *Die Jongspan*, and its tales of Tarzan and the Fox and the Wolf fables (48), white cultural icons now incorporated into her reading repertoire.

For many African women, finding the means to acquire an education is never far from their thoughts. Nongena's aspiration threads its way throughout her narrative, extending back to her mother, to herself and her siblings, and continuing on through her children. When she resolves to stabilize employment and housing difficulties that dog her as a child and an adult, her underlying motivation is the prospect of being able to return to school to complete just one more grade; later this persistent worry is transferred to concerns about her children's schooling, always in danger of being disrupted by yet another upheaval. Despite the family's impoverished circumstances, the allotment of money to school fees is earmarked as a priority, and meager financial resources are juggled to accomplish this goal.

Labor activist Emma Mashinini recounts in her autobiography *Strikes Have Followed Me All My Life* that she and her siblings began attending school at the same age as white children, considered early for black children. With both parents working, "We also went to the better schools available, since although my parents had never received much in the way of formal education, they did everything to ensure their

children did." Attending City Deep Methodist in Johannesburg, this came to an end in 1936 when the family "suffered our first forced removal to make way for a white suburb." Upon moving to Sophiatown, a vibrant haven for black culture until declared a whites only area and "gloatingly" renamed Triomf, Mashinini attended a Salvation Army school in a nearby black township, where she realized that she was one of the few children who had started school at the right age. While her elder sister attended St. Peter's, an Anglican boarding school in Rosettenville (the same institution that authors Ezekiel Mphahlele and Peter Abraham attended), "a far superior school," Mashinini was sent to the local high school as her parents could not afford two children in boarding school. Following a divorce, her mother's impoverished circumstances meant that Mashinini was forced to drop out of school before sitting for her Junior Certificate, despite baby-sitting for a white family after school to earn money for her fees (3-6).

Accounts of schooling interrupted, such as these, are representative of the situation inevitably faced by countless black girls, for the government's lukewarm attitude to African education meant that it had no interest in establishing a stable social network or providing decent-paying employment or child-care facilities to assist parents in accomplishing their goals for their children's education. It seems likely that these short bursts of exposure to school stimulated a desire in black mothers to keep their children in school despite the hardships because of their disappointment—and perhaps resentment— at being selected to drop out whenever younger siblings needed to be cared for during the day, readying them for school in the morning and helping them with their homework after school.

In their determination to see their children educated, black women too often could not count on the financial or moral support of the child's father. In *African Women: Three Generations*, Florah recounts that her father "thought school a waste of time. He had beaten my mother for taking my brother there against his wishes, and for spending food money on school fees and books." In a chapter entitled "My Father Burns Our School Uniforms," Florah recounts how their mother had "painstakingly saved her wages for a big Christmas surprise for my brother and me, in recognition of our fine work at school. My brother had again come out number one, and I was among the top five students in my class." After working for two months as a maid to a large Indian family, their mother had saved enough for a down payment on new uniforms and school supplies. The intensity of their father's opposition to enrolling them in school is remembered by Florah as an "enduring moment of his cruelty" when he douses their prized new uniforms with paraffin and sets them on fire after discovering that their mother has disobeyed him (Mathabane 233-38). In common with many African men of his generation who had been emasculated by apartheid and who were trapped in menial occupations with no prospects for advancement, he viewed Bantu Education with cynicism and contempt, for there was scant proof that education offered a way out of the deprivations of the townships.

The restructuring of African education in 1953 provided an opportunity for black women to apply for admittance to teacher training programs. While white teachers had predominantly staffed mission schools, these teachers were to be gradually replaced by black teachers under the new system as soon as sufficient numbers could be trained. The plan called additionally for the hiring of large numbers

of female teachers because of the cost-saving factors of employing women at lower salaries. "Since a woman is by nature so much better fitted for handling young children," Verwoerd reasoned, "and as the great majority of Bantu pupils are to be found in the lower classes of the primary school, it follows that there should be far more female than male teachers in the service" (qtd. in Rose and Tunmer 265). Accordingly, as posts became vacant, they were reserved for women and declared officially off-limits to male teachers. Consequently, in 1954, lower educational requirements for teachers were introduced by means of the Lower Primary Teacher's Certificate. Acceptance to this three-year training course was restricted to black women who had completed at least their eighth year of schooling (Standard VI). Initially considered an emergency measure to facilitate the rapid training of new teachers to meet burgeoning enrollment in primary schools, this program remained in operation until the late 1960s, by which time an entire generation of black children had been taught by grossly unqualified teachers. Muriel Horrell estimates that 41.71 percent of all African teachers held only the Lower Primary Certificate in 1968 (*Bantu* 155).

With the restructuring of African education, the government's move to turn the responsibility of educating young children over to women teachers should not be interpreted as a gesture of respect for and a reinstatement of the traditional roles women held as educators. Leo Kuper comments that the purpose of these teachers was that of "herd girls shepherding the new generations into the Bantustan kraals" and out of white areas (173). Poorly educated and lowly paid female teachers were

considered subservient enough to accomplish the government's mission, unqualified through their lack of training to advance black education beyond minimal attainment.

A recurring thread in autobiographies written by both black men and women in South Africa is the portrayal of their mothers as dedicated supporters of literacy and determined foragers of supplemental reading materials for their children. Purchasing books and magazines was out of the question for most mothers as their meager wages simply did not allow for luxuries such as printed matter. Scraping together the money to purchase textbooks for school was a hardship for most families, but especially for single mothers. Ezekiel Mphahlele remembers that his mother, eager to foster her son's love of reading, would request permission from the white family she worked for as a domestic servant to take home old newspapers and periodicals (*Down* 85). Access to the discarded reading materials of their parents' white employers provided many children with critical additional resources and, most importantly, a window on white culture.

It seems unlikely that these white employers considered themselves to be sponsors of black literacy, yet by supplementing the scarce availability of reading materials for leisure, white families unintentionally helped provide their servants' children with a variety of texts, not only elevating their reading ability, but also enabling critical literacy to germinate as black children read texts written for a white audience. One of the women Sarah Nuttall interviewed in her 1998 study of the reading habits of black women commented: "My mother was working for a white family when I was at high school, so whenever I came home from school . . . I could get books and magazines from the house" (89). It is unlikely that the mothers had

time to read, as maids typically worked long hours with little time off. Their dissatisfaction with their employment as domestic servants was a key motive for educating their children, regardless of the self-sacrifices this entailed. Mphahlele expresses disappointment that his mother's employers did nothing to encourage his passion for reading, regarding the newspapers and periodicals as merely worthless discards. He "thought naively that if they were superior to me and my kind they should show some interest in a less fortunate creature who wanted to acquire something like the degree of literacy they enjoyed" (*Down* 85).

Older women who were illiterate went to great lengths to encourage children to stay in school, as even an inferior education was preferred to no education.[14] Mathabane's grandmother speaks proudly of her grandson who, despite the gang-infested environment in which he grew up and the poor example set by his irresponsible father, used "education as a weapon." While she remains critical of Bantu Education and skeptical that acquiring an education will substantially alter her grandson's future employment prospects, "like his mother, his greatest ally, I went on faith." Her dedication to helping her grandson achieve his goal is reinforced by her habit of requesting discarded newspapers, comics, and books from the white people whose gardens she weeded for a living. Notwithstanding the hour-long walk home, she placed any contributions she collected in a box and "proudly lugged them home," despite being heavy. Enterprisingly, she took the newspapers to the butcher when Mark had finished reading them and exchanged them for meat, while the butcher

[14] Illiteracy was more prevalent among older Africans due to the limited numbers educated by mission schools. Figures taken from a 5% sampling of the 1980 census reveal that in the 65+ age group, 17.86% of the black male population was literate compared to 13.59% of females. An educational level

recycled the newspapers to wrap his customer's orders. Being illiterate the "black-and-white marks . . . made no sense to me. Yet to my grandchild, books made more than sense . . . . They had the same power over his mind as the bedtime stories his mother and I had entertained him and siblings with when they were growing up." Mathabane's grandmother notes that in response to her white employers' questions about her interest in their thrown out reading materials, and her obvious pride in telling them about her studious grandson, "They would be surprised—most whites thought black children didn't love learning—but would condescendingly congratulate me for having a 'fine grandson'" (*African* 310-11).

Black women placed a premium on providing their children with an education and made extraordinary financial and personal sacrifices to send them to school. Chief Luthuli, himself a former school teacher, admits that he was unaware until he became an adult the full extent of the sacrifices made by his mother who, with "the sweat of her brow provided nine-tenths of my education" (27). Although education in white schools was provided free, black parents were required to contribute to the cost of educating their children. The South African Institute of Race Relations estimated in 1967 that it cost African parents R17.25 to send a child to primary school for one year. This amount covered school fees, textbooks and school supplies, school uniforms, examination fees, and government levies. While considered modest by national standards, this amount was beyond the means of most African families (Horrell, *Bantu* 145). A full-time domestic servant in the 1970s could expect to earn roughly R20-30 per month. As only a small percentage of African children had been

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of Standard III (equivalent to five years of full-time schooling) was the criterion used to determine literate (Ellis 25).

catered for under earlier provisions for schooling, the incoming government recognized that it would take time to accommodate the greatly increased numbers of children expected to enroll. A solution deemed sensible by Verwoerd was the shortening of the four and a half hour school day to three hours, thus enabling double the number of students to attend school through the provision of two-tiered morning and afternoon sessions— an exhausting prospect for teachers facing overcrowded classrooms and a shortage of textbooks.

The Bantu Education Act met with stiff opposition in the black community, and women were active campaigners in the fight against it. The African National Congress (ANC) organized a school boycott, setting up informal schools in the townships, often in the open air, which were known as "cultural clubs" and taught predominantly by black women, transgressing newly enacted school registration laws. School inspectors on the prowl for illegal activity rounded up the material evidence found at these sites: blackboards, chalk, slates, pencils, and books. When hauled into court, the teachers were confronted with the evidence and charged with "trying to teach the children to read or do sums." Continual harassment and the confiscation of equipment led the teachers to resort to subversive tactics to overcome these obstacles and to cover their tracks. Using "a pointed stick to write in the dusty sand," they "devised rhymes and games that would teach numbers and letters" (Bernstein 95). At this stage, women teachers and the mothers of the children were in cooperation with strategies to educate African youth, but this spirit of collaboration against the government's intention to install a system of education for disempowerment was to dissipate once the authorities enforced compliance.

Under the sweeping powers assigned to the Minister of Education, according to Act No. 47 of 1953, a strict code of discipline was administered at his discretion, giving him authority in

> Prescribing a code of discipline of teachers in Government Bantu schools, the punishments which may be imposed for, and the procedure to be followed in connection with, any contravention of or failure to comply with the provisions of such code, and the circumstances in which the services of any such a teacher may be terminated. (qtd. in Rose and Tunmer 259).

Verwoerd's claim that women were better equipped to handle young children disguises his motives—female teachers could more easily be intimidated and bullied to indoctrinate young children into imbibing their inferior status, thereby rendering them more malleable and compliant with the law of the land.

Many of these female teachers were mothers themselves, yet they interpreted their role as educators to be that of pitiless purveyors of punishment. Corporal punishment was meted out by male and female teachers alike. Mphahlele "began to detest the whole idea of school. I came to associate it with physical pain—with the rod, which the teachers applied liberally as a panacea for teaching and organizational skills . . . . The faces of those pedagogues seemed to tell a story of torture" (*Down* 12). As victims of the same oppressive laws as their charges and subject to the abject poverty of the townships, teachers penalized their young charges for violations beyond their control. Freire warns that the "oppressed, instead of striving for

liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or 'sub-oppressors'" because this is the "model of humanity" to which they have become conditioned (27).

From the memoir of Miriam Mathabane, as told to her brother Mark, we can obtain a convincing picture of how this warped version of humanity seeps into the psyche of the oppressed. Chosen as the opening anecdote in *Miriam's Song*, a typical classroom confrontation is played out, cruel beyond belief in a kindergarten setting:

> My heart is thumping against my ribs and my tongue is stuck to the roof of my dry mouth. Tears prick the corners of my bulging eyes as I stare at my Sub-A instructor. She's a tall, lean woman with a harried look on her dark face. We are required to address her as Mistress. Male instructors are addressed as Teacher. The mistress is wielding a thick ruler and giving us a tongue-lashing about the importance of trimming our fingernails. (23)

What is astonishing about this anecdote is not only that the children are kindergartners, but that the discipline being meted out has nothing to do with school learning, rather a subject dear to the hearts of the oppressors: cleanliness, and the lack thereof in the colonized.[15] As the Dickensian scene is played out in the classroom, the teacher appears to gain personal satisfaction from terrifying the children, as she goes down the roll, calling out the names of her victims. As Miriam awaits her turn, "Watching the mistress I can already feel the pain felt by the pupils. I hear howling

[15] The importance of regular cleansing is a source of conflict between colonizers and colonized, as borne out by the title of Anne McClintock's book, *Imperial Leather*, the brand name of an expensive British soap available in the colonies. As McClintock comments: "Colonial travel writers, traders, missionaries and bureaucrats carped constantly at the supposed absence in African culture of 'proper domestic life,' in particular African's purported lack of hygiene" (226). Appropriately, one of the epigraph's to her chapter "Soft-Soaping Empire: Commodity Racism and Imperial Advertising" is the Unilever Company Slogan: "Soap is Civilization."

and shrieking about me, as in a madhouse, after being whipped." Half an hour of nerve-wracking anticipation elapses before Mistress calls out Miriam's name, demanding that she sing the fingernail song, which in English is translated as "I should trim my fingernails short / I didn't listen." Before reaching the second line, the ruler "which seems the size of a club" sharply raps Miriam's fingertips, causing her to "howl with pain. I wish Mama would come and take me away from this horrible place called school" (23-24).

Unfortunately, Miriam's suffering does not end at this point, for additional sins are added to her list of transgressions, causing her to be hit on the forehead with the ruler. This opening anecdote is certainly not an isolated incident, but is characteristic of a pattern of abuse at the hands of female teachers that begins in the first year of school. It also paints a striking psychological portrait of the extent of inhumanity that breeds and festers in the colonial situation, an examination in keeping with the analyses of Fanon and Memmi, and describes how the corruptness of spirit invades the oppressed who lash out at their own helpless people from a position of (hollow) authority.

In their defense, however, black teachers had labored for several decades under a repressive atmosphere and "Underpaid, undertrained, and unprepared for horrendous discipline problems, they had to be agents of a hated regime, with a constant fear of classroom informers waiting for them to make statements contrary to official policies" (F. Smith 105). During Frank Smith's much heralded appointment at the University of the Witwatersrand as an American scholar who would be advising South African educators on a post-apartheid teaching training program, he recounts a

visit to an alternative school in a white suburb of Johannesburg attended by black teenage girls. Observing a young black student teacher who was "loud, strident, and authoritarian, marching up and down the rows of desks and rapping them with a stick to emphasize her points," Smith is told that "her style was 'typical black teaching'" (150).

When Miriam shows the welt on her forehead to her mother, the response is, "Don't worry child. As long as you're learning something it's worth it" (Mathabane 27). This brings to mind Elspeth Stuckey's argument in *The Violence of Literacy* that literacy frequently does not meet the expectations of the marginalized, whether economically or culturally, for the determination to become literate at all costs often produces no gains, yet is pursued relentlessly regardless of continued economic disenfranchisement. Stuckey criticizes Freire for buying into this Western deception that acquiring literacy must have some advantages lurking somewhere, somehow, even if they are not immediately apparent.

African women's support of literacy is not necessarily matched by male relatives, as was evidenced in Florah Mathabane's recounting of her father burning her school uniforms, angry that her mother was spending money on education and its accoutrements rather than on vitals. His position does not waver when he notices the welt on his daughter's forehead, threatening to accompany Miriam to school the following day and "teach that bloody mistress a lesson. I'll *donder* her—whip her good" (*Miriam* 27). As a mother, I find it somewhat perplexing that black mothers supported and sponsored the acquisition of literacy even when it was invariably associated with violence in the classroom at the hands of another black woman to

whom the children were entrusted. Yet, so fervent was the belief that an education would lift their children out of poverty that parents, particularly women, would go to great lengths to persuade their children to persist with their schooling. Eventually, though, no amount of cajoling or coaxing by their mothers was sufficient for children to buy into the literacy at any cost myth, for it was soon to be replaced with the revolutionary slogan: "Freedom now, Education later."

Soweto: The Struggle and the Stimulus to Write

The riots that began in Soweto were a momentous occurrence in South Africa's history of troubled racial relations, a watershed event that remains deeply and indelibly etched in the psyche of South Africans of all races, but particularly the black population that bore the brunt of the violence. I interpret the dramatic upsurge of interest in writing by black women as an act of political empowerment and the consequent increase in literary output as a grassroots movement inspired by the work of Freire. Demands within the black community to seize white sponsorship of literacy from the repressive white authorities bear the hallmarks of Freirean intervention. This movement to "read the word" by interpreting it through a critical consciousness, deconstructing the embedded ideology of words, enables the learner to "read the world" with raised awareness. Not surprisingly, this brazen attempt to deprive the government of its increasingly totalitarian authority resulted in a swift response, wielded through its wide-ranging censorship powers to stifle and suppress this threatening claim to empowerment through education. When addressing the Conference on Women and Writing in 1988, activist and writer Boitulemo Mofokeng

made a point of paying tribute to the "young generation of 1976, the year of the black student, the period of self-discovery and the beginning or intensification of political consciousness" (*Buang* 6).

On June 16th, 1976 black students in Soweto decided to stage a protest following the government's announcement that instruction in half their academic subjects would henceforth be given in Afrikaans, an added burden for students already studying school subjects in English and a vernacular. Homemade placards were constructed from ripped up exercise book covers and cardboard boxes, on which slogans were written: "Down with Afrikaans;" "Bantu Education—To Hell With It;" "Afrikaans is Tribal Language." Denouncing Afrikaans became the rallying cry, an emotional issue for black students and Afrikaners alike, but for entirely different reasons. Student leaders planned the protest, and roughly 15,000 Soweto school-children joined the march to voice their collective frustration. When police opened fire on the crowd of students, young girls were standing alongside boys on the front lines. As Hilda Bernstein notes, throughout 1976

> girls and women were involved in all phases of the uprising. This was seen in the photographs of the students on their protest marches, with girls in their old-fashioned gym-slips well to the fore; in the number of women held as detainees under the new Internal Security Act; and in the grim evidence of the mortuaries, where parents sought the bodies of their daughters as well as of their sons. (102)

Adult bystanders were horrified when the children held their ground and retaliated with bricks, bottles, stones, or whatever missiles were within reach, instead of quickly

dispersing. And tragically, while the students chose a civilized forum for airing their grievances, the police responded with unrestrained firepower and naked aggression, producing the very mayhem that fueled white nightmares in which black perpetrators descended upon white suburbs on a mission of destruction and death.[16]

For the parents of the students, suffering from decades of demoralization under the discriminatory laws of apartheid, enforced with increasing intensity and rigidity as local and global opposition to apartheid mounted, resistance and rebellion were less of an option, for Sharpeville still haunted their generation.[17] The memories of that massacre cast much less of a somber shadow on a younger generation, growing up on a continent rapidly freeing itself of the few remaining colonial holdouts. With the reversion of the colonial buffer states of Mozambique, Bechuanaland, Rhodesia, and Angola to black majority rule, and the newly independent Namibia, the former protectorate of South Africa, the northern borders finally represented safe havens for fleeing anti-apartheid activists. Apartheid had clearly reached its apex, yet the Nationalist government had apparently failed to fully

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[16] The Soweto riots set in motion a white diaspora of considerable proportions. It is estimated that roughly one and a half million South Africans, mostly white, left the country beginning in the late 1970s to settle mainly in English-speaking countries. To put this in perspective, the 1980 census revealed that the white population of four and a half million comprised slightly less than 16 percent of the population. In her 1981 novel *July's People*, Nadine Gordimer fuels the persistent white nightmare of "gunned shopping malls and the blazing unsold houses of a depressed market . . . burst mains washing round bodies in their Saturday-morning garb of safari suits and . . . heat-guided missiles that struck Boeings carrying those trying to take off from Jan Smuts Airport" (9). Since the election of 1994 that brought the first ANC government under Nelson Mandela to power, there has been a steady stream of ex-patriots returning to South Africa.

[17] On March 21, 1960, an anti-pass law demonstration was organized by the Pan African Congress in the black township of Sharpeville, outside Vereeniging, thirty-five miles south of Johannesburg. Panicked at being surrounded by the crowd of demonstrators (estimates range from 3,000-10,000 people, although the police estimated 20,000), the white policemen in the police station fired without warning into the crowd. Sixty-seven people were killed, many of them shot in the back while fleeing. Women and children were among the 187 people injured. A United Nations Security Council resolution blamed the South African government led by Prime Minister Hendrick Verwoerd (the former Minister of Education) for the carnage.

register the intensity of the international condemnation heaped upon it sixteen years earlier following the Sharpeville massacre when in 1976 it ordered paramilitary forces to be dispatched to Soweto to intercept the student's rally.

The majority of accounts analyzing the Soweto rebellion stress that tensions over Bantu Education had been escalating in the months leading up to the protest, thus effectively downplaying the significance of the Afrikaans language issue that was the impetus for the first salvo in the war of nerves between the embattled white community, looking inward to the *laager*, the circle of wagons, for security and sustenance, and the empowered black population, ominously surging toward the *laager*, shaking its physical structure and ideological foundation. While confirming in an interview that the students had the full support of adults in expressing their hatred for Afrikaans, Winnie Mandela added, "But as such, the Afrikaans issue was merely a unifying factor—it could have been anything" (Hirson 193).

Language has emerged as a key concept in postcolonial theory with good reason. In the colonial setting, the colonizer succeeds in imposing his language on the colonized from a position of power and superiority, with very little consideration or acknowledgement being given to the political, philosophical, psychological, and pedagogical fallout which results from arbitrary decisions being handed down from the distant metropole. Thus, language "becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of 'truth', 'order', and 'reality' become established" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 7). If colonial domination is to be successfully opposed, divesting the colonizer's language of its power and authority must take precedence, and alternative,

local versions of truth, order, and reality must be constructed to counter these alien models.

The student rebellion in Soweto provides compelling evidence of how an intense emotional aversion to an imposed language can fuel widespread anger and anguish. Afrikaans, the language associated with an illegitimate, alien settler government, represented the festering deep-seated resentment within the black community, manifested in the vast economic disparity between whites and blacks, their political disenfranchisement, and the denigration of indigenous cultures owing to the hegemony of Western culture. Afrikaans, the language of the Nationalist bureaucracy, was synonymous with harassment, humiliation, and hatred, a language of enforcement spoken by the police, government officials, and also many farmers, legendary for exploiting their black agricultural workers. The anger directed at the edict on the implementation of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in black schools was thus the spark whose ignition set in motion the chaos and carnage in Soweto, a festering resentment that officials at the Bantu Education department in their thick-skinned arrogance chose to ignore

Survivors of the massacre were, says Mofokeng, "an angry lot" who became prominent at funerals for the victims by refusing to be silenced by the superior weaponry of the police and despite rampant censorship laws enforced by the authorities who were keenly attuned to the verbal rumblings and remonstrations in the townships. Speaking out during funeral services by passionately performing the protest poems they had composed in honor of their peers, and cognizant of the trepidation these spirited renditions provoked in the patrolling police, several of these

poets had their works published in the cultural renaissance that materialized rapidly in the townships after the riots. As Mofokeng reminded the assembled participants at the conference on women's writing: "That year inspired many of our young boys and girls, and a generation of protest poetry writers was born. Girls stepped into the shoes of their mothers and wrote about the plight of every mother who lost a child during that year, or suffered any kind of loss due to the confrontation with the police force" (*Buang* 6). Amidst the calamity, black girls discovered a measure of solace and solidarity by penning poignant pieces in tribute to friends and peers who had been killed, injured, or imprisoned.

The waves of activism that washed through black townships spurred not only a desire for catharsis, but also a compelling need to be heard, and to record for posterity their anguish and anger. Frances Baard, known as Ma Baard, who helped organize the Women's League of the ANC, felt that it was incumbent upon mothers to think rationally and come up with a strategy to counter the outrageous police violence. "We are mothers," she said, "A mother will hold the knife on the sharp end. . . . We are sick and tired of what is happening. We see our children being sent to jail for nothing" (Obery 122-23).[18] Mothers, many of them forced into the role of single parents by fathers absent by inclination, incarceration, or incompetence, felt duty bound to rise to the occasion and take up the struggle started by their children.

By claiming the authority of authorship, their eyewitness accounts would become testimony in the struggle to indict the white government in the court of worldwide opinion. International news coverage of the massacre of innocent

[18] "The child's mother grabs the sharp end of the knife (Mmangoana o tshwara thipa ka fa bogaleng) " is an "old Setswana proverb" that Kuzwayo uses to end her autobiography (263).

schoolchildren horrified the global community, and the coverage of South African affairs became a regular feature on news broadcasts, aided by the intensity of anti-apartheid demonstrations on college campuses in the United States calling for corporate divestment.

The situation in which rhetoric emerges as a call to action is a rhetorical concept that Lloyd Bitzer argues has been overlooked, so focused are rhetoricians on those formal concepts that Aristotle theorized and that remain a mainstay of rhetorical theory today. A rhetorical situation requires an exigency, which Bitzer defines as "an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be" (6). The exigency that propelled black women to produce rhetorical discourse was the horrendous attacks launched on black schoolchildren by white paramilitary forces, a desperate situation that required their determined intervention as mothers. In order to persuade the white community to comprehend the repugnancy and moral bankruptcy of apartheid ideology, appeals—the strongest of which were emotional—had to be generated to alter the cultural and social landscape in which racism flourished.

Owing to the military superiority of the white forces and their apparent willingness to initiate violent confrontations against defenseless schoolchildren, rhetorical appeals remained a largely untapped and potentially beneficial resource. A rigorous campaign of censorship served to raise instead of repress the circulation of texts, and the curtailment of public forums for addressing criticisms of apartheid only heightened an interest in the power of rhetorical persuasion through the spoken and printed word that the government increasingly condemned as perverted and

pernicious. But, as Bitzer observes, "a rhetorical audience must be distinguished from a body of mere hearers or readers: properly speaking, a rhetorical audience consists only of those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change" (8).

In addition to considering the exigence and audience analyzed in Bitzer's theory, the entire situation is defined as a "set of constraints made up of persons, events, objects, and relations which are parts of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence" (8). The constraints placed on black rhetoric by a perpetually paranoid bureaucracy of police, pass-office authorities, prison guards, school inspectors, and cabinet ministers, and the restrictions on communications oral and literate, were onerous. Those women who heeded the call to join up as cultural workers in support of the aims of the ANC were indeed in a rhetorical situation, one that needed rhetorical prowess as well as determination, courage, and a healthy dose of anger and disgust in order to work towards a resolution through radical rhetoric if not violent revolution.

As the catalyst for action, reaction, and resistance, Soweto served as the impetus for revitalizing women's intellectual traditions that had increasingly come under assault through the disintegration of rural African society, put under constant pressure by the steady demand for unskilled labor for a rapidly expanding capitalist economy and the resultant exodus to urban areas. Aspiring writers did not emerge on the scene as complete novices, untutored and unskilled in rhetorical practices, but as proud possessors and practitioners of a vibrant intellectual tradition, albeit an oral one. For many women who had never imagined participating in a radical rhetorical

campaign against the government, Soweto was the springboard that propelled the call to write. The insertion of black women's voices enlarged and intensified the accelerating debate over the future of South Africa, a future that had been hastened by the Soweto students who unwittingly, though willingly, set a rebellion in motion. Finding a niche to exploit in the male dominated discourse while refusing to be constrained by black patriarchy that had historically ignored the plight of black women resulted in female writers venturing into new territory despite the inevitable resistance and criticism for trampling on and tampering with traditions. Black women interjected vital arguments in their own defense that added new vigor and vision to a national debate that had become stymied and stale.

In the wake of the riots, many women who had previously distanced themselves from the increasingly militant mood that had surfaced in the townships as the goals of Black Consciousness became more widely articulated were unavoidably drawn into the expectant atmosphere that energized the community. The rapid politicization of their children was a compelling call to action; the resolve of the students to bring about the collapse of the white government was intense and not easily deflected. Within three months of the Soweto uprising, thousands of children had fled the country for neighboring states in which the banned ANC had set up operations in exile, hoping to join the organization's military wing, *Umkhonto We Sizwe* (The Spear of the Nation), for training as freedom fighters.

Had it not been for the political mobilization of the children, black women may have felt inclined to remain in the shadows, watching men take center stage in traditional fashion, with the women observing from the wings. But with children

leading the way, women, also minors in the eyes of the law, felt spiritually emboldened and morally obligated to become actively involved. As Mofokeng urged at the writer's conference, women had to "find more ways to explain our stand and why we want to be part of the whole society we live in today. Let us not wait, to be a disgrace to our children and grandchildren. We owe it to them, the future is theirs" (*Buang* 8). Remaining in the background would have given the men carte blanche to take on the government on their own terms, thereby paving the way for a continuation of patriarchal rule when the white government eventually capitulated to black majority rule.

As many women were single mothers, raising their children with neither financial nor emotional input from the fathers, this option was unconscionable and intolerable. Married women also rankled at their second-class status in the home, a point driven home by Mofokeng when she reminded women "how our marriages contribute to our lack of participation in matters like this" (*Buang* 7). Unless they were able to break through the barrier of patriarchal privilege which pushed women to the margins of political decision making, black women would inevitably have remained mere appendages, voiceless victims, and perpetual minors. Groups who have historically been relegated to the periphery of society have enormous obstacles to surmount to break into communication channels, closed to those without the economic and political clout to claim an audience's attention. Being denigrated on all sides of society, and now even chastised by their children for their passivity towards government sponsored brutality, burdened by excessive responsibilities and long work hours, the severe repression of black women mitigated against them rising up

and denouncing white supremacy. Overcoming their institutionalized voicelessness was a major challenge, ignored as they were by legislative fiat, African cultural mores, and an influential white media.

Fanon has outlined the cultural renaissance that precedes revolution, and his words ring true in the South African context. Literary production rose steadily alongside escalating political protests, labor strikes, and school stoppages. Amidst the chaos and confusion, the excitement and the expectations, this whirlwind of activity blew open many previously locked doors, and black women were caught up in this momentum. The volatility of Soweto 1976 exposed fissures that allowed new voices to resonate, new alliances to be formed, and new forums to open up. Soweto represented the kairotic moment, an unprecedented opportunity to be seized. As John Poulakos claims, "The rhetor who operates mainly with the awareness of *kairos* responds spontaneously to the fleeting situation at hand, speaks on the spur of the moment, and addresses each occasion in its particularity, its singularity, its uniqueness . . . . Because what gets said kairotically is unprecedented, without precedent, it has no ready-made audience" (61).

Even though no ready-made audience existed for black women's writing, a niche could be created in these extraordinary times when even the children were writing, performing, and publishing their protest poetry. Schoolchildren in Soweto unwittingly spawned a literary revolution. The tables had been turned: children were the instigators, the inspiration, and the incentive. The political consciousness of black women, temporarily dormant and suppressed through the heavy-handedness and rampant sexism of the Afrikaner government, sprang back to life.

CHAPTER THREE

A Century of Writing Instruction: Colonizing the Composition Classroom

Colonial education systems in Africa have been productive sites of investigation, steeped as they were in the racist ideologies of the colonizing Europeans. By scrutinizing the choice of textbooks and the curricula deployed in schools attended by Africans and administered by colonial authorities, the central role of education as a tool for disseminating the ideology of the colonizers is reinforced and exposed. The organization of the education system in South Africa along rigidly enforced racial classifications has received sustained scholarly attention, particularly now that the apartheid state has been dismantled and the work of creating a more equitable and humane system for educating all South Africans is a central concern of the post-apartheid government.

Several studies of history textbooks approved by the apartheid state for use in South Africa's racially segregated school system have confirmed a policy of deliberately whitewashing and warping the historical record of land ownership and settlement. For example, in *History in Black and White: An Analysis of South African School History Textbooks*, a 1983 publication written by Elizabeth Dean, Paul Hartman, and May Katzen and sponsored by UNESCO, the authors examine the extent to which Afrikaner mythology had infiltrated the production of history textbooks in South Africa. Essential to the ideology of these texts was the patent distortion of the history of white settlement in the country as a means of legitimizing

and justifying the land claims of the early settlers, thereby providing a foundation upon which to build the case that whites had an indisputable right to the land and its resources, mineral and human. In the United States, the struggle over land and the displacement of Native Americans by white settlers has been described by Gail Guthrie Valaskakis as "a dispute over the meaning of land—land articulated to history and identity, absorbed in the discourse of spirituality and territory, worked in the power of politics and privilege" (152). By effortlessly erasing the physical presence of the indigenous inhabitants, whites have created a mythic vacant landscape in South Africa, simply there for the taking, unencumbered by human occupation and territorial claims, yet in reality the source of centuries of struggles, battles, and skirmishes over land between blacks and whites.

Manipulating history in order to underwrite the colonial aspirations of the white settlers served to justify South Africa's bitter and protracted land disputes that reached a zenith in the compartmentalizing of the African population in Bantustans or homelands. Reinforced by the Nationalist government that was elected in 1948, the policy was designed to exploit the labor potential of the African population, and in the process, doom it to perpetual economic and cultural marginalization. In discussing the teaching of the Western literary canon by the British in Indian schools, Gauri Viswanathan observes that this was "less a statement of the superiority of the Western tradition than a vital, active instrument of Western hegemony in concert with commercial expansionism and military action" (167).[1] The provision of education to

[1] J.M. du Preez, in his study *Africana Afrikaner: Master Symbols in South African School Textbooks*, has identified twelve master symbols that "appear repeatedly" in History and Geography textbooks and in prescribed Afrikaans literature texts. Among his list are: "Legitimate authority is not questioned; Whites are superior; blacks are inferior; South Africa rightfully belongs to the Afrikaner; South Africa

the African majority in South Africa was similarly motivated by the attainment of practical goals rather than being based upon the liberal humanist philosophy of education that has its roots in Isocrates' theorizing.

While history textbooks are fruitful sources from which to examine the conceptualization and legitimization of apartheid ideology and its dissemination through educational channels, English grammar and composition textbooks appear to have escaped a similar scrutiny. As the study of English in South Africa is heavily weighted toward literature, when curricula content does come under investigation, critiques invariably focus on the hegemony of the Western canon in the syllabi of national school leaving examinations and university courses and the implications of this dominance for South Africa's multicultural society.[2] The humble grammar and composition treatise has been over-shadowed by the sustained aura of teaching the works of the European masters as the central mission of English departments. Grammar and composition texts have failed to generate interest as rich storehouses of colonial ideology because they are considered to be merely inventories detailing the mechanics of the English language. As the field of composition and rhetoric has yet to make any meaningful inroads in South Africa's entrenched dependency on what is known in the United States as the "current-traditional paradigm," writing instruction is regarded as a secondary function or a subtext of grammar and literature lessons. Unlike the United States, where composition courses are part of general education

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is an agricultural country; The Afrikaners are a farmer nation; The Afrikaner is militarily ingenious and strong; The Afrikaner has a God-given task in Africa" (71).

[2] Du Preez notes that "Research by educationists has shown that prescribed English Literature seldom has a South African background . . . Some English-speaking teachers have misgivings on South African English writings, possibly because South Africa is still portrayed as an untouched, earthly paradise, ignoring the realities of an industrialised, urban life" (28-29).

requirements, South Africa continues to rely upon the European model of higher education which places the responsibility for teaching students to write on secondary schools and depends on the national matriculation examination as the gatekeeper regulating admittance to post-secondary education institutions.

A critical reading of the ubiquitous grammar treatise can offer rewards in deconstructing the degree to which the teaching of rules for correct usage serves as a touchstone for reflecting the tastes, temperament, and tenets of the colonial rule makers. Learning to write in South African schools during the twentieth century steadfastly remained a highly structured and stultifying activity that privileged the interests, the knowledge, and the experiences of white middle-class students. Elspeth Stuckey boldly and angrily contends on the back cover of *The Violence of Literacy* that "literacy, rather than enfranchising people, is violent, ulterior, and uniquely devoted to Western economic ends." While Stuckey is referring to the United States in particular, her characterization of literacy as a violent economic tool par excellence in the service of those who seek to "maintain privilege and parcel disadvantage" bespeaks the ultra-politicization of literacy as a cornerstone of apartheid racist ideology.

In South Africa, the parceling of literacy along racial lines demonstrates the extent to which the ability to read and write can be co-opted by governments to underwrite ulterior motives. And while the racist nature of education in South Africa is legendary, how this discrimination in education affected black women in particular has not received the scrutiny it deserves. As part of my project to document the intellectual traditions of black women, it is necessary that I not only explore the nature

of education in general that was available to them, but also attempt to discover the approach to teaching composition in black schools, for this will shed light on how black women have been hampered in their attempts to write for publication.

My distant memories of English classes in South Africa in the 1950s and 1960s as being obsessively reliant on the skills and drills method of writing instruction were confirmed when I discovered a surprisingly wide selection of dusty grammar and composition textbooks in the back of a large secondhand bookstore in Cape Town. A cursory appraisal of a cross section of textbooks that encompassed a century of instruction, utilized by all of the four education systems in South Africa, revealed mostly dreary, depressing, and predictable content, devoted to issues of grammatical correctness and repetitious exercises designed to teach rules of conventional usage.

It is difficult to trace the history of writing instruction in South Africa for the reason that the emphasis of English education has consistently been the study of literature. Douglas Young notes that at most universities in South Africa, "'English' as a major subject is almost exclusively a study of English literature," with the result that most teachers who have gone through a university or teacher training program "teach English and all that it implies largely through literature" (187). After scouring auto-biographies written by black South African women up to 1990 for any mention of composition instruction in schools and finding virtually no references to English classes, I have decided instead to approach the teaching of writing by analyzing a selection of textbooks used in South African schools.[3]

[3] While visiting South Africa in 2002, I asked a cross-section of South Africans for their recollections of learning to write in school. The typical reaction was one of puzzlement, which I attribute to the fact that writing has traditionally played a minor role in the study of English, focused as it has been on the mastery of set works of literature required to pass the matriculation examination. When I prompted

From among the numerous grammar and composition texts I acquired while browsing in second-hand book stores, it will be useful for my purpose to focus on three key moments in South Africa's political and social history and the texts that correspond to these events: the Act of Union in 1910, the Bantu Education Act of 1953, and the Soweto riots of 1976. Encompassing roughly a century of watershed events in South Africa's turbulent history, these periods also represent far-reaching political initiatives that impacted the country's education policies, impinging upon pedagogical philosophy and classroom practice. The first text I examine is an early twentieth-century text, *Darter's New South African Grammar and Composition (illustrated)*, which appeared on the textbook market in 1913 shortly after the creation of the Union of South Africa. Next, I critique two texts co-authored by E. Fletcher and K.B. Hartshorne, written specifically for use by the Department of Bantu Education. And, finally, I round out a century of writing instruction in South Africa by examining a user-friendly writing workbook published by the left-wing Ravan Press in 1984 with the emergence of the people's education, a populace movement that sprung up after the demise of Bantu Education in response to the rapidly deteriorating and fatally weakened political and social structure.

Not surprisingly, these grammar and composition textbooks mirror the agendas instituted by the reigning political powerbrokers: first a British imperial ideology being disseminated to schoolchildren during the heyday of the empire; this replaced by the paternalistic and overbearing political philosophy of ascendant Afrikaners, who considered themselves a white tribe with a mission to racially partition South Africa;

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people by discussing my memories of English classes (grammar, précis, comprehension tests, analyses of literary texts), respondents indicated that they had had similar experiences.

finally as apartheid arrogance and indifference began to fracture and disintegrate under pressure from the mobilization of the Black Consciousness Movement, a heightened critical awareness of the systematic oppression of the black community, aided in part by the surreptitious dissemination of Paulo Freire's literacy methods centered on the conscientization of adult learners.

The King's English: The Correctness Club in the Colonies

Writing instruction in South Africa has long been beholden to what is known in the United States as the current traditional paradigm, a skills and drills approach to composition that privileges the rehearsal of formulae and grammatical correctness. The extent to which this method is entrenched in language theories, pedagogical practices, and public attitudes in South Africa is attested to by American academic Frank Smith, who was invited to chair the newly formed Department of Applied English Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand in 1992. Smith arrived in South Africa at an auspicious moment: the release of Nelson Mandela from prison signaled the official end to apartheid in February 1990, President F.W. de Klerk lifted the ban on liberation movements, and negotiations for a new democratic and non-racial South Africa began in earnest. Amidst this dramatic turn of events arose a national debate on the future role of English in a reconstructed South Africa. As Smith rapidly became immersed in this swirling language debate, it became apparent from his interactions with both faculty and students that "[t]here was a sweeping concern with the 'mechanics' of speech and writing, with theoretical analyses of pronunciations and grammar, and with spelling" (17). Faculty in the department insisted that they

were aware that an emphasis on these "finer points" was not likely to bring about much improvement in the students' understanding of the English language, nor increase their facility with text production. Nevertheless, they felt that they needed to maintain "pedagogical vigilance" as grammatical correctness remained a hot button in academic and business writing.

As an outgrowth of the revival of rhetoric in the dissenting Scottish academies in the eighteenth century, the current-traditional paradigm still dominates writing instruction in the United States. After the alarm was sounded in 1874 when Harvard introduced a writing component in the entrance exam and the examiners were appalled to discover what they considered an unacceptable level of error in the applicant's essays, leading to the institution of remedial writing courses at the college level, the current-traditional paradigm has served as a practical and expedient method of teaching large numbers of students to write at an acceptable level. Robert Connors notes that it was "natural that such exams would tend to make 'error-free' writing the central definition of 'good' writing." Inevitably, the focus of writing courses became "the avoidance of error rather than teaching genuine communicative competence" ("Mechanical" 65). In tracing the intellectual roots of the current-traditional paradigm, James Berlin observes that by "Accepting the faculty psychology of eighteenth-century rhetoric, Current-Traditional Rhetoric takes the most mechanical features of Campbell, Blair, and Whately and makes them the sole concern of the writing teacher . . . it can be regarded as the manifestation of the assembly line in education. Current-Traditional rhetoric is the triumph of the scientific and technical worldview" (*Writing* 62).

The ideals of the Scottish Enlightenment have had a considerable influence on South Africa through what President Thabo Mbeki called a "long standing and special relationship between Scotland and South Africa" in his address to the Scottish Parliament in June 2001. Commenting on the nature of this relationship, Mbeki noted that "it was in education that the Scottish influence was felt most" (1-2). Not only were Scottish missionaries crucial in the provision of primary and secondary education for the black population beginning in the early nineteenth century, but they were also instrumental in founding the first black university, Fort Hare, thereby "exposing thousands of Black people to education, to various skills and to the promotion of a society of equal rights for all, irrespective of color" (3). White education at the college level also owes its existence to the endeavors of Scottish educators. Eric Walker opens his history of the South African College, founded in 1829 and the forerunner of the University of Cape Town, by saying: "Who first thought of founding the South African College, no man can say. That forceful presbyter, Dr. James Adamson of St. Andrew's, Cape Town, always claimed the idea as his . . ." (3). Adamson was one of the three founding professors of the college, which offered a surprisingly wide variety of courses including rhetoric, logic, and metaphysics.

It is interesting to note that rhetoric was taught at the South African College at its inception. In North America from 1825-50, Nan Johnson has determined that the rhetoric treatises by Scottish academics Hugh Blair, George Campbell, and Richard Whately were among the six most widely used textbooks (254). Although the University of Cape Town does not list these texts in its current collection, it seems feasible that Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783), Campbell's *The*

Philosophy of Rhetoric (1776), and Whately's *Elements of Rhetoric* (1828) would have been likely choices as course texts, especially when considering the Scottish influence on the intellectual culture of the South African College. As all three rhetoricians were "practicing ministers and theologians," the "ecclesiastical emphasis" of their theories of rhetoric (Golden and Corbett 16) would have made these texts ideal for use by Scottish missionaries and ministers at work disseminating Christianity in South Africa.[4]

An emphasis on the study of grammar that reached a peak in the United States in the middle of the nineteenth century coincides with what Connors calls the "first great period of American linguistic insecurity" ("Mechanical" 62) as the nation became concerned with developing a national culture. In the early years of the twentieth century, South Africa was itself struggling to define the terms of its newly enacted nation status following the union of the Boer republics and the British colonies in 1910. With the disputed dominance of the English language (which was to be overturned in 1948 when the Afrikaner-controlled National Party was elected), similar insecurities over language were apparent. The uneasy and unequal alliance between English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking South Africans is reflected in what Brian Rose and Raymond Tunmer call the "many moments of anxiety in the delicate negotiations" that arose during talks headed by Alfred, Lord Milner. In the lead up to the declaration of the Act of Union between the two Boer republics and the two British colonies, "the language question more than once threatened to upset all their plans" (165).

[4] Several copies of the works of Campbell, Blair, and Whately are in the University of Cape Town rare books collection, all imprinted between 1726 and 1856, although no rhetoric texts are listed.

The publication of *Darter's New South African Grammar and Composition (illustrated)* in 1913, three years after the embattled British and the Boers (the predecessors of present day Afrikaners) agreed to incorporate the British colonies of the Cape and Natal and the Boer republics of the Free State and the Transvaal in the Union of South Africa, represents a new era in South African education.[5] The *Darter's* text was designed to comprehensively cover the syllabi of all four provincial education departments, now operating with a common purpose under the Act of Union, the publisher declaring the books in this series to be "the only ones of their kind on the market."[6] In the preface, the Darter text draws attention to the accommodations made for those schools in which Dutch is the medium of instruction.[7] Noting that "their wants have been fully catered for by the inclusion of numerous exercises in Composition of a simple character, gradually leading up to harder exercises" (7), this statement indicates recognition of the constitutional guarantee of equality between the two white languages that had been reached after much disputation.

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[5] The year 1913 saw the enactment of the Natives Land Act, legislation designed to limit areas in which blacks were allowed to own land. This legislation was authored by the South African Party, under the leadership of Boer Generals Botha and Smuts, that had come to power in 1911 in the first elections to be held after the Act of Union. Support for the Natives Land Act was given by the newly-formed Nationalist Party under the leadership of J.B.M. Hertzog, also a Boer general and a cabinet minister who had broken ranks with the government in 1912 to form a new political party.

[6] Although it has not been possible to ascertain how many schools or students used the *Darter's* text, we have some indication of the longevity and popularity of the series through information contained in a student project undertaken at the School of Librarianship at the University of Cape Town in 1946. Students were required to compile a bibliography containing 150 entries on a particular subject in order to qualify for the diploma. E.W. Schumann chose to undertake his project on South African grammar books. Entry number 71 is *Darter's New South African Grammar and Composition for Standard 4*, fourth edition, published in 1930. Schumann describes the text as being for "English-medium schools. Contains the syllabi of the four provinces and Rhodesia. The different sections of grammar are treated separately" (9). An important change from the 1913 version is that an author is named, John C. Craig.

[7] Establishing Afrikaans as a national language became a pressing issue after the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) when the defeated Boers sought cultural, linguistic, religious, and political unity in the face of what they considered to be their oppression by the British.

The authors (whose identities are not revealed, being subsumed under the well-known and marketable name of "Darter Bros., Publishers") claim to situate their text in "practical oral and written composition," in line with the requirements set out in the syllabi of the four provincial education departments. The authors are in "entire accord with the suggestions for making the teaching of the language more practical and less theoretical," a move away from a previous emphasis "given to detailed analysis and parsing and to the elucidation of grammatical subtleties" (8). The appearance of the *Darter's* treatise on the market seems to be an attempt to adopt a less formal, less rigid, and less stuffy approach to the teaching of English by ushering in a new era of textbooks which are more appealing to students and better suited to the optimism of a new century and a recently unified South Africa.[8] *Darter's New South African Grammar and Composition (illustrated)* offers a fascinating window on English instruction at a momentous point in South Africa's history with the uneasy unification of two hostile white settler groups that had only a decade earlier faced each other in the Anglo-Boer War, both now determined to preserve white rule in the country.

Preoccupied as the English-speaking settlers and the newly emerging Afrikaner nation were with clashes amongst themselves over competing ideologies, the future of the indigenous African population and its coexistence with white settlers in South Africa remained unresolved, particularly in regard to the provision of formal schooling. Mission schools continued to operate with state aid as it was considered

[8] Due to cultural dominance of the mother country in the British colonies and a reverence for the "King's English" or the "Queen's English," the downgrading of a hybrid South African English that had incorporated words from various "non-white" groups in the country made it likely that textbooks were imported from Britain. By including *New South African* in the title of the *Darter's* text, the publishers are drawing attention to the fact that their book has been "specially written for South African schools," a subtle indication of the devolution of power from the heart of the metropole to the newly reconstituted

"wholly impracticable to contemplate transferring all Native schools from the Mission to the Government." After 1910, the provincial education departments took responsibility for overseeing the education of whites, Africans, Coloreds, and Indians, and whites were segregated from blacks in all provinces. Mission schools were subject to the regulations of the provincial education departments, which included the choice of syllabi, the supervision of examinations, and the appointment of teachers (Rose and Tunmer 230).

Mass schooling for whites came into effect in the early years of the twentieth century, while that of the black population continued to depend on the operation of schools by various mission organizations and provincial education departments. The *Darter's* grammar and composition textbook, catering to the syllabi of all four provincial education departments, would likely have been used by any school that fell within their jurisdiction. With white schooling being the only sector of the education market that was mandated by the central government, the audience in mind for this text would have been predominately white. However, in the absence of a coherent policy for black education in the early years of the Union, schools for non-whites would have been dependent on whatever texts were already in circulation, for the lack of a clearly demarcated market for black schools would have been unlikely to interest textbook publishers. (This policy changed dramatically after the Bantu Education Act of 1953 when mass schooling for black children was centrally controlled by the government and contracts for textbooks written specially for this sector was routinely given to Afrikaner-controlled publishing houses.) As a respected name in scholarly

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colony. Despite being written for a South African audience, the *Darter's* text was published in London by the Ballantyne Press.

publishing, *Darter's*, which was established in 1827 with headquarters in Cape Town and Stellenbosch, would have seemed a likely choice to gain the approval of textbook selectors at the provincial education departments.

The "practical" approach to language instruction stressed in the *Darter's* text is in fact a restatement of the philosophy of the Transvaal Education Department, and used by the authors as the "motto of the whole Series."[9] Language study should not be "*taken up as an end in itself, but as a help to accurate and effective expression, spoken or written*" (8, emphasis in original). Whether this philosophy coincides with that of the unnamed authors is unclear, for their publicly pronounced position may in fact be a shrewd marketing tactic for gaining the seal of approval and the marketing endorsement of the Transvaal Education Department in a province that had the largest school enrollment and that dominated the economy of the Union. The authors chose to forego intellectual independence by adopting the department's language as the motto and guiding principle for the entire series, thus casting doubt on their scholarly credentials for their willingness to patronize a statement of bureaucratic anonymity to establish a theoretical perspective.

Both in content and arrangement, the text mirrors the requirements of the provincial education departments, with the approved syllabus for each department's Standard IV (the text under discussion) being reproduced at the front of the book: grammar requirements are listed first, followed by composition, a hierarchy adhered to throughout the treatise. It seems that in the view of the educational authorities, "effective expression" is synonymous with correctness, accuracy, and precision.

"Expression" should not be confused with expressive, as in personal writing for self-development, for "effective" writing in the context of an educational system preparing students to pass the national school-leaving exam means teaching students to please the examiner by dishing up the tried and tested formulae. Instructing students to privilege the formal characteristics or structure of a particular type of composition at the expense of the content makes the teachers' task easier and helps students to maximize the number of points they can earn. Thus, at the beginning of the twentieth century, by echoing the language requirements of all four provincial education departments, the *Darter's Grammar and Composition* provides evidence that the current-traditional paradigm of writing instruction reigned as the supreme method of instruction, at least in the minds of the curriculum designers.[10]

Writing a language textbook to be used in multicultural and multilingual classrooms is a daunting undertaking and perhaps inevitably leads to the privileging of hegemonic forces that determine and dictate cultural content and usage conventions. In South Africa's case, the dominance of the English-speaking sector, fortified by its recent victory in the war with the Boers, sets the tone for the series, conveniently ignoring the complex racial, linguistic, and cultural makeup of the country and its attendant heavy baggage. South African culture is presented unashamedly as an

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[9] The authors indicate that the series will consist of five books. After Book II for Standard IV, the subject of my discussion, three more for use in Standards V-VII were in the process of being published, according to the preface (7).

[10] My experience of English classes while attending two of the most prestigious girls' private boarding schools in South Africa, one in Natal and the other in the Transvaal, in the 1950s and 1960s conform to the current-traditional nature of instruction. I have no recollection of being taught how to write an essay. We spent years memorizing animal gender names, and proverbs were a particular favorite in grammar textbooks. Apart from the briefest of instruction in how to construct a paragraph, learning to write seemed to be a skill that we either acquired by osmosis or failed to master. The textbooks I am reviewing are decidedly reminiscent of the type of treatises I remember being issued with at school. As

extension of bourgeois metropolitan Britain. For Afrikaner children having to learn the victor's language in school, their defeat at the hands of the British must have been a bitter pill to swallow, for the audience addressed by the *Darter's* textbook is British to the core, with the Boers being effortlessly erased.

Colonial versions of English have never sat well with the mother country, "contaminated" as each has become with its proximity to and interactions with indigenous languages, and issues of grammatical correctness and proper usage have abounded in efforts to stem the rot and preserve the origins, the purity, and the correct usage of the "King's English." An example of this in the *Darter's* text is an exercise on "Correction of Grammatical Errors," which concludes with the statement:

> Every English-speaking country has its own provincialisms and colloquialisms, and South Africa is no exception in this respect. It is not our purpose to discuss here the various reasons why certain errors in grammar should be peculiar to South Africa . . . . It will be sufficient if certain common errors (especially of conversation) are pointed out, and the correct expressions given for the benefit of the pupils. Teachers should be quick to notice grammatical lapses on the part of their pupils, and all such errors should be corrected at the time. 'As they speak, so will they write.' (58)

This brings to mind what I.A. Richards calls the "Club Spirit," an agreement in which one promises to abide by the club rules. Richards contends that "in using a language, you join a more or less select company—of correct users of the language. Deviation

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was drummed into us repeatedly, all the knowledge we were acquiring was necessary for success on the national matriculation examination taken at the culmination of Standard X.

from their customs is *incorrectness* and is visited with a social penalty as such" (78, emphasis in original).

In the *Darter's* text, the examples of incorrect usage are literal translations of Afrikaans grammatical structures that have inevitably crept into mainstream South African English, such as the double negative and certain prepositions that may sound awkward to the ear that is not attuned to local speech patterns. The final example of error is: "I will yet buy me a tickey sweets by the Greek shop," a common construction in South African English, yet it is scathingly described as "a genuine 'howler,' and is left without further comment to the student" (59).[11] As Richards points out, it does not matter whether the unauthorized version is an improvement or not, simply being different is enough "to bring you into condemnation," with the basis of this disapproval being snobbery and therefore a social sanction. By ridiculing local expressions that incorporate Afrikaans syntax, this scorn for colloquial English reflects British attitudes of superiority and the perceived cultural decline at work in the colonies where purity of language is sacrificed through the linguistic, cultural, and social commingling of diverse populations.

Despite the authors' statement that the text has been "specially written for South African Schools" (7), the gaze of the British Isles dominates the content of the grammar exercises, the composition topics, and the passages selected for comprehension and paraphrasing. Accompanied by numerous photographs and illustrations, the text depicts the trappings of middle-class culture on the eve of World

[11] Tickey was a local term equivalent to the British thrupence, or three pennies. The ridicule of local speech patterns raises the question of whether the authors of this text were in fact South African. It is possible that the book was produced (and printed) in the United Kingdom and merely distributed in South Africa through Darter Bros.

War I. An accurate commentary on British culture at the turn of the century, Britain is represented as a seafaring, rugby playing, adventure seeking, sexist, class-differentiated, technologically advanced, and racially superior nation that dominates global trade, overseas exploration, and colonial conquest.

Endless grammatical exercises in the *Darter's* text reflect an obsession with the old country and its military might and royal heritage. For example, nouns to be classified include navy, Godhead, regiment, Ruler, Balmoral Castle, queen, Shakespeare, George V (16). Local references are limited to geographic locations and features in South Africa. Exercises on gender inflections that require students to state to which gender a noun belongs or to provide the opposite gender form include items such as countess, duchess, marchioness, and spinster (to which a former owner of my copy had penciled in "spinner") (21-22). From among a list of sentences that require students to underline the prepositions are: "Adown the glen rode armed men" and "George V is Emperor of India" (40). A section on interjections has an entire list of literary expressions that would seem decidedly alien to the average South African child: "Bah! do you call yourself a man?"; Heigh-ho! it is my wedding morn" (44). A note to teachers requires that a given list of expressions (all obscure and archaic) be explained to pupils.

For black students, learning English from a text that is situated geographically and philosophically at the heart of the distant metropole is an alienating experience. "Learning, for a colonial child," Ngugi wa Thiong'o says, "became a cerebral activity

and not an emotionally felt experience" (17).[12] When reminiscing about reading English literature in a Johannesburg "ghetto school" in the 1930s, Es'kia

Mphahlele remarks that he only realized many years later that it was "one short step to sheer snobbery. And snobbery is the cruellest joke anyone can play on oneself in a ghetto situation" (*Es'kia* 447). Requiring eleven-year-old students in South Africa to spend endless hours paraphrasing poems such as Robert's Browning's "Oh, to be in England / Now that April's there!" as the *Darter's* text requires (62), reflects the alienation of the authors to the landscape of the students for whom the text is purported to be written.[13] Phyllis Ntantala, who was born in 1919, reflects that at school in South Africa "there was too much emphasis in our lessons on England, English culture and Europe." She provides an example from her school reader:

> Hardly anything was said of Africa and very little about South Africa, except an excerpt in our Standard 3 reader on Sir George Grey, who was described as 'one of the wisest governors that ever came to South Africa.' Three things he set himself to do: to break the power of the Native chiefs, to stamp out superstition . . . and to eradicate ignorance and laziness among the Natives. I also recall 'A Post Office on Wheels' in our Standard 4 reader with pictures of the post coaches and the men hauling in the post or putting it into coaches. The text began: 'Imagine yourself at Euston Station. It is a foggy morning in London.' There

[12] Ngugi was at the center of a struggle to reform the teaching of English at the University of Nairobi, suggesting that African literature with its strong oral residue should be placed at the center of the curriculum to "invoke the idiom of African culture" (99) that resonated with black students.

[13] Mphahlele comments that if first-year students in the United States were asked to "paraphrase, do précis and comprehension exercises or analyse sentences, it would set off a furore of some kind" (*Es'kia* 450).

was nothing about the 'talking drums' of Africa, used in conveying messages from person to person and from village to village. (30)

Ntantala's memories of her alien and alienating school experiences are echoed in the *Darter's* grammar and composition handbook. Invention for the first composition exercise is conducted orally as a whole class assignment, the given topic being a weekly event at ports along South Africa's east coast—the arrival of the Union Castle mail boat. A much anticipated occurrence, the weekly steamship ferrying passengers and mail between Southampton, England and four of South Africa's principal coastal cities—Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, East London, and Durban—came into service following the 1900 merger of two competing shipping companies. The regal lavender hulls of the steam ships trimmed with a thin red line running the length of the vessels soon became an institution, cementing ancestral ties with the mother country. Emblazoned with stately names steeped in the history of the old country, such as Warwick Castle, Athlone Castle, and Sterling Castle, the Union Castle steamship service continued unabated until its demise in the energy crunch of the 1970s.

The photograph accompanying the assignment shows how passengers in the early part of the century were transferred from the mail-boat in a cylindrical cage to a waiting launch that would take them to the harbor at East London, "a familiar scene to those who have travelled up the coast by passenger steamer" (18). The text instructs those children in the class who have actually experienced this maneuver to "recount at length" their memories of this event to their classmates and submit to questioning and verification by the teacher. After this version of show and tell, it is suggested that "the pupils might be required to write a brief account of how passengers are landed at East

London from the mail-boat" (19). Although an attempt is made to aid students with invention prior to writing through an in-class discussion, those students who had been fortunate enough to travel in this fashion, probably a very small number, if any, are placed in the privileged position of providing the text for the class, and it is their account that must be memorized and repeated for the teacher. Undoubtedly those children who wrote from personal experience would have the authorial advantage in order to create a more authentic, more detailed, and livelier account. The mail-boat exercise is representative of writing assignments that privilege the experiences of students who travel around the country and abroad and who have access to cars, trains, boats, and planes catering to their desire for leisure activities. Although the anonymous authors have attempted to stimulate the imagination of school pupils, the result is a writing pedagogy that is exclusionary and elitist.

In addition, the *Darter's* text portrays the world through a male lens, as in the following assignment complete with accompanying photograph:

> The scene depicted on the next page is a familiar one to all players and followers of the Rugby code.
>
> Why has the "line out" been given? What could have been taken in its place? Explain to your teacher the following terms used in connection with Rugby football: scrum, foot-up, offside, forward pass, mark, drop-out, touch-down, knock-on, try. (30)

The assignment continues to test the (male) student on his knowledge of the rules of rugby, including a listing of the technical differences between Rugby football and Association football. After what one presumes is an animated contest between white

boys in a sports-obsessed country aiming to outdo each other with their expert knowledge of the games' finer details, students are asked to "Write a short account of any Rugby or Association football match which you may have played in or witnessed." Presumably, those girls who have never "witnessed" such an event might feel ashamed to admit their lack of interest or lack of opportunity to participate in the national pastime that has shaped the rugged character of the white South African male.

Never having attended a rugby or football match while growing up in South Africa, I would have been hard pressed to write a convincing fabrication of being a spectator at a game in order to perform the assignment and not incur the displeasure of the teacher. Of course, one should not lose sight of the fact that many teachers in the colonies were British women who, particularly at the end of World War I, were attracted by the prospect of finding a husband in a male-dominated environment or by opportunities to spread Christianity to the African population. The textbook authors fail to take into account the increasing feminization of the teaching profession in South Africa; leading an informed discussion on rugby or football would likely have been a challenging task for many of them. The authors, it seems, have only male teachers in mind when giving directions or creating assignments. And for African boys, lacking the facilities, the equipment, or the coaching to play rugby or football, their exclusion from a traditional white-male dominated sport is carried over to the composition classroom and results in disadvantage.

Likewise, requiring students to "Write a brief account, in the form of a letter to a friend, of any day's fishing you have had recently" (35) caters predominantly to a white male student body. The authors never indicate any awareness that their

assignments indulge the lifestyles of a narrow section of the population, from which the majority of students are excluded by virtue of race, class, and/or gender. This assignment, incidentally, follows a discussion of several kinds of fish illustrated in a drawing provided as part of an "object-lesson;" listed are definitions of fish not native to South Africa, but found in the colder climes of the British Isles and its surrounding fishing grounds: mackerel, herring, sprat, cod, haddock, and whiting. Children must then match the definitions to the fish in the illustration, followed by a zoology lesson on the classes of fins.

The sciences figure prominently as suitable *topoi konoi* for the "brief accounts" the students are required to produce with discussions on waterfalls, earthquakes, sea voyaging, and land travel leading to the production of texts based on the presumption that students have knowledge of the topics either through personal reading or actual experience. There is also an implied bias toward male teachers who are generalists able to lead object-lessons on subjects such as "motor traction"; "a terrestrial globe"; and "the mariner's compass." Should there be any doubt in the minds of the teacher or the students as to the physical and cultural center of the world, when conducting the lesson on the globe, teachers are directed to "Turn globe round so that London is the center of hemisphere at which the class is looking." Additionally, instructors must trace the route of a ship sailing from Cape Town to England and back (49-50). Clearly, in the minds of the authors, all routes lead to the seat of the empire, another indication that the anonymous authors of *Darter's New South African Grammar and Composition (illustrated)* are not only male, but likely British as well.

There is even an "object-lesson" that reflects the British fascination with native peoples encountered during the insatiable quest for an expanding empire. An anthropological account of the "Esquimaux" informs the students that the "Esquimo is small in stature, and fat. He has a low, narrow forehead, high cheek-bones, thick lips, and a large mouth." For those Esquimaux who live "somewhat nearer to the haunts of civilization," they readily engage in bartering furs and skins for "knives, spirits, tobacco, etc." A final comment on the peculiar lifestyle of these strange fat people informs the reader that after the feasting that follows a bountiful seal hunt or fishing trip, "the hunters never think of setting forth again till their larder is empty, and starvation stares them in the face" (46). Having presented the Eskimo as an object of curiosity and primitiveness, students are then required to write a "short account of a day in the life of an Esquimo hunter," apparently considered fully equipped to create a narrative despite the absence of any information concerning hunting methods, tools, rituals, procedures, or rules.

The inherently racist attitudes of the British imperialists are undisguised, being blatantly transmitted to a new generation through the construction of a school composition text aimed at colonial consumption. As James Berlin asserts, "A rhetoric can never be innocent, can never be a disinterested arbiter of the ideological claims of others because it is always already serving certain ideological claims" ("Rhetoric" 477). The content of writing courses in the colonies, weighed down by the hegemonic structure of the empire, was particularly problematic, for the British were clearly asserting their racial, cultural, economic, and military superiority and in the process actively and intentionally oppressing and marginalizing the indigenous population.

Darter's New South African Grammar and Composition (illustrated) series is considered by the authors to be unique in the annuls of textbook publishing in South Africa, having been especially written for the local market (7). Apparently, the authors consider themselves attuned to the needs of South African textbook publishing, a market that was clearly Eurocentric by privileging the white male-centered agenda and excluding female students of all races in the early twentieth century. Homi Bhabha asserts that the "construction of the colonial subject in discourse, and the exercise of colonial power through discourse, demands an articulation of forms of difference—racial and sexual" (67). The ambivalence displayed toward women and their social and political roles in South Africa, a country still dominated by British interests after the Act of Union in 1910, is apparent in the ideological positioning of the authors of the *Darter's* textbook. Each page is weighed down with an anti-student mindset that seems guaranteed to convince learners that as colonial outcasts, even their best attempts to express themselves effectively will inevitably pale beside the literary masterpieces of the British Isles. The racial and gendered hierarchy and categorizations entrenched in South Africa are reflected in the teaching of writing, for the image of the female student is conspicuously absent in the avant-garde *New South African Grammar and Composition*, an indication of business as usual in the composition classroom in the colonies.

Bantu Education: New Roadmaps Point to Retribalism and the Bantustans

Nearly half a century later, after the massive reorganization of African education in 1953 under the terms of the Bantu Education Act as ordered by the

Nationalist government, the teaching of English in black schools occurs as second language instruction, sharing equal time with South Africa's other official language, Afrikaans.[14] African vernaculars assumed new prominence as the government sought to implement a policy of retribalism, playing upon ethnic and language differences and insisting that learning in the vernacular would foster pride in tribal heritage. By limiting the study of English to second language instruction, this restriction served to ensure that the African child would be deprived of achieving all but a basic facility with the English language. At the core of Bantu Education ideology was the determination to retribalize Africans, thereby fostering traditional ethnic rivalries while also physically relocating as many Africans as possible to the Bantustans, bases for promoting ethnic identities.

African parents resisted the policy that required children to learn their school subjects in the vernacular as English was the lingua franca of the commercial sector, and the ability to be conversant in colloquial English was viewed as the key to economic advancement. The political, philosophical, and pragmatic reasons for African authors choosing to write in English rather than the vernacular have been well documented. Nathaniel Nakasa's observations on this issue in his essay "Writing in South Africa" provide a neat recapitulation:

> Without much persuasion from outsiders, black men have chosen English as a means for the expression of their national aspirations; they

[14] According to the guidelines of the Department of Bantu Education, in Sub A and Sub B classes (equivalent to kindergarten), English and Afrikaans instruction was allocated 125 minutes each per week and 185 minutes for the home language. In Standards I and II (the first two years of schooling after kindergarten), the two official white languages were increased to 270 minutes per week each, with the vernacular increasing to 210 minutes. By the time students reached Standards III through VI, English and Afrikaans were allocated 240 minutes each and the home language 180. Writing in the sub-

> have chosen English as the most powerful single instrument of communication with the world and themselves.
>
> In their joint use of English, Africans reach with greater ease the various levels of common ground which are of importance in the process of eliminating tribal division with all its unwelcome consequences. To the African, English has become a symbol of success, the vehicle of his painful protest against social injustice and spiritual domination by those who rule him. (57)

As much as blacks desired to master the English language, the discriminatory policies laid down by the Department of Bantu Education made this goal unachievable for the majority of students. Training programs for aspiring black teachers were poor in quality, leading to under-prepared teachers entering overcrowded classrooms (sixty students to a class was considered quite normal). Compounding the problems faced by underpaid, undereducated, and overworked teachers was a severe shortage of textbooks.

The production of textbooks for the Bantu Education Department became an industry in itself and one that was plagued with corruption and nepotism. As Phaswane Mpe and Monica Seeber state, until 1948 and the rise to power of the National Party, "the schoolbook market was relatively open" (20). However, the victory at the polls set in motion a system of political patronage that unashamedly rewarded Afrikaners for having endured generations of discrimination by the British. For instance, the civil service was filled with loyal Afrikaners, many of whom were

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standards was allotted 75 minutes, increasing to 90 minutes in Standards I and II, and this allotment was eliminated by the time students reached Standard III (Horrell, *Bantu* 64).

only functionally literate. With African education now under the control of the central government, contracts for the publication of textbooks were handed out wholesale to Afrikaans publishing houses, enterprises that had "no qualms" about complying with National Party ideology. These Afrikaner-controlled publishing ventures "came to monopolise all schools in general and the African school in particular—markets where the textbook publishing industry was . . . assured of large profits" (19). Committees were established to regulate the content of textbooks to be used in schools in the Bantu Education system. Publishers such as Oxford and Longman were ousted from their position of dominance in the black primary school market by Afrikaner publishing conglomerates Perskor and Nasionale Pers (Philip and Kantey 417).

The grammar and composition textbooks that I analyze, *English for Standard Three* (1976) and *English for the Secondary School* (1979) written by E. Fletcher and K.B. Hartshorne,[15] were both published by Maskew Miller.[16] This company, founded in 1893, was one of four publishers that focused on the textbook market for white schools.[17] The content of both texts can be considered representative of English language textbooks because of the scrutiny that textbooks submitted to the regulatory committees underwent. In the introduction to the text for secondary schools, the authors state that the series has been "written to cater for the syllabus requirements of

[15] Hartshorne was Director of Planning in the Department of Bantu Education, a position he maintained when the name change to Department of Education and Training came into effect (Behr, *New* 190).
[16] While visiting South Africa in 2002, I inquired of several academics how best to acquire a copy of a grammar and composition textbook that would have been used in the Bantu Education school system. The consensus was that this would be extremely difficult as the Department of Bantu Education strictly controlled the distribution of books, and when a new edition appeared, the obsolete textbooks were collected and destroyed by the authorities. I have not been able to ascertain how many copies of the Maskew and Miller text were in circulation. However, based on the fact that the series was first published in 1975 and the edition I am critiquing was the second edition and the second impression (1981), this indicates that sufficient copies were ordered to warrant continued publication.

the Department of Education and Training," the new name for African education adopted after the riots of 1976 that were instigated by opposition to Bantu Education, a system referred to by blacks as "gutter education." Mpe and Seeber contend that the "Department of Education and Training (DET) was the grand prize for the schoolbook publisher and most of the winners were the publishers best placed to serve the new authorities . . .", an indication of their willingness to conform to apartheid ideology. At the height of apartheid, the educational system in South Africa was managed by no less than eighteen separate departments, with the black sector accounting for eleven of these departments, compared to four for white schools (21). Considering the huge market generated by black schools, it is not surprising that publishers such as Maskew Miller that had traditionally occupied a niche in publishing for white schools ventured into this lucrative market.

As textbooks published by Afrikaner-owned ventures were awarded the lion's share of the market, it was quite usual for texts to be written by Afrikaans speaking authors and then translated into English. (While browsing the shelves in secondhand bookshops in Cape Town, I noticed the predominance of Afrikaans surnames among the authors of English composition texts. This prevalence of Afrikaans authors is confirmed by Schumann's bibliography of grammar books.) Eve Gray comments that many authors of textbooks were Afrikaans, and "books were often written in Afrikaans and translated into English . . ." (167). Sheila Sisulu, whose parents sent her to a mission school in Swaziland when her education began to deteriorate after the implementation of Bantu Education, returned to teach in Soweto after graduating from

[17] The other three publishing houses that dominated the market for white schools were Juta (founded in 1853), Shuter and Shooter (founded in 1925), and Nationale Pers (founded in 1914) (Mpe and Seeber

university in Lesotho. Sisulu reflects on the uphill task of teaching English to some 150 students in one class, contending that the textbook she was issued was in its entirety "a translation from Afrikaans to English—it sounded really clumsy, not English at all." She quotes a sentence from a passage for a comprehension exercise that read: "Yes, master, berry quiet, berry careful" (Lipman 103).[18] The Fletcher and Hartshorne authored series, while it certainly conforms to the prevailing ideology, cannot be criticized for its standard of English.

Young notes that during the apartheid era, nearly eighty-percent of English language teachers in South Africa were second-language speakers. This, he contends, presents serious problems in that

> Pupils who model their speech and communication patterns, syntax and written discourse on the imperfect models of English taught by their non-English speaking teachers, run a serious risk of never adequately being able to master the colloquial, context-sensitive English needed for successful communication in the real world outside the classroom. The resulting communicative incompetence has far-reaching social consequences, such as cross-cultural conflict, communication breakdown and wasted national productivity. (189)

In addition to being taught by teachers who were not fluent in English, the poor quality of teacher training programs for blacks compounded the problem. Regardless of the quality of textbooks, many of the teachers attempting to instruct their students in

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[18] Despite having earned a BA in English and Philosophy and an education certificate, Sisulu was judged unqualified to teach by the Bantu Education authorities because she had not learned Afrikaans.

the English language were themselves woefully unprepared to assist their students in achieving minimal competence.

Fletcher and Hartshorne's *English for Standard Three* appeared on the market in 1976 and caters to the Higher Primary School syllabus of the Department of Bantu Education. It is interesting to note that in the introduction, the authors claim that their text "concentrates on English in everyday use." This approach reflects the growing awareness, as noted by Young, that black students needed to learn colloquial English in preparation for life outside the classroom. Each chapter is divided into "Reading and Understanding; Words and Language Study; Listening, Speaking and Writing."

Comprehension exercises are a standard feature of the curriculum in South Africa and appear on the national matriculation exam as well. Students are required to read a passage and answer the list of questions that follow the excerpt. The eclectic selections provided by Fletcher and Hartshorne range from Grimms' Fairy Tales to African fables, from poems by Christina Rossetti and Lewis Carroll to a Bible story. A welcome change from the *Darter's* text is the selection of models that reflect the hybrid nature of English in South Africa, even though the authors do not refer to this phenomenon. Juxtaposing poems by Christina Rossetti and Lewis Carroll and European fairy tales with traditional African animal stories does indeed reflect English as a colonial language and the lingua franca of Africa, although there is no indication that the authors intended their selections to reflect this. Some attempt has been made to engage black children by employing African first-names in grammar exercises—Thandiwe, Lobo, Nomsa, Busiwe—as well as the names of black townships—Langa

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She was allowed to continue teaching at a reduced salary because she did not meet educational requirements (Lipman 102).

and Soweto—and frequent references are made to African animals—crocodiles, jackals, ostriches, baboons, leopards.

Considering that the repetitious and paranoid justifications for the presence and permanence of whites in Southern Africa is a standard feature of apartheid-era history textbooks, it would be surprising if a restatement of white mythology were not a feature of English textbooks. Dressed up as a comprehension narrative, a slice of settler ideology can be effortlessly slipped between the covers of a textbook, as evidenced by the following passage in Fletcher and Hartshorne's Standard Three text:

> When the Botswana people were attacked by another tribe, Robert Moffat went to their help. He warned the chiefs that their enemies were coming. He then gathered the women and children into places of safety and went to the help of those hurt in the fighting.
>
> He himself was very nearly killed when one of the enemy attacked him. But a Botswana tribesman was just in time to shoot the attacker. After this, the Botswana people did not try to drive Robert Moffat away any more. They came to his church, their children went to his school and there was peace in the land. Now they trusted him as their friend. (55)

As no source is attributed to this passage, I can only assume that the authors themselves wrote an account of Scottish Congregationalist missionary Moffat's experiences in neighboring Botswana, aware that its content correctness rendered it pleasing to the textbook examiners. Frantz Fanon claimed that "the total result looked for by colonial domination was indeed to convince the natives that colonialism came

to lighten their darkness. The effect consciously sought by colonialism was to drive into the native's heads the idea that if the settlers were to leave, they would at once fall back into barbarism, degradations, and bestiality" (211). The comprehension questions following the passage naturally reinforce the friendship/dependability/trustworthiness/ mutual cooperation aspect of the interactions between the missionary and his potential (or actual) converts to Christianity. One must bear in mind that this text is pitched towards Standard Three students, their fifth year of school, and undoubtedly works in tandem with their history classes, reinforcing and reiterating the image of benign colonial paternalism.

Njabulo Ndebele's claim that black South African children were taught to speak and write English so that they could better serve their masters and madams is borne out by an exercise entitled "*Who am I*" which requires students to provide the correct name of a person supplying a particular service. The prompts refer to low-paying occupations reserved for blacks: delivering milk, serving in a café, carrying luggage for passengers, looking after buildings at night (32). The textbook authors have apparently consciously (or unconsciously) absorbed apartheid ideology as it impacts the black population in the choice of a menial occupation, and the teaching of English cannot be divorced from the basic necessity of demonstrating the ability to engage in routine workplace communications with white employers and customers.[19]

[19] The *Syllabus for the Lower Primary School Course* as laid out by the Department of Bantu Education (revised in 1967) states that upon completion of Standard II, children should be sufficiently competent: "a. to understand the spoken language fairly well; b. to speak simple English with some confidence; c. to read English with understanding; d. to write simple, acceptable English" (16).

Fletcher and Hartshorne's *English for the Secondary School: Standard Six* is in the same series as *English for Standard Three*.[20] First published in 1975, the second edition came out in 1979 and reflects the name change from the Department of Bantu Education to the less outwardly contentious Department of Education and Training (DET), one of the measures taken by the government after the student riots to defuse the highly-charged political situation. As the authors note, the layout of the text follows the same pattern as previous books in the series, i.e. comprehension, language study, spoken English (listening and speaking) and general and revision exercises. The Standard Six (Eighth Grade) text provides passages to test comprehension that offer a more African-centered context, with fables, descriptions of the African landscape, and animal tales; however, many of these narratives are written by whites. Included are excerpts from white writers such as F.W. Fitzsimons: *Monkey-folk of South Africa*; J. Grenfell Williams: *Moshesh, the Man on the Mountain*; Anne and Peter Cook: *The Adventures of Kalipe*; Theodore J. Waldeck: *Treks Across the Veld.* Although the authors have restored the focus of the text to Southern Africa, as opposed to the emphasis on the imported British culture so apparent in the *Darter's* text, by selecting excerpts for comprehension that reflect the landscape, the people, and the animals of the country, this local information is presented as a product of white knowledge, interpreted and filtered through the Westernized lens of the settler.

In the black classroom, literary production in English remained the province and the privilege of whites. A noticeable exception is the placement midway through the book of two passages excerpted from Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka the Zulu*, translated

[20] The series consists of six books covering English for Standards 3-5 (higher primary school) and Standards 6-8 (secondary school).

by F.H. Dutton. Michael Chapman notes that Mofolo's text, written circa 1909 in SeSotho, was not published until 1925 "when the Morija Press allowed itself to be convinced that the work was Christian in intent." Stylistically and thematically Shakespearean, Mofolo's *Chaka the Zulu* "ends up endorsing a kind of nostalgic Zulu pride" (*Southern* 211), a sentiment in keeping with the government's move to endorse retribalism as a means to discourage urban assimilation. The passage excerpted for use as a comprehension exercise is an innocuous account of a youthful Chaka single-handedly killing a marauding lion with a spear, thus reinforcing the warrior image that characterizes the Zulu nation in the white imagination and that promotes the pejorative brawn over brain mentality.

The Standard Six version of *English for the Secondary School* has in each chapter a "listening and speaking" exercise requiring students to take turns presenting a one-to-two minute talk on a given topic. This invention exercise is followed by a written component typically calling for the composition of a paragraph based on the preceding oral exercise. While the topics for oral discussion do not reflect the overt white middle-class culture of the 1913 *Darter's* text, it is apparent that the white authors are out of touch with the material deprivations of township life. Although whites could only access black townships by permit, the crude conditions that included a lack of electricity, paved roadways, telephone service, or water and sewage provisions were generally known, though conveniently ignored by the majority of whites.[21] It was, therefore, quite unexpected to come across one particular oral exercise while examining the text. Prefaced by the direction that "Pairs of pupils

should be asked to carry on telephone conversations on one or more of these topics," the following list of choices reveals a surprising ignorance of actual conditions that existed in the townships:

(a) A stranger rings up and asks to speak to your father, but he is not in. Ask whether you may take a message.

(b) Ask a storekeeper whether he would put aside for you an article you would like to see with a view to buying it.

(c) The electricity has failed. Use a telephone directory to find the correct number and then complete the call.

(d) Telephone the local storekeeper giving an order. Make sure that he understands what you want. (53)

The scenarios provided in this exercise are more appropriate and applicable to white students for whom a telephone could be expected to be standard household equipment. I have to wonder what black students living in sub-standard township housing without amenities such as home telephone service made of this exercise, and whether they dared challenge the teacher for requiring them to engage in play acting that only served to reinforce their racial and class disadvantages. Perhaps what Fletcher and Hartshorne had in mind was training for employment, answering the phone for the madam in her absence and accurately taking a message, ordering routine supplies and requesting goods for the madam's approval, or notifying the electricity provider that her employer's service had been interrupted. Consider, too, that in the notoriously overcrowded classes (in Sisulu's case, 150 students in an English class, but sixty was

[21] My growing disaffection with life in South Africa in the late 1960s and early 1970s was considerably influenced by the accounts of township life in Soweto, Benoni, and Germiston as recounted to me by

common), conducting this particular exercise would have required the teacher to furiously circulate while monitoring numerous pairs of undoubtedly highly creative and speculative conversations. The concluding writing exercise requires students to "write two paragraphs on the rules to be observed when you are using a telephone. These include clarity; certainty; politeness" (54). This curious disconnect with the actual lived experiences of black schoolchildren would hamper their ability to make sense of a foreign language when the world it portrays is alien and remote. Typical prompts provided in English textbooks, such as the Fletcher and Hartshorne series, bear no relationship to the restricted knowledge base of these students, thus decreasing their chance of learning to usefully communicate in English, other than by the rote memorization of utilitarian phrases—also frustrating and demoralizing to the teacher facing a daunting task.

Due to the narrow range of experiences that a typical African child confined to the townships or the Bantustans was exposed to, it would have been a challenge and somewhat risky for black teachers with a limited knowledge of English to think up alternative assignments. Textbooks are a lifeline for inexperienced and under-qualified teachers who tend to rely heavily on the prepared (and approved) material. During the apartheid era, moreover, a departure from approved lesson plans placed teachers in jeopardy of falling foul of the regular and rigid system of supervision that H.J. van Zyl warns teachers is a condition of employment. Although some teachers may want to be "left alone, they may rest assured that they will never have that privilege . . . they will have superiors and those superiors will always want to know *what* they are doing and *how* they are carrying out the instructions given them" (12, emphasis in original).

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black women I employed as domestic workers.

A Practical Guide for Bantu Teachers is the title of the van Zyl text, described in the foreword by G.H. Franz, Ex-chief Inspector of Native Education in the Transvaal, to be intended as "a friendly chat with colleagues." "Friendly" seems a rather odd choice of words, for a glance at the table of contents reveals that after the introductory remarks, the first chapter is ominously headed "Inspection," listing the various inspections that the teacher will be subject to. New teachers are told that frequent visits from school inspectors should be reassuring, as "[i]n a well-organised society, no matter what trade or profession a man adopts, he is always subject to supervision and control in some form or another. The better organised the society the more efficient will be the control." Financed by the State, teachers are hired by school boards, who report to a master.

> The master determines the amount of work that has to be done within a certain period and also lays down the standard that should be attained .... It is agreed that if the employer is to be satisfied that the prescribed work is being done well, there must be overseers of different ranks to report on it. In the field the inspector, sub-inspectors and supervisors are the overseers. (9)

By employing such terms as "master," overseers," and "field," allusions to slavery cannot be dismissed simply as an unfortunate choice of words, for apartheid ideology relied heavily of the master/servant mind-set (known as *baaskaap*), with "boss-boys" or *indunas* being selected from among the African workers to function as overseers charged with enforcing the rules of the master.

When bureaucrat van Zyl launches into his discussion of "schemes" or lesson plans, it is noticeable that he chooses to illustrate his directions with a Standard Two Afrikaans language class rather than an English class. The lesson plans must incorporate:

(a) Reading and recitation (poetry).

(b) Grammar and general language work.

(c) Composition, oral and written, (including letters). (47)

The model lesson plans are a good example of micro-management, with detailed instructions being provided for the format of the required daily record of work undertaken in class. As a white government official, van Zyl is patronizing and authoritarian in giving his advice (more like orders) for conducting the language class. When presenting students with models to read and then imitate in their own writing, he considers it a "good plan for a teacher to give the pupils a model composition prepared by himself (on any subject) which they should be required to copy into their books *after* having written one themselves" (78, my emphasis). Students, therefore, must struggle to produce an essay or letter on their own, at the end of which the model is presented for "comparison and guidance." Whether this method of having students take up valuable time in the classroom copying the teacher's composition from the blackboard or by dictation is a cost effective measure for schools without adequate supplies or equipment such as copying machines or copy paper, or whether it represents a pedagogical strategy that would seem to have the effect of humbling students whose attempts would likely not match up to the teacher's model, is not revealed.

Students in higher primary classes and in secondary schools during the Bantu Education era are to be taught how to write a composition based on the following "general framework" provided by van Zyl:

(i) A paragraph of introduction. This may be an explanation of the subject.

(ii) A paragraph of one particular thought or aspect connected with the subject.

(iii) A paragraph on another thought or aspect.

(iv) A paragraph on yet another thought or aspect.

(v) A paragraph for the conclusion derived from, and summing up what has been written in the previous paragraphs. (78)

Although not identified as the five-paragraph theme, this time-worn structure is provided as a template that may need to be modified by Junior Certificate and Matriculation students by adding a "few more paragraphs between the introduction and conclusion. It must be remembered that a paragraph consists of several sentences. Each of these sentences should be short and to the point" (79).

Van Zyl provides no theoretical basis for his "suggestions" for teaching the various school subjects, emphasizing instead the practical nature of his advice as opposed to the pedagogical principles taught in teacher training colleges. As he says, "It is because we are aware of the shortcomings and helplessness of so many teachers, both young and old, that this attempt is made to come to their aid" (2). Teaching English presented particular challenges for a majority of black instructors, overwhelmed by inadequate preparation and a lack of proficiency in the language. No

amount of practical advice can overcome a fundamental lack of subject knowledge. By reproducing the formula for the five-paragraph theme as a tried and tested method for teaching students to write, to be memorized and trotted out on each occasion an essay is required, van Zyl reflects a mind-numbing dedication to formulaic writing.

Even today, many students enrolled in required first-year composition courses in the United States are as bored as the instructors who teach writing as "theory-unconscious skill workouts . . . based on a positivistic/scientific epistemology that dictates that writing is a skill like carpentry or plumbing" (Welch 84). But, as Kathleen Welch points out, "When writing instructors do not have sufficient training in language theory, they teach what is familiar to them; they teach language skills." Chapman, in his critiques of black literary contributions to *Staffrider*, a magazine that appeared in 1978, comments that "It is not always easy to decide whether the dead metaphors and formulaic utterance that characterise a great deal of the writing succeed in evoking an effective 'imitation' of oral styles, or simply confirm a flattened inter-language dependency on lists of idioms and proverbs drilled into the head at school" (*Southern* 372). Neglecting to teach the expressive and emotional uses of language seems inevitable in a situation where poorly trained and under-qualified teachers attempt to provide instruction in a language they may have only limited knowledge of, relying heavily on textbook exercises that teach and test correct usage.

When suggesting suitable books for use in black schools, van Zyl lectures teachers on the importance of books in imparting the right kind of knowledge, advising them that "Riches of the mind are to be treasured and esteemed far beyond the sordid riches of material wealth" (89), a fine sentiment from a privileged white

man who knows only too well that material wealth is to be kept out of the hands of the black population by government fiat. Students are to be steered to books intended for learning, and not those for leisure and pleasure, and this is necessary to "enable us to acquire that fundamental knowledge needed for success and happiness in a civilized world" (89). He repeatedly drives home his message of the necessity of knuckling down to discipline and training, for without the mastery of these essential traits, the threshold of civilization for Africans is an impossible desire. Teachers are told that "One of the most effective ways of spreading new ideas is by means of the printed word," a resource that they can ill-afford to ignore (90). Ironically, the printed word is also highly amenable to censorship, one reason that poetry became the favored literary medium for protest poets who doubted that Afrikaner censors would be motivated to interpret and deconstruct stylized language in what was for them also a second language.

Unfortunately for students, the heavy emphasis on correctness, clarity, and conciseness, together with the cultural detachment and adverse classroom conditions in black schools resulted in English being taught during the Bantu Education era in South Africa as a foreign language in the extreme. As Welch comments, "When student writers are required to drill on topic sentences, paragraph formation, and error correction, their intellectual need for language is not being met" (84). Meeting the educational needs of students in black South African schools was crushed by the necessity of maintaining military-like discipline to keep teachers and students precisely in line with government dictates. Fostering intellectual curiosity was

anathema to a system of African education predicated on the management of teachers and students alike as servants doing the bidding of the master.

Putting Composition on the Agenda: Writing Instruction after Bantu Education

In the wake of the student riots that rippled across the country from the Soweto epicenter in June 1976, discontent with educational inequalities was not restricted to the black community, for Coloreds and Indians also protested apartheid policies. The name change to the Department of Education and Training from Bantu Education was seen as a hollow attempt to defuse the unrest that continued to fester after the school riots. When the Lange Committee, charged in 1980 with investigating education in South Africa after the riots, recommended that there should be a single educational system in the country, the government predictably refused to consider this proposition. As the ideals of the Black Consciousness Movement gained ground, concern at the widespread educational deficiencies that plagued the black population raised awareness that the struggle to overthrow white minority rule would be enhanced and accelerated by a better informed, literate African community.

The discriminatory policies of the Bantu Education system resulted in a dismal failure to produce a sufficient number of literate blacks to fill the needs of an expanding and increasingly sophisticated capitalist economy. Growing frustrations within the black population at their exclusion from economic prosperity and their oppression as a result of apartheid policies led to the gathering momentum of grassroots attempts to provide an alternative to formal education. The appeal of making other avenues available for acquiring knowledge could be interpreted as a

return to traditional African education that for centuries has passed on the storehouse of wisdom and experience communally and informally through the oral traditions.

In its late twentieth-century guise, the promotion of informal education was a move to empower learners by motivating them to seek out opportunities to overcome self-identified and self-diagnosed deficiencies through cost-effective means that could be accommodated according to their respective schedules. As a means to advancing higher education for black students in South Africa, the South African Council for Higher Education (SACHED) was founded in the late 1960s in order to

> provide appropriate learning materials for second language students and an alternative to the apartheid bias of mainstream educational materials. The materials it published addressed issues of methodology, language and content, and aimed to promote critical thought and reflect a perspective wider than that of the syllabus. (Cloete 52)

As Dick Cloete notes, this was accomplished by establishing Turret College in order to offer instruction and suitable materials to adults in the black community. Based on the workbooks that Turret created, an arrangement was made with *The World* newspaper in March 1977 to include an educational supplement known as the *People's College* in its weekend edition. The *People's College* "aimed to promote critical, independent thought, and community and social awareness" (Christie 266). Within a month, circulation had increased by 20,000, an increase that remained stable at 10,000 until October of that year, when both supplement and newspaper were banned during the wide-scale frenzy that resulted in the banning of writers' groups and other cultural organizations across the country. Following the banning of the *World* newspaper,

SACHED came out with *Catch Up*, a supplement to assist students who could not attend school during the chaos following the 1976 student riots. Early in 1980, SACHED was able to produce another newspaper supplement called *Learning Post*, this time appearing in *The Post*. "The hallmark of the newspaper supplements," according to Cloete, was "accessible, learner-centered, well-presented material embodying the pedagogical tenets of Turret College" (52-53).

Pam Christie's *The Right to Learn: The Struggle for Education in South Africa*, a 1984 Ravan publication, is identified as *A People's College Book* and blurs the boundaries of the Western concept of individual authorship. As Christie acknowledges in the introduction, "This book is the product of much joint effort and support," in particular from students and staff of SACHED who were actively engaged in each stage of the planning, research, writing, editing, and designing of the book. Christie takes pains to point out that this was a project of the people, refusing to claim authorship in the traditional Western sense of the word, instead indicating on the title page that her role in the communal project was in preparing the manuscript. *The Right to Learn* has been accorded something akin to canonical status, being consistently quoted since its publication nearly twenty years ago. It is written in simple English accessible to speakers of English as a second language, with clearly laid out historical analyses of educational policies in South Africa and illustrated with cartoon-like drawings.

Also in the People's College series is a composition text, *Write Well: Skills for Better English 2*, the second in the series following *Read Well*, a text designed to improve reading and studying techniques. These two texts resulted from selections of

the best material contained in the "innovative language course" that appeared in *Learning Post.* Although *Write Well* and *Read Well* were well received, "distribution was limited, with print runs averaging 2,000 copies."[22] Both texts "broke away from established school textbook publishing tenets by presenting the black experience," making a "political statement, profiling a different worldview and orientation to the country and continent, introducing African people and events" (Cloete 53).

A hopeful sign in *Write Well* is that students will learn to "make their writing more interesting." This could indicate a move away from what Jasper Neel calls "anti-writing," writing that serves only to demonstrate knowledge of the rules, resulting in a dispassionate, dutiful completion of assignments that students so often resort to when they realize how arduous and unpredictable the writing process is, for thoughts and ideas have a habit of not making sense when transferred to the cold and unforgiving page which will be scrutinized by a critical reader (83). *Write Well* aims to move students in the direction of using English as a second language that is active, engaged, and applicable directly to students' lives. While the cover optimistically highlights the goal that students will be able to "Write good paragraphs and essays," in actuality writing essays is presumed to naturally evolve from instruction on how to construct paragraphs, a position taken by van Zyl with his advice that bumping up an essay to the required length for the matriculation examinations is simply a matter of adding a few extra paragraphs to the five-paragraph formula.

Although the pedagogy that underwrites *Write Well* adheres to the comfortable conventions of the current-traditional paradigm, there are promising signs that the

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[22] *Write Well* first appeared in 1984. The copy that I refer to is the fifth impression that came out in 1991.

minority stranglehold on the cultural center is in the process of being overturned. Archbishop Desmond Tutu's "rainbow nation" metaphor becomes the racial template for representing South African society, both textually and graphically, with photographs and drawings comprising approximately one-third of the content of *Write Well.* Incorporating comic strip-type drawings complete with word bubbles to current and historical photographs, South Africa's multi-racial society is represented in terms that reflect the actual racial make-up of society with blacks being numerically superior and whites in the minority, a major departure from the white dominance of earlier textbooks. When whites are the subject of photographs, they are not always portrayed in positions of power and privilege. A picture of a woman whose features and dress indicate that she is an Afrikaner has the following caption underneath it: "During the 1930s many people were unemployed. The South African government provided a food aid scheme to help poor whites" (30). Juxtaposed is a picture of a gathering of residents from the squatter community of Crossroads in Cape Town depicting black men and women holding children in their arms with older children squatting at the front of the loosely formed group. The solemn expressions on the faces of the subjects in each photograph is a reminder that poverty in South Africa has historically not been confined to the black population.

Freed from the hostile environment that so often characterized the teaching of a colonial language to the indigenous inhabitants, *Write Well* makes concerted attempts to dismantle the barriers to learning English that had been created by the Bantu Education Act. Aided by photographs of global scenes, the authors portray black South Africans as members of the international community. Learning English in

this inclusive setting helps to neutralize the resistance to foreign language instruction that can occur when the colonial language is installed as the lingua franca, displacing and downgrading the centrality of homegrown languages in local institutions, a situation that Memmi lamented:

> If only the mother tongue was allowed some influence on current social life, or was used across the counters of government offices, or directed the postal service, but this is not the case. The entire bureaucracy, the entire court system, all industry hears and uses the colonizer's language. Likewise, highway markings, railroad stations signs, street signs, and receipts make the colonized feel like a foreigner in his own country. (107)

Described as a workbook to accompany the (ubiquitous) grammar textbook, *Write Well* serves a dual purpose for making English appear less as a foreign imposition to be resisted but rather as a lingua franca to facilitate cross-cultural communication; the text can be used in a traditional classroom and/or as a self-study guide for learning English.

The authors have anticipated the social, economic, and cultural role of the English language in a multi-cultural and future democratic South Africa as demonstrated by an exercise to teach a two-sided argument in which students must work through the prompt: "English or an African language? Which language should be the national language?" (155). In this decidedly topical context, the English language becomes vested with political significance and serves as a language of national unity, encouraging participation in the outreach to reclaim South Africa's

contact with the rest of Africa and the world and the reinstatement of diplomatic, cultural, economic, and sporting ties that were breached during the bleak years of isolation as the South African government relentlessly pursued its racist agenda.

Dramatically different from the dull, formal English textbooks that have been drearily replicated for decades in South Africa, this *People's College* book seeks to help both black schoolchildren and adults overcome language deficiencies in an informal, entertaining, and engaging manner, utilizing scenarios that pertain to the lived experiences of the readers. For example, in the chapter on strategies for constructing arguments, the process is modeled on the topic of the pros and cons of keeping pets, illustrated by two photographs, one of a well-groomed and well-fed cat reclining comfortably and the other a mangy-looking dog foraging for scraps on a brazier in a township (149). The concept of pet ownership expressed in these images applies equally to ghetto dwellers or garden community residents, enabling learners to identify possible lines of argument for taking a position on the topic.

In their efforts to redress the balance in racial relations, writers, editors, and compilers Gail Cretchley and Jennifer Stacey, together with their team of contributors, have not neglected to subtly rewrite gender relationships. Placed in the margin at the bottom of the page, a sketch of a well-dressed black woman in high heels, comfortably seated in an armchair in the living room reading the paper (with an arrow labeled "me" pointing to her head) while her apron-donning husband washes dishes in the kitchen (59), serves to address a contentious theme in black women's writing. Frequently expressed frustrations in interviews with aspiring and established writers concern the exhaustion of the typical black woman who must perforce work two jobs, one outside

the home that entails the stressful commute to the white cities and towns to work long, demanding hours for a white employer, the other that begins with the return home after dark, the supervision of the children's homework, the household chores, and the preparation of the evening meal while the husband returns from work, settles in his chair with the paper and demands his supper.

This humorous (and pointed) dig at male insensitivity makes a candid attempt to raise awareness and to open a dialogue on gender issues as part of the process of constructing the "new" South Africa, the end goal of the nation-building discourse. The cartoon-like depiction of a possible and preferable reversal of gender roles provides a visual prompt to an exercise on sentence combining that requires the student to construct one sentence describing the two actions taking place simultaneously in the sketch, and in the process consciousness-raising is subtly introduced as a light-hearted jest with the serious intent of setting in motion the process of chipping away at the edges of deeply entrenched cultural conventions. By asking students to construct a written sentence to interpret the unconventional action taking place in the picture, they cannot escape engaging with the gender dynamics portrayed in the scenario.

Merely acknowledging the presence of black women in a composition text represents an important step in opposing apartheid ideology. However, as *Write Well* first appeared on the market in 1984, a decade before the apartheid government was voted out of office, it would be unrealistic to expect that black women after centuries of neglect, oversight, and obscurity as a result of traditional African patriarchal customs and then layered with Western gender norms, would be suddenly moved to

center stage. The text is dotted with photographs of black women in a variety of roles: as a sales assistant in a Johannesburg boutique, demonstrating the making of an omelet sans the traditional maid's uniform, and one of writer Miriam Tlali. A cartoon shows Cherrie, a glamorous, mini-skirted, young black secretary, rejecting the advances of a secret admirer who expects her to do his laundry. These fledgling attempts to raise the visibility of black women are to some extent offset by depictions of women in traditional roles: fetching water from the communal tap, as mothers feeding their families, and as clerical workers taking advantage of the boss's absence by applying lipstick and nail polish, and knitting at their desks. Black men, on the other hand, are shown in leadership roles as prime minister (Robert Mugabe appears twice), as three-piece suited business men, as a minister of religion, and in a variety of skilled and semi-skilled occupations.

While the "skills" aspect of *Write Well* represents an uncritical continuation of South Africa's national dependency on a formulaic approach to writing instruction, the text does indeed represent a radical departure from apartheid-era texts such as the Fletcher and Hartshorne series I discussed earlier. Elements of the current-traditional paradigm underlie the theoretical approach to *Write Well*, in particular a continued dependence on the modes of discourse. In the United States, by the end of the twentieth century, the modes were considered to be an outdated method of teaching writing, and as Connors claims, "the only teachers still making real classroom use of the modes are those out of touch with current theory. Stripped of their theoretical validity and much of their practical usefulness, the modes cling to a shadowy half-life in the attic of composition legends" ("Modes" 453). The back cover of *Write Well*

promises to help students "learn to write clearly and logically, to use topic sentences effectively," as well as offering students a truncated version of the famous modes of discourse, presenting instruction in "definitions, descriptions, and arguments" in preparation for the writing requirements in their academic subjects, and especially the national school-leaving examinations.

Letter Writing: A Staple of Composition Instruction in South Africa

Letter writing is an established component of the teaching of composition in South African schools, as evidenced by the inclusion of letter writing sections in all the textbooks I discuss that cover writing instruction in the country during the twentieth century. An underlying motive for including letter writing as a standard component of the national examinations seems likely to spring from the desire to instill in students the habits of polite society through a civic rhetoric, inculcating in young people the cultural conventions of white society and its inferred superior standards of social and business etiquette. Another reason for the dominance of this genre in composition textbooks is the need to prepare students for the job market, an emphasis that in itself is biased toward males, as white South African women did not enter the job market in substantial numbers until the 1970s and 1980s. This gender bias is evident in the *Darter's* text, which introduces letter writing as "a form of composition which does not always receive adequate attention in our schools. Merchants and other business men frequently complain that boys who have entered their business straight from school have been unable to put the simplest facts together in the form of a letter" (66).

In addition, learning to write letters was an important mode of communication for the black community. Due to migrant labor policies, many black families were separated for extended periods, and letter writing became virtually the sole means of maintaining contact with friends and relatives. If a person were illiterate, a friend or acquaintance would often agree to function as a scribe to take down the letter from dictation or would read a letter that had been received. A compelling example of this practice can be found in Pippa Stein's article on the performance of literacy histories by English teachers in a postgraduate program at the University of the Witwatersrand that she began directing in 1994. One black student wrote about her experiences as a ten-year-old living in the rural Northern Transvaal:

> My two sisters and I were amongst the few who stuck to school. Since the place did not have any electricity or telephones, communication was limited to letter writing. Many people would come to us every week to ask us to either read or write letters for them. The majority would be women who wanted to communicate with their husbands, children, or boyfriends. These were the most humbling moments I could remember from my youth, humbling because many of the old people would entrust me with the most private and intimate news of their lives.

As the author of this literacy autobiography reveals, being literate was an ability that was regarded with awe and respect as the elderly "would kneel asking for my services." While rendering a valuable service to her community, she reflects that "I feel now that I was exposed too early to adult life and, in a way, I feel robbed of my

childhood" (521-22). Although the author does not mention how letter writing was taught in school, it was likely a method similar to that laid out by J.P. Coetzer in his *Functional English*.[23]

Coetzer provides general rules for composing a letter, together with three pages of charts that detail the correct salutations and endings to be used depending upon the nature of the letter—private, business, official—and the relationship the writer has with the recipient. As is to be expected with a prescriptive approach to writing, students can scan the lists, selecting the appropriate salutation and ending from among the choices provided. Models demonstrating what is considered to be appropriate content, tone, language, and style in the body of the three categories of letters are noticeably absent—a dry list of formatting devices and formal and informal modes of address was considered adequate aid for undertaking the assignment. After all, as Coetzer says, the writer has to know what to say. Students without immediate inspiration and innate knowledge of what to say in the body of the letter can presumably read into his comments that they are deficient in a basic and necessary skill.

William Merrill Decker notes in his examination of letter writing habits in America before the advent of telecommunications that although letter writing manuals abounded, writers typically "modeled the letters they wrote on those they received; the authority of letter-writing manuals and conduct books would have played a secondary

[23] No date of publication is given for this text. Schumann, in his bibliography of grammar books, deplores the "reprehensible habit of many South African printers and publishers to omit any indication of the dates of their works [which] has resulted in much helpless gnashing of teeth" (v). He has listed six different texts co-authored by J.P. Coetzer and various authors (M.A. Malan; J.H.K. Vivier; S.W. Cloete; J.J. du Preez), four of which were published by Maskew Miller and the other two by Nasionale Pers (9). These texts are listed in a section on grammar books published after 1930 and up to 1945

role in encouraging an unquestioning acceptance of certain structures and phrasings" (95). Perhaps textbook authors imagined that schoolchildren wrote and received as many letters as their parents, thereby rendering any discussion of the content of the letter unnecessary for young writers who would simply use their acquired knowledge to construct appropriate correspondence.

A rare model is provided after the *Darter's* introduction to the art of letter writing, but surprisingly it is not a professional literary model for the students to emulate. "[W]ritten by a boy of twelve who had passed the fourth standard examination," it is presented 'as is' except that "the names and date have been altered." The teacher is instructed to "[i]nvite the pupils to criticise the form and style of it, and to state where it could be improved upon." Addressed to "My Dear Father," it recounts the boy's train journey from the family farm to his new boarding school in the city, relaying his first impressions of the school and the staff in the respectful manner expected of him (66-67).

The authors note that Standard Four students will be writing letters "mainly of a private nature" that will not be "couched in the same formal terms as a business communication." In the absence of a good model to present the ideal letter home from boarding school, the students presumably have to rely on their instincts as to the correct "form and style" the authors want the students to comment upon. Once again, the male-centeredness and elitism of the *New South African Grammar and Composition* remain uncompromised with the schoolboy addressing his first letter home to his father—his mother, referred to as "Mater," assigned to the background.

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according to the "date stamp of the South African Public Library" used to "place an approximate date to entries" (v).

Telling his father that "I think I shall like the school, and the fellows all seem very decent," he formally signs his name as "Alfred Graham" (67). Many boarding schools in South Africa are elite institutions for the English-speaking sector, true to the traditions of the British model of public schools, and the subject of a fascinating study by Peter Randall entitled *Little England on the Veld: The English Private School System in South Africa.* The letter home from boarding school is in itself almost a minor genre in South Africa, meaningful to the privileged minority who have attended one of these institutions, and in this case, another indicator of the rhetoric of empire—the boarding school in the veld.[24]

Van Zyl, the Bantu Education bureaucrat, notes that students who sit for the Junior Certificate and Matriculation examinations are "often accused of being unable to write letters properly." He places the blame on teachers who have failed to provide sufficient examples or opportunities to compose letters, thereby denying students "that continuous practice which is necessary for the cultivation of the art of letterwriting" (73). If examiners at the national level felt that matriculation students had not mastered letter-writing despite years of exposure to this genre, a responsive pedagogy would have led to the critique of existing methods and revised the instructional approach accordingly. Innovation and experimentation in the classroom do not thrive under conditions in which "a narrating Subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the students)" rehearse traditional pedagogical methods in which the teacher

[24] Many of the English-speaking boarding schools were single sex schools. Having attended two of these elite institutions myself, I remember the weekly letter writing sessions during which we wrote home to our parents informing them of our progress, our high regard for the teaching staff, and our affection for the school and its traditions. At one of these schools, our letters had to be placed unsealed in a mailbox for approval. On several occasions, letters were returned to me for infractions of content and tone. Keeping up appearances was obviously a key requirement of the mandated weekly letter home.

is cast in the role of the ultimate authority and students the vessels to be filled, a relationship that Freire aptly termed "the banking concept of education, [in which] knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider know nothing" (53). When the deposits of information being transferred to the students are "lifeless and petrified," education ends up "suffering from narration sickness" (52), an absence of any reflection on how students acquire knowledge. The responsibility for students' apparent poor performance on letter writing prompts under examination conditions is placed by van Zyl on their teachers. His diagnosis of the problem and his cure requiring that teachers provide students with more writing practice under the practice-makes-perfect rubric is an indication of an unawareness of or a refusal to theorize the act of writing. This blame game points to a serious flaw in the literature/grammar/comprehension model of language instruction in South Africa.

In Fletcher and Hartshorne's textbooks written for use in black schools during the Bantu Education era, letter writing is relegated to the appendix, indicative of the minimal role that writing plays in the English curriculum. Appendix A consists of one page, providing a short sample letter for students to copy, an invitation to a party, and the letter is dissected for its technical components, detailed as "heading, greeting, message, friendly close." The central part of the letter, the crux of the communication, is described simply as: "This part tells what you have to say" (66). As an example of the low priority attached to writing instruction in South Africa in the twentieth century, a century that ushered in mass education in the country, it reveals in part why writing has not flourished in the black community, or in any of South Africa's racially

segregated school systems, for that matter. Untheorized and undervalued, writing in South African schools has been reduced to a series of formulae that if copied laboriously by hand a sufficient number of times will somehow sink into the student's subconscious, ready to be retrieved at a moment's notice.

Composition as the Appendix: The Bare Bones Approach to Essay Writing

In South Africa, composition theory as it is formulated in the United States remains largely unexplored territory and is likely to remain so as long as the linguistics approach to language instruction retains its strong influence. This neglect of and resistance to the wealth of composition theory generated in the United States is unfortunate, especially as a great deal of research has centered on minority writing, Ebonics (or black English), and gender issues in the composition classroom, all of which would be eminently applicable to the South African context. Based upon my perusal of several composition and grammar textbooks used in South African schools from the 1970-1980s, learning how to move beyond paragraph construction to a fully-fledged essay consistently receives the least amount of space and attention in the typical English textbook. This coincides with my memories of the uninspiring and repetitive content of the textbooks I was assigned in English classes while in school in Natal and the Transvaal during the 1950s and 1960s.

In Coetzer's *Functional English* for Standards VII and VIII, "The Composition or Essay" is tucked away in the middle of the book, sandwiched ironically between "Common Errors" and "Abbreviations." I say ironically because the avoidance of error and proper usage is a hallmark of language instruction from primary school to

university level in South Africa, and the lack of enthusiasm for teaching writing as a meaningful act of communication that students might actually enjoy is patently clear by its abbreviated nature. The opening to Coetzer's sermon on the essay begins thus: "No essay of any value can be written without ideas. The writer must know what to say. He must therefore have sufficient knowledge of the subject to be able to use his imagination. Secondly, the writer must know how to express himself" (112).

This attitude to invention has its roots in eighteenth-century rhetorical theories that were then carried over into the nineteenth-century, where they remained influential. Sharon Crowley contends that "students who inherited an eighteenth-century model of the discovery process were forced to rely primarily upon their native ability where invention was concerned, an ability they presumably brought to the writing course." Additionally, the writer's accumulated worldly knowledge serves as a resource. Consequently, "the discovery process takes on an empirical cast; the writer is to look to the world about her . . . rhetorical invention deals not with the discovery of the arguments available to a writer, but with her resources as observer and researcher" (51-52).

In the absence of alternative theories of writing instruction, authors of composition texts in South Africa appear to have merely replicated outdated theories of composition that were introduced into the country in the early nineteenth-century. Coetzer's text is substantially the same as other government-approved texts. Dryly laying down the law on the science of the essay, Coetzer continues to admonish students: "Once you have chosen your title, refer repeatedly to it to make sure of its scope and purpose and that you are not digressing" (113). Woe betide the student who

follows his or her imagination, daring to explore the twists and turns that might reveal new threads and greater insights. Coetzer's abbreviated course in essay writing replicates the five-paragraph theme approach which provides the blueprint for efficiently getting the job done, ensuring a one-draft product trimmed of all fat, just the bare bones.

R.M. Cohen and J.L. McGregor's *A New English Course for the Middle School* (undated), a 262 page textbook, distills instruction in the art of composition into a mere handful of sentences.[25] Atop a list of 41 topics for the construction of a paragraph is the instruction: "Be as accurate and, at the same time, as interesting as you can" (139). One of the main criticisms of the current-traditional paradigm is that the focus on correctness tends to freeze students' capacity to invent, as students fear the red pen bleeding over their efforts. Yet Cohen and McGregor's admonition to write correctly while writing creatively within a single paragraph puts the emphasis on accuracy. Preceding a list of 156 essay topics, the authors provide the sum total of three "helpful hints":

1. The best English is the simplest English; avoid pompous words and long, involved sentences.
2. Describe accurately, without affectations such as *Lady Moon* or *Dame Nature*.
3. Choose a subject with which you are familiar, i.e. a place you have seen, or an experience of your own. (140)

[25] Although this undated textbook published by Maskew Miller does not indicate which educational system it was geared for, the content suggests that it was written for the white school market, a specialty of publishers such as Maskew Miller.

The substantial list of essay topics provided by the authors provides an interesting commentary on the privileged lives of the average white school child in South Africa, traveling extensively around the country, involved in a variety of after school activities, and attending a wide range of cultural and sporting activities. Precisely three topics invite students to write about their perceptions of South Africa's black population: "Our Bantu cook, or wash-girl, or house-boy;" "An actual visit to a Bantu kraal or to a settlement in a town;" "A Zulu war dance." In each case, the otherness of Africans is apparent as domestic workers are inevitably "Bantu," Africans have distinct living arrangements, and the exoticism of African culture and its martial overtones are evident.[26]

However, in fairness to Coetzer and his composition cohorts, schooling in South Africa was and is currently still predicated on the final outcome, the national examination, in this case the Junior Certificate and the strictures of the prescribed course of study. This straightjacket approach to the teaching of English does not allow for innovation or experimentation, and the authors of composition texts have little intellectual or financial incentive for producing an innovative approach to the teaching of writing. With the comprehension test constituting a major portion of the examination, the lean and mean approach to essay writing is designed to provide students with a surefire approach to writing under the pressure of the stopwatch and the strictures of the red pen. This unrelenting obsession with reading and religiously following the instructions atop the examination paper is reflected in the direction

[26] Attending a Zulu war dance was an established activity on the tourist agenda. On the Witwatersrand, the concentration of mining activity and the housing of migrant black labor in segregated hostels provided the venue and the cast for a regular schedule of war dances in full regalia. These events were

heading a list of 83 essay subjects provided by Coetzer: "Compositions should consist of 300-350 words, i.e., 40 lines" (114). A diverse list of topics from which to choose is provided, such as "The joys of gardening;" "Waiting for a train at a lonely siding in the veld;" "A dog describes a day at the seaside;" "My fellow suffers in the examination room." However, regardless of the topic chosen, the production line approach to essay writing dictates a set amount of words to be spilled on the page, neatly corralled within the 40-line boundaries—a method that encourages brevity rather than a thoughtful exploration of ideas. Students are trained to write for examination purposes, anxious to fulfill the requirements administered by scores of examiners trained to check for the faithful replication of formulae and correct usage conventions.

South Africa's national obsession with correct usage was a bone of contention with Frank Smith in 1992 during his short tenure as chair of the recently formed Department of Applied English Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. Smith taught an honors seminar for mostly experienced English teachers. To his dismay, mechanics were a focus of the three-hour written test administered to students hoping to gain admittance to the seminar, which required "reading extracts from transformational grammar texts and doing 'tree structure' analyses of simple sentences" (23). Although linguistics was influential in composition studies in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, stimulated by the potential of Noam Chomsky's theory of transformational grammar, "[a]fter 1980, linguistics was no longer seen as a panacea for improving student writing, and

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a mecca for foreign tourists, representing for them a slice of "authentic" African culture and ubiquitous photo opportunities.

applications of structural linguistics, Chomsky's generative linguistics, and sociolinguistics faded from composition journals." Initially thought to be a "methodological breakthrough, a way of describing the messy data of language with orderly rules that could obtain universally," the formal rules of generative grammar were not necessarily useful for unordered, everyday language usage (Faigley 83-84). But once again, in the South African context, the outmoded content of the test was justified on the grounds that black students tend to perform well on this assignment and like to teach this method to their students.

Students in Smith's honors seminar comprised a cross section of South Africa's racial makeup. He asked his students to design a new course to present to the faculty for approval at the end of the semester. Frequently, the students were frustrated when called upon to think critically and independently, for this was an alien concept to them, having been educated in the banking system that Freire identifies. As Smith comments: "Students became passive recipients of information, learning by rote. They could not discuss. Questions usually tested children's memories, not their understanding" (56). Education throughout South Africa has fixated on what has been called the 'full frontal' model in which the teacher stands in front of the class controlling the flow of information by lecturing, asking questions that require the recitation of predictable responses and, which is as I have shown, a characteristic feature of South African composition textbooks, directing and determining the outcome of invention exercises.

During a visit to Soweto, Smith sat in on an English class in a school that took fee-paying students and that was considered privileged in comparison with other

schools in the township. Reading was taught by passing one book around the class of forty students, and as the student in possession of the book read the assigned passage, the rest of the class strained to hear in the crowded classroom and waited to be called upon to answer questions. Trying to get a feeling for the type of written work that the students were required to do in the class, Smith sat down next to a student to look at her open notebook, noting that

> the students had copied definitions and examples of different kinds of English sentences. The student next to me had many of them wrong. Line after line, the teacher had put a line in red ink through her answers, with no explanation of what the error or correct response might be. But the teacher's final comment was '30/60—good work!' The typical pattern of the English textbook was a half-page passage (the first was from Shakespeare) followed by about five pages of smaller- type questions and exercises. (74)

What Smith observed is a staple of English classes in South Africa: the comprehension passage followed by a series of questions to test the students' understanding of the passage. That the passage was from Shakespeare is not surprising considering that the canonical works of European masters were standard fare on national exams.

Smith's frustration with the teaching of writing as a study of mechanical correctness that so concerns and paralyzes the students in his honors seminar is obviously a minority position in South Africa.[27] A study conducted at the University

[27] Smith did not fulfill his contract at Wits, leaving before his term was up because he saw his efforts to reform the curriculum as futile. In *Whose Language? What Power?*, he documents his experience, a book which I found absorbing as he analyzes the teaching of writing in South Africa from his perspective as an American scholar.

of Cape Town circa 1976 entitled *Errors in English Essays: A Comparative and Statistical Approach to First-Year University Work* by M.L. Fielding is indicative of this nationwide obsession with error. Over two hundred pages are devoted to the detailed study of errors found in first-year student papers written at UCT. It makes for depressing reading indeed.

A comparable situation arose in the United States with the advent of open admissions policies in the 1970s that guaranteed college entrance to all high school graduates. This decision lead to an outcry from instructors who were overwhelmed by having many students enrolled in their classes who lacked the preparation necessary to cope with college work. Mina Shaughnessy's seminal study, *Errors and Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing*, arose from her experience at the City College of New York where, instead of throwing up her hands in horror at the hoards of under-prepared students she was required to teach, she systematically examined the types of errors students made in their papers, determining that rather than providing evidence of illogical thinking or lack of intelligence, the errors could be reduced to a few recurring patterns. Many of these basic writers were members of minority and lower-income groups who found acclimatization to the academic discourse community challenging due to their cultural and economic marginalization.

Fielding, in the opening paragraph of his introduction, notes that the "essay is important, not only because it is a useful means of displaying a well-organised body of knowledge, but also because it is the only adequate indication of a student's knowledge of spelling, punctuation, sentence and paragraph structure, and grammar" (1). He goes on to say:

> Any course in English language, in order to give students the knowledge and skills necessary for their varied university courses, and to ensure that they are well equipped professionally, has to concern itself not only with the so-called mechanical skills such as spelling, punctuation, and sentence and paragraph structure, but also with problems of vocabulary, idiomatic expression and grammar. It should, in addition be concerned with the acquisition and spread of ideas.

A concern with the rhetorical features of the students' essays are (predictably) tacked on almost as an afterthought. An inability to construct argumentative, analytical essays is blamed on inattention to grammatical correctness. The approach seems to be that if the mechanical errors are redlined, the communication of ideas in the essay will somehow fall into place. In discussing "the purpose of the investigation," Fielding hopes that by "changing numbers of errors and changes in the gravity of errors made," this would be a "useful indication of the students' ability to write English" (6). Students were unpracticed in the demands of formal usage, frequently demonstrating their inability to recognize the language shift between comfortable colloquial English and the distanced, detached language of academia.[28] Troublesome to the researchers were common grammatical errors such as verb agreements, inconsistent tenses, and a host of usage problems. Singled out under the category of unacceptable language was the use of contractions and inappropriate word choice. Worrisome, too, were students who randomly expressed their thoughts on the page without coherent organization.

[28] In his essay "Inventing the University," David Bartholomae argues that students need to be socialized into the writing conventions of academia. "The student" he claims, "has to learn to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of our community" (192).

The content of the papers was subsumed under correctness issues; whether the students wrote intelligent, thoughtful papers that merely needed better editing and organizing was lost in the sea of mechanics.

As apartheid policies were gradually dismantled in the 1990s, allowing black students the opportunity to enroll in white universities, the alarming failure rate of first-year black students at white universities was blamed overwhelmingly on their inadequate facility with the English language. The philosophy of these institutions to English language instruction was reflected in the attitudes expressed repeatedly by the faculty of Smith's department: "Lecture analytically on the correct forms, give lots of examples and appropriate readings, require students to write sentences and paragraphs as often as possible, and provide swift feedback on every error that was made." This structured approach to the teaching of writing was supported, despite reservations about the effectiveness of this method, because the emphasis on grades and regular examinations in the national education system demanded strict standards and objective evaluation. Additionally, the faculty rationalized, it was fairer to black students to enforce this type of instruction as "black students were accustomed to rigidly structured 'transmission' styles of teaching and indeed preferred them as they did not have the habit of thinking for themselves" (18).

The teaching of composition in South Africa has been mired in the policing of correctness, coherence, and conciseness, rules that have been motivated by an insistence on maintaining white hegemony at all costs. By maintaining a tight rein on the circulation of knowledge, composition has been taught as a skill to be mastered through years of endless drills and testing. This policy has come at the expense of

teaching composition as a fruitful means of knowledge construction, ripe with the possibilities for critiquing the so-called common sense categories of gender, race, and class. Timothy Barnett contends that "whiteness" continues to dominate English studies in the United States because "the discipline seems unable or unwilling to question 'whiteness' in all its complexity despite (because of?) the efforts of literary, creative writing, and composition teachers and scholars to bring to the foreground issues of race having to do with multiple 'Others.'" He notes that "another attribute often credited to 'whiteness' [is] its dependence on rules, order, and formal institutional structures" (10-11). English studies in South Africa have only very recently begun to critique the imbrication of whiteness in the academy, an examination that it has not embraced willingly. The stranglehold of the white minority on literacy instruction in South Africa has been responsible for an unimaginative and circumscribed approach to the teaching of writing.

It is apparent from my critique of grammar and composition textbooks that serve as the foundation for writing instruction in South African schools that the curriculum has been consistently male-centered until the 1980s, when the fallout from the Soweto rebellion of 1976 gained momentum, causing an unprecedented upheaval in the country. The appearance of black women as speaking subjects in the composition text *Write Well* is evidence of this sea change in society. Learning to write in South Africa has been predicated on the worldview of white males. As a young girl growing up in South Africa, I had very little interest in English classes, for they did not represent the culture nor the landscape that I was familiar with.

While I may have been disenchanted with the European canon that I was required to study in order to be considered literate in white society, for black women in South Africa, their exposure to literacy has been an utterly alienating and disempowering experience. They have suffered the most extreme form of intellectual impoverishment by an educational system that compounded the multiple forms of oppression they were exposed to. They have been restrained from "reading the world" and making sense of it from their own perspective as subalterns who have been politically, economically, and culturally marginalized. Instead of rehearsing generative grammar exercises suited to idealized language uses, these women needed stimulating, meaningful, and realistic writing classes that invited the invention of "generative themes," engaging exercises that situated students as agents and constructors of knowledge, critically and consciously deploying their insights gained authentically through their lived experience. In a country that seems assured a permanent place in history for its extreme experiment in social engineering, the value of literacy to a subaltern class is far more pressing than an examination of the literary traditions of the politically enfranchised and economically privileged.

CHAPTER FOUR

Critical Literacy in Action: Women Writing What They Like

The name of educator, theorist, and activist Paulo Freire is synonymous with the movement to teach literacy as political empowerment and consciousness-raising, particularly in Latin-America. Considering the influence of Freire and his insights in bringing about a revitalization of oppressed peoples through his method of conscientizing adult learners in literacy classes, his system would seem uniquely suited to helping the disenfranchised and undereducated black majority in South Africa rise up and topple the white minority government.[1] Freire's pedagogy extends far beyond the bounds of traditional approaches to basic literacy training that consider the mission accomplished once learners demonstrate an elementary ability to decode and encode text. Surprisingly, relatively little is known about the deployment of Freirean literacy methods in South Africa during the anti-apartheid struggle.[2] My interest in this chapter is in charting the success of Freirean intervention in helping black women in South Africa to become literate, to develop a sense of agency, and to join the anti-apartheid struggle as active and effective cultural workers determined to bring about the demise of the government. I begin by establishing the ineffectiveness

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[1] Freire uses the term "conscientização" which is described in his preface to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (17).

[2] There had been previous attempts to teach radical literacy to the black community. One such attempt began in 1925 when the Communist Party founded a night school in a slum in Ferreirastown, Johannesburg. Edward Roux writes that students were "taught by candle-light, without blackboards or desks. The pupils sat on benches and struggled with complicated political doctrine at the same time as they learnt their letters. Later more suitable readers were provided. " The school thrived for several years until a dispute between the party and African trade unionists led to its demise (346).

of government-sponsored adult literacy instruction during the apartheid era as it pertained to black women in particular. Next, I trace the importation of Freirean literacy methodology into the country and surreptitious attempts to disseminate his work in the black community. I then explore the intersections of conscientization and the emergence of testimonials written by basic writers, several of which were generated by the need to provide suitable material for adult learners in non-government sponsored programs. These texts provide an important historical record of the reemergence of a women's rhetorical tradition, one that bears the hallmarks of Freirean conscientization as women become agents of change in the political ferment stirred up by the Soweto riots of 1976.

The Competing Ideologies of Adult Literacy Programs

While many black students dropped out of school after the first four years under the Bantu Education system, only a limited number of opportunities were available for adults who wanted to continue their education or for those who needed basic literacy instruction. Prior to the election of the National Party in 1948 and its drastic reorganization of African education that took effect in 1953, Africans could enroll in private correspondence classes and in primary and secondary education classes that were offered at night. One of the more successful attempts to offer literacy instruction to the African community began in 1945 under the auspices of the South African Institute for Race Relations, which offered instruction in the two official white languages and in several African languages. Committed to tightening official control of South Africa's majority black population, the Native Affairs Department in 1955

introduced strict new regulations pertaining to adult literacy instruction, including restrictions on the grant-in-aid program that had supplemented the funds of privately run operations. Whether subsidized by the government or not, all literacy programs were now regulated by Pretoria, the seat of bureaucracy.

In 1967, in a sweeping move to establish control, permits were denied for all programs that operated in areas classified as white only, and only those located in the townships, in the homelands, and in black compounds of mining or industrial operations were permitted to operate. This heavy-handed decision had a particularly harsh impact on black women who were employed as domestic workers and who lived on the premises of their employers. Due to the long hours of service and the unavailability of transportation at night, it became virtually impossible for domestic servants to attend classes now offered only in the townships (Horrell, *Bantu* 19-20). In an attempt to fill the void left by the forced closure of so many classes, several black organizations worked to generate an interest in reestablishing literacy instruction. In 1968, the National Council of African Women urged its members to establish literacy classes in their communities, and as a result, classes in several towns were founded. For example, in the township of Daveyton near Benoni, a town located in the heavily industrialized East Rand area surrounding Johannesburg, classes were offered at ten centers which were staffed by approximately 40 volunteer teachers, predominantly women (113).

State-sponsored programs provided the bulk of adult literacy instruction, yet government-run classes were less successful in helping blacks become literate. Shelley Tracey, an instructor and writer of course materials with the literacy project Use,

Speak and Write English (USWE), contends that boosting the confidence of learners did not factor into the instruction, operating as government programs did from the premise that "a little of this kind of learning might be dangerous" (*Buang* 19-20). Reading materials provided by the majority of state-run literacy programs were inappropriate for non-traditional learners, being invariably juvenile in nature and offensive to women by reinforcing the very patriarchal attitudes that had contributed to their oppression and that continued to undermine their self-esteem. Women learning to read are unlikely to be motivated to continue making sacrifices in time and money to get to class when they are asked to struggle through a course text that reinforces a stereotypical domestic scenario. Admitting that she is "adding a bit of parody," Tracey gives an example of a typical reading passage: "See Sam and Betty. Sam is a man. Betty is a woman. Sam is happy. He is happy because Betty is a good wife. Betty is cooking. Sam is watching. Betty is a good cook. Sam is pleased to see Betty cooking" (20). Texts used in government-run classes were not an anomaly, for they merely reflected the stereotypical images of women that proliferated in the South African male-dominated media.

As Tracey asserts, local literature invariably "entrenches the acceptance of women as superficial, powerless and materialistic, or the objects of temptation and corruption" (*Buang* 22). Stereotyping black women was very apparent, for example, in *Drum* magazine, a publication that Dorothy Driver notes "is crucial in South African literary and cultural history" because it provided a vibrant forum for aspiring black (mostly male) writers. In Driver's essay, she examines how *Drum* manipulated gender construction when the black population became increasingly urbanized and

modernized. As gender roles were reshaped, "women's voices were silenced and a set of 'feminine' voices were constructed in their place." Driver charges that "Not only was *Drum*'s so-called 'vibrancy' constructed at women's expense, but the magazine's shift from rural 'past' to urban 'present' was negotiated largely by means of belittling and damaging misrepresentations of women" (231-32).

Unsympathetic literacy instructors who had no regard for building the self-esteem of the women in their classes and who actively encouraged their oppression led to the further demoralization of these learners. For Monica Mnguni, government-sponsored literacy classes during the apartheid era failed to fulfill the needs of black women, even if they completed the course as they "still fe[lt] inadequate and unable to face life alone," causing them to "lose confidence in education." The type of instruction they received was detrimental to their self-esteem in that it further undermined the low level of confidence with which they entered the program. Mnguni notes that it was not uncommon for women to be deliberately humiliated in class by being manipulated or coerced by the instructor into giving incorrect answers in front of male students, and also being called upon to respond to questions in English when they had no knowledge of the language (*Buang* 23).

The second-class status of women affected every aspect of their lives, and the success or failure of women in literacy classes was often governed by circumstances outside the classroom that were due to gender discrimination. For many women employed as domestic servants, it was very difficult to attend class on a regular basis due to the unpredictable demands of their employers, who invariably expected their maids to baby sit whenever required and cook for and clean up after evening guests.

Women living in the townships where classes were held were handicapped by having to depend on the availability and/or reliability of baby-sitters, making it difficult to commit to regular attendance. Frequently, the unsupportive or downright hostile attitudes of husbands to their wives' attempts to become literate disrupted their plans and further discouraged women from attempting to overcome illiteracy. Dawn Norton, from English Literacy Project (ELP), mentions that, in addition to feeling overburdened by excessive demands on their time at home when they returned from work, many women complained of husbands who were upset when dinner was late, or "jealous husbands who didn't want their wives to attend literacy classes if they themselves were illiterate or who thought that their wives were seeing other men instead of attending class" (*Buang* 26). Given these negative attitudes to women's acquiring literacy and the constant harassment and humiliation they endured as they sought to achieve their goals, it is laudable that so many women did persevere.

Obstacles that can derail even the most concerted attempts to overcome illiteracy are too frequently not given the serious consideration they deserve, especially when the hurdles address issues faced predominantly by women. Black women routinely encountered not one but several impediments as they fought for the right to literacy. A recurring theme in interviews is that of having to cope with the unremitting exhaustion that shadows black women as they struggle to work long hours both inside and outside the home, often compounded by the absence of both the physical and emotional support of the men in their lives. In turn, this affects literacy teachers who have to contend with women in their classes fighting exhaustion, making it impossible for them to concentrate fully on the task at hand. Included in the bundle

of issues that militate against women's success in acquiring literacy are physical concerns, such as the inability to read because eye examinations and eyeglasses are not affordable and/or not available. So widespread is the problem that one frustrated teacher urged that "no literacy training should be given until eyesight check is done—spectacles provided if found necessary." Yet another teacher suggested that the government provide free eyesight testing (French 107). Additional deterrents literacy workers regularly encountered that particularly affected women were transportation problems at night after class ended, personal safety concerns in violent and dark townships, being unable to concentrate in class due to persistent money problems, ridicule by fellow workers for attending literacy classes, and disrespect from children because their mother was illiterate.

Clearly, the materiality of women's literacy is not immaterial, but is an underlying and persistent cause why many Third World women are never able to achieve their aspirations of becoming literate as a first step on the long and torturous road to escaping poverty in the ghettos. In fact, many black mothers in South Africa have given up hope of a better life for themselves, preferring to live vicariously through their attempts to provide for their children's education, thereby laying the foundations for the next generation by doing everything within their limited power to keep children in school and out of trouble on the streets.

It is important to consider how being unable to read or write affects the self-esteem of adults, a concern addressed by Freire who sought to expose and examine the sources of discrimination and disadvantage.[3] As Tracey observes through her work

[3] References to Freire's methodology are often absent in discussions of NGO literacy groups operating in South Africa during the embattled 1970s and 1980s. For instance, at the Conference on Women and

with USWE, "Many illiterate people are shy and embarrassed by what they see as their stupidity. Women learners, in particular, lack self-confidence and tend to condemn themselves. They think they might even be too stupid to learn anything. They blame themselves for their lack of education" (*Buang* 19). "Self-depreciation," notes Freire, is common among the oppressed for "[s]o often do they hear that they are good for nothing, know nothing and are incapable of learning anything . . . that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness" (45).

Freirean Literacy Initiatives and the Anti-Apartheid Movement

The promotion of literacy in the African community became a major objective of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), which emerged in 1968 on university campuses in South Africa as a result of the unique problems that confronted black students due to the restrictions that apartheid laws placed on their freedom of movement. Ellen Kuzwayo, in her autobiography *Call Me Woman*, identifies literacy as "a project highlighted as first priority in South Africa by blacks," and provides first-hand evidence of the government's targeting of these groups as her son Bakone was arrested for his involvement with the University Christian Movement (UCM) and the South African Students' Organization (SASO).[4] As a leader of UCM, a multi-racial

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Writing sponsored by the Transvaal chapter of the Congress of South African Writers in 1988, Shelley Tracey presented a paper on her work with USWE at the session entitled Women and Literacy. Though the methods employed by the group are clearly inspired by Freirean concepts, no mention is made of his towering presence. On the one hand, it seems likely that this omission is strategic in that government spies would have infiltrated any group promoting cultural production that threatened the survival of apartheid. It would have been impossible to continue operations if literacy groups proclaimed their reverence of Freire, a banned figure in South Africa. However, on the other hand, the keyword "conscientization" is liberally used at conferences and in documents, despite being a hot button guaranteed to cause police intervention.

[4] In discussing the "community education, literacy and health projects" launched by the South African Student Organization (SASO), an organization founded in 1969 expressly for black students, Sebiletso

student organization, Bakone "slept and dreamt literacy twenty-four hours a day" (185), motivated by the movement's goal of encouraging university students of all races to volunteer as literacy instructors in black townships for short periods during their school vacations. From 1969-1971, he "gave his mind, body, soul and emotions to the programme," a dedication that led to him being placed under house arrest in Mafikeng, a small town near the Botswana border, and subject to the notorious banning orders which effectively prevented him from addressing a gathering, from being interviewed, limited his contacts with other people to one person at a time, and made it an offense to quote him. The literacy program sponsored by this organization ceased after UCM, together with Black Community Programmes (BCP) and other black organizations, including flourishing writers groups in the townships, were banned in 1977 by the government as part of a host of repressive measures aimed at curbing any activity that could be interpreted as insurrection in the climate of political awakening that was fueled by the Soweto uprising of 1976.

UCM's literacy program ran into trouble because it had adopted Freire's radical approach to literacy. Kumi Naidoo states in a footnote in his essay "The Politics of Student Resistance in the 1980s" that Freire's "ideas were consciously studied and recommendations extracted by some youth organizations and educational projects in South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s." The deployment of Freire has been "uneven and the application of his theory has been very selective. Where this did occur however, it would have been restricted to the leadership elements of such organizations" (142).

Mokone Matabane comments that these programs had a "definite radical political content [and] like its response to all radical literacy programs before, the government's answer to SASO's agenda was ruthless. The organization was banned and many of the leaders were arrested or forced to operate either underground or in exile" (346).

Teachers of critical literacy invariably find themselves attracting the negative attention of the authorities in countries ruled by repressive regimes because their revolutionary methods have an overtly political agenda that is regarded with suspicion for its subversive potential in raising the consciousness of adult learners. The South African government feared the reputation, the research, and the results of Freire's campaign to conscientize oppressed peoples, particularly in South America and Africa, and his works were added to the notorious list of banned publications.[5] The harsh punishment metered out to Kuzwayo's son for his involvement in a literacy campaign conducted without government sanction is indicative of the risks that literacy workers in South Africa assumed when setting out to implement Freirean-style methods that have the potential for intervening in and interrupting repressive, regressive governments.

The extent to which the radical educational methods of Freire were deployed in South Africa during the concerted campaign to overthrow the apartheid government in the 1970s and 1980s is difficult to assess. Due to a repressive state apparatus, literacy workers operating without government sanction were forced to go about their work under a cloud of suspicion and constant threats that necessitated resorting to subterfuge.[6] Thus, much of the underground activities of these groups remains undocumented. Freire's methodology was one of many intellectual movements that the South African government sought to inoculate and isolate its citizens from as it scrambled to fortify the *laager*, a circling of the wagons mentality inherited from

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[5] A draconian campaign of censorship was implemented through a series of laws such as the Suppression of Communism Act (1950), the Riotous Assemblies Act (1956), and the Publications Act (1963, amended 1974), intended to bolster apartheid ideology by quelling opposition.

[6] Matabane writes about the "shared common challenges" faced by private literacy programs, many of which functioned under apartheid as "community self-help projects." Noting the "extremely difficult circumstances under which they operate[d]," such as the persistent interference of the authorities and

Afrikaner frontier history and conveniently exploited to sustain its vision of a permanent and paternalistic white presence on the southern tip of Africa, the final bulwark against *swart gevaar*—black peril.

That Freire's methods were circulating in the country is evident, although not well documented. The mysteries of the concept of critical literacy as revealed to Judge Boshoff by Black Consciousness leader Steve Biko during his trial are detailed in *I Write What I Like*, a collection of his writings. In a partial transcript of the 1974 trial of leaders of SASO and BCP included in Biko's book, David Soggot—a member of the defense team—prompts Biko to explain to the judge why he had been undertaking research in the townships. Biko provides an overview of how literacy workers prepare to set up programs in the community by listening to ordinary people's conversations in order to discover the generative themes, those pressing and oppressive local issues that are to be tapped as *topoi* for literacy classes aimed at conscientizing learners and offering them hope for a future free of apartheid (111-19). As Freire insists, it is necessary that "revolutionary leaders do not go to the people in order to bring them a message of 'salvation,' but in order to come to know through dialogue with them both their *objective situation* and their *awareness* of that situation . . . " (76, emphasis in original).

The Reverend Colin Collins, a Catholic priest, is credited with smuggling copies of Freire's work into South Africa, photocopying some five-hundred copies of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and distributing them (Bird 212). In Donaldo Macedo's introduction to the thirtieth anniversary edition of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he

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chronic underfunding, information on small-scale literacy programs that operated from an anti-apartheid stance is "virtually nonexistent" (348).

acknowledges that in "most totalitarian states" people "risked cruel punishment, including imprisonment" if caught reading this work. He goes on to mention that

> I remember meeting a South African student in Boston who told me that students would photocopy chapters of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and share them with their classmates and peers. Sometimes, given the long list of students waiting to read Freire, they would have to wait for weeks before they were able to get their hands on a photocopied chapter. (12)

Together with Basil Moore, a Methodist minister, Collins co-founded UCM in 1967.[7] This movement enabled black university students to work together to promote solidarity and consciousness, an opportunity that would not have presented itself if black students had been restricted to membership in the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS), an organization whose power base was firmly entrenched on white campuses, although sympathetic to issues of black empowerment. The Black Consciousness Movement grew out of the supportive environment provided by UCM. With copies of Freire's banned work circulating and gaining attention, critical literacy was selected as the preferred method when increasing the literacy levels of the black population was established as a key component of the movement's modus operandi.

Freire's emphasis on the immersion of learners in a critical awareness of the political connotations of language as a fundamental step to acquiring literacy is geared

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[7] Biko hired Anne Hope, a member of the International Grail Movement, to organize a Freirean-style literacy campaign. As a result of her work, she was arrested and deported, only recently being allowed to return to South Africa. In 1974, Hope and Sally Timmel founded a literacy training program in Kenya called Development Education and Leadership Teams in Action (DELTA). Hope and Timmel co-authored *Training for Transformation: A Handbook for Community Workers* in 1984, an approach to literacy training that embodies the Freirean concept of conscientization within a religious framework.

to segments of the population who are oppressed, dispossessed, and rendered voiceless and invisible in society. Being denied the right to voice their opinions, situated as they are on the margins of society by virtue of class, race, and, all too often in Third World contexts, gender, these people are invariably conditioned to their status as victims of economic, political, and social conditions beyond their control. Critical literacy as theorized and practiced by Freire is considered subversive because it undermines the status quo by questioning and exposing the ideological content of words. Freire believes that being technically literate is simply not enough, for literacy must be combined with an attitude of critical consciousness, what he calls *conscientização*, in order to escape from perpetual powerlessness and dependency. This requires that participants in literacy classes not only reflect on the ideology that informs words and allows people to name the world but also, most importantly, to take action to transform the world. As Freire contends:

> Those who have been denied their primordial right to speak their word must first reclaim this right and prevent the continuation of this dehumanizing aggression.
>
> If it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings. Dialogue is thus an existential necessity. (69)

In literacy classes, this process is set in motion through the selection of generative themes that initiate a dialogue between learners and facilitators. As learners decode words, supplemented by the viewing of images, they are asked to reflect upon their

personal situation, thus stimulating a critical examination of their positioning in society and the material conditions of their lives.

During his testimony, Biko selects the word 'hostel' to describe to the white judge how generative themes form the basis of the type of literacy instruction that he was engaged in as a member of UCM. As a regular passenger on a bus that each morning passed a hostel—sex-segregated barrack-type housing provided by the government for black male workers—streams of women were seen leaving the premises, acting in defiance of the ban on their presence. Routinely at this point in the trip, the conversation on the bus would turn to an animated and agitated discussion among the black passengers about the white government and its rigid and unwarranted control over the private lives of male workers by denying them the right to heterosexual relationships (113). If in a critical literacy class the word 'hostel' had been emptied of its ideological content in apartheid-era South Africa, contradicted by a photo of the daily exodus of women from a hostel in the early morning, the responses from women who participated in this ritual and the male hostel dwellers who were legally deprived of female companionship would have been sharply critical. Those most intimately affected by the hostel regulations would probably not need much prompting to initiate a dialogue with the class and the instructor from a position of authority, reinforced by anger and resentment.

J.J.W. Aitchison records that "[i]n the early seventies, small university groups inspired by their illegal copies of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* tried out radical literacy work on a very small group or on a one to one basis without any major impact on South Africa's literacy statistics," exposing probably only about two

thousand people to these methods (7). Despite the limited distribution of Freire's work and the small number of people who were exposed to his methods, Aitchison's statement that there were "enormous consequences" when UCM and BCM adopted Freire's conscientization method points to the radical potential of critical literacy to rouse latent revolutionary inclinations in historically oppressed peoples. Once the genie was let out of the bottle, so to speak, Freire's empowering pedagogy had the potential to destabilize the already volatile situation in townships through the country.

As Henry Giroux insists, critical literacy is at its most potent in "anti-colonial and postcolonial discourse," a condition often diluted or disregarded by North American intellectuals who have "appropriated it in ways that denude it of some of its most important political insights" (15). "Freire's writings," Giroux affirms, "embody a mode of discursive struggle and opposition that not only challenges the oppressive machinery of the State but is also sympathetic to the formation of new cultural subjects and movements engaged in the struggle over the modernist values of freedom, equality, and justice." He also notes the applicability of Freire's thought to a country such as apartheid-era South Africa (17). When analyzed through the perilous lens of the anti-apartheid struggle, it is evident that individuals and groups that embraced Freire's teachings took great risks, of which Steve Biko's death and many other anti-apartheid activists is a painful reminder. The dangers faced by opponents to dictatorial governments illuminate Giroux's concern for a Western appropriation of critical literacy as a "static plunge into a textuality disembodied from human struggles," when Freire envisioned and practiced a "politics of literacy forged in the political and material dislocations of regimes that exploit, oppress, expel, maim, and ruin human

life" (18). It is against this chilling colonial backdrop that I examine the traces of Freire in black women's texts as they took on the apartheid machine and rigorously deconstructed its architecture.

Feminizing Freire: Engaging Women in the Anti-Apartheid Struggle

Literacy as a gendered practice has concerned feminists for some time. As Carroll Smith-Rosenberg notes, "Contemporary feminist analyses assume the discursive nature of gender and sexual identities, see women caught in the prison house of the master's language, valiantly struggling to emerge as resisting readers and as authors of alternative discourses" (xi). Freire has not escaped scrutiny by feminists for failing to pay attention to the particular plight of women and the role that gender plays in the oppression of illiterate subalterns. His early work was "[t]ied to an over-emphasis on class struggle" to the extent that Freire "ignored the various forms of domination and social struggles being addressed by feminists, minorities, ecologists, and other social actors" (Brady 143).[8] Despite this omission, it is apparent from the experiences of organizing literacy classes in South Africa around Freire's radical methodology that the concept of conscientization struck a decidedly responsive chord with black women. Regardless of the orientation of Freire's early work to humanity articulated from the male experience, and compounded by the overtly male focus of the Black Consciousness Movement that promoted critical literacy, black women were

[8] As Brady points out, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was overtly masculine in emphasis. However, in the twentieth anniversary edition, modifications to the translation "reflect the connection between liberation and inclusive language" (10), and the inclusion of "women" alongside "men" makes for a less jarring reading in the updated version.

able to directly apply Freire's empowering ideas to an analysis of the circumstances of their lives.

The extent to which the acquisition of literacy is highly valued by African women is evident from the results of the Zimbabwe literacy campaign that was started in 1983, three years after the white minority government of Ian Smith was forced out of office. Although the campaign did not meet expectations, with only 23 percent of the anticipated number of people enrolling, Matabane states that "What was unique and encouraging was that females, who had not had equal opportunities to obtain an education, accounted for 85 percent of the learners" (353). Participation in adult literacy classes in South Africa also catered largely to a female clientele, as Edward French confirms from the responses he received to a survey of 348 government-run, industry-sponsored, and private/voluntary programs, published in 1982. In answer to his question, "What are the most common occupations of your students?", domestic service was listed twice as often as any other type of employment, leading French to note that "this would seem to confirm the impression that most literacy work outside of mining and industry caters very largely to women" (48).[9]

When the promotion of literacy in the black population was identified as a major goal of black consciousness, the call to action was predictably couched in overtly masculine terms, and rather forbidding to black women as a result of their traditional subservience to men. Aligning themselves with the liberation movement was troublesome, as "Older Africans, older women in particular—and African women

[9] French's study also revealed that irregular attendance hampered rural literacy classes more than urban ones due to the seasonal nature of agricultural work, the most common type of employment for rural women. However, rural women were often able to attend classes during the day, thereby reducing the

in general—were inclined to give a wide berth to any organization associated with violence, and to see threatening talk and heroic posturing on the part of the young as wild and irresponsible behavior" (Gerhart 221). Biko, à la Fanon and Memmi, identified the essence of the movement as the "realisation by the black man of the need to rally together with his brothers around the cause of their oppression—the blackness of their skin—and to operate as a group to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude" (91-92). Although just as eager and determined to throw off the fetters, women felt understandably restrained by the warrior posturing that galvanized the movement, claiming as it did to "make the black man come to himself; to pump back life into his empty shell; to infuse him with pride and dignity" (29).

Women, however, established a niche for themselves in the literacy campaign, responding avidly to the challenge to learn to read and write, offering as it did the opportunity to assert themselves in the consciousness movement and to oppose the government. Enrolling in literacy classes in far greater numbers than men, as French's research shows, cultural work was a sphere in which women could excel, for they were after all adept at persuading, arguing, and informing, a skill honed through their storytelling traditions. The tantalizing prospect of a radically different South Africa emerging after apartheid was dismantled allowed for the possibility of reshaping the role of women. Women's voices had to be heard. Though largely uninvited to participate as equals in the anti-apartheid campaign, women saw themselves as victims of discrimination no less than the men, although reluctant to cause dissent and discord

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negative effects of tiredness, an ongoing detriment to learning encountered by urban women who would be exhausted by the time they arrived at their evening literacy classes.

by diverting attention from the focus of bringing down apartheid by insisting that gender discrimination be brought to the table for discussion at this crucial juncture.

This ingrained habit of demurring to the wishes of the men was challenged by Boitumelo Mofokeng, a writer, poet, and member of the Federation of Transvaal Women. Defining a role for the black woman in South African society amounted to choosing between two options, she stated: "One is to have courage to stand up and speak," or in traditional fashion, she can "fold her arms and wait for men to dictate terms to her" (*Buang* 6). At cultural events, women are "good at catering whilst men are on stage, preaching the gospel of mass mobilisation, unity and the need to stand up together to win our struggle" (8). Stirring women to action, even at the risk of clashing with male authority, was a purpose articulated in critical literacy classes no less than at events aimed at soliciting women's participation in cultural production.[10]

Providing workshops that catered exclusively to women was necessary considering how many of them had been discouraged from pursuing their own interests by overbearing husbands and fathers, particularly in an atmosphere of heightened anti-apartheid activity when solidarity with the cause was frequently interpreted as freedom first, feminism later, if at all. We can gain insights into how these workshops were structured by examining a booklet produced in South Africa, and heavily influenced by Freirean intervention: *On Our Feet: Taking Steps to Challenge Women's Oppression.*[11] A key component of the workshop is an emphasis

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[10] Traditional attitudes to women's roles surfaced in literacy classes as Mpoetsi Goba, a founder member of English Literacy Project (ELP) notes. Alluding to the generative themes used to stimulate discussion, Goba comments that in her experience "Learners were more conscientised around issues of race and class than around gender." She found it necessary to "try to develop a sensitivity around gender," for "one cannot presume interest, this needs to be assessed" (*Buang* 26).

[11] In chapter three of *On Our Feet*, in which popular education is explained and its applicability to challenging women's oppression discussed, the theoretical roots of this method are not attributed

on reflection that encourages the participants to share their personal experiences of oppression, initiated through a series of freewriting exercises similar to any such activity contained in a first-year composition text. Stressing that since "they are writing off the tops of their heads they can't expect excellent writing from one another," the women are urged but not required to read what they have written to each other, focusing on the range of experiences among the group rather than on evaluating the writing (L. Mackenzie 116). Writing about and then discussing incidents in their lives helps the women make sense of their individual experiences by situating them in a system of oppression. Apart from the catharsis the sharing of text promotes, the women are also learning to marshal writing in the interests of intervening in South Africa's sexist culture and to devise a strategy for countering and combating patriarchy in South Africa.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the text circulating underground in South Africa, Freire carves out no special territory for literacy as it pertains to a woman's experience and her unique and ambivalent relationship to the master's language. Literacy, however, is greatly valued by black women, attested to by their unstinting efforts to provide an education for their children, no matter the degree of sacrifice this called for. I would speculate that a reason for domestic workers enrolling in literacy classes at twice the rate of other occupations is that their constant exposure to a

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directly to Freire, although "popular education" is described as "education for social change which emerged in Brazil in the 1960s" (48). Skirting specific mention of Freire's research and practice is troubling, occurring as it does in the majority of reporting on liberatory literacy programs operating in South Africa. Considering that Freire continues to loom large over the critical literacy movement in the United States even after his death, a similar cult following in South Africa would have seemed likely considering the hero status accorded liberation movement leaders, a surefire strategy for riling the government. The endnotes to chapter three of this handbook discuss popular education but make no mention of Freire, referencing sources in Canada, a move likely due to the fact that a foreign scholar,

sophisticated literate culture in white homes stimulated their desire to become literate. Seeing first-hand the emphasis placed on completing homework before the children went out to play, seeing the madam reading next to the pool, dusting the desk piled high with the master's documents, observing the ritual of opening and reading the mail, writing checks and balancing bank statements, bringing in the newspaper from the driveway—all these mundane activities that we engage in routinely are observed keenly by someone who is excluded from a literate environment. Granted, many domestic servants had low levels of literacy or were illiterate, an uncomfortable and alienating situation to be in when struggling to pay children's school fees, but an inability to decipher the reams of text surrounding them must have tended to reinforce the feeling of exclusion and deficiency.

As Freire emphasizes, reflection upon one's circumstances must be accompanied by action. In the case of women who enrolled in NGO literacy classes employing Freire's methods, action was interpreted as putting their newfound literacy to immediate and practical use by testifying to the conditions of their lives under apartheid. The educational wasteland of Bantu Education that I described in chapter two was abandoned by private sponsors and volunteers who brought literacy centers to the townships, promoting literacy as a basic skill to be mastered but also as a method of situating the adult learners in the midst of the political maelstrom swirling around them. Progressive ventures in literacy instruction were termed the "people's education," expressly intended to extend their immediate goal of offering adults remedial or compensatory education to redress deficiencies incurred by dropping out

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Joan Conway, "the Canadian popular educator who helped CACE run its first Talking Gender workshop," instituted training sessions to aid the deployment of this method in South Africa.

of formal schooling or from not having mastered basic skills in childhood. Promoting literacy as a personal right and as a communal obligation to the cause was a continuation of the ongoing struggle over the word and its active deployment in the world, as Freire articulated.

The Subaltern Speaks: Writing in the Service of the Community

A small number of black South African women writers whose names are recognizable in Europe and the United States, at least in academic circles, encompasses what is considered to be the literary output of contemporary black women in South Africa. I am referring to authors such as Ellen Kuzwayo, whose autobiography *Call Me Woman* is assured a place in literary history as the first such work to be written by a black South African woman. Miriam Tlali, as well, has achieved a place in history as the first black woman to pen a novel in English, the loosely autobiographical *Muriel at Metropolitan* which details her experiences as a clerk at a Johannesburg furniture and radio store owned by a Jewish man whose clientele was largely working-class blacks lured into purchasing goods on the "never-never" scheme. These groundbreaking works paved the way for other female voices to emerge, such as Lauretta Ngcobo and Sindiwe Magona, and although the literary merits of these trail blazing writers have been rather disparagingly debated in South Africa and abroad, these authors achieved international recognition for establishing a female literary tradition.

Those writers whose works were published abroad gained considerable recognition, being interviewed repeatedly, invited to address conferences, and to

participate in writing workshops in Europe and in the United States in particular. As producers of marketable texts and also as serious commentators and critics of apartheid, their visibility abroad, and to a lesser degree in South Africa due to the government's crackdown on literary production, was a welcome addition to anti-apartheid forums. Their works have been the subject of numerous scholarly articles, magazine features, book reviews, and their inclusion in the oeuvre of black women's writing from Africa is now established.

My interest is in a different aspect of text production by black women in South Africa, that of ordinary women who under normal circumstances would never have aspired to becoming writers. Acquiring literacy and actually using it to get under the skin of the authorities by writing what the government considered to be incendiary works seemed a natural extension of women's rhetorical talents and traditions which had increasingly lain dormant due to official clampdowns on speech. At least, from my perspective as a white South African woman and as a composition instructor, it is the voices of these women who must certainly qualify for inclusion in Spivak's contested category of the subaltern—those who supposedly cannot speak—but who in reality offer compelling testimonies that strike at the heart of apartheid's inhumanity. Their detailed and descriptive documentation of the effects of an experiment in social engineering so elaborate and shocking that the word apartheid even after its demise has crept into mainstream usage around the world provides a compelling reply to the often quoted "Why Write?" question that appears in first-year college composition textbooks in the United States as a motivation to students inclined to dismiss the value of writing as anything other than business communication.

The texts produced by South African subaltern women compare favorably with the genre of slave narratives written by African-Americans in the nineteenth century and should be examined in a similar light. While the latter texts are now considered valued contributions to the history of slavery and the African-American experience after a century of neglect, the writings of South Africa's subalterns who have lived in conditions akin to slavery seem destined to fade into history, having served their purpose in what Fanon once termed a "dying colonialism."

Politically disenfranchised, economically marginalized, discriminated against by virtue of gender, class, and race, the female subaltern seems to have no outlet for speaking. However, as I have argued thus far, despite the cloak of invisibility the subaltern is forced to wear, she can indeed speak articulately, intelligently, persuasively, and passionately, although being restrained by the impediments that have traditionally silenced those without access to powerful public forums. Peggy Ochoa contends:

> the subaltern speaks as much as any other human being, but not from a subject position recognized as authoritative by a racist and sexist dominant discourse. Those who have the power to give her speech validity or to recognize her as anything other than a subjugated object of colonialism can ignore her speech as irrelevant to the colonizing project. (221)

Ignoring, censoring, and dismissing the oral or written testimonies of the subaltern reinforces her silence and invisibility, and by callously brushing aside her speech as irrelevant, her fragile status clinging to the margins for survival is perpetuated.

A serious impediment to the subaltern becoming a speaking subject is her dismal economic situation; without a well-connected sponsor, the subaltern is all but locked out of access to the publishing industry, an issue that I will discuss in chapter five. Due to the commercial nature of the publishing industry, acceptance for publication is weighed against potential marketability.

In South Africa, the newly literate and functionally literate struggling to master the basics of composition cannot hope to compete for attention with those writers who have at least benefited from some exposure to a college education or from completing additional years in school beyond the first four years of primary education that the apartheid government deemed sufficient for employment purposes. Exposure to white literature in high school and the writing of essays on literary topics, despite its well-documented limitations of being unrepresentative of African culture and language, to some extent makes the act of writing a less arduous and overwhelming proposition, as well as a less intimidating and alien undertaking. Despite their lack of so-called "literary qualities," novice women writers served as recorders, witnesses, and community activists, revealing the most inhumane aspects of South Africa's racist agenda in simple, straightforward, yet hard-hitting prose.

While attempts to chart the fertility of Freirean methods on South African soil are obviously fraught with difficulties, we have more reliable evidence of their flowering by examining the written results of this empowering pedagogy. In light of the absence of well-documented analyses of the deployment of critical literacy in NGO literacy classes in South Africa during the era of accelerating anti-apartheid protests, and in view of questionable literacy statistics maintained by a government

that sanctioned separate and unequal education systems for different races, we can, nevertheless, affirm and assess the influence of Freire's methodology on black women's literacy by examining textual evidence.

The generation of texts by participants in literacy classes for use by other learners was a feature of some NGO literacy initiatives following the turbulent post-1976 years when the high level of illiteracy in the black population was targeted by opposition groups as the goal of community outreach projects. Written by the participants themselves, or transcribed from their oral testimony by workshop facilitators, these texts demonstrate that the concept of critical literacy, even if only limited in its dissemination, was spreading rhizomatically through the black community in defiance of government attempts to prevent subversive literacy instruction from taking root.

Although Freire's methods are often, to repeat, not explicitly referred to in discussions of literacy groups in South Africa, the influence of his generative themes can be detected in descriptions of the activities of these groups.[12] USWE, for instance, organized writing workshops in order to generate user-friendly texts suitable for other learners in the program in an effort to overcome the ongoing unavailability of appropriate materials and the chronic shortage of funds. Encouraging groups of learners to engage in a dialogue about social issues identified as negatively impacting the quality of life in the black community as a direct outcome of discriminatory

[12] A rich and invaluable source for discovering the activities of NGO literacy groups for black women is contained in the publication *Buang Basadi: Khulumani Makhosikazi=Women Speak*, sponsored by the Congress of South African Writers, Transvaal Region. In November 1988, a conference on women and writing was held in the hope that it would "contribute to the process of moving from ideas to action that is needed to ensure the progressive cultural transformation of our country" (3). Representatives from the literacy groups USWE and ELP and *Speak* magazine presented papers on the Women and Literacy panel.

apartheid laws, teachers asked participants to write down their opinions and personal experiences. By drawing deeply on the lived experiences of women in the group and valorizing their testimonies, writers found the task less daunting in a supportive environment, despite the participants having entered the class labeled by society as illiterate, uneducated, and therefore outcasts. In the USWE workshop, participants were encouraged to write their narratives individually if they were comfortable writing; for those less confident, collaborating to produce a group statement was encouraged (*Buang* 21).

As a multiracial and multilingual nation, South Africa's complex population profile was observable in adult literacy classes. Some adults were able to read and write in their home language, while others were complete beginners; some adults chose to learn in their mother tongue, while others elected to learn in English. When writing about a topic that particularly interested them, writers made the decision about which language to communicate in. For those lacking confidence in their literate abilities, transcribers were available, especially for beginners who wished to dictate their stories. Tracey points out that although the stories were edited, the original style of the author was retained as much as possible, and the stories were "never rewritten." Writers were given the opportunity to read the edited version to ensure that the transcriber had not distorted their original intention. Final products were then compiled into a booklet made available to all students enrolled in the program (*Buang* 21). Experienced writers were also encouraged to produce reading materials for literacy groups, as learners needed help reducing a range of informative publications such as news reports and pamphlets containing health and legal information to a level

suitable for newly literate adults. Light-hearted reading was not neglected, with calls going out for writers to create fiction such as "love stories."

Asking students in literacy classes to produce material for future learners would seem to be a tall order, for adults enroll for the very reason that they lack reading and writing skills. Presuming that they will be placed in the traditional position of passively absorbing the superior knowledge of the teacher—a one way flow in which the student receives an automatic deposit of information transferred from the teacher's accumulated stock—learners do not expect a role reversal. Freire comments on this banking system in his work with illiterate peasants, observing that "Almost never do they realize that they, too, 'know things' they have learned in their relations with the world and with other women and men" (45). Immersing learners in text production—the business of the professionals—turns the literacy enterprise into an exercise of empowerment rather than bewilderment and belittlement (as unfortunately tended to happen at government sponsored sites). The booklets produced from the testimonials of participants attending literacy classes served as stimulating reading material for other learners in the program, aimed at fostering a sense of community as they identified with the demoralizing and degrading experiences recounted in narratives written by other adult learners.

The Testimonial as Adult Literacy Class Text

Ravan Press has been monumental in offering a publishing outlet for subaltern writing in South Africa, as has Ad Donker and David Philips. Without the sponsorship of these left-leaning, risk-taking white publishers, literary output in South Africa

would have continued to be dominated by conservative-minded, government-fearing publishing houses.[13] Ravan's mission to create a forum for new black writing made it possible, for example, for the publication of *Thula Baba* in 1987 (written in 1984), a text that emerged from discussions among domestic workers in the context of an adult literacy class and that was distributed internationally.[14] Ravan's dedication to facilitating the emergence of previously submerged voices in South Africa is borne out by the publication of this book whose questionable marketability was outweighed by its redeeming social value at a particular juncture in history.

While *Thula Baba* was produced primarily as a text for use in a literacy class, it can also be classified as a testimonial, a genre that George Yúdice defines as

> an authentic narrative, told by a witness who is moved to narrate by the urgency of the situation (e.g. war, oppression, revolution, etc.). Emphasizing popular, oral discourse, the witness portrays his or her own experience as an agent (rather than a representative) of a collective memory and identity. Truth is summoned in the cause of denouncing a

[13] With the official end of apartheid, the raison d'être for alternative publishing in South Africa had gradually played out its course. There has been a host of mergers and acquisitions in the South African publishing industry since 1994. Ravan Press was absorbed by Hodder & Stoughton Educational Southern Africa in 1994. SACHED books were taken over by Maskew Miller and Longman in 1995 after these two companies merged. In 2002, New Africa Publishers acquired a majority share of David Philip Publishers, and, as of 1991, Ad Donker is now part of Nasionale Pers (Mpe and Seeber 29-31). As a result of the shake up in the industry and the absorption of alternative publishers who had sponsored works such as *Thula Baba*, black women will continue to struggle to find outlets for their work. One optimistic development is that Lovedale Press has been purchased by a group of workers who pooled their pensions and severance packages to buy the company after the Presbyterian Church, the former owners, put the business up for auction in June 2001. While in desperate need of investors, the new Lovedale Press had already published three books by April, 2002 (www.dispatch.co.za/2001/06/29/easterncape/PRESS.HTM).

[14] Although it has not been possible to ascertain how many copies were printed, a search of the electronic database First Search revealed that 90 libraries within their system own a copy of *Thula Baba* (including the University of Oklahoma). I also had no trouble locating several copies of the text in a search of the used and out-of-print section of the Barnes and Noble web site.

> present situation of exploitation and oppression or in exorcising and setting aright official history. (17)

John Beverley notes that "one of the richest sources of testimonial material has been in the interaction of intellectuals, peasants, and working people in literacy campaigns" based on Freire's pedagogy (14-15). And, in Latin America "testimonial literature is powerfully gendered by the voices of women" (Gugelberger and Kearney 8). Returning to Yúdice's definition, his key words help explain the attraction of this genre for women beginning their foray into the world of writing and particularly writing for publication: authentic, witness, urgency, oppression, experience, agent, collective memory, identity, truth, exploitation, exorcising official history, and especially oral.

Privileging the local knowledge and the lived experience of the writer and her community, the subaltern can tap into the collective memory of the oral traditions, regaining a sense of agency and identity in order to undermine oppressive official history by constructing an authentic narrative that reflects the ugly truth of exploitation from the perspective of the oppressed. Anne McClintock describes oral memory as "a refusal of the dismemberment of history, a laborious life-giver" which functions as a "device against oblivion, a strategy for survival" (317). The power of the oral traditions as repositories of communal wisdom and knowledge offsets the writer's lack of knowledge of literary modes, codes, and conventions. As sites of local knowledge, or *petits récits*, to use Jean-Francois Lyotard's term, the *testimonio* empowers the subaltern distrustful of universal or totalizing discourses such as colonialism and capitalism (although not Christianity, an enduring grand narrative

embedded in colonialism's grand scheme and a central component of Freire's methodology).

Thula Baba, a title taken from a traditional song that means Hush Child, has no single author, a trend I noted in the *People's College* series, preferring instead to attribute the work to communal authorship, not unlike the oral traditions. Placed under the title, authorship is credited thus: "This story was written after many discussions between groups of adult learners and teachers in literacy classes. It is based on the lives of some domestic workers in a city." However, when the individuals whose stories are told in the book are introduced, responsibility for setting down the narrative is attributed to "Ntombi. She writes the book" (8).

Ntombi functions in the traditional role of the storyteller, weaving the accounts of the trials and the consolations experienced by the tight-knit group of domestic workers into a coherent story, always privileging the communal spirit and the bonds of friendship that prevent the women from spiraling into utter despondency over their miserable existence in white suburbia. A noticeable feature of the text is that it is written in simple English using short sentences, repetition, rhythmic patterns, and a lilting quality that reflects the oral residue of the women, as demonstrated in the following example:

> I always eat food from the house.
>
> But now my madam,
>
> she says she is on a diet.
>
> My madam, she is fat.
>
> She is mafutha.

It is the same every time.

She doesn't buy enough food.

She gets hungry.

She eats everything in the house.

The white people,

they worry that they eat too much.

We worry because

we don't have enough to eat. (29)

By retaining the speech patterns of the women, this lends credence to the authenticity of the narrative as the spoken words of the participants; this is their story, and the voices of the domestic workers echo throughout Ntombi's measured testimony, arguing for recognition of their humanity that whites so effectively dismiss and deny.

In an industry dominated by white interests, the publication of a narrative written by "native girls" that critiques and condemns the practice of employing black servants in white households in slave-like conditions indicates that the apartheid system is beginning to disintegrate. It would have been inconceivable that a white-owned publishing house, albeit vehemently leftwing, would have undertaken such a project prior to the Soweto riots, for what domestic servants thought about their working conditions and the entire apartheid enterprise was considered inconsequential, the general feeling being that if they did not appreciate their employment, other maids were lining up, ready to take their places.

The full-color cover of *Thula Baba* foregrounds the average black woman, depicting a scene familiar to any South African. Crossing a bridge near the station with South African Railways rolling stock in the background, a black mother walks across the grimy bridge with the ubiquitous cardboard box balanced carefully on her head, baby secured on her back with a multi-colored blanket, the mother looking purposeful and determined. On the back cover, the scene is continued with two other women, neatly dressed, heads covered in the standard beret, walking behind the foregrounded mother. Taken as a whole, the cover suggests a metaphorical crossing over the bridge in the growing knowledge that South Africa is on the move to an inevitable full-participatory democracy, a prospect encouraged and enabled by the women's enrollment in a (critical) literacy class.[15]

The editorial note (anonymous) carefully charts the contents and the context of the book. Claiming that it "describes the everyday life of black domestic workers in a contemporary South African urban setting," it breaks into controversial territory by noting that these workers

> live in a world of insecurity and uncertainty, often subject to the whims of their employers, and with very limited bargaining powers. They also have to contend with the legal constraints placed on them as black South Africans. The potential pathos of their situation is often starkly highlighted by the problems they face once they have children of their own.

[15] Permission was required and granted by the S.A. Transport Services, and acknowledged by the publishers, to take the cover photos and two additional photos shot in the vicinity of a railway station. One wonders if authorization would have been granted had the authorities known the radical content of *Thula Baba*.



Fig. 3. *Thula Baba.* Johannesburg: Ravan, 1987.

Although *Thula Baba* was published after the detested pass laws were repealed in 1986 by a government under assault, mired in escalating internal strife, an uncertain and wary attitude to officialdom remained entrenched. Domestic workers were, however, already engaged in forming a union at this time.[16] Boldly critiquing apartheid policies was still risky business, especially when the inhumanity of the law of the land was being contested publicly by female domestic workers who elected to come out of the shadows, casting aside the isolation imposed on them by being hidden away in the backyards of white homes, toiling in working conditions akin to slavery. The anonymity of the participants in the project (photo credits would indicate that models stand in for the actual domestic workers who live in an unnamed city) and an unsigned editorial indicate the degree to which speaking out in South Africa was fraught with dangers as writers were routinely persecuted and prosecuted.[17] It is ironic that the most vulnerable victims of apartheid and those who were so effectively and routinely silenced should be viewed as capable of presenting any recognizable threat to the government.

In *Thula Baba*, the women who document their daily lives do so from multiple subjectivities—as mothers, daughters, wives, workers—and from these numerous vantage points, the focus is consistently placed on the apartheid system and its supporters, down to the white madam who is blind to her complicity in compounding

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[16] The material for Suzanne Gordon's *A Talent for Tomorrow: Life Stories of South African Servants* (1985) was generated through her interactions with domestic servants while working on the Domestic Worker's Project from 1971-1981. Because "Parts of their experiences and many of the views they express are common to others of their calling throughout the country" (xi), these testimonials serve an important role in demystifying the hidden world of the domestic worker subjected to abusive practices that are repeated daily in millions of white homes unobserved and unaccounted for.

[17] Copiously illustrated with photos, *Thula Baba* would be less intimidating to learners who were no doubt familiar with the photo-comic genre that was very popular in South Africa. Soap opera-type

the suffering of a black mother, leading Miriam Tlali to rebuke the typical white woman who "remains mute and insensitive while the black woman wallows in the squalor on the fringes of the white suburbs" (*Buang* 57). Domestic workers chafe at their status as invisible objects skulking around the backyards of white homes, regarded with suspicion and hostility, yet indispensable to their employers. *Thula Baba* is convincing proof that literacy classes, far from merely being disseminators of an elementary facility with reading and writing, can be productive sites of resistance and personal growth and awareness. That the proceedings of an adult literacy class could be considered a viable threat to the apartheid apparatus is testimony to the potential for critical literacy to bring about change in a political system. The earnest discussions that literacy workers encouraged adult learners to participate in provided a safe and supportive forum for airing grievances about social issues that directly affected them.

A manifesto of sorts precedes the beginning of the narrative. Entitled "Domestic Workers," it is a call to action for women in domestic service across the country, striving for solidarity within their ranks and demanding the establishment of an organization to protect and regulate the rights of domestic workers nationally. Referring to their status as minors under the law, these women are well aware how their dubious legal status allows their employers to treat them as juveniles:

> We are called girls.
>
> We are called maids.
>
> It is like we are small.

---

dramas were played out by a cast of characters, captured on film with minimal text to accompany the action.

It is like we are children.

We are told what to do.

We are told what to say.

We are told what to think.

We are told what to wear.

Mary DeShazer describes these lines as "singsong, childlike repetition" (171), but I would argue that they demonstrate the incorporation of elements of the oral traditions with which women were so familiar. The entire book is written as an extended poem, structurally and stylistically reminiscent of the polyphonic oral traditions with its repetitions, refrains, and mesmerizing rhythms and cadences.

For Sidonie Smith, a manifesto is "[e]xpressly a public performance," one that "revels in the collocation of identity" (193). The demeaning habit in South Africa of referring to domestic workers as "my girl" or the "garden boy" is at the core of the denial of agency; condemned to a perpetual childhood by whites, blacks cannot escape being trapped in a relationship in which they are dismissed as intellectually undeveloped, dependent on the intervention of whites at all levels of their existence. "Historicizing identity," Smith notes, "the autobiographical manifesto implicitly, if not explicitly, insists on the temporalities and spatialities of identity and, in doing so, brings the everyday practices of identity directly into the floodlights of conscious display." Shucking their white-assigned identity as children who need the constant supervision of their patronizing employers, the workers recast their identity, countering their interpolation as children by asserting that

We are women.

We are mothers.

Our bodies are strong from hard work.

Our hearts are big from suffering.[18]

Railing against their dehumanization by whites (and in this case, particularly white women), the domestic workers testify to their "struggle against hunger . . . poverty . . . sickness . . . suffering." By airing their collective grievances, this small but tightly knit group of domestic workers personalizes an entrenched system of exploitation that has gone virtually unchallenged since the beginnings of colonial occupation at the Cape of Good Hope when slavery was instituted by the Dutch settlers. Fissures created by the rapidly deteriorating and disintegrating social structure in the late 1970s, exacerbated by the momentum generated by a frenzy of cultural activity that spilled out of the townships and reached the walled backyards of white suburbia, gave the humble maid the temerity and the courage to confront her mute madam with her grievances.

Given the opportunity to record their personal histories, black women were able to authenticate their suffering and their struggles and in doing so took a small but significant step in undermining the official cloak of invisibility that permeated every aspect of their lives. *Thula Baba* is framed as a case study of four domestic workers—Ntombi, Lerato, Sibongile, and Tembi—and Matshepo, a caretaker of a block of flats. Constructed as a chronological selection of entries from Ntombi's journal, noteworthy

[18] Parallels can be drawn with the rhetorical strategies of the (illiterate) African-American slave Sojourner Truth in her speech "Ain't I a Woman?" delivered at the 1851 Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio. Arguing for women's equality with men, she bares her arm, showing the audience her muscles, claiming that she is as strong as any man having tended the fields and borne thirteen children, a strategy followed by an impressive display of her intellectual capacities. In Africa, it is the women by tradition who tend the fields, producing the food for the extended family who live communally.

events are interspersed with more mundane observations from a monotonous, yet always precarious, existence on the fringes of the white nuclear family. The first entry, 4 January, is significant for Ntombi, the narrator:

> Yesterday my baby was born.
>
> I will call her Lindiwe.
>
> She makes me very happy.
>
> She is my last child.
>
> But she is also my first child.
>
> I sent my other children away.
>
> But now my madam says
>
> I can keep Lindiwe with me. (12)

While the birth of her fourth child is a memorable event in her life, Ntombi opens up for discussion a dialogue on a generative theme that is central to black women: the disintegration of the black family brought about directly by sweeping government policies that regulate every aspect of their existence, cruelly separating husbands and wives, children and parents in the interests of securing the labor needs of the capitalist economy at the expense of the stability of the black social structure. Black women for the most part were relegated to the periphery of the industrial economy. When they were able to find employment legally in white areas, it was largely as domestic workers, as janitorial staff in the commercial sector, and as workers in light industrial enterprises such clothing and textiles.

Isolated in the backyards of comfortable white homes in suburbia, living in the cold, Spartan concrete servant's quarters attached to the garage, typically with only a

toilet and no washing or cooking facilities, domestic servants depended on each other for company and support. Sisterly bonds formed with other maids were a lifeline for domestic workers who had to endure the separation from their children sent away to live with relatives in the distant homelands or in the townships, as it was illegal for black workers to house their dependents on the property of white employers. Despite its humble origins and the specific circumstances of its composition, *Thula Baba* functions as a historical record of the role that black women undertook in loco parentis while white women worked outside the home or made the social circuit of the country club, tea parties, and volunteer work. Although Ntombi's employer was atypical in that she allowed her servant to keep her newborn baby with her (her three older children lived with relatives in the homeland), the care of the white madam's children took precedence over the needs of the infant, who of necessity had to be left unattended in the dark and dingy servant's quarters for hours at a time while her mother gave her full attention to her charges.

Beginning her job three days after giving birth, Ntombi is responsible for maintaining a six-room house and catering to every whim of the master and the madam and their two children, the seven-year-old daughter who is "already a little madam. She changes her clothes three times a day," and Daniel, her brother, who demands to be carried on Ntombi's back in place of Lindiwe and hits the baby on the head with a toy. Unfortunately for Ntombi, just as she spanks the spoiled white child, his father walks in and observes her meting out punishment to his son (44). As a powerless maid without any bargaining rights, both her job and her place of residence are jeopardized by this incident, and her continued employment is completely in the

hands of her mercurial madam. But, the "worst thing about my work," Ntombi observes, "is that everything is white . . . Only people who never clean a house will have everything white" (18).

English is not Ntombi's native language, but her simple yet forthright prose painfully portrays the divided loyalties of a mother who is forced to neglect her own children in order to earn money to purchase the bare necessities to support her offspring. Ntombi's narrative is structured around the circle of friends and the close bonds formed with other women in domestic service in the vicinity. Motherhood is a unifying force in the lives of these women and is never viewed as a factor contributing to their oppression, a view in opposition to many Western feminists who feel constrained by their identification as mothers above all else. Ntombi considers herself more fortunate than her friend Matshepo who is responsible for cleaning twelve flats, on call twenty-four hours a day attending to residents' needs. When Matshepo's baby is heard crying one night by a white resident, he threatens to call her employer. As her firstborn son died after being sent to live in the homelands with relatives, she is tormented by the fear that she will be forced to send her second son away and that he will end up dead like his brother. Predictably, a state inspector pays an unannounced visit to the block of flats, and Matshepo is given twenty-four hours notice to send her baby to the homelands. Apart from the distress at being forcibly parted from one's child for an extended period, Ntombi educates her secondary audience, white readers, about the reality of conditions in the Bantustans:

> Food is double the price
> in the homelands.

The people are poor.

They have no money.

They have no jobs.

But the food is double the price.

We are hungry here in the city,

but in the homelands

many people are starving. (67)

Thula Baba is compelling reading, aside from its humanitarian perspective, because of its directness, its honesty, and its sustained argument against apartheid. This is the type of book that, had it been required reading in schools, would have forced young white South Africans to confront the exploitation of black women in their own homes and their complicity in the mistreatment of their overworked and underpaid maids. White schoolchildren, however, were too busy dissecting and discussing the dry technicalities of literary works written by European masters or Afrikaner patriarchs in order to pass the national school leaving exams.

Read in conjunction with Jacqueline Cock's *Maids and Madams: A Study in the Politics of Exploitation* (1980), a sociological analysis of the relationship between black female domestic workers and their white female employers in the eastern Cape, *Thula Baba* complements Cock's scholarly study by providing an in-depth case study of five women in domestic service, gaining its authority by being narrated by one of the group. It is clear that the subaltern can indeed speak with conviction and clarity, conveying her message with frankness, straight-forwardness, and boldness.[19] On the

[19] Revealing the dark secrets of the domestic service industry did indeed take guts, as Cock found out when her home was firebombed after the publication of her study, one act of terrorism among many

surface, it would appear that the market for a book produced by a group of women in a literacy class would be minimal, useful merely to organizations committed to critical literacy. Apart from this small audience, there would seem to be virtually no market for a slim volume written in basic (black South African) English, structured as one long poem, liberally illustrated with photographs of models enacting the scenes in the text, and detailing the daily drudgery of a circle of poor black mothers eking out a subsistence on the brutal margins of a self-centered white society. *Thula Baba*, however, potentially has the same impact as slave narratives produced in the United States. The emotional impact of the testimonies of the defenseless and the downtrodden brings into sharp focus the deployment of legislation aimed expressly at bolstering the good fortune of the economically powerful at the expense of the disenfranchised. As a politically charged statement formulated and delivered by subaltern women in apartheid-era South Africa, *Thula Baba* has a value that extends far beyond the confines of an adult literacy class.

The process by which women claim agency in order to work toward achieving social change has been described by Nedra Reynolds as one of "interrupting," a strategy that is necessary because "[a]gency is not simply about finding one's own voice but also about intervening in discourses of the everyday and cultivating rhetorical tactics that make interruption and resistance an important part of any conversation" (59). As Reynolds points out, interrupting a conversation is invariably viewed as bad manners, particularly when the person breaking into a conversation is a woman or a child. Suggesting that interrupting could be deployed as an effective

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incidents and harassment she experienced for daring to confront white South Africans with the ugly truth of their exploitation of black women employed in the intimacy of their homes.

rhetorical device for those groups who frequently find themselves on the receiving end of this tactic, Reynolds goes on to propose that "Through interruption and talking back, women rhetors can draw attention to their identities as marginalized speakers and writers as they also force more attention to the ideological workings of discursive exclusion" (60). *Thula Baba* effectively interrupts apartheid discourse, breaking into the conversation pertinently, pointedly, and purposively.

Capitalizing on the lived experiences of adult learners in literacy classes is an empowering strategy, despite Freire's work being "constrained by binarisms and totalizing narratives that worked against his most valuable insights" (Brady 143), and his method of conscientizing the oppressed offers a methodology particularly suited to black women in South Africa. The personal does indeed become political and public for women participating in a process of conscientization. Securing friendship, answers, strength, and hope is the mantra of adult literacy classes taught under the guiding principles of critical literacy, principles that Freire acknowledges might be dismissed in some quarters as "so much reactionary 'blah'" (19). But these tenets provide a supportive environment that those who are dispossessed desperately need. This sense of solidarity offers somewhat of a solution to the fragmented existence of the domestic worker whose confinement and invisibility within the white home creates a sense of isolation that is debilitating. As the manifesto of the "Domestic Workers" poem that precedes the *Thula Baba* narrative states in its conclusion:

> But we find friendship if we meet together.
>
> And we find answers if we talk together.

And we find strength if we work together.

And we find hope if we stand together.

As a text to supplement the decidedly limited amount of suitable reading material available to women enrolled in adult literacy classes, *Thula Baba* achieves its purpose admirably. By publishing and distributing *Thula Baba* abroad, Ravan has also recognized the significance of this collective and autobiographical commentary by domestic workers to the anti-apartheid forum worldwide. It is for this reason that I suggest that texts such as *Thula Baba* should be considered as a sub-category of the autobiographical genre that could be called autobiographical testimonials. Gugelberger and Kearney make a clear distinction between testimonials and autobiography on the grounds that in the latter, writers portray "selves which are impressed by their own feelings of unique significance," whereas testimonials "show that the self cannot be defined in individual terms but only as a collective self engaged in a common struggle" (9). The collective/individual construction of Kuzwayo's autobiography *Call Me Woman* has received a good deal of critical scrutiny, resisting as it does classification as autobiography in the accepted Western sense of the genre. *Call Me Woman* moves back and forth between both individual and communal identities; the ability to weave back and forth between seemingly incompatible and inharmonious discursive fields results in an interlacing of the two in ways that are invariably resourceful, extemporaneous, and often ingenious. Judith Coullie credits Kuzwayo with having undertaken a "progressive and novel shaping of autobiography into a new kind of personal and social document which transmutes, rather than translates" (138). Black women in South Africa have been instrumental in reshaping the

autobiographical genre to their own particular location and application, adapting it to reflect the individual drawing strength and sustenance from her identity as a member of a particular community.

Ravan also published *We Came to Town* (1985) in conjunction with the literacy program USWE. Described as a "collection of stories written by black workers learning English," the editor Caroline Kerfoot notes in her introduction that "[t]he "students did not find it easy to write." The learners participated in an editing process, reworking their stories from the taped or written first versions with Kerfoot's role being limited to grammatical and spelling corrections, leaving the narratives essentially untouched. In a note to the literacy instructor, the editor states that *We Came to Town* fills a need in literacy classes for "simple, authentic material which deals with everyday adult concerns and experiences." Copious photographs "which are not intended as direct illustrations" but to "stimulate interest and group discussion by contrast and comparison" complement the dozen narratives. The use of images directly relating to the knowledge of the students is an important aide to stimulating discussion on generative themes in Freire's literacy method.

Contributions from both men and women attending USWE's literacy classes are grouped under headings such as "Who am I"; "My life story"; "Stories I heard at home"; and "Stealing." When compared to the "Who am I?" exercise in Fletcher and Hartshorne's *English for Standard Three* in which students are asked to provide the correct occupational title for a list of low-paying jobs (32), the writers in the "Who am I" chapter in *We Came to Town* (three of the four contributors are women) confidently

establish their own unique identities. Esther Letsatsi, for instance, in a brief composition states that

> I am a mother.
>
> I am a married mother.
>
> My daughter is a teacher.
>
> I paid her fees when she was at school.
>
> Luckily, she finished her schooling without getting into trouble.
>
> Now I myself can learn something.
>
> I want to learn to read and write English.
>
> I want to read the Bible. (4)

Letsatsi has written a succinct testimonial, describing an experience that is all too common for black women in South Africa. It is important for her to establish that she is a "married mother," for the destruction of the black family through the imposition of migrant labor policies, the lack of secure employment, and living arrangements that were frequently temporary and turbulent due to routine raids by the police and the bulldozing of illegal squatter communities meant that extramarital and transient relationships between men and women were a fact of life for the African community. Paying for her child's education is in itself a generative theme, considering the deep-seated resentment in the black community to the policy of requiring fees from black parents when white education was fully covered by the government. Letsatsi's sacrifices have paid off, for her daughter has achieved a degree of status by entering one of two professions open to black women: teaching and nursing. The fear of "getting into trouble" by becoming pregnant while a teenager haunts girls and parents

alike in the black community and has been a persistent reason for girls dropping out of school, despite claiming that finishing school is a goal high up on their list. [20] Throughout *We Came to Town*, the writers express regret for a deferred education, frequently caused by a mother not being able to afford school fees.

Although the editor does not specifically refer to Freire, his influence is apparent in the methodology that informs the text. For instance, in a section containing advice to the literacy instructor, it is suggested that the teacher "Use pictures or photographs to trigger off ideas. Try to bring in key words or new words the students give" (66). Students' writing is described as "authentic" and thus meaningful to the learner, while at the same time, the aim is to "stimulate a critical consciousness of the issues governing the world around him" (63). The selective use of Freirean methodology bears out Kumi Naidoo's assertion that progressive literacy programs in South Africa incorporated some elements of his approach but that this application was "uneven."

With a resurgent and sustained interest in documenting the people's history as a necessary function of cultural workers contributing to black consciousness, the job of accessing, recording, and publishing the stories of the man and woman in the street became a stimulating activity following the Soweto riots.[21] Mobilizing the masses

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[20] Miriam Mathabane, in her memoir as told to her brother Mark, records the trauma of falling pregnant as a high school student after being raped by her boyfriend, only to find out that three of her closest friends are also pregnant. The theme of out-of-wedlock pregnancy recurs in her memoir. When Miriam returns to high school after giving birth, she lies to the headmistress about her year-long absence. "Students with babies are registered last, and often, when enrollment is beyond the school's capacity, they end up not being allowed to resister," the reason being that "sick babies and abusive boyfriends" are likely to cause the student to drop out of school (263).

[21] Luli Callinicos provides a detailed account of the recording of popular history in South Africa in "The 'People's Past': Towards Transforming the Present." The formation of history groups around the country has led to the production of texts that have been successfully used as materials for literacy groups. For example, the magazine *Learn and Teach* achieved "heartening results" in their attempts to

required the active participation of ordinary people, and coming forward and testifying to one's personal experience as a member of the black community added ammunition to the cause. The international world was listening, apartheid was crumbling, and the momentum had to be maintained. Within this widening public platform, black women created a space from which to resist the government and reinstate themselves as speaking subjects, a reclamation of their historical rhetorical prowess. For an uneducated or undereducated woman to use literacy as a weapon to create a space to speak was an empowering, albeit daunting, prospect.

An intermediary stage to using literacy for speaking out about issues in one's community and raising the visibility of women is that of placing the instructor in the role of midwife, assisting the women to communicate with the outside world. In 1986, Hanlie Griesel, a literacy worker in the community of Mboza in northeastern Natal, undertook a joint project with the women attending literacy classes. In *Sibambene: The Voices of Women at Mboza*, three generations of black women talk about the "realities, the uncertainties, and the hopes" of living in a rural area with the men having migrated to the white urban centers looking for work, leaving the women to fend for themselves and the extended family. This they do admirably, having conceptualized and constructed a market and sewing center in Mboza, an inspirational and demanding venture that sets an example for other rural women in South Africa to emulate.

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provide interesting and accessible material for adult learners, focusing on writing about events in the community that some readers may remember from personal experience. As Callinicos says, the recording of "past struggles is a political act in itself—and to make this popularly accessible is a political act" (62), the type of text production that meshes well with critical literacy instruction.

Griesel emphasizes that the "book is intentionally written in the spoken words of the women . . . the text *is* the words of the women as they talked together in groups about photographs and information they would like to see included in their book" (n. pag., emphasis in original). *Sibambene* is a compelling example of women reflecting on their situation, taking action, and then reporting on their experiences from a position of authority. Yet these women have already reached an awareness of their situation as victims of South Africa's labor policies that split families apart by forcing the women to remain behind in the rural areas, lacking the necessary permits to move to the city with their husbands and fathers. Literacy for these women provides them with a communicative lifeline to the nationwide black community and facilitates an exchange of information. Their conscientization did not magically awaken in a literacy class. As the traditional teachers in the community, analyzing, assessing, and accounting for social and cultural practices is a time-honored intellectual legacy with which they are very familiar.

Through writing, ordinary people can seize the opportunity to establish a presence; they can turn to writing as a "request for reassurance that they in fact *have* an identity, that they have rescued the fragments and shards of a personality from the systematic official attempt to eradicate it" (Watts 115, emphasis in original). In an interview with Sidney I Dobrin, Michael Eric Dyson contends that communal writing is an engrossing activity undertaken by oppressed peoples because it enables them to "articulate a self through narrative" in the interest of "both revealing and inventing the future of the race" (85). Taken as an unprecedented interruption in South African literary culture, the autobiographical testimonials of the systematically silenced and

suppressed black underclass in South Africa document the reshaping and rewriting of apartheid history, subverting the strident discourses of colonialism with a view of history from below, articulated through the project of critical literacy.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Politics of Sponsorship: Manuscripts, Mentors, and Marketing

In her essay "The Patron and the Crocus," Virginia Woolf contends that aspiring writers typically receive the "plausible but utterly impracticable advice to write what they have to write as shortly as possible, as clearly as possible, and without other thought in their minds except to say exactly what is in them." Rather, she says, what should be uppermost in a budding writer's mind is attending to the mundane matter of securing an outlet for his/her work by carefully selecting a sponsor, someone who will "cajole the best out of the writer's brain and bring to birth the most varied and vigorous progeny of which he is capable" (149). Not surprisingly, the sponsor chosen will be a "desirable man," for patrons of the arts through the centuries have been well-heeled men whose prestigious social position has enabled them to wield influence, accessing the intricate web of financial and political connections at their disposal to assist the up and coming artist to gain exposure, secure contacts, and move in the right circles.

Woolf's readership was primarily made up of middle-class, educated young Britons, would be writers themselves dreaming of breaking into print, inspired through years of studying European literary masterpieces in schools and universities and reading for leisure at home. Even though the competition was stiff, achieving one's goal was doable if an aspiring writer joined the right literary circles, tapping into a network of writers and hoping for that fortuitous introduction to a potential well-

heeled patron. Nonetheless, for aspiring writers in countries such as South Africa, the situation is entirely different, particularly if you are black and female. Without access to the requisite networks, shut out of any flourishing literary culture, subjected to an impoverished education system, economically disadvantaged, dominated by neocolonialism and entrenched sexism, the black woman who dreams of becoming a published writer faces an extraordinary array of challenges.

Deborah Brandt's concept of "sponsors of literacy" is a particularly useful framework for analyzing the impediments encountered by black women in South Africa in their efforts to seek access to publishers. Brandt has coined the term sponsors of literacy in recognition of the fact that the attainment of increasingly sophisticated literacy levels is driven by market forces. By connecting "literacy as an individual development to literacy as an economic development," sponsors (or underwriters) function as "any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, and model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold, literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way." As Brandt asserts, "Sponsors are a tangible reminder that literacy learning throughout history has always required permission, sanction, assistance, coercion, or, at minimum, contact with existing trade routes" (*American* 19). This concept of sponsorship can be extended to the practice of women's oral traditions in South Africa, as who was allowed to speak, on what occasion, in which venue, to what audience, and on which subject has historically been determined and dictated by economically and politically powerful males, even within isolated rural settlements. As women were excluded from the making of knowledge and the

construction of "truth," they were marginalized, as the production of truth "is thoroughly imbued with relations of power" (Foucault 60).

Additionally, Brandt notes that the sponsorship of literacy is a "concept useful for tracking literacy's materiel: the things that accompany writing and reading and the ways they are manufactured and distributed" (*American* 20). In the last quarter of the twentieth century, the sponsorship of reading and writing has become an increasingly complex operation as the promotion and distribution of literacy in a highly competitive consumer culture necessitates a network of sponsors to promote new books, plays, films, magazines, and other cultural products that vie for the attention of the overwhelmed consumer.[1] "Sponsors," in Brandt's view, "are delivery systems for the economies of literacy," recruiting literacy for specific ends (19). Competing for attention in a crowded market, new writers face a difficult challenge in breaking through established reader references and reading patterns. In apartheid-era South Africa, new black voices were largely dependent on white academics, alternative presses, book reviewers, and progressive journalists who had the power, the contacts, and the motivation to introduce their work to the reading public—a predominantly white audience. With blacks having limited disposable income, the relatively high cost

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[1] Oprah Winfrey has emerged as a highly successful sponsor of literacy, having promoted reading through her book of the month club. By selecting a new title each month, Winfrey's promotion of reading for leisure and pleasure has had enormous financial consequences for publishing houses, for her book recommendations can lead to depleted store shelves and hurried reprints when her television audience rushes to buy her latest recommendations. The National Book Foundation awarded Winfrey a medal in 1999 for her sponsorship of reading. Toni Morrison in particular has benefited from Winfrey's promotion of her work, including the purchase of the film rights for her novel *Beloved*, in which Winfrey played the leading role. The well-heeled patron of former times has evolved into the high-profile television host who promotes books through interviewing authors about their latest work (without necessarily having read the work in question but being prepped by prepared questions supplied by staffers). Winfrey has also been instrumental in raising awareness of the plight of black South Africans through her sponsorship of author Mark Mathabane's mother and siblings, who were flown to the United States to appear on the Oprah Winfrey Show. Mathabane has written several books such as

of books made a culture of reading far less likely to take hold in the black community, thus their exposure to their own emerging writers, who had to depend largely on foreign interests to establish a foothold in the literary market, has been severely restricted. Securing the white "seal of approval" was inevitably an essential step to achieving international exposure.

Along with Woolf, Brandt draws attention to the "ideological freight" of sponsorship, pointing out that the recipients of sponsorship may be "oblivious" to the ramifications of this "ideological burden" (*American* 20). Woolf admonishes novice writers to "be sure you choose your patron wisely" (149). It is the ideological baggage of mainly white sponsorship that I find to be particularly revealing in the promotion of black women's writing in South Africa, for sponsorship does not necessarily guarantee that the interests of both producers and consumers of books are being well served. Even if a writer does attract the attention of a white sponsor, this much sought after publicity can backfire, for the critical reception of emergent writers can be quite negative when the literary paradigms of white academia are applied to works produced under unfavorable material conditions. White sponsors are often hampered by an unconscious display of imbedded racist ideology despite the outward appearance of rendering marginalized and relatively unknown writers a valuable service. As Woolf contends, this "business of patron-finding is one of the tests and trials of authorship," for a patron is "not merely the paymaster, but also in a very subtle and insidious way the instigator and inspirer of what is written . . ." (149-51).

Kaffir Boy (a title that frequently appears on college reading lists in the United States), *African Women: Three Generations*, and *Miriam's Song: A Memoir*.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty has raised our awareness of the colonizing project of Western feminist scholars who represent Third World women as "ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, religious, domesticated, family-oriented, victimized," while portraying themselves as "educated, modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the 'freedom' to make their own decisions" (199-200). From their privileged positions, these scholars come to the rescue of Third World women who, supposedly, cannot speak for themselves. Mohanty's critique of Western feminists who undertake research on women that Spivak would class as subalterns should cause us to reflect on the motives of white women who benefit from scholarly interventions in the lives of these women. The patronage of black women's writing in South Africa must be scrutinized accordingly, for the danger that the sponsorship of new writers serves to reinforce the colonizing project rather than support the emergent agency of these women is an ever-present risk that must be interrogated.

Mohanty's seminal essay on the subject is echoed by Dabi Nkululeko in "The Right to Self-Determination in Research: Azania and Azanian Women."[2] Nkululeko contends that "alien/settler" scholarship (95) predominates because the majority of funding comes from foreign governments and multi-national corporations and is therefore ideologically beholden to Western methods and research topics that serve the interests of the donors and not the oppressed masses in Africa (90). African women are particularly vulnerable to being represented by outsiders by reason of their lack of education and funds, with the result that "alien scholars, mainly female, still examine, report and analyze the role of the Azanian woman, focusing on whichever of the forms

[2] Azania is an African name for South Africa.

of oppression they saw as important for themselves and harping on that until the other forms were forgotten by all except those who suffered them" (97).

While Nkululeko correctly identifies the pitfalls of sponsorship from a "he who pays the piper names the tune" perspective, not all white South African women scholars are guilty of being blinded by their privilege to the extent that they are unable to escape its limitations. Liz Gunner and Isabel Hofmeyr, for instance, in their analyses of women's oral traditions, have successfully moved away from a fixation with apartheid, a myopic "over-emphasis" that Nkululeko takes issue with, by interpreting the oppression of black women as a complex and interlocking system that Nkululeko identifies as comprising not only race, sex, and class, but also "national oppression" (104).

Our knowledge of the lives of black women in South Africa over the centuries has been sparse, a situation in evidence throughout the African continent because women have historically been conditioned to operating within the domestic sphere, subordinated to the perpetuation of patriarchal social organization. In the late 1980s, as the white minority in South Africa gradually yielded to the inevitable yet dreaded black majority rule, part of this process entailed a determined and defiant dismantling of the rigid and suffocating control on the circulation of information. As whites lost control of their claim to be the sole subjects of South Africa's history, the suppressed majority—Indians, coloreds, and blacks—relished the chance to counter decades of misinformation, misrepresentation, and muzzling by the white hegemony. Soon to be the inheritors of the new South Africa, the black population found itself the subject of mounting international curiosity that was evidenced by a noticeable increase in

newspaper reports, magazine articles, and television features that focused on blacks recounting the harrowing details of decades of white exploitation.[3]

An unprecedented quantity of research on black women began appearing in the mid 1980s, a momentum that continues unabated two decades later. As black women began to publicly comment on their lives lived under the oppressive shadow of apartheid, white women, both local and foreign, discovered opportunities for recuperating the silenced voices of these black women, an expediency brought about by black-initiated political turmoil. Whether sponsoring the writing of these women or acting as midwives assisting in the genesis of narratives previously screened from the eyes and ears of white audiences, their motivation for undertaking these studies has gone largely unexamined. In this chapter, I provide an historical overview of the politics of publishing in South Africa as it applies to the attempts of black women to secure outlets for this work. I begin by discussing the role of missionary presses in creating the beginnings of a literary tradition for black women in South Africa. I then focus on the second quarter of the twentieth century in which the intervention of whites, mainly women, although I do examine the case of a white male sponsor, is crucial to bringing these women writers to print. I conclude by noting efforts within the black community to create opportunities for black writers to reach an audience without white financial, editorial, scholarly, or publishing sponsorship. Without white backing, black writers would have had considerably more difficulty in establishing a literary tradition. While I am generally sympathetic to Mohanty's argument, it is

[3] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, under the leadership of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, has had a similar mesmerizing effect, particularly in South Africa, by providing a public forum to accommodate a national catharsis as witnesses came forward to testify to the atrocities suffered under

inevitable in the colonial situation that aspiring writers from the suppressed and silenced majority are forced to depend upon the patronage of the privileged white minority to gain access to publishing outlets. As Brian Wafawarowa says in his foreword to *The Politics of Publishing in South Africa*, publishing is "not simply a manufacturing industry." We need to consider the "politics of ownership" as well as "issues generated around representation, knowledge, language and literacy, power and association, and government policy" (1).

Missionary Presses and Black Women's Publishing Prospects

A major legacy of mission stations was the founding of printing presses to promote a reading culture among an emerging educated African elite by producing suitable materials in the vernaculars.[4] The largest and most successful of these operations was Lovedale Press, founded in the Cape in 1823. These enterprises have been the site of conflicting interpretations of the intentions of missionaries. For example, Andries Oliphant asserts:

> The missionary press is sometimes misleadingly considered to be the origin of the 'black press' in South Africa. While the Lovedale Press, and others like it, were founded to translate the African languages into writing and print, they were strictly speaking controlled and managed by European missionaries, and formed a critical institutional extension of the colonial order in South Africa. Not surprisingly, the literature

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the auspices of the apartheid government and the perpetrators of crimes revealed details of their actions in the hopes of being granted amnesty.

[4] For education purposes and for radio transmissions, Xhosa, Zulu, Swazi, North Sotho, South Sotho, Tswana, Tsonga, and Venda are officially recognized languages.

> produced by writers educated in mission schools and published by the various missionary presses invariably centred on propagating Christianity and, along with it, Western culture as a value system both superior and preferable to indigenous culture. (112)

While Oliphant's position does alert us to the underlying motives of mission societies in embarking on this expensive and controversial endeavor, R.H.W. Shepherd, in his history of Lovedale, presents a somewhat different perspective. Lovedale Press continued as a successful operation from its inception until the incoming Nationalist government began to dismantle publishing ventures of this type in an effort to curtail and control black literary output.

In reference to attempts to establish a black literary tradition in South Africa, Shepherd asserts that "naturally such literature has sought to fulfill the aims of missionary societies. Thus books of a scriptural or devotional character and text-books for schools predominate" (*Literature* 15). "Without printing," Shepherd claims, "the mass of the people must remain barbarous, whatever might be the increase of their material wealth" (12). Paternalistic as his pronouncements are, the vision of the Lovedale Press was not entirely driven by disseminating literacy in order to civilize the African population and as a medium for spreading Christianity. In 1870, the press launched a monthly magazine, *The Kafir Express*, which underwent a name change in 1876 to *The Christian Express*, and finally, *The South African Outlook*. The *South African Outlook*, according to Shepherd, provided its African and white readership with a forum for discussing interracial issues, thus, it "rendered a special service" to its African readers "by providing them with a medium of expression, and by giving them

a share in its management with all this means by way of training in literary and public affairs" (13-14). Shepherd, it seems, was willing to share the technical expertise and management acumen of the press in the interests of promoting and expanding a literate culture among Africans. It would even suggest that Shepherd encouraged critical literacy by his awareness that growing racial tensions in South Africa could only be resolved by supporting and sustaining an interracial dialogue, offering the pages of the *Outlook* as a suitable forum.[5]

Shepherd was unperturbed when "trade union regulations laid down that the press must confine its operations to Bantu literature and missionary or Native affairs publications," as this had always been the main focus of the press.[6] Books for purchase and for use by Africans "should, as far as possible, be printed and bound by Bantu workmen" (*Literature* 16). Courses in bookbinding and printing were offered to boys as part of Lovedale's curriculum, yet another example of the masculinization of the printing trade in the country. And while the translation of the Bible into Xhosa was a primary task of the Lovedale Press, together with the publication of sermons, prayer books, dictionaries, grammars, school readers, spelling books, magazines, and newspapers for use by the African population, the establishment of a literary tradition among the literate minority was a key concern of the institution. Although presses such as Lovedale were organs of the missionary societies, Shepherd's comments

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[5] Shepherd considers it "noteworthy" that all the editors of the *Isigidimi Sama-Xosa* (The Xosa Messenger), the vernacular portion of *The Christian Express* which was published in English, were Africans, "an early instance of Lovedale faith in Native capacity" (*Literature* 12).

[6] A variety of terms have been employed to describe the indigenous African population in South Africa as we see in Shepherd's use of "Bantu" and "Native" in one sentence. Bantu is a generic term for a number of tribes in Central and Southern Africa, and this term was abandoned in the 1980s in favor of "black."

indicate a desire to train Africans to participate in all aspects of the publishing field with a view to establishing their own operations.

In the 1950s, Shepherd notes that the volume of manuscripts received by the press was gratifying. In particular, "It is noteworthy that women quite frequently submitted their attempts at authorship" (*South* 142).[7] Unfortunately, he does not provide additional details about these manuscripts authored by women, despite his comment that they received regular submissions from aspiring authors. Unearthing these unpublished manuscripts, which are likely scattered around the country, if not lost, would be a worthwhile endeavor and an essential task in order to recover as many of these silenced voices as possible. Margaret Daymond et al, in their introduction to *Women Writing Africa*, note that in the early days of the missionary presses, although black men began to write biographies of notable African males and some fiction, "[p]roduction was sparse, and sparser still by women." An indication of the lack of seriousness with which women writers were treated and a subsequent negligence in handling their manuscripts is evidenced by the statement that "The corpus of writing by black women is further depleted by the inexplicable 'loss' of two of the texts after they had been the subject of summary or analysis by male researchers and critics" (30).

Lovedale Press continued to prosper, and by the 1950s, its annual sales were in the range of half a million books, its expressed goal still being to provide books to

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[7] In an appendix to the Negro Universities Press edition of Shepherd's *Lovedale and Literature for the Bantu: A Brief History and a Forecast* is a list of the works that "Lovedale has accepted for publication at its own risk and cost" (17). Under the section on fiction is an entry for Zora Futshane, who wrote *Ujujuju*, described as "A short novel of merit by a woman writer. 1939. Pages 76. New orthography" (103). The original manuscript of this novel is contained in the Lovedale Press archives at the University of Fort Hare in Box 14, together with an additional work by Futshane entitled *Mhla*

Africans as cheaply as possible in light of their economic circumstances. Shepherd comments that many of the manuscripts submitted "did not come up to publication standard," although Lovedale accepted a higher percentage of manuscript submissions than did British publishing houses, which reportedly only accepted about two percent of the manuscripts they received (*South* 142). Never being tempted to lower its standards despite seeking to promote an emerging culture of black writing, "Lovedale did an indirect but valuable service towards bringing Bantu literature into esteem when at an early stage of its work as printer and publisher it set a high standard of workmanship" (*Literature* 13). Whether the unpublished manuscripts were rejected through quality concerns or financial limitations, it seems likely that a wealth of information lies waiting to be discovered about black women's literary abilities and their insights on African culture and its collision with white culture in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[8]

Albert Gérard has identified three untranslated South African black women writers in *Four African Literatures: Xhosa, Sotho, Zulu, Amharic* (1971). One of these is Lillith Kakaza (although Gérard identifies her only as L. Kakaza). He describes her as being one of the writers "responsible for the emergence of Xhosa prose fiction during the second decade of [the twentieth] century." Her "thirty-one page novella, *Intyantyambo Yomzi* (*The Flower in the Home*)" is a story "dealing with the fortitude of a girl who overcame temptations until the day of her death."[9] Kakaza's

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Ngenqaba in three folders. A complete listing of the Lovedale Press Box is available at www.ufh.ac.za/collections/NAHECS/ Cultural%20Heritage/ lovedale3.htm.

[8] Among the manuscript archives of Lovedale Press in Box 45 are three folders of miscellaneous material that do not contain the names of the authors. It is possible that some of these submissions are the work of aspiring women writers. In Box 13 is a work by Lillie Cox titled *Ubuko Benene*, apparently unpublished.

[9] According to V.M. Sisi Maqagi, Kakaza's first novel "cannot be traced" (Daymond et al 206).

recounting of the endless temptations surmounted by the protagonist would seem to suggest a Christian theme with a lifelong tug of war between the forces of good and evil. One wonders if the novella is partly autobiographical (a hallmark of black women's writing that emerged in the 1980s after the Soweto riots), for the notion of autobiography as truth and confession has religious roots, as Leigh Gilmore explores in "Policing the Truth: Confession, Gender, and Autobiographical Authority." Gilmore contends that "confession can be thought of as 'self'-policing" (60), while never escaping the intersections of gender coding and masculinist privilege that are cultural productions. Gérard notes that Kakaza subsequently penned *U-Tandiwe wakwa Gcaleka* (*Tandiwe, a Girl of the Gcaleka*) which he describes as a "longer tale that was published in 1914 by the Methodist Book Room in Cape Town" (65).

A second Xhosa woman writer identified by Gérard is Victoria Nombulelo Swaartbooi, whose only novel, *UMandisa* (*The Bringer of Joy*), was published by Lovedale in 1935 (listed in the publication list as "A short story. 1933. Pages 63").[10] In his dissertation written at the University of the Witwatersrand in 1945, Benedict W. Vilakazi describes Swaartbooi as the first Nguni woman to produce a book. His critique is rather scathing and decidedly sexist, claiming that

> There is nothing striking in Miss Swartbooi's language and style. They are simple and straightforward, well suited to the theme of the book. In reading "U-Mandisa" one finds the figure of a woman who loved teaching for its own sake, but who perhaps would have done better had she had an opportunity to be trained as a Florence Nightingale, or in

> some other type of specialized social service among the ignorant and illiterate people of her race. (332)

Swaartbooi portrays an African girl who goes to school and trains as a teacher, echoing her own experience of being educated at several missionary schools, such as Mgwali Training School and Healdtown, then returning to Mgwali to teach domestic science at the Girls' Practising School for a short period before dying after a brief illness in 1937. An excerpt from *Umandisa*, translated from Xhosa, appears in the anthology *Women Writing Africa*. V.M. Sisi Maqagi, who provided the headnote, reveals that Swaartbooi's protagonist, Mandisa, "represents the emergence of a new type of woman," one who relishes her accomplishments as a teacher and breadwinner in her home, while also "affirm[ing] the centrality of males and the self-sacrifice of women to bolster that centrality" (206). Daymond et al consider it "significant" that Mandisa "deploys orature in the classroom and thus identifies herself as a social commentator in the more oblique mode appropriate to the *intsomi* rather than to the parable" (30).

The final woman writer identified by Gérard is Violet Dube, one of several writers whose work marked "the auspicious beginnings of Zulu creative writing." *Woza nazo* was published by the Oxford University Press in Cape Town in 1935 and is a collection of traditional oral stories. Vilakazi, the scholar and poet, wrote in his dissertation that her work is "an outstanding effort," describing her book as "a masterpiece of story-telling. It is a mine of literary wealth rich in vocabulary" (331). He asserts that she "is not concerned with inventing new forms of literature, but with

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[10] The discrepancy in the date of publication in unaccounted for. The Lovedale Press list of publications does not indicate if there was a second or subsequent printing, and the original manuscript is not in the

perfecting and building on the old . . . she puts her readers in possession of the ardour and exultation, with which the oral narrator worked out his arguments" (328-29). Until these novels are translated into English, we will have to rely on critiques by black scholars to discern their literary merit. The excerpt from Swaartbooi's novel and accompanying critiques provide tantalizing evidence that what little remains of black women's literary output during the era of missionary education is well worth translating and publishing. Swaartbooi's *Umandisa* provides rare insights into the limited possibilities for reinventing the traditional concept of woman.

During the nineteenth century, the publishing industry in South Africa was "largely a white affair. Within the structure of white ownership and the rivalries between the English and Afrikaans sectors of society, the output and status of the various literatures reflected the prevailing power relations" (Oliphant 14).[11] Were it not for the limited sponsorship of missionary presses, black women would have had no outlet for their work. Although these presses privileged the literary talent among elite African men, promoting it as part of their mission of evangelism, at least a few women are known to us today through the sponsorship of their work by Lovedale Press in particular.

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archives at Fort Hare.

[11] Oliphant could have added that these power relations reflected male dominance of the press and literary output. While he does make mention of the fact that "[i]n South African English literature, greater opportunities have to be created for black women writers who are still severely marginalised" (122), in the volume in which Oliphant's article appears, The Politics of Publishing in South Africa, a discussion of gender relations is noticeably absent. Apart from a brief discussion of *Speak* magazine that appeared in 1982, sponsored by the Durban Woman's Group, an organization that promoted women' s solidarity and an awareness of social issues, the status quo in South African publishing remains intact. A remarkable omission is any mention of Seriti sa Sechaba, a publishing house established and managed by a group of black women in the 1980s for the purpose of "wip[ing] out that feeling of defeat and of being left out of the game." Seriti sa Sechaba declared that "this publishing house should be owned and used fully by all those aspiring potential women writers, as a vehicle which will prepare them to achieve that desired recognition, which is a dream of all writers the world over" (Tsikang 3).

A Window on Tribal Culture: The Native Informant as Research Assistant

A somewhat unusual type of collaboration, this time between a white male academic and a young black woman, has produced a detailed and vivid account of the Venda people that reveals rich insights into tribal life from the perspective of a schoolgirl. The 1964 publication of *Black Background: The Childhood of a South African Girl* is the result of their unusual literary partnership. However, the circumstances under which this collaboration occurred and its surprising results appears to have passed virtually unnoticed, at least as far as the production of texts by black women is concerned. British musicologist and anthropologist John Blacking, who was a faculty member at the University of the Witwatersrand, lived among the Venda in the Northern Transvaal for a two-year period from 1956-1958. *Black Background* came about as part of Blacking's research project during his sojourn and is a somewhat unorthodox text, for his research on the Venda was assisted largely by his collaboration with a seventeen-year-old girl from the Sibasa district. Under the name Dora Thizwilondi Magidi, a pseudonym provided at her request, she produced a sufficient number of pieces for Blacking to be able to select those that "illustrate the way in which a Venda gradually becomes aware of her culture, and how she strikes out on a path that leads her away from many of its traditions" (8). In all, twenty-seven short autobiographical stories written in Venda were selected for inclusion in *Black Background*, translated into English by Blacking, who has "tried to reflect as faithfully as possible the meaning and spirit of the Venda texts."

Magidi was paid by the author to write these autobiographical accounts as "Her work was good, and so I encouraged her to write regularly; she in turn, was very glad to be able to earn extra money" (8). Beneath Blacking's name on the title page appears the statement: "Based on the Autobiography of Dora Thizwilondi Magidi," with the frontispiece displaying a full-page, close-up photograph of a nameless young black girl. While an analysis of Magidi's literary accomplishment was obviously not the focus of Blacking's research on the Venda, he admits that "This book would never have been written without the stimulus of Dora's texts, and I am most grateful to her" (10). Magidi's narratives comprise the bulk of the book, 117 pages, compared to Blacking's 72 pages encompassing the introduction and extensive anthropological commentary on Magidi's autobiographical sketches.

While I applaud Blacking for encouraging this budding author and providing her with monetary compensation for her writing, it is disappointing that she chose to remain anonymous, although her request is understandable considering the political climate of the late 1950s with South Africa hunkering down to the edicts of the Nationalist government. (Blacking, a British national, was expelled from South Africa in 1969 for anti-apartheid activities.) As a young Venda woman growing up in rural South Africa, Magidi would have been conditioned to knowing her place in the tribal hierarchy, and the authority she would have accrued by virtue of authorship, particularly in collaboration with a white academic, would have placed her at odds with the male tribal leadership and upset her subordinate role as a female in the community. However, as a result of Magidi's literary collaboration with Blacking, several questions arise: Was she encouraged to continue writing? Did she complete

her education? Was she among the renaissance of black women writers post-Soweto? Who exactly is the anonymous Dora Thizwilondi Magidi? I had hoped that one of her autobiographical pieces would be included in the anthology *Woman Writing Africa: The Southern Region*, released in 2003, a collection of mostly unknown writers gathered as a "project of cultural reconstruction that aims to restore African women's voices to the public sphere" by focusing in part on the "dailiness of women's lives" (xviii).[12]

Magidi provides fascinating accounts of her daily life, revealing how gender played a significant role in the type of activities she participated in or was excluded from. Describing how her eight-year-old brother Godiseni learned the rituals of hunting with his friends and her father, she accepts without comment her exclusion from the excitement and dangers of hunting. When her brother and father are arrested for trespassing on a white farmer's land while in hot pursuit of a duiker (buck), Magidi is sympathetic and supportive, cooking and delivering food to the police station, then running home to fetch money to pay the fine imposed by the Native Commissioner (70-72). When a woman arrives to escort her on the long trek to her grandmother's house for a month-long visit, this interlude is an all-female event, and Magidi relishes the company of the four girls who live with her grandmother. After supper comes the ritual of storytelling, with the girls gathering around the fire "while granny told us stories about the old days. She made us very happy, especially when she told us some of the wonderful fairy tales that she knew" (75). Magidi proceeds to give a lively rendition of her favorite story, demonstrating that to become an accomplished

[12] The editors state that they had to "reluctantly drop" Magidi's work because of space limitations (footnote 64, page 63).

storyteller is a rhetorical skill and social convention that girls must acquire, practice, and perfect, and an art form that she ably demonstrates.

Blacking's aim in *Black Background* is to provide a "simple introduction to the complex culture of one of the smallest of the rural African societies of the Republic of South Africa" (7). Although our entry into Venda culture is facilitated by the reminiscences, observations, and interpretations of a seventeen-year-old, this by no means indicates an unsophisticated view of this society, for the strength and appeal of Magidi's delightful, descriptive, and lively anecdotes is her ability to negotiate her increasingly hybrid existence through the rapid encroachment of white culture and industrial development on the Venda's traditional pastoral habitat. Magidi's authorial capabilities provide an interesting commentary on mission school education, although we learn nothing of her writing instruction. Her text raises many important questions about the nature of writing pedagogy, at least in her particular school, for her narrative strategies demonstrate that concepts such as naming, detailing, dialogue, time markers, tension, and resolution are used with style. In fact, her narrative could more aptly have been titled "Incidents in the Life of a Venda Girl," for the wide range of subjects she covers provide a rich cross-section of the ordinary and the extraordinary events of her young life. While the canon of invention has atrophied under the rule of current-traditional pedagogy, and many students experience difficulty selecting topics that interest them (hence the myriad heuristics that have sprung up to overcome this problem), Magidi, it would seem, was bursting with topics and enthusiasm for her foray into the world of white publishing.

Merely glancing through the index, the titles of her stories provide a clue to the wide range of events that Magidi selected and eagerly wrote about: "A bathing incident;" "My brother learns to hunt;" "I visit my grandmother and hear the story of Nyabanga;" "I learn to dance tshigombela;" "I stay with my uncle in Johannesburg;" "Wild dogs and buffaloes near Sibasa;" "The 1955 Eisteddfod;" "My father organizes a davha work-party." The diversity of incidents is astonishing. It would be interesting to compare these descriptive titles with essay topics typically chosen by white South African school-children in Standard VI (Eighth Grade), the highest grade Magidi had passed when she wrote her narratives. Writing instructors invariably complain about the generic topics chosen by the average student and the inevitable dull and predictable prose that is frequently produced, yet here we have an underprivileged (at least from a Western perspective) black girl from a rural area, seventeen at the time she passed Standard VI, in distinction to the typical age thirteen for white children, producing model essays.

Magidi's style is energetic and fast-paced, and she has a clear conception of her intended (white) audience. We are not privy to the extent that Blacking may have worked with her on her rough drafts, or if she even rewrote them at all, or whether he made suggestions as to possible topics, content, narrative devices, etc. For a compositionist, this lack of information on her composing processes is frustrating, as it is difficult to assess the degree to which her work has been shaped by her white sponsor and editor. Take, for instance, her understanding of audience. Magidi was aware that she was writing for white people with extensive reading habits, yet she herself would likely have had access to few books outside of school; reading for

leisure and personal enjoyment simply was not a part of the life of the average black person, especially in a rural area where the daily chores predominated. Whereas most inexperienced writers have difficulty in analyzing the complex demands of their audiences and fail to provide enough information to communicate their ideas effectively, Magidi explains concepts that her white audience would not understand, such as "Every morning I used to eat muladza, the porridge left over from supper." White people, of course, would not eat porridge for supper, nor eat the remains of supper for breakfast. After eating, she joins two friends, Musandiwa and Luvhengo, in a game with pebbles called *ndode*, instructions for which are given thus:

> We scratched out a little circle in the ground for ndode: we put ten pebbles into it, and then we began to play the game. We had to throw up one pebble into the air, and scrape up other pebbles before catching the first pebble again. If one of us failed to catch the pebble, another took her place. (61)

Similarly, when the older girls put together a team to dance the *tshigombela* and are invited to perform for the headman of a neighboring village, Magidi choreographs the dance for her readers, describing the various roles assigned to the dancers, and provides a classic definition—with class and differentiae—of the instruments, the *mirumba* and the *thungaw*. Although her parents would not allow her to go on the expedition, her recounting of this exciting event in the lives of these young girls demonstrates her ability to interview the participants, seeking out interesting dialogue, unusual angles, unexpected reactions, and then weaving her material into a perceptive commentary on the limited, yet rewarding, role open to young women in tribal

ceremonies. In conclusion, she admits her disappointment at being forced to stay home and miss this gala affair but discloses that by the time another opportunity arose to participate in *bepha*, she had enrolled in school "and did not wish to dance *tshigombela*" (86), an indication that her entry into formal schooling had begun to weaken her ties to traditional tribal culture by causing her to reevaluate her participation in such activities.

Although Blacking does not indicate that the purpose of his research was to provide a gendered view of Venda culture and society, through Magidi's animated sketches, we gain intriguing insights into what it was like to be a young Venda girl in the 1940s and 1950s, a disruptive time in South Africa for the black population as Afrikaner nationalism emerged as an ominous and destructive force in race relations. Magidi's work seems well-suited to a "project aimed at capturing African women's creative landscape" (Daymond et al xvii). Ironically, *Black Background* is an apt description of Blacking's collaboration with the young black writer whose true identity is hidden by a pseudonym, for Magidi's creative endeavors and cultural critiques remain in the background, an accompaniment to Blacking's foregrounded scholarly interpretation of Venda culture.

On the Shoulders of Giants: Marketing and the Power of Name Recognition

As I have demonstrated throughout this dissertation, black women in South Africa have certainly not lacked the ability to contribute to the cultural production of their community, but they have been hampered in reaching a larger audience by a lack of access to forums for disseminating their work. When the breakthrough did occur in

the late 1970s and early 1980s, facilitated by the loosening of the government's vice-like grip on law and order as a result of political agitation in the black community, the "silence was broken," as many commentators have termed this phenomenon.

The publication of Ellen Kuzwayo's autobiography *Call Me Woman* in 1985, the first black woman to write an autobiography in South Africa, raises troubling questions that point to Mohanty's contention that Western women helping Third World women escape from oblivion can in reality compound their oppression. Marketing the autobiography of Kuzwayo, a black woman unknown to an international audience, although a public figure with a distinguished record of activism in the black community in South Africa, required overcoming this obstacle. By approaching two giants in women's writing in South Africa, representing both the black and white communities, the reputations of these illustrious writers guaranteed instant name recognition and a consumer's "seal of approval" concerning the literary merits of *Call Me Woman*. Nadine Gordimer agreed to write the preface and Bessie Head provided the foreword. On the cover, a photograph of a smiling Kuzwayo appears underneath the names of both patrons, which are displayed prominently beneath the title. Convention holds that by agreeing to be associated with a work by writing a preface, introduction, or afterword, established authors vouch for the quality and the merits of the work.

It is Gordimer's preface that most perturbs me, for her endorsement carries special weight by virtue of her status as an internationally acclaimed white South African woman novelist who has exposed the horrors of apartheid by way of her finely crafted characters. Capitalizing on Gordimer's name recognition and her reputation as

a prolific writer (who became a Nobel Laureate in 1991) was an astute decision to entice bookstore browsers to purchase a copy and to gain the attention of seasoned book critics. These efforts paid off as *Call Me Woman* was published in South Africa by Ravan Press, in Britain by Women's Press, and in the United States by Spinsters Ink. The latter's mission statement claims that it publishes books that "not only name crucial issues in women's lives, but also demonstrate healing and change." My contention is that Gordimer's prefatory remarks do not work in tandem with this expressed goal, but in fact devalue and defuse Kuzwayo's overtly political incentive for writing her autobiography.

The "crucial issues" which have compelled Kuzwayo to dare to speak out are elided by Gordimer, and the possibilities for "healing and change" between black women and white women never materialize despite Gordimer's insistent critique of apartheid, a driving force in her work, and her frequent and well publicized denunciations of apartheid. Gordimer's cameo performance fails to endorse Kuzwayo's groundbreaking entry into print and shatters any expectations of a rapprochement between white women and black women as apartheid drew fitfully to its demise. The extent to which apartheid ideology seeped into and saturated the psyche of those whites who believed that their public refusals of complicity carried over to their private lives is revealed by Gordimer's essentializing portrait of Kuzwayo, the black woman.

Without the sponsorship of Sir Harry Oppenheimer, mining magnate and chairman of the Anglo-American Corporation, it would not have been financially possible for Kuzwayo to write her autobiography. His assistance enabled her to give

up her full-time job as a social worker employed by the Johannesburg City Council for two years to concentrate on writing, while the University of the Witwatersrand generously provided her with free office space. Kuzwayo approached Gordimer hoping for a critique of her draft; her response is recorded in the acknowledgments: "Ellen I am pleasantly surprised by what you have written—go ahead and allow no one to interfere in your style of work." From the brief quote Kuzwayo provides, it is impossible to ascertain what specific advice (if any) Gordimer gave this novice writer. However, the term "pleasantly surprised" has patronizing overtones, indicating that Gordimer's initial expectations about the quality of the work were not high. Her preface is similarly vague and noncommittal, which is my concern with the choice of Gordimer to celebrate the publication of the first autobiography written by a black South African woman. Approaching seventy when she undertook the writing of her book, and without literary forebears as a result of the government's decimation of black creativity, composing in a vacuum without female role models to turn to for inspiration, Kuzwayo's need for reassurance and guidance about her writing capabilities from someone of the stature and reputation of Gordimer is understandable.

What Gordimer really thought of Kuzwayo's manuscript remains undisclosed, as her prefatory remarks offer no laudatory opinions. In fact, her second sentence kills any illusions the reader may have that Kuzwayo's writing abilities are to be commended, for Gordimer states that: "Fortunately, although she is not a writer, she has the memory and the gift of unselfconscious expression that enable her to tell her story as no-one else could" (xi).[13] Having just completed a 266-page manuscript,

[13] Kuzwayo's foreword to *Singing Away the Hunger*, an autobiography by Mpho 'M'atsepo Nthunya, edited by K. Limakatso Kendall, provides a striking contrast to Gordimer's preface to Kuzwayo's *Call*

Kuzwayo still cannot claim to be a writer (at least in Gordimer's estimation); thus she is undermined by being denied the authority, the power, and the legitimacy of authorship. Cast in the traditional role of the oral storyteller in a preliterate era who draws her inspiration from the communal memory, her writing thus reflects an "unselfconscious expression." Yet Kuzwayo painstakingly articulates her acute consciousness of her situation and her status as a black woman and her duty to record black history as a woman who had access to a superior missionary education unavailable to apartheid-era blacks, detailing in her autobiography her educational experiences at several missionary institutions. Gordimer's characterization of her work as a "simple but highly observant narrative" diminishes the author's hard-won educational achievements and her contributions to the history of mission schools, relegating her to the role of a grandmother telling stories around the fireside to entertain the children. As an authoritative version of history from someone who has lived through what Head terms the "old order" when black people in South Africa lived mostly as farmers to the "broken disjointed chaos of the slums and shacks of the townships . . ." (xiv), Gordimer denudes Kuzwayo's research of its factual basis.

The privileged circumstances of Gordimer's own life allow her to write undisturbed in a "room of her own" with direct access to her garden in an exclusive and secluded Johannesburg suburb, sustained and supported by black female servants who free her from monotonous and time-consuming household chores. I would at least have expected a brief recognition of the factors and the forces that have denied

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Me Woman. Kuzwayo describes Nthunya's text as a "simple book, but a great book, and part of its greatness is the questions it forces us to ask: about our societies, our values, the sets of choices we now refer to as 'lifestyles'; and about the lives of women and men in colonised African communities" (xii).

aspiring black women writers the chance to practice and perfect their craft.[14] Kuzwayo's achievement in writing her autobiography was indeed groundbreaking, a historic moment that deserves acknowledgement by being documented for posterity, especially when Gordimer as a privileged white woman has succeeded directly because underprivileged black women through their menial labor have been forced to contribute to the maintenance of the ideal writing environment.

In her foreword, Head provides the historical context for Kuzwayo's work from the black perspective, noting that the

> documentation of human suffering in this book is terrible . . . . But at the end of this book one feels as if a shadow history of South Africa has been written; there is a sense of triumph, of hope in this achievement and that one has read the true history of the land, a history that vibrates with human compassion and goodness. (xiii)

Head validates Kuzwayo as researcher, recorder, and reporter, crediting her "high quality" education at mission schools for "equip[ping] her for the beautiful contribution she makes during her lifetime." By peeling away the "rhinoceros hide at which are hurled tear gas, batons, bullets and ferocious police dogs" (xiii) and exposing the depths of human suffering endured by blacks under apartheid, Head

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Discussing the quality of writing, Kuzwayo refers to the author's "artistry," her "calmness of mind and thought," and her "spare and factual" prose" (x).

[14] The image of writer Gcina Mhlophe tucked away in a public toilet in a park, turning a public space into a private "room of her own" in which to write, is a powerful image. Threatened with having to vacate her temporary quarters at any minute should another park patron wish to use the facilities, Mhlope's short story "The Toilet" (1987) speaks forcefully to the need to rethink and reflect on the act of writing from the vantage of the subaltern. Mhlophe was forced to hide in a public toilet each day until it was time to leave for her job in a clothing factory, as she was living illegally in the servant's quarters with her sister who was employed as a domestic servant for a white family in Johannesburg. Her appropriation of the confined space in the cold and draughty utilitarian structure in which the "walls

credits and applauds Kuzwayo for writing the type of book that "will be the Bible one day for the younger generations" (xv).

Kuzwayo's "story," as Gordimer chooses to refer to it, will be "both exotically revealing and revealingly familiar to readers" (xi). Stepping dangerously into another political minefield with her use of the term "exotic," Gordimer raises the colonial specter of "otherness" that distances and damages non-Western cultures and landscapes by portraying them as foreign, alien, strange, fascinating, and also stimulating. Exoticism carries with it connotations of desirability and appropriation, yet Gordimer applauds what she interprets as Kuzwayo's move away from her native African culture through her incorporation of aspects of the Western model of womanhood. Gordimer seems to fall victim to the fate of the colonizer who outwardly refuses complicity with discriminatory and oppressive colonial administrations, yet is doomed to live "under the sign of a contradiction which looms at every step, depriving him of all coherence and all tranquility" (Memmi 20).

If Kuzwayo is contaminated with Western values (which Gordimer favors), but partially retains her Africanness, then her contamination dilutes her exoticness; she can no longer appear as a tantalizing object to white readers. Gordimer fails to recognize that she has "simply changed difficulties and discomfort," for Memmi observes that it is "not easy to escape mentally from a concrete situation, to refuse its ideology while continuing to live with its actual relationships" (20). The exotic is enticing precisely because it is unfamiliar, yet according to Gordimer, Kuzwayo's account of her life is "both exotically revealing" while it is also "revealingly familiar

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were wonderfully close to me—it felt like it was made to fit me alone" (119), provides a compelling contrast to the writing workspace of white authors such as Gordimer.

to readers." As the apartheid machine effectively silenced black women, the substance of their lives was veiled from view; the tragedy is that white South Africans for the most part were oblivious to execrable conditions in the townships, conditions that were revealingly unfamiliar and not in the least exotic.[15] Whites simply had no reason to enter the townships, and the ever-present danger of being attacked was discouragement enough. Foreign visitors to South Africa invariably asked to be taken to a township to view conditions and experience a slice of the "real" Africa; to accomplish this, a permit had to be obtained from the authorities.

For Gordimer, Kuzwayo "represents . . . a particular triumph: wholeness attained by the transitional woman." But Kuzwayo, in permanent transit between two worlds, has expressed no desire to "achieve a synthesis" as claimed for her (xi). Gordimer seems dedicated to maintaining the modernist project that values the autonomous self—an ideal that provided the rationale for apartheid ideology and its insistence on the separate development of races. By crediting Kuzwayo with having achieved "wholeness," Gordimer denies the fragmented and hybrid existence of the colonized, continually crisscrossing borders in order to interface with white culture of economic necessity while whites remain distant and disengaged from the realities of the cultural collision of the colonial encounter.

With her attempt to homogenize the black experience, for "Ellen Kuzwayo's life has been lived as a black woman in South Africa, with all this implies" (xi), Gordimer leads the reader to believe that Kuzwayo is an indistinguishable subaltern, the undifferentiated Third World woman. However, her life is atypical. At the front of

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[15] Lauretta Ngcobo comments that as a black South African reading Gordimer's works, "it is like listening to someone who passes comments upon you." This she attributes to the author's perspective as

the book, the reader can readily check her credentials on a page entitled "Ellen Kuzwayo's Career": College educated, employed as a teacher, trained as a social worker and employed by the Johannesburg City Council, General Secretary for the YMCA—Transvaal region, and appointed as the first president of the Black Consumer Union, among other impressive achievements. Gordimer vaguely refers to her "evolution as a politically active woman, all the way to the final commitment to the black struggle that brought her to prison."[16] This, she tells us, derives from an "instinct to turn toward freedom." Kuzwayo's intellect and dogged determination, which make her a worthy role model for the black community, are downplayed.

Kuzwayo becomes the monolithic Third World woman that Mohanty takes issue with. Gordimer describes Kuzwayo's experience as "the life of that generation of women anywhere—in different epochs and different countries—who have moved from the traditional place in home and family system to an industrialised world in which they had to fight to make a place for themselves" (xi). Head, in her foreword, situates Kuzwayo as a historical subject, a product of the racist ideology of white South Africans; in no way can her experiences be construed as representative of women in transition in the Third World. Gordimer views Kuzwayo as "not Westernised; she is one of those who have Africanised the Western concept of woman and in herself achieved a synthesis with meaning for all who experience cultural conflict" (xi). Presumably, Gordimer would not consider herself a woman in transition between two disparate cultures, for her status as a white protects her from

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a white person observing from "behind a wall, as if she is looking from a distance" (Vivan 108).

[16] Kuzwayo was the only woman on the Soweto Committee of Ten that was formed as a liaison between angry black residents of Soweto and the indifferent white authorities in the wake of the Soweto riots of

forming a fragmented and hybrid identity, one that is unavoidable for Kuzwayo, who must constantly cross borders in order to survive economically under the white stranglehold of South Africa.

Considering Gordimer's frequent assertions that she has no interest in feminism, her very public stand on the subject diminishes Kuzwayo's project of raising the status of black women in South African society, distilled in Kuzwayo's statement that "black women have for several generations . . . been condemned as unproductive, unintelligent, incapable to the point of being seen as male property . . ." (243). Cecily Lockett believes that feminists who address Gordimer's work should attempt to "reveal the male-centered perspective from which she writes and to attempt to account for her strong identification with patriarchy" ("Feminism(s)" 15). And Karen Lazar has commented that Gordimer's "utterances on gender reveal an uneven and ambivalent relationship with feminism." She has also noticed that in Gordimer's latest work her depiction of women, while more sympathetic than in her earlier work, is frequently "denigratory, ironical and essentially unpoliticized" (282-83). Yet Gordimer has, on numerous occasions, assumed the mantle of unofficial spokesperson for black women in her interviews with local and foreign media, and in one such interview, when questioned about the role of feminism in the black community, remarked that a "black woman has got things to worry about much more serious than these piffling issues" (Bazin 203).

Weighted down by her "ideological freight," Gordimer does little to advance the literary aspirations of black women in South Africa. Yet Miriam Tlali stresses that

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1976. Her service on the committee resulted in a five-month detention without trial for political activities.

the visibility of Kuzwayo as a published author has had the effect of "drawing in a lot of women who would otherwise be sitting at home knitting and cooking or ironing. They have been drawn into this thing of writing, and they realise that they have to read, they have to explore some of these areas" (Mackenzie and Clayton 79). Gordimer effusively concludes her preface: "This book is true testimony from a wonderful woman. For myself, she is one of those people who give me faith in the new and different South Africa they will create" (xii). Gordimer's fuzzy vision of a rainbow nation, as Archbishop Desmond Tutu envisioned a reborn South Africa, provides no indication as to how she interprets Kuzwayo's history from below as servicing her vision of black majority rule other than as an article of pure faith. Gordimer's commentary on Kuzwayo's life history offers no clue that Kuzwayo's intellectualism would be rewarded by being elected to parliament in the first ANC government in 1994, that she would become the first black writer to be awarded the prestigious Central News Agency prize for her autobiography, and that even though she is "not a writer," the Feminist Press and David Philip in Cape Town would publish a collection of her stories entitled *Sit Down and Listen* in 1990.

Leading the Witness: What Makes Black Women Writers Tick

Interviewing writers, writing book reviews, arranging book-signing sessions—all these activities are a necessary part of the sponsorship of writing if the reading public is to be made aware of new releases. White academics interviewing new black writers who were published in the 1980s, especially those authors who had achieved international visibility, resulted in the publication of several collections of interviews,

both South African and foreign. These transcripts are revealing in that there is a tendency to regard the black woman writer as curious, inauthentic, and puzzling. As one of the first black South African women writers to secure a book contract internationally, Kuzwayo underwent the type of scrutiny concerning her ability to compose that would have been inconceivable had she been white, for the act of writing is viewed as an alien undertaking for a black woman. This is not without precedent, for Phyllis Wheatley, the African-American poet and writer, underwent a similar scrutiny in 1772 as I discussed in the introduction to my dissertation. For my purpose in examining the attitude of white academics to emerging black women writers, an interview that Kuzwayo granted in 1986 is particularly revealing.

South African academic Cherry Clayton arranged to interview Kuzwayo at the office of the Black Consumer Union in Johannesburg, of which Kuzwayo was president. Noting that the interview was "more like a conversation than a formal interview," Clayton comments that Kuzwayo is an "expressive and volatile speaker, with great sincerity" (Mackenzie and Clayton 59). Clayton begins by asking what the "motive or idea" was in writing *Call Me Woman*, an opening that Kuzwayo eagerly seizes upon to make a statement about the neglect of black women's contributions to the development of South Africa, to which Clayton comments that Kuzwayo "seem[s] to suggest sometimes that authorship is a way of giving people a voice" as black women's silence has been responsible for their unacknowledged contribution to society. I have to wonder how Clayton would have responded if asked the same question in respect to white women. The very fact that Clayton has requested an interview with Kuzwayo indicates that the author's voice has been heard and that the

academic is sufficiently interested in what she has to say provide her with an additional forum.

Clayton's next question encapsulates the enforced ignorance that enabled whites to keep their distance from blacks, woefully uninformed and misinformed about the history, culture, and society of black South Africans. She asked Kuzwayo if she thought that black women had been "ignored or silent because they've been living in an oral culture, not a written culture." Kuzwayo responds in the negative, adding that "I think the present history could have given them an opportunity to do so, but they have been the underdogs, the lowest in the society, primarily because they were not given the same opportunity to start when the men started an education" (60). Her eloquent response in defense of the oppression of black women takes up half a page. Throughout the interview, Kuzwayo responds passionately and articulately to the questions posed to her, providing rich and critical commentary on the black situation in South Africa despite the inconvenience and the distraction of having to speak loudly into the type of radio/tape recorder, known as a ghetto-blaster, that Clayton provided.

Halfway through the interview, Clayton brings up for discussion the "actual writing" of Kuzwayo's autobiography "because what interests me is this process of writing, and why. Black women don't often commit themselves to print. Do you think that has a special value for women, to communicate through print?" (64). As a white academic, Clayton's naïve question about the supposed unnaturalness of writing for black women is tantamount to asking Kuzwayo if she thinks her labor in writing her autobiography was a frivolous waste of time. Trinh Minh-ha refers to the "deep and pervasive sense of guilt" that haunts Third World women who want to write, guilt for

the time writing takes away from their responsibilities as women (7). Kuzwayo forcefully and persistently reiterates how apartheid chips away at the aspirations of the black community, stating that writing is difficult for blacks because "we are paid so little in the jobs that we do that for the greater part of our lives we are struggling to survive." In her case, she wrestled with giving up her job and starving in order to write, ultimately deciding, "'Ellen Kuzwayo, If I live on the side my bread is buttered, I'll never write this book.' So I chucked the job" (Mackenzie and Clayton 65-66). Unable to finish her project by the time her two-year sponsorship ran out, Kuzwayo went overseas to find a publisher; fortunately, she was given additional financial support by a couple in Liverpool that enabled her to complete her manuscript.

In response to Clayton's questions about how she "got the initial thing down," Kuzwayo insists that she enjoyed writing, remarking that she "never sat and talked into a machine like this. I write, it comes through here, it comes onto my pen, onto my paper. This is how I write." (At this point the interviewer inserts a description of Kuzwayo's movements: "Runs her hand down the side of her head, over her shoulder, and down her arm, to her fingers, then claps her hands.") Reaffirming the naturalness of the act of writing for herself, the author traces the free flow of her inspiration from brain to paper, revealing nothing intrinsic to a black woman writer. Continuing to look for signs that Kuzwayo must have found writing difficult, Clayton asks if she is "happy with what finally emerged in your book?" Complimenting her that "It reads very clearly," the next question is predictably: "Did you participate in the editing with somebody else?" (66-67).

Far more beneficial to exploring Kuzwayo's manner of composing would have been a discussion of her memories of learning to write in respectable mission schools such as Lovedale and Adams College and a comparison with the standard of writing instruction provided in the intellectually impoverished Bantu Education system. Situating the composing of *Call Me Woman* within the tradition of women's writing that began under missionary tutelage would have provided depth and insight into the long dry spell that Kuzwayo was partly responsible for breaking.

The longest responses that Clayton elicits from the author are directed toward a continuation of the dialogue opened up within *Call Me Woman,* which details the contributions made by black women in South Africa and the deliberate downgrading, denial, and dismissal of their considerable achievements. Kuzwayo appears far less interested in discussing her writing skills than in analyzing her work from the aspect of its significance as a window on black women's degradation under apartheid and a celebration of their refusal to be broken by the system. During the interview, it is Kuzwayo who repeatedly raises the issue of the material factors that have kept black women silent. She observes that "I can imagine that there are many people with a great talent for writing, but because all the time they are nursing this meagre wage, few of them have time to write" (Mackenzie and Clayton 66).

The organization of the material in *Call Me Woman* is symbolic of Kuzwayo's relationship to the black community. The first and third sections, which deal primarily with the devastating effects that apartheid has had on black families, the cohesion of the community, and particularly on the self-esteem of black women, bookend the second section, which details her own personal trials and triumphs. Kuzwayo

acknowledges that the "courage, generosity and support of my people have over the years helped me to carry a load that under ordinary conditions I would have not found easy to bear" (221). Particular recognition is given to the sisterly bonds that exist among black women, and in this aspect of her autobiography, Kuzwayo reaches back to the oral traditions of African culture, creating a praise song for black women that records their achievements for posterity. However, her incorporation of the women's tradition of reciting autobiographical praise poems is a subtle reworking of this genre. Whereas praise poems evolve through each retelling as biographical information is added and/or omitted, Kuzwayo makes the bold move of committing to print her praises of several influential black women, and in doing so, preserves their achievements for future generations to study, evaluate, and reflect upon. In keeping with the communal nature of the oral traditions, Kuzwayo refuses to privilege the autobiographical "I" despite her claim that "I am the author of this book" (55). This is perhaps a decisive statement to counter inevitable claims that she was assisted in writing by a (white) ghost writer, always conscious that the cultural products of black women will be under suspicion that the guiding hand of a white person hovers in the background.

At an unprecedented moment in South African history in which black majority rule appeared as a real and achievable possibility, both Gordimer and Clayton fail (or refuse) to encourage black women to claim agency, allowing them minimal bargaining rights by refusing to underwrite their project of deconstructing and destabilizing the basic assumptions upon which apartheid was founded. The sponsorship of new writers who have faced difficulties in breaking into print as a result of factors beyond their

control requires a degree of sensitivity and responsibility that I find decidedly lacking in the Clayton interview and Gordimer preface. In both cases, the exoticism of the "black woman writer" pervades, thereby seriously undercutting the touted benefits of white sponsorship and exposing the considerable chasm between white women and black women.

Poppie Nongena: The Political Whitewashing of One Woman's Testimony

The life story of a poor, rootless black woman became a surprising best seller in South Africa in 1978, having come into being through the unlikely and unprecedented collaboration with the Afrikaans writer, Elsa Joubert. In December 1976, in the midst of rioting in her township fueled by a nationwide wave of support for the students in Soweto, "Poppie Nongena"—the fictional name assigned to her by the white author—arrived at the white woman's door in dire distress, having fled the conflagration with her children. Joubert, who at this time was casting around for material for a new book about the Bantustans, realized the potential of the black woman's story as she listened to Nongena recount the misfortunes that had befallen her in their common language, Afrikaans. Buoyed by the tempting prospect of receiving a share of the profits from this joint venture, Nongena, as she became known, agreed to return to Joubert's home on a regular basis to tape record her life story, which would then be transcribed, edited, and submitted for publication.

Originally published in Afrikaans in 1978 as a novel under the title *Die Swerfjare van Poppie Nongena*, it was translated by the author into English and came out two years later as *The Long Journey of Poppie Nongena.* When it appeared in

bookstores, it took South Africa "by storm, receiving such adulation and attention as had never before been payed to any South African literary work, particularly not one written in Afrikaans" (Schalkwyk 184). Potentially, the novel represented a political bombshell, laying out as it did the compelling and wrenching testimony of a desperately poor black woman's heartbreaking struggle to keep her family intact in the face of divisive legislation aimed at rigorously regulating the movement of the black population in its search for work, housing, and education. The mainstream reception of *Poppie Nongena* is fascinating on many fronts, resulting in the publication of numerous scholarly articles examining the uncritical acceptance of the novel by a politically unconscious public, a white South African public that André Brink characterized as having "lost their curiosity and who have allowed themselves to be coaxed or bludgeoned into accepting without question whatever happens," adding that "a growing number of whites simply do not know—and do not want to know—what is happening" (*Writing* 152).

By refusing to accept Nongena's testimony as politically charged, by whitewashing her narrative as mere fiction, the rejection of her harrowing personal account of the ruthless implementation of influx controls serves to indict the white community for its denial of the inhumanity of its government's policies, while at the same time offers ample evidence of the deliberate and routine drowning out of black women's voices raised in protest. While the subaltern woman possesses the rhetorical prowess to speak persuasively, piercingly, and poignantly, her statements are at risk of being appropriated, misapplied, and denuded of their political significance by the expediency of her white sponsors, as is the case with Joubert.

As Anne McClintock points out, the "female collaboration across the forbidden boundary of race" was a "flagrant challenge" to male authority (301). Particularly astonishing is that the literary collaboration should have taken place with Joubert, a conservative Afrikaner. Woolf's cautionary advice to aspiring writers to choose a patron with the utmost care is particularly apt in this situation, for the agreement drawn up between the woman known to us only by the pseudonym Poppie Nongena and the Afrikaans writer is fraught with complications. Joubert, as a dour Afrikaner matron, had no intention from the outset of rocking the political boat by portraying Nongena's life story as an indictment of apartheid.[17] Yet this product of cross cultural and interracial female collaboration peeled away the layers of political posturing and propaganda that habitually suppressed evidence of the degradation and decimation of black familial relationships to which the average white South African remained conveniently blinkered.

Poppie Nongena soon became a publishing phenomenon; it was reprinted three times within the first six months of its publication, a stunning feat considering that Afrikaans speakers constituted roughly sixty percent of the white population, which itself comprised less than sixteen percent of South Africa's population according to the 1980 census figures. The book also received three major literary awards within one week, was serialized by newspapers and magazines, was translated into three languages, appeared in both paperback and hardcover editions, and by 1982 was

[17] When American journalist June Goodwin and academic Ben Schiff interviewed Joubert at her home in Cape Town in 1992, they described her demeanor as that of a "crotchety curmudgeon, no matter how many nice things were said about her book. Her corrugated, croaky voice fit her prickly attitude." Goodwin and Schiff comment that when Afrikaners are asked if they ever think what it must be like to be black in South Africa, most of them are "stopped cold, thinking the question quite odd." When this question was posed to Joubert, she responded "nastily" that "It doesn't stop me cold" (305-6).

already in its sixth impression in Afrikaans (Schalkwyk 186). The novel was rapturously received by white readers, both English and Afrikaans, being deliberately depoliticized by interpreting Nongena's trials and suffering as a work of fiction, as "no literary text would stoop to the pragmatic business of 'making a point' and so *Poppie Nongena* must be saved from this evil by enthusiastic reviewers" (187). Through Joubert's creation of an "artful illusion," Nongena does not in fact narrate the majority of the story, for roughly seventy percent of the story is told by an "anonymous, omniscient (white) narrator," and only thirty percent of the story is related by the protagonist herself (192). Joubert's authorial intervention thus significantly shapes and molds the black woman's substantial narrative told to the author in regular sessions of three days each week over a period of six months.

The Joubert/Nongena collaboration brings into sharp relief the ambivalent relationship between a sponsor who represents white bourgeois interests and a narrator who represents the black proletariat, disenfranchised and useful purely for the value of her labor. The arrival of the physically distressed and emotionally ragged Nongena on Joubert's doorstep as she packed for her vacation could be considered a lucky break for the white author, a kairotic moment. Nongena's impassioned story told to Joubert amidst the rioting was the human interest angle she needed for her new book and one that she took pains to portray in numerous interviews as not motivated by politics. As she told a journalist with the *Rand Daily Mail*, *Poppie Nongena* is "not a political book. I wrote it because the theme was one that interested me. I wanted to bring across the person as a human being. And that is as far as my interest goes."[18]

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[18] *Rand Daily Mail*, January 4, 1979.

Joubert's repeated assertions that the book was apolitical were reflected in numerous letters to the editor and in reviews of *Poppie Nongena*. White South Africans took Nongena to their hearts because her suffering was conveniently universalized; her tragedy was sanitized of its situatedness in apartheid-era South Africa.

And, once again, the preface written by a white woman reveals significant "ideological freight," for Joubert states her "novel is based on the actual life story of a black woman living in South Africa today. Only her name, Poppie Rachel Nongena, born Matati, is invented." While Nongena requested anonymity for obvious reasons of personal safety driven by the fear of official retaliation, McClintock questions the manner in which the story is "marketed as a novel *by* Joubert *about* Nongena. Except for a woefully inadequate and easily missed prefatory note, Nongena's crucial engendering role is entirely erased . . ." (307, emphasis in original). Joubert claims the copyright, despite her collaboration with Nongena, thereby reducing her life story to her property. The legitimacy of Nongena's voice as a transmitter of her people's history and culture is detoured through fiction by the author, who thus effectively deflects debate on the pressing social and political issues that are revealed by the black woman's account of her entrapment in the brutal and inhumane system of which she is a victim. In spite of the theoretical problems raised by Joubert's dubious and ambiguous authorial intentions, *Poppie Nongena* remains embedded in the historical record as a transitional document in the emergent cultural production of black women in South Africa.

The circumstances that led to the production of *Poppie Nongena* expose the risks of the native informant in agreeing to tell her story to a white writer with the

objective of having it published. In the exploitative system perfected in South Africa, the power differential at play in interracial collaborations can have unforeseen consequences for the person revealing the circumstances of her life. While the white reception of the novel has received considerable examination, Nongena's reaction to seeing her factual and faithful recounting of her story to Joubert over a six-month period emerge as a work of fiction remains unknown. Joubert has kept to her bargain to protect Nongena's anonymity, although there seems little reason for her to remain in the shadows other than for peace and quiet, as the safety issue dissolved along with the disintegration of apartheid. How Nongena feels about the lopsided rendition of her collaboration with her white sponsor may never be revealed. Of course, Nongena may have deemed that a fifty/fifty share of the profits from the publication of her story was sufficient remuneration for her efforts and simply resumed her life, this time with enough money to build the house she desperately wanted. However, Nongena's agency has been severely diminished through the fictionalization of her story, to the extent that many white South Africans were able to dismiss the political statement her narrative communicated by choosing to believe (or being confused and thinking) that Nongena was a fictional character, a figment of Joubert's authorial imagination. The protagonist could be interpreted as a timeless and universal character who, in Christian tradition, endures countless trials and tribulations with stoicism and a heightened sense of spirituality.

In order to do justice to Nongena's taped narrative Joubert, in her role as amanuensis, should have treated the material entrusted to her care as a *testimonio*, for the multi-vocal oral narrative bears the hallmarks of this genre. Nongena's perception

of her individuality is indistinguishable from her tribal affiliations and her female ancestry, which is apparent from the opening sentences of the novel: "We are the Xhosa people from Gordinia, says Poppie. My mama used to tell us about our great-grandma Kappie, a rich old woman who grazed her goats on the koppies the other side of Carnarvon" (11). This auspicious opening bodes well as a marker for the assertion of the collective "we" of the (auto)biography and refutes the Western generic convention of the autonomous and privileged "I." As McClintock comments: "We may balk at being refused identification with a single self, but through this refusal we are invited into an altogether different notion of identity, community, narrative power and political change" (327). By miscasting Nongena's narrative as fiction, her testimony is stripped of its political urgency and cogent testimony. Joubert may continue to claim that its overriding value for her as an author lay in its human interest angle, but, in the interest of restoring *ubuntu* or humanity in South Africa, Nongena's compelling narrative would have warranted a public hearing at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Sexism and Plagiarism: Black Women Writers Getting Ripped Off

As problematic and controversial as the issue of white sponsorship has been in creating an appreciative audience and a sustainable market for the life histories of black women, when women have dedicated themselves to writing their own accounts for publication, they invariably face additional insurmountable barriers to getting published, often from the least likely quarters, as Boitumelo Mofokeng charged in an article entitled "Where are the Women?" (1989). Commenting on the appearance of

an anthology commemorating a decade of contributions to *Staffrider*, a magazine produced under the auspices of Ravan Press and devoted to providing a forum for new black writing in the townships, *Ten Years of Staffrider: 1978-1988* ignored most of the contributions to the magazine by black women.[19] *Ten Years* is a celebration of the renaissance of black writing that began in the 1970s when apartheid was increasingly protested and resisted across the country. However, the anthology overwhelmingly extols the accomplishments of the black male writer.

Mofokeng called this omission a "sad history, at least for me, because it suggests that women's contributions in that period was a very small, almost a non-existent one." She continues:

> But the truth is that women did write for *Staffrider* and almost all of them have been excluded from this anthology. No reason can be sufficient to justify their exclusion; its effect has been to deny them not only the recognition which should belong to them as writers of our times, but their rightful place in the history of the development of our culture. The international world has been denied the opportunity of knowing and understanding the role of women writers, especially black women writers, in South Africa. (41)

Women regarded the documentation of their roles in the struggle as essential for preserving the historical record for future generations.[20] Excising women's cultural

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[19] The term "staffrider" refers to the dangerous practice of passengers who jump on a train as it pulls away from the platform, clinging precariously to the doors, the steps, or clambering up on the roof. This conduct imitates the habit of train conductors who hang on the exterior of the coaches as the train departs the station.

[20]Black women's record of resistance against government measures to curtail their freedom is impressive. The march on the Union Buildings in Pretoria on August 9th (International Women's Day) in 1956 by an estimated twenty-thousand African women to hand deliver a petition to Prime Minister

contributions during this historical era of black literary production perpetuated this exclusion and papered over the silences and the gaps in South African black literary history, a male-dominated tradition. By omitting these emerging female voices from *Ten Years*, this decision could be interpreted as a sign that women's writing was not up to publication standard when measured against men's work or, as Mofokeng suspects, that it was simply "irrelevant," an opinion likely to cause these women to "feel insulted."

Rather than retreating in the face of this sexist insult and quietly reverting to a traditional position of subordination to which women have been subjected, Mofokeng uses her status as a published writer and credible spokesperson to interrupt this male conversation, challenging the arbitrary rules established for participation. Reacting with sadness, Mofokeng appeals to the better instincts of her readers, calling for justice for the women who were active in the struggle. By asking her audience to "reflect on the true position of women writers in that period of strong political awareness, protest and uprising," she contests their exclusion on the grounds that the lack of experience of writers who emerged during this period should not be held against them. She alludes to the argument that established criteria for assessing literary merit are based on the aesthetics of a work by pointedly drawing attention to the fact that "Many of those who wrote for *Staffrider* lacked previous experience of writing but they were a new breed whose work had spontaneity, truth and authenticity" (41). Mofokeng was herself a product of this galvanizing era, having been at the time one of

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Strijdom is considered a defining moment in women's history in South Africa. The extension of the pass laws to black women was vigorously protested and, although the law was passed, the well-organized campaign received considerable coverage in the media. It was for this occasion that the protest chant

those young girls who committed herself to writing protest poetry in response to the Soweto uprising.

The lack of appreciation for the cultural contributions made by women points to the sexism that was still rampant in the black male community. At a time when women sorely needed men to acknowledge their contributions to Black Consciousness and to recognize their intellectual abilities and creative output, they continued to encounter barriers to their participation. A particular problem was that of plagiarism. It was not unusual for a woman to hesitantly show her writing to a family member, friend, or coworker for reinforcement and approval of her tentative efforts, only to receive a lukewarm reception or outright rejection. As one writer at the workshop on women's writing sponsored by the Congress of South African Writers (COSAW) told the audience: "I wrote more and more, but I was so scared. I had no confidence. I used to show my writing to some people. And they used to say to me these are just not right. But when I saw their shows, I saw so much of my work there and I realised I was getting ripped off" (*Buang* 17).[21] Another participant reported that men in particular would discourage her from continuing to write: "When we looked around, there were no women writers and poets. Then I found that other people were using my works, and I said to myself, but this means I am good. It means that this is right. They wouldn't use it if it wasn't. So I sat down and wrote more" (17). More conservative black women were anxious and apprehensive when they witnessed an

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"Strijdom, you have tampered with the women, You have struck a rock" was composed (C. Walker 195).

[21] Particularly in the labor movement, the work of writers was dramatized through acting, dancing, oral renditions, and singing.

infraction of traditional mores by an assertive and defiant sister who sought to encroach on traditional male cultural territory.

Any person or group of people who contravenes cherished cultural conventions can expect a backlash of varying degrees from those elements of society that perceive their territory as being threatened and invaded, and for black women in South Africa, it was this deliberate encroachment on traditional male cultural turf that elicited hostility. Reactions from women to this territorialism are varied. Lauretta Ngcobo accepted "without bitterness" that her dream of becoming a writer was impracticable as "years of conditioning had taught us that only men have a voice and are worth listening to." She singles out this "tutored feeling of 'less worthiness'" as a "crippling factor in all my creative thinking," one that lead to her deliberately destroying manuscripts ("My Life" 86). Kuzwayo, however, strongly denounces what she interprets as a male "vendetta" to suppress women's (re)emerging eloquence and a deliberate attempt to negate the contributions women have made to the sustenance of their community. She believes that "the men, somewhere, are not playing a fair game. They don't give the black women an opportunity to honestly realise their potential and to recognize that potential; when it does come forth. They're doing everything to thwart it" (Lipman 19).

Sometimes women writers reluctantly tolerated the outright plagiarism of their work because in a backhanded way it affirmed their talent in an environment that restricted their access to an audience and offered them very few outlets to showcase their abilities. As one writer disclosed: "When you discover you are a writer, you sit alone and find yourself with your writing. You don't know how good it is. You look

at books and magazines in bookstores and wonder, will I ever be in that bookshelf?" (*Buang* 16). It is regrettable that these emerging women writers felt that they had no option but to yield to male pressure to keep in the background, passively accepting the outright plagiarism of their work, when they felt as committed to the cause as their male counterparts. This lack of assertion of their rights was the result of chronic low self-esteem, reinforced by the overtly machismo displays in the Black Consciousness Movement.

Not all black men participated in what Kuzwayo calls a "vendetta" aimed to frustrate and block women's attempts to be treated as equals who had a great deal to contribute to the liberation movement. Mark Mathabane, for example, has exhibited great sympathy for the plight of black women, as evidenced by his authorship of *African Women: Three Generations*, the story of his grandmother, mother, and sisters in South Africa. His project of highlighting women continued with the publication of his sister's memoir, entitled *Miriam's Story*, described on the back cover as the "gripping tale of a woman—representative of an entire generation—who came of age amid the violence and rebellion of the 1980s and finally saw the destruction of apartheid and the birth of a new, democratic South Africa." Mathabane's skill and sensitivity in sponsoring his sister's testimony is achieved in part because he grew up in Alexandra, the teeming township located ten miles north of Johannesburg, and his empathic rendering of her experiences is heightened by his firsthand knowledge of the situations she describes.

It would have been highly unlikely that Mathabane would have been in a position to undertake the writing of his sister's story had he not been able to escape

from the poverty and violence of Alexandra as a result of being sponsored by the American tennis player Stan Smith, enabling him to attend college in the United States. As an aspiring tennis player, undeterred by derogatory remarks in the black community about him indulging in a "sissy sport" played by whites (*Miriam* 90), Mathabane, the only black player participating in the South African Breweries Open in 1977, was introduced to Smith during the tournament. After graduating from Dowling College, New York, in 1983, Mathabane wrote his autobiography, *Kaffir Boy*, which became a best seller (and a work that appears on lists of the most frequently banned books in the United States). *African Women*, Mathabane's third work, appeared in 1994. In the preface, he credits his mother with preventing him from "self-destructing amid the raging hell of ghetto life." In a rhythmic style reminiscent of a praise poem, he provides a snapshot of her life:

> She raised seven children and put up with physical abuse at the hands of my father, all while groaning under the yoke of triple oppression: she was black in a white-dominated and racist society, a woman in a patriarchal culture, and illiterate in a world where those who could read and write had control over her life and the lives of others like her. (xi)

In weaving the stories of his grandmother, mother, and his sister Florah into a compelling narrative, Mathabane has had to confront the abusive patriarchal culture that has been his birthright. Through listening to the accounts of the three women, he learns that his father was "far more of a tyrant and abuser than I had let myself remember" (xiv).

While transcribing the taped interviews that his white American wife Gail made during a solo visit to South Africa in 1992, Mathabane "sought to avoid intruding on the ways my grandmother, mother, and sister saw, felt, thought, and acted," noting how often the incidents they revealed were filtered from a different perspective for him as a male (*African* xiii-xiv). The production of *African Women* became a family project, for it not only involved his wife who traveled to South Africa to interview his female relatives, but also included his sister Miriam who assisted during the taping by translating the Shangaan language that his mother and grandmother spoke (*Miriam* 305).[22]

Mathabane is atypical for a black male South African writer in that he acknowledges that the stories of the "struggles and experiences" of women like his mother "have waited too long to be told." Admitting that African women have played a key role in Africa in ridding the continent of colonialism, he laments that "many of their exploits, accomplishments, and sacrifices have gone unrecognized" (*African* xii). *Miriam's Song* is a novel undertaking in the annuals of South Africa literature, for the collaboration between a brother and sister to bring her memoir into being breaks new ground. Mathabane's acknowledgment to his sister for her "capricious heart, generosity of spirit, courage, and faith in entrusting me with her life story" ends with the earnest hope that "I've done it justice."

A limitation of *Miriam's Song* is that, as the back cover reminds us, "Mathabane writes in Miriam's voice." It is through the brother's mediation that we come to understand what it was like to be a teenage girl growing up in the township of

[22] Gail Mathabane took great personal risks, having been in Alexandra visiting her husband's family when Chris Hani, the secretary general of the South African Communist Party, was assassinated by a

Alexandra during the most turbulent years of apartheid in South Africa. That Miriam is in awe of her famous brother is evident, and her appreciation for him having rescued her from the ghetto is very apparent. It should also be noted that Miriam's memoir is told to her brother in their native Shangaan and translated by the author. Responses to *Miriam's Song* by book critics and the public alike have been overwhelmingly positive. One reader commented in her review on a bookseller's web site that "Her story is inspiring and her candid writing makes the reader feel as if she is sitting right there in the room, like a new friend telling you about her life."[23] The appeal of the memoir to a Western readership is that a fluid narrative style and vivid and tension-filled descriptions are a common feature of paperbacks that reach the bestseller lists. It is all too easy for a reader unfamiliar with black women's writing in South Africa to be seduced into thinking that Miriam herself is speaking. While I grant that Mathabane has written a compelling and accurate account of life in the townships for a young black girl in the 1970s and 1980s, *Miriam's Song* lacks the simplicity and straightforwardness of a narrative such as *Thula Baba* in which the cadences of black English in South Africa convey the writer's words and milieu without the trapping of Western-style literary conventions. The copious dialogue in *Miriam's Song* in fluent English does not convey the problems of writing in a foreign language with only an elementary knowledge of the formal English taught in schools. Had Miriam written this memoir herself, it would not have achieved the mass appeal that *Miriam's Song* obviously has, at least in the United States.

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white man, which led to rioting in the streets and chants of "One Settler, One Bullet (*Miriam* 311).
[23] This anonymous review is available at www.boondocksnet.com, accessed 9/28/03.

Writing Groups: Creating a Dissenting Rhetorical Space

Writers' groups in contemporary South Africa have played an important role in nurturing and sponsoring black authorship, as Njabulo Ndebele has detailed in his article, "The Writer's Movement in South Africa." Ndebele characterizes the surge in literary activity in the townships in the mid-1970s as a "phenomenal mushrooming," noting that the existence of "at least twenty-five" groups has been documented (413). One of the groups to form in 1977 was the Medupe Writers Association. In an article that appeared in *Donga* that year, a spokesperson for the group noted with pride that Medupe had increased its membership in the first six months from twenty to two hundred writers. Its mission was to "discover and promote talent but also to encourage interest in writing among young blacks." Noting that there was an abundance of talent in the community, the group intended to offer "encouragement for the young writers to keep on writing and in no time we shall have established writers of tomorrow" (Chapman, *Soweto* 124).

Providing aspiring authors with a place to meet other writers was essential because an entire generation had been deprived of meaningful instruction at school. Karen Press claimed that "there are many artists and aspirant artists inside South Africa who are desperate for opportunities . . . to receive guidance, support, training, constructive criticism, in the detailed technical aspects of their work." Writers were at a particular disadvantage when it came to seeking help, for "there is *nothing*" (emphasis in original). Arguing that while associations such as COSAW, SACHED, and Community Arts Project (CAP) had begun to introduce workshops for writers, "there is virtually no input of ideas as to what such workshops should consist of, or

what a writing course could look like. We simply don't have the experience of running programmes for creative writing . . ." (72-73).

In writers' groups such as Medupe, the "declared intention" was frequently to "resuscitate the African oral tradition; to stress that the traditional functionality of art now was enlisted for political mobilization" (Ndebele 414). The emphasis on pressing art into the service of political agitation led to the disbanding in 1982 of the Johannesburg branch of PEN, an international writers' group. Formed in 1978 in a "daring effort to bring together members of the guild and the township groups" (415), it was dissolved four years later when it became increasingly difficult for black writers to work together with whites in the group due to the racial tensions engendered by the focus on anti-apartheid protest. The African Writers Association (AWA) came into existence as soon as PEN folded. And, in 1987, the founding of COSAW provided additional support for writers struggling for recognition and seeking outlets for their work. In 1990, COSAW and AWA assisted the journal *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa* by sponsoring a one-day workshop on black women's writing and reading practices. *Current Writing* subsequently published an edited transcript of a panel discussion during which six writers talked about a wide range of issues pertaining to black women's writing and community responses to their work.

While writers' groups were successful in bringing aspiring authors together and providing them with mentorship, criticism, and editorial assistance, the problem for black women was still a lack of outlets for their work. In order to overcome this limitation, the publishing house Seriti sa Sechaba was founded so that black women would "have a platform from which to share with their readers, their fears, pains,

frustrations, hopes, likes and dislikes, which are but a fraction of the experiences of some of the writers and many other women of their community" (Kuzwayo, *Women* 1). In her preface to the anthology *Women in South Africa: From the Heart* that contained work from previously unpublished authors, Kuzwayo urges women "with the tiniest flame of a desire to write." Kuzwayo, as a revered member of the community and a published and award-winning author, has the authority to claim that "There is no magic to writing when you are literate. The next ingredient to literacy is self-discipline. Women, once you have decided to write; you can use that art as an instrument of liberation for yourself, your women-folk and your community" (4).

Seriti sa Sechaba conformed to its own particular logic, created to respond uniquely to the needs of novice women writers. Dinah Lefakane, in her publisher's note to *Women in South Africa—From the Heart*, states that "ways of doing things, customs and norms must change to fit with our needs and intentions at any given time. That brings with it a dynamism and growth" (5). Claiming that the anthology is "unusual" because it has been "produced by people who, though knowing that they had the skill to write, had never dared dream that they would actually put it all in print," Lefakane acknowledges that "some will see recklessness . . . ." Many women considered this business of writing to be reckless and shied away from involvement because they had been conditioned to believe that black women should not or could not write. As hattie gossett caustically remarks about the reception of writing by radical women of color in the United States: "who told you anybody wants to hear from you? You ain't nothing but a black woman!" (194).

Replacing ingrained habits requires consciously overcoming negative messages and distorted images. Tlali, in an interview with Cecily Lockett, has commented that at meetings where readings were invited from the public, she was invariably the only woman in attendance. She remembers asking a group of young male writers: "Where are your sisters? Where are your mothers? Where are your wives? Where are they? Why should you come to meetings alone?" Even when they did attend, women would express reluctance at being there, concerned that they were taking time away from their prime responsibility—domestic chores (Mackenzie and Clayton 79). But for Tlali, writing became a weapon, as "other forms of fighting I cannot indulge in because they are out of my means."

Even when sponsors came forward to assist black writers in gaining access to publishers, South Africa's burdensome censorship laws enforced the culture of silence that writers striving to be published tried to circumvent. Tlali describes the action of the government censors as that of "erecting a big iron wall between yourself and your own people, the people you are trying to reach. It's like spitting into a dead wall, where your words hit the surface and they rebound, they come back to you, and you keep on hitting back and nothing happens" (Mackenzie and Clayton 77). She reports that her first novel *Muriel at Metropolitan*, a largely autobiographical account based on her experiences and observations working as a clerk for a Johannesburg hire-purchase firm dealing in furniture and appliances, was "very much expurgated when it was published by Ravan Press. A lot of material was removed from it to make it

acceptable to the white reader," with the result that the local version "does not have all the right terms, the originality, that I had in my manuscript" (71-72).[24]

Tlali herself became a sponsor of black women's writing, opening her house and her library to writers' workshops; her generosity was acknowledged by Mofokeng at the 1988 COSAW conference on women's writing, attended by Tlali. Mofokeng claimed that "we were too young and naïve to understand her concern" (*Buang* 10), alluding to the fact that Tlali, as one of the "old horses in the field" (7), was well aware of the hurdles that the angry writers who emerged in the wake of Soweto had to face. Ngcobo, in her introduction to Tlali's *Soweto Stories* also expressed gratitude to the author for her part in the "mammoth task of coaxing and training new writers for our people" (xv). As Tlali noted in 1980 in an article she wrote for *The Star*, a Johannesburg newspaper with a largely white readership, "They say writers learn from their predecessors. When I searched frantically for mine, there was nothing but a void" (Chapman, *Soweto* 45). The frenzy of bannings that took place in 1977 was a desperate attempt by the government to silence the increasingly vocal and volatile black population after the riots of the previous year, and forced the closure of many writers' groups that had sprung up in the turbulent townships. Tlali was acutely aware of the obstacles to writing that deterred budding black writers, especially women, and her role as a mentor and model for women to emulate was substantial.

In black women's writing in South Africa, the common thread which binds their emerging literary tradition is that of a rhetoric of cultural reconstruction, a rehabilitation of the subjectivity of women, and the restoration and extension of

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[24] *Muriel at Metropolitan* was published in 1995 under its original title *Between Two Worlds* by the Longman African Writers Series.

communication channels that have come under assault as a result of colonial intervention. With the introduction of literacy, women's cultural production was severely curtailed because of the necessity of relying on the patronage of whites to gain access to publishers. As Minh-ha claims, "She who 'happens to be' a (non-white) Third World member, a woman, and a writer is bound to go through the ordeal of exposing her work to the abuse of praises and criticisms that either ignore, dispense with, or overemphasize her racial and sexual attributes" (6). In their efforts to have their work taken seriously, black women writers in South Africa have consistently been confronted with racial and sexist prejudices that have been detrimental to their acceptance as authors.

Yet the discursive techniques and rhetorical strategies of black women which have been produced under considerably less than ideal social, political, cultural, and economic circumstances in South Africa provide an unexpected and invariably stimulating excursion into the awesome capacity of language to shape and construct our perceived knowledge and our interpretation of social relations.

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