

“Born in Africa but...”

—

Women’s poetry of post-Apartheid South Africa in English



12/100 "Walks of life" David Mushongwe buse 07

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Dedication

For my Family and Friends

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Introduction

South Africa is on the tip of everyone's tongue: Everyone has heard of Nelson Mandela, an 'A-list celebrity' who is well-known worldwide, and three other South African Nobel Peace Prize laureates, Albert Luthuli, Desmond Tutu and Frederik de Klerk; of Charlize Theron, who got an Academy Award (Oscar) and a Golden Globe in 2004 for her portrayal of Aileen Wuornos in the movie *Monster*;² of the movie *Tsotsi*,³ based on the novel of the same name by Athol Fugard, which won the Academy Award (Oscar) for the best Foreign Language Film in 2005; of the country as a tourist destination, with its natural beauty, diverse landscapes⁴ and abundant wildlife; of South Africa as being the host nation of the Football World Cup in 2010; and especially of the high crime rate and the high incidence of HIV/Aids. Also in the literary world South Africa has a reputation for the novels of Nadine Gordimer and J.M. Coetzee, the two Nobel Prize winners for literature in 1991 and 2003.

Yet little is known abroad about South Africa's rich contemporary poetic tradition. Few studies have been published on contemporary South African poetry and even less about South African women's poetry, and that despite the fact that the poetry scene in the country is extremely rich and vibrant.

The title of this dissertation on South African poetry reflects its limited scope necessitated by the vast amount of literary material available.

The primary focus of this thesis is on women writers. The main reason for this is, as has already been mentioned, that there are vast numbers of South African women poets who produce a wealth of poetry, the existence of which is largely unknown and where known, is greatly underestimated. Women's poetry is relatively under-represented in publications and anthologies. In most anthologies poems by male writers outnumber those of women writers by far. This study has been carried out against the background of this discrimination, which applies doubly for women poets of colour, who are not only being marginalised, if not

² Directed by Patty Jenkins, 2003.

³ Directed by Gavin Hood, 2005.

⁴ Shooting movies, video clips, photo shootings and advertisements in South Africa has become a big business for the country.

disregarded entirely, because of their being women, but also for the fact that they are of colour. Therefore, one of my chief aims in this dissertation is to give South African women writers the attention they are due; especially, but not exclusively, those black and coloured newcomers who are now so prominent on the literary landscape.

Within the framework of giving exposure to women poets of all colours, my survey and analysis serves as a descriptive introduction to fresh texts. It seeks to broaden the scope of the research into South African literature as a whole by completing the picture of South African poetry and by contributing to the formation of a representative canon of poetry, which includes women poets.

In my effort to include poets of all of the 'South African racial groups': Blacks, Whites, Coloureds and Indians, I will, throughout this dissertation, carefully refer to the people of South Africa in these terms coined during Apartheid, as they are still used extensively by the South Africans of today.

Given that ethnicity, language and colour determined membership in state and society in the recently abolished apartheid system, how can formerly excluded communities be recognised without perpetuating apartheid categorisations?⁵

Naturally, my intention is neither to belittle those who suffered, nor to condone the Apartheid system of ethnic classification. The fact is, however, that some groups and individuals have a strong feeling of community with these groupings, artificial as they may be, and unfortunately, even in the new South Africa, many old habits linger on.

Although this study aims at giving a representative picture, the poets chosen for review do not proportionally represent the ethnic elements of society with which they are affiliated. For example, assuming that 75-80 percent of the population is black, the same percentage of published South African poetry is not written by Blacks. There are many reasons for this discrepancy: personal connections, the role of luck in getting published, available funding, publicity, the language of the poem etc. Unfortunately, many of these factors always have and still do favour white poets. For this reason the main focus of this dissertation will be on black and coloured women poets.

⁵ Abebe Zegeye. "Imposed ethnicity." *Social Identities in the New South Africa. After Apartheid. Vol. 1.* Ed. Abebe Zegeye. Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2001. 2.

This leads to another choice I had to make, namely to decide, among the eleven official South African languages, upon the one(s) to be considered. In the interests of keeping my dissertation within reasonable limits, I elected to use only poetry written in English, and only by non-exiles. This inclusion of only poetry in English has the advantage of making it available to a worldwide audience.

Furthermore, I have selected examples according to their relevance to the theme of 'identity'. The search for a new identity is an important issue in the post-Apartheid era in general, and particularly in its literature and poetry. Yet this issue is not the preserve of post-Apartheid South Africa alone. The importance of the preoccupation with one's identity becomes clear if one looks at how often this topic is treated in poetry around the world. Amongst others, the search for an identity, which is at the centre of my analysis, is a central theme in the 1962 poem "A Far Cry from Africa" by Derek Walcott, who later won the Nobel Prize for Literature. Despite the difference in place and time, Malika Ndlovu's "born in africa but", which is analysed later on in Chapter VI.1, recalls in several lines the complex of problems in the following stanza of Walcott's poem:

I who am poisoned with the blood of both,
Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?
I who have cursed
The drunken officer of British rule, how choose
Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?
Betray them both, or give back what they give?
How can I face such slaughter and be cool?
How can I turn from Africa and live?⁶

For comparison the first lines of "born in africa but", the poem which inspired the title of the present dissertation, are:

born in africa but
breastfed another mother tongue
put to sleep on foreign lullabies
praying for a jesus-heaven
when i die

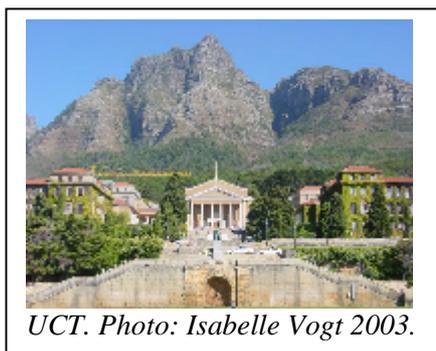
Upon reading these two poems it immediately becomes clear that both poets have one thought in common, the depiction of the inner conflicts arising from the existence of two souls and two traditions in one person.

⁶ Derek Walcott. "A Far Cry from Africa". *Collected Poems 1948-1984*. New York: The Noonday Press, 1986. 17-18. First published in *In a Green Night*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1962.

Furthermore, the title of my dissertation indicates another focus on post-Apartheid poetry. I limited the corpus to anthologies and collections of poetry by female poets, which were published after the first democratic elections in 1994. A printed list of female South African poets and their works published after 1994, from the National English Literary Museum (NELM) in Grahamstown, was helpful in learning about the latest poetry collections published in South Africa.

Some of the poets started writing long before the change of regime. Others had their creative peak after the end of Apartheid. This is why I will not consider some famous women poets who never saw the ending of Apartheid, such as Ruth Miller or Ingrid Jonker, even though they are widely known through their published poetry. Another reason for exclusion was that these notable women poets wrote in Afrikaans.

Of course, this study can still not include all poetry and anthologies published in South Africa. Yet with the help of the NELM in Grahamstown, an attempt has been made to cover all women's poetry collections published between 1994 and 2007, although not all of them can be treated in equal measure: some poems are treated in more depth than others. Here I have been guided by the – admittedly subjective – questions which influenced Robert Berold in his editing of poetry: “Did the poem move me? Did it nourish me? Was it useful in my life? Did it wake me up? Did I want to read the poem again? Did it tell me something new the second time?”⁷

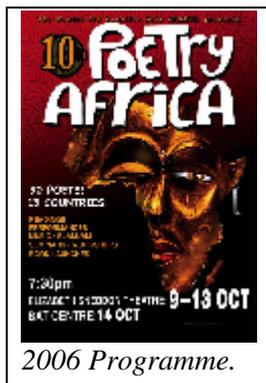


A poet of special interest to me is Malika Ndlovu, whom I first met during the course of my studies at the University of Cape Town in 2003. In 2005, I then wrote my Magister thesis⁸ on Malika Ndlovu and the writers' collective WEAVE. It was already at the University of Cape Town that I first read Malika Ndlovu's poem “Distinguished Umbrella”, which is possibly a reason why this poem, besides “born in africa but”, takes such a central place in both studies.

⁷ Robert Berold, ed. “Editor's Note”. *it all begins – poems from postliberation South Africa*. Scottsville: Gecko Poetry, 2002. No pagination.

⁸ The thesis was entitled: “*Black Woman Artist*” – *Die Perspektive einer farbigen Künstlerin in den Gedichten von Malika Ndlovu*.

Within this present study an entire chapter is dedicated to Malika Ndlovu and her work, and also her motto “Healing through Creativity” gets separate attention. That the title of one of her poems, “born in africa but”, is included in the title of this dissertation, comes not only from the fact that it is descriptively appropriate, but also from the importance which I attach to Malika Ndlovu’s poetry, both of which reasons will become clear from the poems chosen.



Aside from all other considerations, the present dissertation originated from my longstanding fascination with the work of South African women poets. In the present study, this contemporary poetry will be discussed and developed in much more depth than it ever has been before.

During my stays in South Africa I have tried to attend poetry festivals around the country such as the Poetry Africa Festival 2006 in Durban.⁹ On these occasions, I met many South African experts on poetry, including Professor Michael Chapman of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, as well as numerous poets. To prevent a distortion of the picture and to avoid the impression that this thesis focuses mainly on the literary scene around Cape Town, an attempt has been made to include poets from the ‘four corners’ of South Africa, as follows:

<u>Cape Town</u>	<u>Johannesburg</u>	<u>Durban</u>	<u>Port Elizabeth</u>
Gabeba Baderoon	Lisa Combrinck	Michelle McGrane	Shelley Barry (orig., now in Cape Town)
Finuala Dowling	Lebo Mashile	Gcina Mhlophe	Crystal Warren
Gertrude Fester	M. ‘Khosi’ Xaba	Rose Mokhosi	
Khadija Heeger		Sally-Ann Murray	
Colleen Higgs		Meganthrie Pillay	
Deela Khan	<u>Free State</u>		
Ingrid de Kok			
Malika Ndlovu	Antjie Krog (orig., now in Cape Town)		exemplary, table not complete
Weam Williams			

⁹ 10th Poetry Africa Festival. Johannesburg 6-7 October, Durban 9-14 October 2006. Centre for Creative Arts, University of KwaZulu Natal. Department of Arts and Culture, Republic of South Africa.

An explanation for the generally high number of published poets from Cape Town may well be the easy availability of publishers there and the encouragement to self-publish provided by the Centre for the Book in Cape Town. Then, there is, the ever-present tendency to favour the people you know: people who know publishers or editors and who maintain a high profile on the Cape literary scene get published more easily than others.

Since the end of Apartheid there have been certain changes for South African poetry. The Capetonian poet and professor Ingrid de Kok sees some of them in more publications, more visiting writers and possibly more poetry readings than before. She says there is

More cultural buzz. And there's more variety and commentary in politics and ideas generally. This will certainly have an effect on what people read and how people write, particularly young, black, writers who were assumed to fit into certain writing patterns.¹⁰

This also explains the many changes to older anthologies which can be seen in new editions, such as in Michael Chapman's *The New Century of South African Poetry* in comparison with his 1981 anthology *A Century of South African Poetry*.¹¹ The more recently updated editions try to be more politically correct: they omit poetry idolizing controversial and divisive aspects of history like the *Boertrek* or Apartheid, and reduce the percentage of white and male poets. Moreover, they include formerly banned poets and up and coming poets of all colours, who will feature in later chapters.¹²

Regarding the academic work dealing with literature in South Africa, much research has been done concerning South African novels and drama; and also certain aspects of South African poetry may have been explored, but most well-known studies were written before 2000. Thus, in the field of poetry, and especially women's poetry, a lot still needs to be done, both due to the large corpus which has been produced, and with regard to its thematic variety.

¹⁰ Robert Berold, ed. *South African Poets on Poetry – Interviews from New Coin 1992-2001*. Scottsville: Gecko Poetry, 2003. 116.

¹¹ Michael Chapman, ed. *A Century of South African Poetry*. Johannesburg: AD Donker, 1981. And: Michael Chapman, ed. *The New Century of South African Poetry*. Johannesburg and Cape Town: AD Donker, 2002.

¹² Chapman (2002: xvii). The differences between the two anthologies merit a separate study.

Scholars who have shown a deeper interest in South African poetry are, amongst others, Michael Chapman from the University of KwaZulu-Natal and Cecily Lockett. Probably the best known works about modern South African poetry in general are Michael Chapman's 1981 *A Century of South African Poetry* and the updated version from 2002, *The New Century of South African Poetry*. Numerous interesting points are made in the introduction to the latter and the poems collected give an excellent sampling of the wide spectrum of the poetry written in South Africa throughout the last century. Poetry relevant to this study, which has been published in other collections of poetry, but also in Chapman's anthology, is quoted from this book due to its broad availability. In addition, Michael Chapman has proven his expertise on the subject by the large number of essays and books on South African poetry which he has published over the last years.

Another name, which recurs in connection with studies on South African women's poetry, is that of Cecily Lockett, the editor of *Breaking the silence – A Century of South African Women's Poetry*.¹³ Her anthology is the best-known South African anthology of poetry dedicated to women poets only. The title "Breaking the silence" itself shows her intention to give space to those who thus far were not given as much attention as they deserved. *Breaking the silence* can be considered an inspiration for the present study; the foreword and the collection itself have shown the way for this dissertation. Yet, as the focus of this study is on post-Apartheid poetry, no poetry has been drawn from Lockett's anthology, which was published in 1990. Lockett's essays "Feminism(s) and Writing in English in South Africa",¹⁴ "Preface" and "South African Women's Poetry: A Gynocritical Perspective",¹⁵ however, are of continuing importance to this field of study.

¹³ Cecily Lockett, ed. *Breaking the silence – A Century of South African Women's Poetry*. By Cecily Lockett. Parklands: AD Donker, 1990.

¹⁴ Cecily Lockett. 1990. "Feminism(s) and Writing in English in South Africa". *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa* 2.1: 1-21. Reprinted in *South African Feminisms: Writing, Theory, and Criticism 1990-1994*. Ed. M.J. Daymond. New York: Garland Publishing, 1996. 3-26.

¹⁵ Cecily Lockett. 1992. "South African Women's Poetry: A Gynocritical Perspective". *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*. Vol. 11, No. 1: 47-49 and 51-61.

What made the search for secondary literature for this study more difficult is that most other researched academic pieces or anthologies either focus on another region (e.g. black Africa / Southern Africa), period (e.g. Apartheid) or male poets. Thus, Chapman and Lockett were preceded by Jacques Alvarez-Pereyre, who wrote – admittedly groundbreaking – studies on South African poetry, as far back as 1977, 1979 and 1981.¹⁶ In the German speaking world, due to the contributions of Elmar Lehmann and Erhard Reckwitz, the University of Essen has become known as a centre for studies on South African literature over the last several decades. But also Horst Zander's *Fact – Fiction – "Faction": A Study of Black South African Literature in English*¹⁷ was a valuable source of information for this study. Another more recent study concerning South African poetry was written by Ralph Pordzik in 2000,¹⁸ but its focus is on the years 1950-1980 and on almost only white writers.

Pamela Dube's *Contemporary English Performance Poetry in Canada and South Africa*,¹⁹ published in 1997, focuses more specifically on the topic of and theories around performance poetry. Her study was another source of inspiration, yet, the poems themselves are not central to her work while they are to this study. And the editor of *South African Feminisms*,²⁰ Margarete Daymond, together with another scholar in the field of South African literary feminism, the co-editor of *Women Writing Africa*,²¹ Dorothy Driver, concentrates more on feminist research than on the literature itself.

¹⁶ Jacques Alvarez-Pereyre. *Poésie parmi nous. Poètes engagés sud africains*. Grenoble: Maison de la Culture, 1977. *Les Guetteurs de l'Aube. Poésie et Apartheid*. Grenoble: Presses universitaires de Grenoble, 1979. *L'Apartheid et la Poésie engagée Sud-africaine de langue Anglaise*. Lille: Service de Reproduction de Theses, 1981. (dissertation first published in 1977).

¹⁷ Horst Zander. *Fact – Fiction – "Faction": A Study of Black South African Literature in English*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1999.

¹⁸ Ralph Pordzik. *Die moderne englischsprachige Lyrik in Südafrika 1950-1980: Eine Darstellung aus funktions- und wirkungsgeschichtlicher Perspektive*. Heidelberg: Winter, 2000.

¹⁹ Pamela Dube. *Contemporary English Performance Poetry in Canada and South Africa – A Comparative Study of the Main Motifs and Poetic Techniques*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1997.

²⁰ Margaret J. Daymond, ed. *South African Feminisms - Writing, Theory, and Criticism 1990-1994*. New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1996.

²¹ Margaret J. Daymond, Dorothy Driver et al. *Women Writing Africa – The Southern Region*. New York: The Feminist Press at the City Univ. of New York, 2003.

Much more common than academic work on South African poetry is the knowledge shared in the forewords or introductions to collections of poetry and anthologies. One of those valuable forewords can be found in an anthology of poetry published by Michela Borzaga and Dorothea Steiner in 2004.²²

Also a few poets themselves gather information and data, which they make available on the internet. Personal homepages and private blogs (cf. Michelle McGrane's <<http://peonymoon.wordpress.com/>>). As well, platforms like *Poetry International WEBlog*, and even *Facebook*, help in communicating, sharing and publishing poetry and poetry reviews, and additionally they offer a modern and efficient way of reaching people and audiences.

This list could go on forever, but neither all the academic work nor all the collections of poetry and anthologies which have provided material for this study can be named in this place. Therefore an attempt has been made to comprehensively and systematically group and list all useful primary and secondary literature in the bibliography at the end. One can but hope that the scholars who have so far shown an interest in contemporary South African poetry will publish more of it in the coming years and thus help to bring it the attention it deserves.

This is the outline of the course this study will follow across a landscape as interesting as the savannahs, mountain ranges and game parks of South Africa. For the very fact that the poetic landscape of South Africa is much less well known than its famous natural sights, the work of South Africa's women poets may well have a special appeal and include some surprises for all interested observers.

²² Michaela Borzaga and Dorothea Steiner, eds. *Imagination in a Troubled Space – A South African Poetry Reader*. Salzburg: Poetry Salzburg, 2004.

I. A short introduction to South Africa

A beautiful land
With beautiful mountains
And beautiful seas
But not for me²³

Even though much has been written on race and skin-colour in South Africa, some background information about the country might nonetheless be useful for those readers of this study who are not familiar with all the details of both the historical and social development and the current situation in South Africa.

As mentioned in the introduction, I will need to refer to the South African terms of racial classification that were institutionalised during Apartheid, as they are still a point of reference. Then, the South African population was split into four official racial groups, ‘Whites’, ‘Coloureds’, ‘Indians’ and ‘Blacks’,²⁴ by the *Population Registration Act*, which is explained in detail in Chapter I.2.

However, I need to clarify the terminology. I will refer to black South Africans, who during Apartheid were often referred to as Natives, as ‘Blacks’ or ‘Africans’,²⁵ and to white South Africans as ‘Whites’ or ‘Afrikaners’, a term deriving from the Afrikaans for ‘African’.²⁶ The Afrikaners, though, counted among themselves only the descendants of the first settlers (Dutch, French, German) and those who spoke their own language, Afrikaans, as their mother-tongue. In this manner, they distinguished themselves from other Whites, for

²³ “Haunted Eyes” by Gladys Thomas, in: James Matthews and Gladys Thomas. *Cry Rage!* Johannesburg: Spro-cas Publications, 1972. Poem “79”. No pagination.

²⁴ I will capitalize these terms to indicate their legal status in South African law.

²⁵ Interestingly enough, the word ‘African’ was never used by the Afrikaans authorities. The problem was that when translated back into Afrikaans it means ‘Afrikaner’, which was the name the ‘Boers’, the white descendants of the Dutch, used for themselves only. They referred to the ‘Africans’ as ‘Blacks’ or ‘Bantus’, the last of which is incorrect, as it does not acknowledge the fact that not all Africans are Bantus: the biggest Bantu-speaking peoples are the ‘Nguni’ (Xhosa, Zulu, Ndebele, Swazi) and the ‘Sotho-Tswana’.

The term Afrikaner was first used to mean ‘white’ by a certain Bibault in Stellenbosch in 1707, and this is seen as the first expression of Boer nationalism. Cf. Vernon A. February. *Mind your colour – The ‘coloured’ stereotype in South African literature*. London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981. 41.

²⁶ The groups will be capitalised, not the adjectives.

example, those of British or Irish origin who were referred to as ‘English speaking South Africans’ (ESSAs).²⁷

The South African ‘Coloureds’ were people of mixed African, European, Malay and Khoi or Bushmen²⁸ descent. Tests²⁹ of doubtful merit tore apart entire families, decided who was black, coloured or white. *Proclamation 123* of 1967 split up the Coloureds in seven further subgroups: Cape Coloured, Cape Malay, Griqua, Chinese, Indian, ‘other’ Asiatic and ‘other’ Coloured.³⁰ Coloureds were seen as beneath Whites, who were all joined in one group, no matter what their country of origin. Yet, as the Coloureds were not black and some of them were of mixed origin and had ‘white blood’, they had an advantage over the Blacks when it came to finding a job or residence.

In some contexts, the ‘Asians’ or ‘Indians’ formed a fourth group, but due to their small proportion (2%) relative to the whole, and for reasons of simplification, they were counted among the Coloureds. This classification was the basis of the three class system of Apartheid. It meant enormous privileges for Whites and disadvantages for all other racial groups. The impact of racial classification is the topic of many poems written during Apartheid, such as James Matthews’ poems in *Cry Rage!*³¹

The country’s literary history and development cannot be seen independently of its history. As the examples of poetry discussed later in this study deal with such aspects of South African identity, I find it necessary to start with an overview of the South African history and Apartheid.

²⁷ Anthony Adams and Ken Durham. *Writing from South Africa. Figures in a Landscape*. Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1995. ix.

²⁸ I use the term ‘Bushmen’ instead of ‘San’, as that the term ‘San’ was used derogatorily by the Khoi for the ‘Bushmen’.

²⁹ Examples of tests: genealogical trees; indicators such as twisting the hair with pencils to judge curliness; combing the hair and measuring lips. Such methods led to many or racial re-classifications. More on this topic can be read “Appendix III – Race classification...” of February’s study (1981: 190-193).

³⁰ February (1981: 192) Chinese were in general considered ‘non-Whites’, whereas people from Taiwan, South Korea and Japan, due to close diplomatic relations, were considered ‘honorary Whites’, which was frequently the case with African Americans and a few other people of colour.

³¹ Cf. “Poems “54” and “59”. Matthews and Thomas (1972). James Matthews’ poems in *Cry Rage!* have no titles, only numbers, and there is no pagination.

L.1 South Africa's history

Of course history and past politics have had a huge impact on South African society. Contrary to what the country's schoolbooks taught till 1990 (cf. the lines of Lebogang Mashile's poem "Devona":³² "classrooms[,] where the rightness of white/ Scrubbed us to the bone"), South Africa was not uninhabited upon the arrival of the first European settlers. The settlement of South Africa dates back to the second and third centuries of our era. At the beginning of the 19th century, the black Bantu-tribes had widely displaced the lighter-skinned Khoi and Bushmen. The warlike Zulus, who were organised in clans, were responsible for extensive demographic changes in the South of Africa. The kingdom of Swazi and the realms of the Ndwandwe and the Ngogi came into being at this time. This proudly remembered part of tribal African history has always been important for the national pride and the self-esteem of black South Africans. Poems like "The Birth of Shaka"³³ deal with these times.

In 1652, the Dutch East India Company founded a station at present day Cape Town, which, at the southern tip of Africa, was the most important supply point for their ships trading with East India. "It was estimated that during the first twenty years of its existence, no less than 75 per cent of the children born at the Cape of slave mothers were half-breeds",³⁴ the intermixing took place at all levels; the coloured community was founded. Antjie Krog's acclaimed epic poem on "Lady Anne (Barnard at the Cape)"³⁵ and Karen Press' long poem "Krotoa's Story"³⁶ deal with the events of these times. Especially the "Krotoa"-poems show how, with the arrival of the Europeans, an unequal and bloody conflict was started for the country.

³² Lebogang Mashile. *In a Ribbon of Rhythm*. Johannesburg: Mutloatse Arts Heritage Trust and Cape Town: Oshun Books, 2005. 23.

³³ Oswald Joseph Mtshali. *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum*. Johannesburg: Renoster Books, 1971. 12.

³⁴ February (1981: 13).

³⁵ Antjie Krog. *Down to my last skin - Poems*. Johannesburg: Random House, 2000. 61-80.

³⁶ Karen Press. *Bird Heart Stoning the Sea – Krotoa's Story – Lines of Force*. Cape Town: Buchu Books, 1990. 45-67.

From the Cape, the so-called Voortrekkers, in their Great Trek,³⁷ looking for farming and grazing land and trying to get away from the English after their arrival and conquest of the Cape in 1795, began to trek deeper and deeper into the interior. On their way, they fought and pushed back the Khoi and Bushmen as well as the resident Bantu peoples. The promise of great profits through the mining of raw materials and the goal of national prestige started a great imperial contest, 'the Scramble for Africa', amongst the big European nations to seize the largest possible areas for their own colonies. At the same time, since 1795, Great Britain attracted more and more British settlers to the country, which led to conflicts between them and the Boers and thus later to the Anglo Boer Wars.³⁸

From their side, the Blacks made attempts to liberate themselves from the Europeans as they had no say in the decisions made concerning them. The Europeans, for example the British in Matabeleland, were confronted with armed uprisings, as many of the native peoples did not want to give in to foreign rule without a fight. Yet, all the attempts of the natives were in vain and after the First World War, the exploitation of Africa was even extended.

The Second World War, however, led to a higher self-esteem amongst the Africans, which induced the British and French to make extensive concessions. This encouraged the formation of national movements including the Pan African Movement. All over Africa, popular political parties and trade unions were founded. Towards the end of the 1970s almost the entire continent had become independent. All these events were proof to the Blacks and Coloureds in South Africa that they could have the same success there. Yet the situation in South Africa was different from that in other African countries.

³⁷ This was described for the first time from a black perspective in Solomon T. Plaatje's novel *Mhudi*. Oxford: Heinemann, 1978 (first published in 1930).

³⁸ One point of conflict was the abolition of slavery in 1834.

Government after 1948, when it only won with a small majority over the United Party of the English, shows that the most important goal was the extension of the supremacy of the Afrikaners over the English-speaking Whites. These were their goals:

1. the assurance of the supremacy of the Whites in South Africa over the black majority;
2. the assurance of political supremacy of the Afrikaners in the state and its withdrawal from the British Commonwealth; and
3. the economic equality of the Afrikaners with the English speaking Whites.

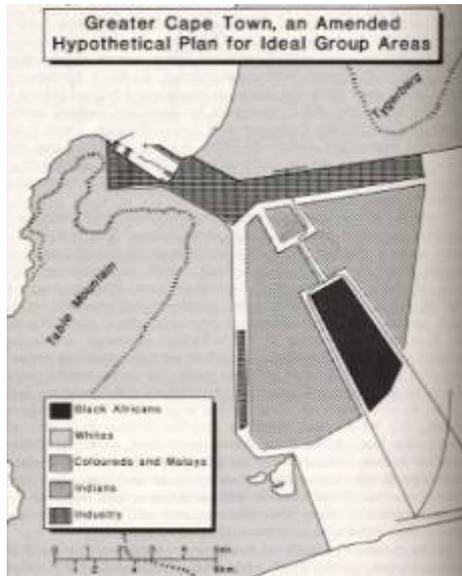
In comparison to the time before 1948, when problems like industrialisation were the only ones approached by the government, now the regime began to immediately take action on the basis of Apartheid. All the new laws passed aimed at the economical, political, territorial and social segregation of the different races. Interracial marriages were forbidden and thus a crime. Blacks were denied a good education. The Blacks living in towns had to move to racially segregated, designated urban areas and were forbidden to run for elective office. They were forbidden to found independent trade-unions. Posts as specialists or in the administration were exclusively reserved for Whites.

In South Africa, Apartheid as an ideology and as an institution was defined by the country's laws in such a way as to secure the sovereignty of the white minority. Millions of Blacks were relocated to new townships. The Whites protected themselves with more than 300 laws concerning racial segregation and with exclusive voting rights. "The first of these laid down [...] those places where 'Europeans' could live and those which were set aside for Africans or other racial groups".⁴⁰

In 1950, the *Population Registration Act* brought about the division of the South African population into four groups – Whites, Coloureds, Asians, Blacks. One of the most drastic laws was the *Group Areas Act* of the same year, which was gradually tightened.

⁴⁰ Adams and Durham (1995: xi).

The Group Areas Act was a key plank in the policy of 'grand apartheid', or 'separate development', which was pursued from the time the National Party came to power in 1948 until 1990.⁴¹



Greater Cape Town, an Amended Hypothetical Plan for Ideal Group Areas⁴²

Group Areas were designated residential areas allocated to individual racial communities (see table). The *Mixed Marriages Act* (1949) and the *Immorality Act* (1950) banned interracial marriages and “outlawed all sexual and many social relations between Blacks and Whites”.⁴³ This is made a topic in James Matthews’ poems “38”, “59” and Gladys Thomas’ “Immoral Love” (Poem “75”) in *Cry Rage!*⁴⁴, as well as in Oswald Mtshali’s “Pigeons at the Oppenheimer Park”.⁴⁵ With the introduction of the *Pass Laws*, which became a frequent topic in the

literary work of, among others, Mongane Serote, James Matthews and Asvat Farouk, all Africans had to carry passes at all times and wherever they went. The Whites, in their turn, were forbidden to enter townships without special permission, which had the effect that no one side knew about the conditions of any of the others. This ‘separate development’ is mirrored in such lines as Shabbir Banoobhai’s “the border// is as far/ as the black man/ who walks alongside you”.⁴⁶

After the *Bantu Authorities Act* from 1951, the Blacks were assigned to “Homelands”, a term that is misleading, as the Blacks did not get their fertile, former tribal areas back, but were relegated to the most inhospitable regions instead. Through the *Bantu-Self Government Act* the Blacks obtained a limited

⁴¹ Adams and Durham (1995: xi).

⁴² Mark-Antony Da Gama Rose. No date. “History.” Macalester. <<http://www.macalester.edu/geography/courses/geog261/mark/history.html>> (accessed March 20, 2004).

⁴³ Adams and Durham (1995: xii).

⁴⁴ Matthews and Thomas (1972).

⁴⁵ Oswald Joseph Mthshali. “Pigeons at the Oppenheimer Park”. *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum*. Johannesburg: Renoster Books, 1971. 16.

⁴⁶ Shabbir Banoobhai. “the border”. *echoes of my other self*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1980. 36.

individual responsibility for their own affairs within ‘their’ (by the rest of the world not recognized) homelands, and in 1959, the Blacks were divided into eight further ethnic groups, which were supposed to found small nation states for themselves. These laws and the fact that they forbade the Blacks to live in any other but their designated areas without a special permit, without which they could be deported back to their homelands, were the basis of Apartheid. The final aim was to secure white power by declaring Blacks to be foreigners whenever outside their homelands and in the rest of South Africa. The Whites maintained that this justified them in calling their political system a democracy, not a dictatorship, as it is normal for foreigners not to be allowed to vote in a where they have a work permit but are not citizens.⁴⁷

In 1953, the Minister of Native Affairs, the so-called ‘Architect of Apartheid’ Hendrik Frensch Verwoerd who was to rule the country as Prime Minister from 1958 till 1966, passed the *Bantu Education Act* with the goal of bringing all education and especially the Mission schools under state control and segregating them racially. The *Bantu Education Act*

reinforced the already segregated school system by requiring that instruction of Africans in primary schools should be in their own mother-tongue [...] but those Africans who did attend school [...] wanted above all access to English, which they saw as a wider base for communication than their own tribal language, or Afrikaans, the language of the hated oppressors.⁴⁸

This *Bantu Education Act* was aimed at the black opposition, which consisted mainly of the Western educated black African middle class, and against black competition with the white employees and workers. This act and the prohibition of Whites teaching Blacks were supposed to lower the educational level. The spending for education was reallocated from the Blacks to the Whites. All laws enacted at this time were designed to keep the black and coloured population from obtaining a good and modern education and to make it impossible for them to acquire qualifications for higher positions. In 1959, it was forbidden for black students to enrol at universities. Their own, black universities were supposed to be founded for them, one in each homeland. Furthermore, the state tried to help Afrikaner employees to find more privileged positions on the

⁴⁷ Another term used to describe this arrangement is the wryly apt one of ‘pigmentocracy’.

⁴⁸ Adams and Durham (1995: xii).

labour market. In 1951, the *Bantu Building Workers Act* limited the employment possibilities for trained black workers to the homelands and the African dwellings in white areas. In 1956, the white government extended the 'job reservation', favouring white workers, from the mining sector to all other industrial areas. Only the agricultural sector remained an exception.

Already in 1947 the per capita income of the black South Africans was 10 times and in 1970 15 times lower than that of the Whites. In 1971, the white mine workers earned in comparison to the Blacks 21 times more and 6 times more in industry. Because of the low salaries of the Blacks, exports were enlivened and the investment climate for foreign capital became more favourable.

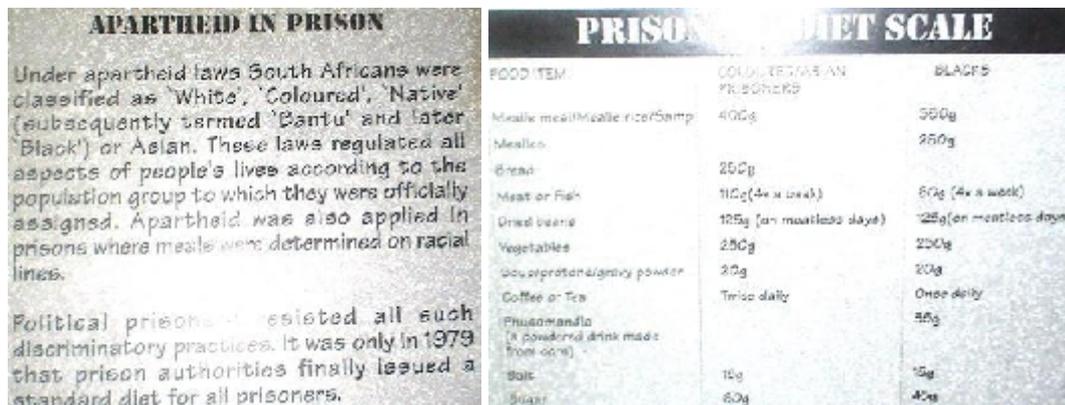
Just as the change of government in 1990 brought a change in favour of the Blacks, with the victory in the elections of 1948 the Afrikaners started a 'Boerification' of the state institutions. So far, the number of Afrikaners allocated positions in the administration had been low in comparison to those of the English-speaking Whites.⁴⁹ Here, the Afrikaners were favoured over their English speaking countrymen when it came to filling lower and higher positions in the civil service, in the judicial and the public health system, in the army, the police and in state organisations, the whole public sector. The demand for qualified manpower was enormous, as the state administration of the Apartheid system was only possible at huge administrative cost. Slowly, South Africa became a police state. The *Suppression of Communism Act* of 1950 (from 1976 on, *Internal Security Act*), as well as the legislation of the *Sabotage Act* of 1962 and the *Terrorism Act* of 1967 were supposed to provide security for the Afrikaner rule and to silence the opposition, which was asking for 'one man – one vote'. Furthermore, the decisive voice of the court of justice in constitutional questions was at this time limited.

Under Prime Minister Verwoerd, South Africa became a Republic again through a constitutional amendment in 1960. Of the white voters, 52.3% voted in favour of it. During this time, the whole of Africa was going through a period of decolonisation. In the case of South Africa, one could talk about an 'internal

⁴⁹ Detailed statistical data can be found in chart XXIV "Prozentuale Verteilung der Afrikaner auf drei Berufskategorien" of Paul Drechsel and Bettina Schmidt. *Südafrika. Chancen für eine pluralistische Gesellschaftsordnung. Geschichte und Perspektiven*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1995. 141.

decolonisation’: The development of Apartheid in South Africa can be seen as completed in 1961 because it was then, that the Apartheid government started with the formal implementation of the autonomy of the homelands. Some of these laws were found in practice to be economically crippling. All subsequent laws were merely a modification of the existing state of affairs, a case of conforming to the realities of the situation, or even the abandonment of the existing rules in the face of repeated national and international protests.

In March 1960, several peaceful demonstrators, amongst them children, were shot by the police in Sharpeville and the government had to declare a state of emergency. Thousands of Blacks were arrested and political parties, such as the ANC and the newly founded Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), were outlawed.⁵⁰ In 1962, the government passed the *Anti Sabotage Act*, which penalized most forms of political opposition. The ANC and the PAC then decided in favour of an armed resistance against the regime. The beginnings of the ‘Armed Struggle’ can be traced back to “the attempt of the ANC in 1955 to provide a blueprint, ‘The Freedom Charter’ [based on Marxist principles], for a future South Africa that would no longer be dominated by the white Afrikaner National Party”.⁵¹ In 1964, Nelson Mandela, the leading figure of black resistance in South Africa and the leader of the ANC was accused of sabotage and treason and arrested.



Apartheid in prison. Wall charts on Robben Island.

Photos: Isabelle Vogt 2003.

In 1970, the goal of control of the black Africans and final territorial segregation was fulfilled with the *Homeland Citizenship Act*, according to which

⁵⁰ In 1959 the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) had split from the ANC because it favoured an armed struggle against the white government, whereas the ANC had wanted to continue the peaceful struggle. Both parties were outlawed in 1960.

⁵¹ Adams and Durham (1995: x).

all Blacks who lived in white areas and all inhabitants of homelands were dispossessed of their citizenship. In return they were given the citizenship of 'their' homeland with the right to vote there. This creation of mono-racial national states was supposed to free South Africa from its international isolation. The 'special treatment' of the Blacks, which was obviously only based on racial criteria, was supposed to be justified through the fact that now, Blacks were only foreigners in South Africa. A capitalistic system based on what was effectively slavery, however, could not survive in a modern world,⁵² and the homelands were not recognised anywhere outside South Africa.

Slowly, even the businessmen turned against the government, when South Africa's economic situation changed fundamentally in the 1960s. The new need for qualified black employees, made the underprivileged black educational system and migratory labour, which had been necessary for the politics of homelands, counterproductive. For economic reasons the rapid manpower turnover resulting from the workers' unfavourable living conditions and the long distances⁵³ they were obliged to travel to work from their assigned areas was no longer sustainable. Hence the demand for the permanent settlement of black skilled labourers outside the homelands grew in the 1970s. The salary increases in the industrial and mining sector made the system of migratory labour more costly and this is why, in Kimberley in 1972, for the first time, the request for permanent settlement of migrant workers was acceded to. The German version of David Winner's book on Desmond Tutu reflects the situation of South Africa at the time. Tutu says "I want to make this perfectly clear. South Africa is full of violence, a violence which emanates from Apartheid, from the forced removals, the imprisonments without sentences, the mysterious deaths during the term of imprisonment, the inferior education, the existence of migratory labour and live-in positions of employment, which systematically destroy the lives and family life of the Blacks".⁵⁴

⁵² Hans Brandt and Bartholomäus Grill. *Der letzte Treck. Südafrikas Weg in die Demokratie*. Bonn: Dietz Taschenbücher, 1994. 47.

⁵³ Many Blacks had to get up at 3 or 4 am, as they had to walk for hours before they could even reach their places of work.

⁵⁴ Winner (1990: 43), my translation. This quote can only be found in the German version of David Winner's book on Desmond Tutu, not in the English original.

In 1975, the leader of the Zulus, Chief Mangosuthu Gatsha Buthelezi, formed the *Inkatha Freedom Party*, which, apparently flying in the face of logic, using terror and counterintuitively working closely with the Apartheid regime, tried to drive the anti-Apartheid politics of the ANC out of the population's minds.

In 1976, there was more violent conflict, when 10,000 pupils demonstrated in Soweto against the language of the oppressor, Afrikaans, being the only language of instruction. The townships were the place of origin of the resistance. When Steve Biko, the founder of the *Black Consciousness Movement*, died in 1977 from being tortured by the police,⁵⁵ further riots took place. The resistance of the black population, which had started non-violently, led to numerous conflicts and many deaths. Around 1980, South Africa was close to a civil war.

Due to the Apartheid policies, the Boers almost drew level economically with the English speaking South Africans in the 1970s. At the same time, a slow reversal of conditions in favour of parts of the black and coloured South African population began. In theory, Apartheid was a continuation of the Afrikaners' efforts to secure white predominance in South Africa. Most Whites profited from the oppression and supported the Boers with their votes. Economically, though, it was a concept that was not viable. The South African economy was unintentionally and unwittingly a symbiosis of black and white South Africans, the separation of which damaged the economy, even if only as a result international boycotts.

While the Apartheid system was causing international protests and boycotts, on a national level, the black opposition under the leadership of the ANC was offering bitter and, since 1960, armed resistance to racist policies. Only in 1988, international sanctions and the failed military engagement in Angola and Namibia led to a slow attenuation of President Botha's rigorous Apartheid politics. Then, in 1989, his successor, Frederik de Klerk, signalled the coming of fundamental changes, when he took up lengthy negotiations between the government and the ANC.

⁵⁵ Cf. various poems on these happenings, e.g. in Robin Malan, ed. *Worldscapes – A collection of verse*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press Southern Africa, 2001 (first published in 1997). 242.

The culmination of the gradual dismantling of the structures of ‘petty Apartheid’,⁵⁶ such as separate entrances to post offices and hotels, in the 1980s ended with the peaceful transition to democracy. The single most important event for South Africa, at least symbolically, was Nelson Mandela’s release from prison which came in 1990. Finally, in 1993, came the enactment of a new constitution and the abolition of both Apartheid and racial discrimination. A further crucial date for South Africa is that of the first free and democratic elections in 1994, in which, for the first time, all South Africans were allowed to participate. The ANC emerged clearly victorious. Since then, South Africa’s National Holiday has been April 27th, in memory of these elections, which have been described in various poems recalling the long queues in front of the election halls and the atmosphere ranging from solemn to cheerful.

On May 10th, 1994, the leader of the ANC and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, Nelson Mandela, was inaugurated as President. Separation of powers, equality between ethnic groups as well as of men and women, freedom of speech and religion are essential constituents of the new constitution, which meant the dawn of democracy in South Africa. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC, 1996-98) was a controversial but unique way to treat the past. Those who committed human rights offences and gave testimony could request amnesty, and the forgiveness of the victims. The goal was to bring both sides into dialogue so they could see things from the other’s perspective. The head of the commission was the Nobel Peace Prize winner of 1984, Archbishop Desmond Tutu. The TRC became a topic for all literary forms, see Antjie Krog’s novel *The Country of my Skull* and Ingrid de Kok’s poems “The transcriber speaks” (with the unsettling line: “Is weeping a pause or a word?”) and “The archbishop chairs the first session”.⁵⁷

“The archbishop chairs the first session” is part of a cycle of poems called “A room full of questions” from *Terrestrial Things*. The cycle deals with reports from South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission. These poems try to capture and give an account of some of the pain people had suffered and the experiences they had lived through, which were described in testimony to the TRC. A recurring topic is the exhaustive questioning in search for answers needed

⁵⁶ Adams and Durham (1995: xii).

⁵⁷ Ingrid de Kok. *Terrestrial Things*. Roggebaai: KWELA and Plumstead: Snailpress, 2002. 32, 22.

by both, the victims, and those responsible. The quest for answers, on both sides, that go beyond ‘political explanations’, is portrayed in the startling and shattering words between a victim and an offender: the question of a victim “*What kind of a man are you?*” is followed by the not less disoriented army Captain’s quote “*I ask myself the same question*”.⁵⁸

The Archbishop chairs the first session

by Ingrid de Kok

THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION.
APRIL 1996. EAST LONDON, SOUTH AFRICA.

On the first day
after a few hours of testimony
the Archbishop wept.
He put his grey head
on the long table
of papers and protocols
and he wept.

The national
and international cameramen
filmed his weeping,
his misted glasses,
his sobbing shoulders,
the call for a recess.

It doesn’t matter what you thought
of the Archbishop before or after,
of the settlement, the commission,
or what the anthropologists flying in
from less studied crimes and sorrows
said about the discourse,
or how many doctorates,
books and installations followed,
or even if you think this poem
simplifies, lionizes
romanticizes, mystifies.

There was a long table, starched purple vestment
and after a few hours of testimony,
the Archbishop, chair of the commission,
laid down his head, and wept.

That’s how it began.

“The Archbishop chairs the first session” witnesses the touching scene of Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s breaking down on the very first day of the hearings. The poem, from a detached distance, reflects the unexpected and honest display of emotions at the depiction of the crimes of the era of Apartheid.

Ingrid de Kok also mentions the “national/ and international cameramen” mercilessly filming the moving scene. To underline the accuracy of her portayal of the event, she adds, “even if you think this poem/ simplifies, lionizes/ romanticizes, mystifies” the poet repeats the completely unexpected, unbelievable and unpredictable fact that the Archbishop, “chair of the commission”, “put his grey head/ on the long table/ of papers and protocols/ and [...] wept” and thus removes all doubts on the

subject. The poem’s last sentence is “That’s how it began”. This refers as well to

⁵⁸ All quotes from the poem “What kind of a man?” by Ingrid de Kok (2002: 25).

the opening of the TRC, as to the entire effort to effect a reconciliation amongst the people of South Africa.

For All Voices, For All Victims

[in response to stories at the TRC]

by Antjie Krog

because of you
this country no longer lies
between us but within
it breathes becalmed
after being wounded
in its wondrous throat

in the cradle of my skull
it sings, it ignites
my tongue, my inner ear, the cavity of heart
shudders towards the outline new in soft
intimate clicks and gutturals

of my soul the retina learns to expand
daily because by a thousand stories
I was scorched

a new skin

I am changed for ever. I want to say:

forgive me
forgive me
forgive me

You whom I have wronged, please
take me

with you.

Another poem inspired by the TRC and written in response to the stories uncovered is Antjie Krog's "For All Voices, For All Victims".⁵⁹ The poem tells how the shocking stories told "in soft intimate clicks and gutturals" touch and change the white journalist Antjie Krog and how she witnesses the hearings as healing: "because of you/ this country no longer lies ["lies" = carrying a double meaning]/ between us but within/ it breathes becalmed/ after being wounded".

The lyrical speaker records the positive aspects of the TRC: "I am changed for ever" and asks the victims of Apartheid, "You whom I have wronged", to "forgive me". This plea is repeated three times, which gives it a religious touch and

further underlines the need to be forgiven. The last request to "please/ take me// with you" springs possibly from the fear of being put into the same 'white' drawer with the oppressors and is thus a plea to the wronged not to make the same mistake as the Whites did, but to take the lyrical speaker along on a path together.

Nowadays, South Africa has to battle an increasing crime rate. Since the abolition of Apartheid, the black and coloured population is free, but poverty and violence

⁵⁹ Chapman (2001: 268). And in slightly different form in: Krog (2000: 98). Krog herself translated this poem from the Afrikaans original.

remain. Johannesburg has the dubious distinction of being known as the ‘world capital of crime’, and news of crimes and xenophobic attacks taking place in South Africa reach newspapers all over the world. The Apartheid regime and its opponents flooded South Africa with arms and violence. Additional forms of crime have joined the fray: South Africa has become an important centre for international drug trafficking. The living conditions in the townships, in which a majority of the black and coloured populations still lives, are still far from the living standards of the Whites. Townships like Khayelitsha in Cape Town or Alexandra in Johannesburg bear witness to the fact that the social factors which produce violence have neither changed nor disappeared after the end of Apartheid. Furthermore, South Africa has to deal with the Aids epidemic which is ravaging the country.

At Darling Street⁶⁰

by Luvuyo Mkangelwa

They lie
on the pavement
asleep and agape
in broad daylight

the ones dreaming
glue dreams
evading the pain of hunger and begging
their daily rhetoric

Then, there remains the problem of the huge number of orphans and street children. The description of the futureless children in “At Darling Street” by Luvuyo Mangelwa is a ruthlessly realistic portrayal of one of the realities in the, in so many ways promising, contemporary South Africa. These children, exposed to hunger, drugs (“dreaming/ glue dreams”), crime and abuse, can be seen as post-Apartheid’s ‘god’s stepchildren’.⁶¹ This barebones poem consisting of essentially two sentences is written entirely in lower case, without punctuation, and it describes the miserable situation of street children. Only the children, “They”, are capitalised. They pose a huge problem for South Africa and one cannot close one’s eyes to them as it all happens “in broad daylight”. One can try, but if one has a heart, one must find a way to put an end to the situation. This is one of the many important problems which South Africa still has to deal with in her near future.

⁶⁰ Ingrid de Kok and Gus Ferguson, eds. *City in Words – An anthology of Cape Town poems*. Claremont: David Philip Publishers, 2001. 31.

⁶¹ The term used derogatorily by Sarah Gertrude Millin for children of mixed parentage. Cf: Sarah Gertrude Millin. *God's Step-Children*. London: Constable, 1924. And: Chapter IV.2.

L.3 The South African society

The peculiar nature of South African society as multi-ethnic, multilingual, but still partly illiterate adversely affects the possibilities of communication through literature.⁶² In 2007, the population of South Africa was estimated to be 47.9 million, and the population density was 39.2 inhabitants per km². This is in a country 3.4 times bigger than Germany, where there are 231 inhabitants per km². According to the 2001 census, the population is made up of 79,6% Black Africans, 9.1% Whites, 8.9% Coloureds and 2.5% Indians/Asians, with the percentage of the Whites decreasing continuously. South Africa's greatest problem is the high HIV/Aids rate and the fact that about 50% of the population lives below the poverty level. The number of Aids-orphans increases constantly and life-expectancy, which is now only about 42 years, has sunk rapidly over the past decade.

Even though Afrikaans (13.3% mother tongue speakers) and English (8.2%) dominate as official languages in South Africa, there is a total of eleven: isiZulu (23.8%), isiXhosa (17.6%), sePedi (9.4%), Setswana (8.2%), seSotho (7.9%), xiTsonga (4.4%), seSwati (2.7%), tshiVenda (2.3%), isiNdebele (1.6%). The remaining 0.6% speak other languages as a mother tongue. Most South Africans are multilingual from an early age on, which one sees in many South African poems, where the poets use words from different South African languages to get their message right or to be as authentic as possible.

Education was and is not equally spread amongst all South Africans. More than 20% of South Africans are illiterate, and about 11% of the population live in informal settlements and shacks. Whites always had and mostly still have access to privileged education, while the *Bantu Education Act* during Apartheid intended to educate Blacks poorly so they would still be available as cheap labourers and not be in competition with the Whites as a quote of Verwoerd demonstrates:

What is the use of teaching the Bantu-child mathematics when it cannot use it in practice? [...] If the Native in South Africa today is being taught to expect that he will live his adult life under a policy of equal rights, he is making a big mistake.⁶³

⁶² The following general and statistical information on South Africa refers to the pages of SouthAfrica.info and CIA.gov.

⁶³ David Winner. *People Who Have Helped the World – Desmond Tutu*. Milwaukee: Gareth Stevens Publishing, 1989. 20.

In the German version of the book, Verwoerd is further cited as saying that Natives would be badly disappointed if they were qualified for jobs which would not be given to them anyway. It would be, therefore, better to train them according to the needs of the South African society, the full quote is as follows:⁶⁴

Schooling must educate the Native so that he can fulfil the expectations which the economy of South Africa has of him... In the society of the Europeans, there is no place for the Native above the level of certain tasks... Interracial relations can never get better, if the Native receives an education which gives the Native false hope; when their education disappoints them in their expectations when the education creates people who are not trained for the jobs that are open to them.⁶⁵

During the past thirteen post-Apartheid years many attempts have been made to make adjustments in the educational system in favour of the formerly disadvantaged groups.⁶⁶ It is the government's goal, so far unfulfilled, to provide the same level of education and individual opportunities for all racial groups.

Freedom of religion exists in South Africa as it does in England and in the USA. Yet personal faith is also of relevance in understanding South African poetry and society as a whole. Therefore, a few more figures may be allowed in order to sketch the stratification of society in this respect. More than 25% of the population follow a traditional African religion and the gods that have accompanied them through every day life for thousands of years. The most widespread single religion in South Africa is Christianity with 75.5%. Christian denominations include the Independent African Churches (e.g. the Zion Christian Church) with 25.74%, the *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk* – the former established church of the Afrikaners – with 8.9%, the Roman-Catholic Church with 8.6%, the Methodists with 7.1%, the Anglican Church with 4%, and the Lutheran Church with 2.6%. Almost all white and coloured South Africans and about 60% of the Blacks and 40% of the Indians belong to these churches. Of the Indians, 60% and therefore 1.4% of the total population are Hindus. A further

⁶⁴ David Winner. *Vorbilder - Desmond Tutu*. Würzburg: Arena Verlag, 1990. 32.

⁶⁵ This paragraph has been translated back to English from the German translation of the original text in David Winner's book on Desmond Tutu. It is obvious that the German text is an amplified version of the English original.

⁶⁶ The universities have many scholarships for students from needy backgrounds available and some study courses (e.g. Music, Arts, Dance etc.) may even be studied if he or she does not have the required school leaving certificate, provided that the student has proved his or her outstanding performance ability. Through these measures, South Africa is trying slowly to improve the situation for the underprivileged.

1.4% of the South Africans are Muslims, while Jews make up 0.2%. Such detailed information is useful, as many poets write about subjects having to do with their religions: Antjie Krog states that the Bible is a source of inspiration for her poetry; Sarah Johnson's collection of poetry, *personae*,⁶⁷ is full of Biblical characters ("Ham", "Jacob", "Potiphar's Wife", "Bathsheba", etc); and Malika Ndlovu's journey from Catholicism to Islam is the topic of many of her poems ("Full Circle", "AND AGAIN SHE WAS BORN"⁶⁸).

Perhaps one of the best poems capturing the spirit of contemporary, post-

Wrapped Up

by Malika Ndlovu

Hanging out with my bra⁶⁹
Somme chooning⁷⁰ about the way South Africans are
We took a trek across the nation
To sort of S-A-B-C the situation

You see, between bunnychow and boerewors⁷¹
Between melkert and breyani⁷²
There's a flavour that's our own
Between phutu and samoosas⁷³
There's a taste we can call homegrown

Ag, with a chommie⁷⁴, beer and skyfs⁷⁵
Even Hillbrow's⁷⁶ not a bad place
There's mos a space for every face

Apartheid South African society is Malika Ndlovu's "Wrapped Up".⁷⁷ "Wrapped Up" is exceptional amongst Malika Ndlovu's other poems, not least because it has an almost conventional form, and makes much use of rhyme. Rap-like, it is a (performance) poem that portrays contemporary everyday life and underlines

⁶⁷ Sarah Johnson. *personae*. Plumstead: UCT Younger Poets Series No. 3, in association with Snailpress, 2004.

⁶⁸ Both: Malika Lueen Ndlovu. *poetry-in-progress from period 1986-2002* (unpublished).

⁶⁹ Friend, shortform for brother.

⁷⁰ Just talking.

⁷¹ Local fast foods: baked beans curry embedded in breadloaf and Afrikaner farmstyle sausage.

⁷² Milk tart and Indian savoury rice dish.

⁷³ Cooked maize meal and triangle-shaped Indian savoury snack.

⁷⁴ Buddy, "little chum".

⁷⁵ Cigarettes.

⁷⁶ A rundown crime-ridden area in central Johannesburg.

⁷⁷ Malika Lueen Ndlovu. *Born in Africa but*. Cape Town: Educall, Harrington House, 2000. 38. And: Michael Chapman, ed. *The New Century of South African Poetry*. Johannesburg and Cape Town: AD Donker, 2002. 353.

We stopped to have a chitchat
With a bunch of Buddhists on a mat
We checked some happy-clappies
Jussis⁷⁸, even they are lekker chappies⁷⁹

Then there was this auntie
Now she was on a different plak⁸⁰
Standing on the corner in a mini-skirt
Gesui⁸¹, but still trying to push her luck

By now our beetle was sounding kronk⁸²
So we pulled in at a Trek⁸³
To have our tjorrie⁸⁴ checked

By a man dressed like a quagga⁸⁵
Who thought we were soeking dagga⁸⁶
So I got out and pulled up the hood
And then he understood

Back on the road it somme just clicked
That whether it's Savuka or R.E.M.⁸⁷
'Nkosi sikelele or Die Stem⁸⁸

This division is mos kak⁸⁹ en palaver
Just makes us agro to each other
There's no reason to be stressed
This pot-pourri means we've been blessed

the fact that post-Apartheid South Africa is culturally very diverse.

Furthermore, this lively discussion of the essence of the South African spirit is difficult to understand for people who are not familiar with the South African variety of English, which is enriched by other languages spoken in the region (cf. Chapter III.4 Language and its impact...).

One way in which Malika Ndlovu communicates the new South African identity is through the use of *Kaapse Taal*, Language of the Cape, and also *Kombuis*, Kitchen Language. The language of this poem underlines the fact that there is now a broad and broadly accepted linguistic palette from

which to choose, in South Africa. The list of vocabulary at the end of the poem makes "Wrapped Up" a playful record of contemporary South African culture and language, accessible to the English speaking reader.

⁷⁸ Afrikaans equivalent to the expression Gee whiz!

⁷⁹ Nice people.

⁸⁰ Mission.

⁸¹ Drunk.

⁸² Cranky.

⁸³ Local petrol station.

⁸⁴ Jalopy = 'alte Kiste'.

⁸⁵ Zebra-like indigenous animal.

⁸⁶ Looking for marijuana.

⁸⁷ An internationally famous pop band.

⁸⁸ African national anthem or Afrikaner national anthem.

⁸⁹ Just bullshit.

As the pun in the title anticipates, the poem can be read as a Rap piece; and it wraps up contemporary expressions and lifestyle. With its narrative form and entertaining approach, its fast rhythm and the popular language of an SABC presentation, the lyrical speaker, and through her, Malika Ndlovu,⁹⁰ is searching for the explanation of what South Africans are really like, but it shows us that there is no such thing as *the* South African. South African culture is a mix of the diverse and rich cultures of all the people who settled there during the last centuries. This is symbolised by the various different culinary specialities mentioned: black African specialities like “phutu” (‘pap’), made from ground maize meal, meet “melktert”, the Afrikaans cheese cake, and “boerewors”, the typical barbecue (in South Africa known as ‘braai’) sausage meets the Indian “samosas” and halaal specialities of the Muslims. Yet there is a “taste we can call homegrown”, as all of these foods are familiar to most South Africans and are being eaten throughout the different groups of society. Also mentioned in the poem are different religious groups which can be met on a walk through a South African city: “Buddhists” and “happy-clappies”, noteworthy as South Africa must be one of the most tolerant countries in the world when it comes to religions, allowing them to live peacefully together.

The poem also refers to the different styles of music and the tastes of South Africans, represented by “Savuka” and “R.E.M.” and the different anthems which make up the post-Apartheid South African anthem. It is a very tolerant attempt to combine “Die Stem”, the original anthem of the Afrikaners in Afrikaans and “Nkosi sikelele Africa”, the former ANC hymn which begins the new South African anthem, and which is also the anthem of several other African countries.

Yet the central sentence of the poem is “There’s mos a place for every face”, which shows the new tolerance and thus celebrates the new South Africa,

⁹⁰ In the case of most South African women poets, amongst them Malika Ndlovu, one can say that they identify with their lyrical speakers in their poems. This is why the lyrical speaker will be referred to throughout as ‘she’.

Of course one always needs to be careful and cannot fully trust the author, for “how may one represent the past (or the future, or, indeed, even the present) without simply appropriating it to one’s own position?” Michael Green quoting himself in the chapter “Historical Fiction and Literary History”. *Constructing South African Literary History*. Eds. Elmar Lehmann, Erhard Reckwitz, Lucia Vennarini. Essen: Die Blaue Eule, 2000. 178.

despite criminality, prostitution, differences in education, etc. These major problems still affect all parts of society, but there are hopes that the young democratic nation is on its way. It can be seen that, even though especially abroad negative news is to be found on a daily basis, many South Africans keep a positive attitude towards the future of their country. As discrimination is now unconstitutional, all groups of people can consider themselves as equal South Africans. This is confirmed at the end of the poem: “There’s no reason to be stressed/ This pot-pourri means we’ve been blessed”. The political message of the poem becomes clear. There is no more reason for ‘apart-heid’. On the contrary, the diversity of the nation should be celebrated.

The form of the poem is also bound up with its political message. Stylistically, “Wrapped Up” is one of the few rhyming poems by Malika Ndlovu, yet here she only uses commas, and no full-stops, as if to underline the fact that there is not yet a full stop to the development of the country. The rhymes connect or divide words in English and Afrikaans. In the first stanza, two rhyming couplets can be found: “bra” – “are” and “nation” – “situation”. The second stanza only allows two rhymes between line 3 and 5, “own” – “homegrown”. “boerewors”, “breyani” and “samoosas” symbolically cannot rhyme yet. In the third stanza there are rhymes between “place”, as well as an interior rhyme between “space” and “face”, between “chitchat” and “mat”, “happy-clappies” and “lekker chappies”, “plak” and “luck”. “Trek” and “checked” hint at a rhyme, then there are “quagga” and “dagga”, “hood” and “understood”. And in the last stanzas, ironically the opposites, “R.E.M” and “Die Stem”, rhyme, as well as “stressed” and “blessed”. It is this mix of English and Afrikaans and *Kaapse taal*, which makes the poem a celebration of South African languages and cultures. The fact that *Kaapse taal* is used in a rhyming poem shows the acceptance and tolerance towards all socio- and regiolects.

Even though “Wrapped Up” was written at the beginning of the 1990s, it brings back great memories to everybody who spent time in South Africa around the millennium and witnessed the national awakening and the mostly positive atmosphere of change following the collapse of Apartheid.⁹¹

⁹¹ More poems with a similar topic, the love for the city of Cape Town, are “IN PRAISE OF THE CITY” and “NIGHT OF THE JAZZ LEGENDS” by Halejoetse Tsehlana. *Poems and Songs from the Mire*. Cape Town: New Voices Publishing, 2006. 8, 10.

II. Identity-formation in post-Apartheid South Africa

Identity-formation in South African poetry, even in the post-Apartheid period, has much to do with race, skin-colour, gender and an individual's experiences. Chapter I, by way of introduction, gave a brief overview of South Africa and South Africans for readers who are not familiar with the subject. This is because most South African poetry cannot be seen independently of its political and social context and cannot be fully understood without an awareness of the fact that South African poetry often provides a way to remind one of, find or form an identity.

What makes this search for a personal identity so difficult is that identity is a construct, and in post-Apartheid times, it is possible for people to contribute to the construction of their identities themselves. Still, identity always depends on multiple factors like the environment and other people's views of oneself. The tricky thing about South Africa, on top of everything else, is that there is not just one truth for this country. There are several truths and realities for the people within the same country, within the same town, within the same street... Therefore, their search for identity and the identities themselves can turn out very differently.

As one can say 'it depends' in South Africa possibly more than anywhere else, this complex situation calls for clarification of the term 'identity' itself. Also the title of this dissertation, "*Born in Africa but...*" - *Women's Poetry of post-Apartheid South Africa in English*, calls for clarification of the term 'Post-Apartheid'. Both terms will be addressed in this chapter.

II.1 Postcolonial theories and the post-Apartheid search for identity

Postcolonial literature is literature written by authors living in or coming from a place or region that has formerly been colonised and has in modern times achieved independence, or by writers who can trace their descent to such a place or its people who live in a diaspora. Postcolonial theory and postcolonial studies are primarily concerned with issues that are directly related to the (trans-) cultural legacy and the effects of colonisation and subsequent independence. The breakthrough of the new paradigm, which had been established through works by Frantz Fanon and others, occurred in 1978, with Edward Said's study *Orientalism*.⁹²

In a literary critique of South African literature, the question is very often the degree to which South African literature can be called 'postcolonial'. Do we have the right at all to call things postcolonial or does that again display our ignorance, be it willingly or unwillingly, consciously or unconsciously, of the experience of the people who lived through exactly this phenomenon? Is this once more a neo-colonial tendency or the ignorance of the Western world when explaining another world of which Westerners have never been part? For, can the South Africa during the Apartheid era really be called colonial and now, the same country after the first democratic elections in 1994, post-colonial? Furthermore, do post-colonial peoples have much at all in common with colonized peoples? Many of these questions are addressed in Dennis Walder's *Post-Colonial Literatures in English: History, Language, Theory*⁹³. In the present thesis, the answer to these questions will be searched for in the poetry selected for this study, and one will see, the subject is delicate, there is no single simple answer.

Most scholars agree that the actual influence of pre-Apartheid colonialism on the present and future of South Africa has been neutralized by Apartheid. This specific period of 40 years differentiates South Africa from other former colonial countries even though the region was itself part of the British Empire for many years before it was granted dominion status and before the National Party won the

⁹² Edward Said. *Orientalism*. London: Penguin Books, 1995 (first published in 1978).

⁹³ Dennis Walder. *Post-Colonial Literatures in English: History, Language, Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998.

elections in 1948. Therefore, many literary critics and writers prefer to use the term ‘pre-Apartheid’ for the time before Apartheid and have Apartheid, the years between 1948 and 1994, stand out as unique and distinct from all other parallel historical periods in formerly colonial countries. This is why in the case of South Africa, for the time after the first free elections in 1994, the term ‘post-Apartheid’ was coined.

Yet post-Apartheid has a lot in common with post-colonialism. Frequent topics in both fields are the dilemma of developing a cultural and national identity after years of oppression, and the need to project and correct a picture of the once ‘subordinated’ people not as inferior and passive, but as human, societal and cultural equals. Thus, post-Apartheid can be considered the time in which old “binary oppositions”⁹⁴ like good/bad, man/woman, oppressor/oppressed, enlightener/enlightened, advanced/retarded, civilized/primitive, black (nonwhite)/white, combinations of opposites one of which was always established as dominant, are assaulted, disintegrated and overcome by more diverse possibilities.⁹⁵

The three major thinkers and theorists in post-colonial theory after Frantz Fanon are the above mentioned Edward Said, and then Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak.⁹⁶ They became famous in the post-colonial discussion, its critique of cultural imperialism and the fear of racial mixing (miscegenation), as happened in South Africa. Post-colonial theory started the debate about the effects of hybridity and mixing in literature and culture.

Homi Bhabha’s *the location of culture* (1994) [...] analyses the liminality of hybridity as a paradigm of colonial anxiety. His key argument is that colonial hybridity, as a cultural form, produced ambivalence in the colonial masters and as such altered the authority of power. Bhabha’s arguments have become key in the discussion of hybridity. [...] he originally developed his thesis with respect to narratives of cultural imperialism, [...] This critique of cultural imperialist

⁹⁴ Cf. Peter Childs and R.J. Patrick Williams. *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory*. Harlow: Longman, 1997. And: Peter Childs, Jean Jacques Weber and Patrick Williams, eds. *Post-Colonial Theory and Literatures. African, Caribbean and South Asian*. Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2006. They discuss each theorist at greater length.

⁹⁵ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. *Post-Colonial Studies – The Key Concepts*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000. 23-27.

⁹⁶ Childs, Weber and Williams (2006: ix).

hybridity meant that the rhetoric of hybridity became more concerned with challenging essentialism and has been applied to sociological theories of identity, multiculturalism, and racism.⁹⁷

Both the colonial, racialist anxiety and the consequent debate about miscegenation and its effects are at the heart of Apartheid and anti-Apartheid politics. South African literature and culture are a reflection as well as a location of such contested views, since the time when Sarah Gertrude Millin's novel *God's Stepchildren* (1924), which expressed the colonial and pre-Apartheid anxiety, was answered by William Plomer's *Turbott Wolfe* (1925), a novel which presented miscegenation not as the problem, but rather as the solution, and as an alternative to 'apart heid'. The debate continued. Again, for Homi Bhabha

the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it [...]. The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new era of negotiation of meaning and representation".⁹⁸

The poets treated in this study are 'third-space practitioners' who challenge the dichotomies of racial anxiety/rainbow society, feminist/mother, religion/struggle with faith, and tradition/modernity. As development workers and educators, these women upset existing categories of identity to practice progressive politics in the public sphere.

Gayatri Spivak is a household name when it comes to the post-colonial theory of the so-called 'subaltern',⁹⁹ a term used to express something like 'minor citizens'. She fights against the marginalisation especially of women due to their lower class, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation.

Two very famous postcolonial theories are that of 'binary oppositions' and 'othering'. The creation of binary oppositions was used frequently to distinguish

⁹⁷ Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2000: 118-121).

⁹⁸ Homi K. Bhabha. "The Third Space. Interview [Jonathan Rutherford] with Homi Bhabha." *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. Ed. Jonathan Rutherford. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990. 207-221. 211.

⁹⁹ Term coined by Antonio Gramsci (1881-1937). Cf. Gayatri Spivak's famous 1988 essay: "Can the Subaltern Speak?". *Social Theory: The Multicultural & Classic Readings*. Ed. Charles Lemert. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, Reprinted in 1993. 609-614.

between the mother country and the colonies or the Westerner and the ‘Oriental’. Obviously, the Western world was always presented as being the better, more honourable, more principled and more progressive. This binary opposition justified the ‘need and right to rule’ these ‘poor natives’.¹⁰⁰ Yet, the naïve, binary and antagonistic concept of ‘the colonizer and the colonized’¹⁰¹ is less simple than it seems, because in reality even these groups, which seem to be unalterable, are in a state of flux. This can be seen in the voting behaviour of the Coloureds of the Cape in 1994, who unexpectedly voted for the oppressors’ National Party:

The failure, in coloured terms, of the grand narrative of liberation – for how else to describe our vote against non-racial democracy – demands fresh enquiry into the questions of postcolonial ‘hybridity’ and identity as well as the territorialization or geography of belonging within which identity is produced.¹⁰²

The other theoretical approach mentioned above is the discussion about ‘otherness’. In the process of ‘othering’, one portrays oneself as positive and valued and therefore all others as negative and valueless. This is particularly true for representations of Africa in the debate over colonialism.¹⁰³ In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said deliberately uses the picture of stereotypes being created for ‘them’ by Europeans “in their descriptions of ‘the mysterious East’” as well as of Africans, to justify “bringing civilisation to primitive or barbaric peoples”.¹⁰⁴ In the case of othering, everything, including literature, is contrasted with the colonial empire, which always wins the comparison. It is interesting to note that in their poetry, many South African women writers attempt to incorporate their ‘otherness’, with which they often struggle, into their own identity. In the process, their poetry becomes the place where they try to define and rid themselves of negative effects of other people’s view of them. In this

¹⁰⁰ Very interesting in this context is the Englishman Rudyard Kipling’s poem “The White Man’s Burden” from 1899, which was immediately used and abused by imperialists to justify their conquests.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Albert Memmi. *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1965 (first published in 1957).

¹⁰² Wicomb (1998: 94).

¹⁰³ Cf. Edward Said’s broadening of his conceptualisation of the theories from *Orientalism* (1978) to a so-called ‘Africanism’ in *Culture and Imperialism*.. London: Vintage, 1994 (first published by Chatto and Windus in 1993).

¹⁰⁴ Said (1994: xi).

context it often shines through that, especially for the coloured poets, skin colour is still perceived as a feature of otherness (cf. Chapter VI).

Globalization was an unavoidable development after long years of isolation through boycotts, which left South Africa small and vulnerable like a little fish ready to be swallowed by the big one. As a result of this globalisation process, the post-Apartheid era has been a time in which South Africa ‘entered’ Africa and the globe, and in which South Africans began to participate in international discussions. As a reaction to the emergence of postcolonial theories written by Westerners, it is found more and more that the formerly colonised people answer back, in this case “write back”,¹⁰⁵ to what for the colonisers is ‘the

centre’, the mother country of culture. A very specific intellectual form of decolonisation is when the formerly oppressed, using the coloniser’s language, re-write their history and their identity.

In poetry, post-Apartheid has been marked by new topics such as nation-building and re-writing, or rectification, of history and the historical record, as can be seen, amongst others, in Shelley Barry’s poem “Storytime”.¹⁰⁶ The poem ends with an optimistic paradoxon as punch line: “For here begins/ Our once upon a time”. Finally, South African women poets do not have to wait for a voice to be

Storytime (abridged version)

by Shelley Barry, WEAVE

We will write
Gather stories unto ourselves
And breathe them out
We will write
For our ancestors
For unborn children
For I and I

We will write
When all we have
Are words
[...]

We are writing the sounds
Of our lives
The smell of our Africa
We are slaves mothers sisters queens
Friends comrades lovers

We pound unbeaten drums
We carve our words on the cave walls of time
We write ourselves into history
[...]

For here begins
Our once upon a time

¹⁰⁵ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. 2nd ed. London and New York: Routledge, 2002 (first published in 1989).

¹⁰⁶ Shelley, Ndlovu and Khan (2002: 35).

given to the (supposedly) voiceless;¹⁰⁷ they can talk for themselves. This poem will be discussed in full length and in detail in Chapter VIII.

Amongst all groups of South Africans, there is a self-fashioning¹⁰⁸ (a term used by Stephen Greenblatt and the *New Historicism*, which stands for ‘marketing the author’), self-positioning and self-placing going on, which writers have clearly made one of their battlefields. It is their main aim to re-tell history from an actual point of view, now that censorship cannot interfere with the telling of the truth anymore. Forms of identity are found represented in South African poetry’s contents, on a language level and in structure. The poetry itself melts into a ‘contact zone’,¹⁰⁹ where different languages, cultures and views of history meet and are firmly bonded, as can be seen in the poetry in Chapters VI to VIII. South African poets work with European techniques amalgamated with impulses from other cultures, such as story telling and the importance of oral delivery. All these influences are found in written as well as in performance poetry (cf. Chapter III.2), even if to varying extents.

¹⁰⁷ Garman (2006: 11).

¹⁰⁸ Term used by Stephen Greenblatt and the New Historicism. Cf. Aram H. Veesser, ed. *The New Historicism Reader*. New York and London: Routledge, 1994. Or: Moritz Bassler, ed. *New Historicism*. Tübingen and Basel: A. Francke, 2001.

¹⁰⁹ A term used in post-colonial theory for the place where former oppositions meet.

II.2 Aspects of identity in South Africa

The theoretical approach is taken first to present definitions of identity and to highlight the aspects of identity this study is interested in. Personal identity (or the Self), in philosophy, deals above all with continuity, persistence and uniqueness, with affiliation and sameness, but also with time and change. This form of identity is made up of the individual personality and unique characteristics which are peculiar to each individual and which make this individual distinguishable and recognizable to fellow men (and women). In social science, identity is an umbrella term describing individuals' understanding of themselves as separate and distinct entities. The process which shapes the distinct personality and personal identity and which distinguishes the individual from and to others, as well as to him or herself, is called identity formation. This process can often be witnessed in contemporary South African women's poetry.

Amongst other types, further specific identities which are often singled out and discussed in South African poetry are cultural identity, ethnic identity, national identity, religious identity, professional identity, gender and psychological identity. As mentioned above, the present study is especially interested in detecting the manifestations of ethnic (Chapter VI), gender (Chapter VII) and professional identity (Chapter VIII) in the poems of contemporary poets.

Yet traditionally, Blacks and Whites have a different understanding of identity. Whites tend to celebrate individualism, while Blacks rather share group identities and fear this 'white', Western individualism as a threat to their family and community structures. It goes that far that in an African context, 'I' can even stand for 'we'. These concepts, however, are becoming more and more blurred. When dealing with the heritage of Apartheid, one has to redefine who and what

can be said to have authority in South Africa when the end of apartheid has raised challenging questions as to what it is to be a South African, what it is to live in a new South Africa, whether South Africa is a nation, and, if so, what is its mythos, what requires to be forgotten and what remembered as we scour the past in order to understand the present and seek a path forward into an unknown future? What is our story when storytelling in its most harrowing form occupies the attention of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission with families and friends recollecting those who were bludgeoned to death by the forces of the racist state?¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Project MUSE. No date. "Chapman, Michael, 1945-" Project MUSE – Scholarly journals online. <http://muse.jhu.edu/login?uri=/journals/new_literary_history/v029/29.1chapman.html> (accessed August 8, 2008).

It is obvious that South Africa, as a country as well as a nation, is still confronting the effects of a political system that, over four decades, made people believe in the existence of racial differences and consequently educated people according to their racial backgrounds. Recovery, reconciliation and rebuilding are processes which are still going on. A transformation cannot come overnight, and even 14 years after the first free elections, the effects of Apartheid still linger in areas such as education, jobs, housing, poverty, health, HIV/Aids as well as other every-day situations. Yet it is South Africa's primary challenge to find a new national unity and identity superimposed on all the ethnic boundaries formerly drawn, and to create a country which is worth living in for all its citizens. In this new, unique and hybrid land, South Africans want to overcome conflicts of social classes, religion, race and ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation,¹¹¹ which can be seen in many works and publications of recent years.¹¹²

What the problem of identity indicates, however, is a position that undermines the new narrative of national unity: the newly democratized South Africa remains dependent on the old economic, social, and also epistemological structures of apartheid, and thus it is axiomatic that different groups created by the old system do not participate equally in the category of postcoloniality.¹¹³

Identity in South Africa has always been something that was 'pre-defined' by the state. It was not something that could develop or evolve, but laws and acts would only allow people to form an identity within the prescribed borders set by Apartheid. The coloured community, especially, was split up according to weird and arbitrary classification systems. The system was not interested in their original history, and their real identity was of no interest either. Their varied and

¹¹¹ Dube pinpoints the issues addressed as crucial elements of the process of colonial resistance and post-colonial self-definition: "self-representation, identity creation and reassertion, displacement, suppression, race, gender, class, difference, ethnicity and what Ashcroft, Griffith and Triffin define as 'responses to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe such as history, philosophy and linguistics, and the fundamental experiences of speaking and writing' (Ashcroft et al, 1995: 2)." Dube (1997: 13).

¹¹² For the aspect of sexual orientation, in addition to the poetry discussed in this study, see: Matthew Krouse, ed., assisted by Kim Berman. *The invisible Ghetto – Lesbian and gay writing from South Africa*. Fordsburg, Johannesburg: COSAW Publishing, 1993.

¹¹³ Wicomb (1998: 94).

colourful mixes were simply ignored and families were split up and placed in different 'boxes'.¹¹⁴

During the celebrations of the 2007 World Poetry Day in Cape Town, Professor Harry Garuba pointed out that to learn about historical truth, Europe has history books, but for Africa, the truth or a plausible picture of the past as yet only circulates in novels. Textbooks formerly glorified the colonial world and neglected or left out the stories of the indigenous peoples who are obliged to struggle to re-create their identities (cf. Chapter I.1 South Africa's History).

According to Harry Garuba, it was often women writers who took the lead in telling the truth (e.g. Buchi Emecheta from Nigeria) and in 're-writing' and redefining realistic identities, as these women writers wanted to paint the true picture of women.¹¹⁵ In representations by male writers, women often were displayed either in the antithetic clichés of Madonnas or whores. In Africa, male descriptions often glorified the situation of the indigenous peoples before colonialism. For women writers, though, it was important to correct, contest and question these male portrayals of life, like in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*. For them, it was and is important to present the truth, including the pains and problems of their lives and strengthen the connection between literature and reality. Also the representatives of the *Écriture féminine*

emphasize that women, historically limited to being sexual objects for men (virgins or prostitutes, wives or mothers), have been prevented from expressing their sexuality in itself or for themselves. If they can do this, and if they can speak about it in the new languages it calls for, they will establish a point of view (a site of *différence*) from which phallogocentric concepts and controls can be seen through and taken apart, not only in theory but also in practice. [...] the theory and practice of *féminité* must be focused on women among themselves, rather than on their divergence from men or from men's views of them.

Although the goal of many of the writers of the *Écriture féminine* was a "joint attack on phallogocentrism",¹¹⁶ most South African women writers were / are less radical and concentrated on the race struggle to the neglect of the gender struggle.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Chapter II.3 The 'coloured' case.

¹¹⁵ Cf. "Colonialism – Gendered" by the WEAVE member Lynette Hlongwane. In: Borzaga and Steiner (2004: 82).

¹¹⁶ All quotations taken from Ann Rosalind Jones, Jones, Ann Rosalind. No date. "Writing the Body – Toward an Understanding of l'Écriture féminine". *Wofford*. <<http://webs.wofford.edu/hitchmoughsa/Writing.html>> (accessed August 8, 2008), italics added.

In his speech, Harry Garuba further pointed out that the new elite in Africa, also in the field of writing, consists of former freedom fighters. This poses difficulties and challenges for the upcoming new generation of writers. They will have to compete with this condition and these idols as a fact of literary life. In South Africa, as anywhere in the world, the new writers have to work in the shadow of the ones preceding them; in the case of the South Africans, this means, in the shadow of the great names of the leaders and role-models to succeeding generations. According to Harry Garuba, new literature always has to contest the older one, and only good literature challenges the old texts successfully (like those by Gordimer, Coetzee or Achebe from Nigeria).

This study intends to show which contemporary South African women poets have taken the initiative to challenge their predecessors, and even though their voices might sound different, why they can be named in one breath with the poets of earlier generations.

Women, especially, struggle with their identity and the implied double marginalisation of being the 'weaker' sex. Makhosazana Xaba's poem "Suggestions Please"¹¹⁷ has parallels to poems in *Cry Rage!* by James Matthews and Gladys Thomas (1972). Even though written in post-Apartheid times, these lines by Makhosazana Xaba remind one especially of the 1972 poem on democracy by James Matthews (Poem 2 in *Cry Rage!*), where he laments the perverse hypocrisy of democracy which could be found in South Africa during Apartheid. Makhosazana Xaba's poem refers to the way in which the lyrical speaker is still not treated as she should be, even though all South Africans are now, in a democracy, legally equal.

The lyrical speaker's astonishment, disappointment and irritation at the raw questioning and assumptions made by the white woman, nine years into democracy, is portrayed by the lyrical speaker's internal monologue and swearing, but also by the insecure answers put in brackets, answers as they must be disbelief, expected by the racist white lady.

Makhosazana Xaba is a feminist specialised in Women's Health. She was born in 1957 and is currently living in Johannesburg. Judging from the blatant an-

¹¹⁷ Xaba (2005: 31). The sentences in Zulu are profanities.

SUGGESTIONS PLEASE

by Makhosazana Xaba

At the National School of the Arts the other day
What? What did you just say?
I was reminded of a question
that the Johannesburg Metropolitan Council
and nine years of democracy,
Excuse me, I didn't hear what you said?
colluding, lulled me into believing
Jou ma se gat.
I'll never hear again
Msunu kanyoko, ungijwayela kabi!

Do you work here?
(No Missus, Yes Missus,
I need a job, I'll do anything.)
My entire body transformed.
Oh, hi, my name is Khosi.
What's yours?
You are talking to me, right?
My eyes fixed on her wrinkles, her grimace.
Are you blind, I'd be in uniform if I did!
I recognised the nearly-forgotten, uniform expression
on such white women's faces.
Really, do I look like your maid?
My mind rushed back into the void of primeval files
Fuck you! Did you hear me,
I said, f...u...c...k you!
as, with disappointment, I recalled
that in all those years
Listen, I know all blacks are the same to you.
But, no, I don't work here.
I never found the perfect answer
to this perennial question.
(No, Madam, I wish I did,
I am currently unemployed.)

The void deepened
Mfazindini, uzonya ungizwa kahle.
as our eyes locked like packs of dynamite.
Masimb' akho.

I really need suggestions
Up your fat pink arse.
'cause I've clearly failed
to find a fitting response.

What, what did you just say?
Nine years! Nine years of ... WHAT?

ger, not only between the lines, she must have experienced situations like the one in the poem herself: white people assuming that as a black woman, she could not be more than part of the cleaning staff, asking: "Do you work here?" Still startled, the lyrical speaker toys with different answers she could give, ranging from "Are you blind? I'd be in a uniform if I did." to "Really, do I look like your maid? [...] Listen, I know all blacks are the same to you./ But, no, I don't work here". But then, studying the white face, or even "grimace", and swearing internally, the lyrical speaker must admit that she has "clearly failed to find/ a fitting response."

With no appropriate answer to the humiliating assumptions and in disbelief at, after all this time since the end of Apartheid, having met someone as narrow-minded and yet so convinced of the hierarchies of the 'old world' as this white lady, the poem

ends with lines of incredulity that something could still happen in the ‘new’ South Africa: “*What, what did you just say?/ Nine years! Nine years of ... WHAT?*”

The structure of “SUGGESTIONS PLEASE” is worth mentioning. The poem contains a dialogue between two speakers. Firstly, there is the white, questioning lady, then, secondly, there is the lyrical speaker who narrates what is happening and whose emotional internal reflections are represented in italics. These unvoiced thoughts include the most different linguistic registers, including profanities in Zulu, which the white lady, who the profanities are addressed to, could not have understood but surely would have recognized as such.

Now, are the women poets of this study those whom they call the subaltern? Are they ‘the others’, or are their topics universal in their subjectivity and individuality? The following chapters (especially Chapters VI-VIII) seek to clarify who the South African women poets of post-Apartheid times are, and what their relationship to the “Rainbow Nation” and its “Unity in Diversity”¹¹⁸ is. They further seek to find out which topics are the subject matter common to the poetry of all women poets from all backgrounds, and where the poets’ and the poems’ differences are. Furthermore, this study will focus on a variety of different contributions writers, male and especially women writers, can make to South Africans’ overall view of the world and on the different ways in which these views are formulated and expressed. Thus, the poems of this study will show that South African women poets certainly can speak.

¹¹⁸ Claudia Drawe. *Erinnerung und Identität in ausgewählten Romanen der Postapartheid*. Trier: WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2007. 25.

II.3 The 'coloured' case

Me, Coloured

by Peter Abrahams

Aunt Liza.
Yes?
What am I?
What are you talking about?
I met a boy at the river.
He said he was Zulu.
She laughed.

You are Coloured.
There are three kinds of people:
White people, Coloured people,
And Black people.
The White people come first,
Then the Coloured people,
Then the Black people.
Why?
Because it is so.

[...]

For a South African, the concept of 'coloured', as described in the poems "Me, Coloured"¹¹⁹ and "Distinguished Umbrella",¹²⁰ has a special meaning, and this particularly South African concept is very important if one wants to understand many of the poems in which this study is interested. This chapter is thus given over entirely to the closer study of the implications of the term 'coloured'.¹²¹

For one not even born when the *Population Registration Act* of 1950 and the *Population Registration Amendment Act* of 1967 were introduced to restrict the lives of thousands; for one not born in a land where social status varies with skin tone; for one who has grown up with people of other nationalities and complexions, who has shared

school bench, public transport, and favourite restaurant with them and seen them at home, it is an every-day normal event to 'exist under one umbrella' with all kinds of people. As a child, one can realize there are other religions and cultural backgrounds besides one's own. Such differences are then accepted without condition. The word 'coloured' is but one more word for people with another skin tone than black or white, without the implication of suppression or discrimination. Rather, it has the connotation of colourful.

The interesting thing about the word 'coloured' is that earlier on it was presented as it was used in the United States of America, as a synonym for black.

¹¹⁹ "Me, Coloured" by Peter Abrahams from *Tell freedom*, 1954. Chapman (2002: 132).

¹²⁰ At all times referring to: Ingrid de Kok and Gus Ferguson, eds. *City in Words – An anthology of Cape Town poems*. Claremont: David Philip Publishers, 2001. 29-30. And: Ndlovu (2000: 54-55).

¹²¹ One South African writer and scholar, who intensively dealt with this topic and who supported the suppressed during Apartheid, was Richard Rive (1930-1989).

Then, new words for people with darker skin tones in the US popped up: Words like ‘Coloureds’ or ‘Black Americans’ suddenly were ‘out’ and others, such as the politically correct terms of ‘African Americans’ for Blacks or ‘Indigenous People’ and ‘Native Americans’ for Indians replaced the old designations. In South Africa other, clearly derogatory terms were used: ‘Nigger’, ‘Kaffir’ and ‘Bantu’ (as a word for ‘people’ in several African languages) for Blacks and ‘Coolie’ for Indians. Language is ‘alive’ and in flux and certain words change just as fashions and politics do.

In the poem “Distinguished Umbrella”, which will be discussed in depth in Chapter VI.1, Malika Ndlovu brings the confusingly vague (or perhaps deceptively simple yet imprecise) term coloured into bright relief. In South Africa the designation refers to all those whom the Apartheid system had, by the *Population Registration Act* of 1950, simply relegated to the same ‘coloured box’. The Coloureds, so called, were people of mixed origin as well as many people from other nationalities. They never were a homogenous group and belonged to different religions and cultural backgrounds. This made many Coloureds struggle with their assigned identity, which did not take the diversity and cultural richness of the group into account. Even today, many in this group are still trying to rename themselves and to establish their own identity.

But what is this coloured identity and where does it come from – if it exists at all? Adhikari’s study *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough* is an attempt to pinpoint and describe each element within this special and, in its origins artificial, racial grouping. The book is entirely dedicated to coloured identity and the author himself finds “the overall result has been an oversimplification of the phenomenon”.¹²²

[The Coloureds] make up 4.1 million of South Africa’s [population. ... They are] mostly working class and concentrated in (but not restricted to) the Western Cape Province (where they comprise 53.9 percent of the total population) and the more rural Northern Cape.¹²³

¹²² Mohamed Adhikari. *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough: Racial Identity in the South African Coloured Community*. Athens: Ohio University Press and Cape Town: Double Storey Books, 2005. 35.

¹²³ “According to the official statistical service, Statistics South Africa (cf. *South African Yearbook* (2006: 2)). The yearbook also reports that according to the last official census in 2003, Coloureds make up 8.9 percent of South Africa’s 44.8 million people.”

In 1983, for the first time, the Apartheid government offered ‘Constitutional reforms’, which would have established ‘separate Houses of Parliament’ for Whites, Coloureds and Indians. According to their plans, Whites would have retained control over ‘national affairs’ such as defence, finance and foreign policy, while Coloureds and Indians would have gained ‘control’ over their ‘own affairs’ such as education, health, and social welfare. Once more, Blacks were not considered in the reforms and the Whites could override any decisions of the two other houses, even regarding their ‘own affairs’. The ‘reforms’ were, however, rejected.¹²⁴

The current political identity and behaviour of Coloureds is linked to the times of transition, when suddenly

the major political actors – both the ANC and the NP – openly courted Coloureds *as Coloureds*; not as *so-called* Coloureds. (For a long time being Coloured was associated with stigma both by whites and blacks, including Coloureds themselves, hence the prefix “so-called”).¹²⁵

In his study, *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough*, Adhikari discerns four “characteristics rooted in the historical experience and social situation of the Coloured community that regulated the way colouredness acted as a social identity under white domination”.¹²⁶ They are:

1. The attempt of the Coloureds to assimilate, hoping to become accepted into the dominant society.
2. The fear that they might lose their intermediate status and “their position of relative privilege and be relegated to the status of Africans”.¹²⁷
3. The negative connotations associated with their “hybrid” origins.¹²⁸

Sean Jacobs. 2007. “Coloured Categories - Review of Mohamed Adhikari, *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough: Racial Identity in the South African Coloured Community*”. *H-SAfrica, H-Net Reviews, May, 2007*. <<http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=187391183841475>> (accessed August 8, 2008).

¹²⁴ Jacobs (2007: 2).

¹²⁵ Jacobs (2007: 2).

¹²⁶ Jacobs (2007: 3).

¹²⁷ Adhikari (2005: xii).

¹²⁸ The poems from Chapter VI often show ‘hybrid identities’. One can but hope that the ‘new’ South Africa offers the possibility for a true ‘contact zone’ where all can meet.

And, maybe the most important attribute:

4. Their marginalization, “which caused them a great deal of frustration”¹²⁹ because it limited them severely socially and politically.¹³⁰

It is easy to see that the Coloureds were disappointed by the new South African government’s ‘reform’. Indeed, there had been a big change for the black people in the 1990s, but not much had changed for the Coloureds, and they felt and feel forgotten. The Coloureds still feel they are poorly represented in the government and often passed over, as when ‘job reservation’ (affirmative action) and the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) law were enacted in favour of the Blacks. Of course the self-identification amongst Coloureds and the expression of their identity is also affected by the ambivalence and fuzziness of the concept. For long, Coloured identity and racial categories in general had been rejected by the people they were meant to refer to, but Adhikari’s study claims that there is a kind of ‘stability’ of identity amongst the coloured community.¹³¹ Adhikari’s study closes with an evaluation of this community in the post-Apartheid period and thereby makes an important contribution, as not many academic studies have been published on the subject. According to Jacobs, however, Adhikari neglects to consider studies written in Afrikaans as well as Vernie A. February’s pertinent and informative study *Mind Your Colour: The Coloured Stereotype in South African Literature*.¹³² Jacobs counts this omission as a shortcoming of Adhikari’s study, considering how widely spoken Afrikaans is amongst the coloured community in South Africa and that coloured identity since 1960 has often been discussed by

writers such as S. V. Peterson, P. J. Philander and Adam Small, writing mainly in Afrikaans, [and who] had a much larger impact on popular Coloured consciousness and intellectual politics than either La Guma or Matthews could ever achieve [...]. (February covered this ground excellently in his book *Mind Your Colour*.)¹³³

¹²⁹ Adhikari (2005: xii).

¹³⁰ Adhikari (2005: xii).

¹³¹ Jacobs (2007: 4).

¹³² February (1981). Although this study was published long before the end of Apartheid, it has not lost its relevance to the discussion of this topic.

¹³³ Jacobs (2007: 4).

In the meantime, important post-1994 movements set up to fight for the rights of the Coloureds, which Adhikari mentions, like

the right-wing Coloured Liberation Movement, a Khoisan “Revivalist” Movement (whose members premise their claims for rights on a primordial link to the first inhabitants of modern-day South Africa) [and] the ANC-derived December First Movement¹³⁴

were dissolved or reformed. In a qualified summary judgment, Jacobs admits that Adhikari’s “‘counterintuitive argument’ that Coloured identity was stable (rather than evolving gradually over time or changing abruptly) is not original (it is a common refrain among some activists and political operatives), but is certainly bold as a scholarly argument”.¹³⁵

From my own experience I would agree with what Adhikari states on the last pages of his book, which is that the Coloureds’ attitude towards their own colouredness is far from homogenous. It “remain[s] in flux [and is] experiencing a degree of change unparalleled since its emergence in the late nineteenth century”.¹³⁶

One recurring criterion of identity is the people whom Coloureds will talk to in a particular moment, situation and place: As with many other racial groupings worldwide, in general, Coloureds appear to be most inhomogeneous and characterised by “fragmentation, uncertainty, and confusion”.¹³⁷ This is particularly noticeable in the way they judge themselves.

On the other hand, when the Coloureds form a front against something or someone, they unite and find common ground they would normally deny existed. Furthermore, there seem to be ‘non-racial’ factors amongst the Coloured community that play a role in cohesion, such as religion for the coloured Muslim community. Coloured writers such as Chris van Wyk (*Shirley, Goodness and Mercy*¹³⁸), Gabeba Baderoon and Malika Ndlovu write about exactly these topics

¹³⁴ Jacobs (2007: 4).

¹³⁵ Jacobs (2007: 4).

¹³⁶ Adhikari (2005: 187).

¹³⁷ Adhikari (2005: 186).

¹³⁸ Chris van Wyk. *Shirley, Goodness & Mercy – A Childhood Memoir*. Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2005 (first published in 2004).

from first hand experience, and they raise awareness of this often forgotten minority.



*Gabea Baderoon.
SPIER Poetry Festival.
Stellenbosch 2007.
Photo: Isabelle Vogt 2007.*

As an example, Gabea Baderoon's poetry usually is very personal and rather private. With her attention to detail, her work finds a way to detect the poetic in the ordinary of every day life. In her poetry, she often observes people and human relationships around her, mostly family members. In general, Gabea Baderoon's poetry deals with living now, in the present, and yet, even such poems, the topic of racism towards people of colour subtly creeps in. The poem "I forget to look"¹³⁹ stands out for its account of the past's racism. "I forget to look" recalls the fate of the lyrical speaker, most likely Gabea Baderoon's mother, who "was the first in her family to take/ the bus from Claremont/ up the

hill to the university". Objectively, as from a distance, the lyrical speaker tells of the racist treatment her mother had to live with, in "a world that defined how black and white/ could look at each other, touch each other", and in this narration, history becomes unforgettably alive:

"At one point during the lectures at medical school,/ black students had to pack their notes, get up and walk/ past the ascending rows of desks out of the theatre.// Behind the closed door, in an autopsy/ black students were not meant to see, the uncovering and cutting of white skin." And yet she adds cynically, "Under the knife, the skin,/ the mystery of sameness". This glance into South Africa's history is a very rare moment in Gabea Baderoon's poetry, and yet it shows us, that even if she does not normally chose this topic as her centre of focus, she, as a coloured South African woman, has stories like this to tell and to record for the future.

¹³⁹ Gabea Baderoon. *A hundred silences – Poems*. Cape Town: KWELA BOOKS and Plumstead: Snailpress, 2006. 26-27.

II.4 *A Coloured Place*



The performance poet Malika Ndlovu's one-woman-play *A Coloured Place*¹⁴⁰ is intended by the writer as an example for this rise in awareness. Its content stands in close relationship to Malika Ndlovu's poem "Distinguished Umbrella", which will be studied in depth later. In 1995, Malika Ndlovu, then still called Lueen Conning, was commissioned to write *A Coloured*

Place for the *Women's Arts Festival 1996*. She researched this piece amongst the Coloureds in Durban.

Before *A Coloured Place* there were very few plays dealing with colouredness. An exception is Athol Fugard's *Boesman and Lena*, which, however, has a different and a sombre tone. With *A Coloured Place*, Malika Ndlovu wanted to wake up her fellow coloured men and women. The piece is intended to let them see themselves in a mirror and show them just how much, often unused, potential is in them.

Nowadays there exist numerous hilarious plays on colouredness which play with stereotypes and clichés, such as *Shirley, Goodness and Mercy* by Chris van Wyk; *Vatmaar* by A.H.M Scholtz; *Joe Barber* by Oscar Peterson and David Isaacs; the Marc Lottering Shows and the musical *District Six* by David Kramer and Taliep Peterson. Especially the musical has been severely criticised by the coloured writer and academic Zoë Wicomb for its "popular attempt at inventing an authentic colouredness".¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Kathy A. Perkins, ed. *Black South African Women – An Anthology of Plays*. Rondebosch: University of Cape Town Press and New York: Routledge, 1999. 9-22.

^{140b} Photo: Shelley Barry, Malika Ndlovu and Deela Khan, eds. *ink@boiling point – A Selection of 21st Century Black Women's Writing from the Southern Tip of Africa*. Cape Town: WEAVE Publishing, 2002. 171.

¹⁴¹ Zoë Wicomb. "Shame and Identity: The Case of the Coloured in South Africa". *Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid, and Democracy, 1970-1995*. Eds. Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly. New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. 91-107. 95.

Our post-modern suppression of history demands a strategy of relocating and rehistoricizing our own situation lest we come to believe the myth of our [the Coloureds'] collective birth in Cape Town's District Six in the early 1960s. The making of the subject and the script of shame imbricated in such ethnographic self-fashioning as well as in the discursive construction by others need to be examined in the light of the narrative of liberation and its dissemination in the world media that constructed oppression in particular ways. [...] Here [in the musical] ethnicity was constructed within a politics of nostalgia that sentimentalized the loss. The contradiction of forging an 'authentic' culture, ironically also the overt theme of 'District Six', through North American cultural conventions and musical forms seemed to escape the mainly coloured audiences enraptured by the process of being constructed in the tepid, amniotic fluid of pastiche. [...] [This] signalled its refusal to engage with collocations of colouredness, or with interacting identities in a larger framework of South African citizenship [...]. [It is significant] that the spatial over-identification with District Six was temporally linked to identification with the black nationalist struggle [in the 1980s].¹⁴²

Malika Ndlovu's play, however, was one of the first that treated colouredness as a serious issue. It was her aim to avoid the mere clichés used by others when they think about Coloureds, an anyway artificially constructed community of those who were not black or white. This is why Malika Ndlovu interviewed various Coloureds for their own opinions. In our interview in June 2003,¹⁴³ she said that she noticed that

even within their own families those with lighter skin, smaller nose or straighter hair were preferred. Then you start to believe in what they say. That lighter is more beautiful and you start having your hair straightened.

This echoes a similar remark which can be found in the German version of David Winner's book on Desmond Tutu where the latter complains that many Blacks and Coloureds are so brainwashed that they have come to accept their own oppression and exploitation, and their treatment as 'Others'. In the 1990 book, Desmond Tutu further states that slowly, one starts believing in what others say about one, which fills one with self-contempt and self-hatred. Then, one starts believing in a negative picture of oneself, and it takes a lot of time to exorcise this demon, once one has been taught to believe that only white races count for something and that Whites are the measure of everything and define one's role.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Wicomb (1998: 94-95).

¹⁴³ Malika Ndlovu and Isabelle Vogt. *Interview*. June 7, 2003. Observatory, Cape Town.

¹⁴⁴ Winner (1990: 39). This paragraph has been translated from German to English by the author from the German translation of the original text in David Winner's book on Desmond Tutu. In the original English version, this quotation does not appear.

In a somewhat similar vein, 15 years later, the black poet Lebogang Mashile brings up this topic in “Tomorrow’s daughters”.¹⁴⁵ There, her lyrical speaker says “I want to write a poem/ About pretty black girls/ Who don’t relax and lie their dreams away”. Here, she, too, alludes to the pointless aspirations of many black and coloured girls to be lighter skinned and to have straight hair. The lines “Together we can build a bridge” show that the lyrical speaker sees a future for “Tomorrow’s daughters”: “pretty black girls/ Wearing crowns of change”. Comparing Lebogang Mashile’s lines to those of Desmond Tutu, one can feel Lebogang Mashile’s post-Apartheid optimism.

And yet, according to Zoë Wicomb, uncertainty about one’s own allegiance and the effects of brainwashing concerning one’s own identity could still be seen in the 1994 election results of the Western Cape, the home of the Coloureds, who make up 52% of the population, the only region, where, because of the Coloureds’ support for the white dominated NP, the ANC did not get a parliamentary majority in the first democratic elections.¹⁴⁶

Malika Ndlovu further noticed during her research for *A Coloured Place* that due to a lack of information and of possibilities for information exchange during Apartheid, the Coloureds stayed such an inhomogeneous group that they did not even ‘know themselves’. The life of Coloureds in Durban is very different from the life of Coloureds in Cape Town, especially as the Durban Coloureds do not speak Afrikaans. This astonished the Coloureds of Cape Town when *A Coloured Place* was performed there. For Malika Ndlovu, the play was also an attempt to deal with her own prejudices towards the Coloureds of the Cape, for, even though the government always tried to create a ‘Coloured nationalism’, Malika Ndlovu never felt close to Coloureds in places other than Durban. In our interview, she said: “For me, a Cape Coloured was somebody who was fine with the boss, a flower seller, a tooth-less fisherman or a wine-farm worker.” On the other hand, the Coloureds of the Cape saw the Durbanites as people who collaborated with the ANC. Malika Ndlovu states in her foreword to *A Coloured Place*:

The aim of the play is to feed and stimulate the questioning about identity and [...] and why as Coloured people, we’ve never acknowledged our roots. The play

¹⁴⁵ All from “Tomorrow’s daughters”. Mashile (2005: 6).

¹⁴⁶ Wicomb (1998: 93).

says out of this acknowledgement we can define our true identity, and be at peace with that. *A Coloured place* means that there is a rightful place for Coloured people in South Africa - we do belong somewhere, but many lack this sense of belonging. [...] Coloured people feel low on the waiting list, but there is a kind of bitterness that exists.

Because of not having an overt cultural or collective identity or something they could call their own, Coloured people have experienced, in a sense, a major identity crisis. In the old South Africa they didn't fit into any of the prescribed boxes. African, Indian, and white communities had very distinct cultures and parameters. Coloured people were dumped into a separate box, lived in their own areas. And, in a sense, purely out of the circumstances, there was a sense of community.

Unfortunately, the urban Coloured community is on a trip that is all about escapism. [...] Everything I see is about people escaping who and where they are. Whether through alcohol and drug abuse, gangsterism, or denial of their African heritage. Not a love for whites, but almost an aspiration toward that because white is still seen as beautiful and privileged. Coloured kids are aspiring toward the African American gangster-hero image or glossy inner-city images they see on TV. Also, the trend of seeing African Americans via the media being free, accomplished, having wealth, and exposure - all of that has inspired a sort of interest and a bit of pride in being black, but it's still not recognition of our Africanness.¹⁴⁷

Thus, as the sun rises on the new South Africa, we are presented with a picture of the coloured segment of that society wondering where their place in the sun lies. This small but significant minority of under 10% finds itself sandwiched between Asians who look to the East, the well entrenched Whites, who look North, and a vast majority of Blacks who are deeply rooted in the African soil. Complicating matters is the fact that the Coloureds are divided among Muslims and Christians, many of whom think that the sun 'rises in the West', maybe in America. Due to the frequent denial of their own Africanness and because many dare not accept themselves as they are, one is left with the impression that the Coloureds are 'their own worst enemy' and "stuck in the wings/ while the rest take flight".¹⁴⁸ To remedy this situation, many of the writers who are the subject of this study, do their best to inspire the Coloureds among others to take a good look at themselves, to overcome the shame recurrently affirmed by Zoë Wicomb¹⁴⁹ and, finally, to be proud and to take their proper place in a New South Africa.

¹⁴⁷ Perkins (1999: 7).

¹⁴⁸ "Distinguished Umbrella" by Malika Ndlovu. In: de Kok and Ferguson (2001: 29-30) and Ndlovu (2000: 54-55).

¹⁴⁹ Wicomb (1998: 91ff).

III. Poetry in South Africa

A “poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth”.¹⁵⁰

- Percy B. Shelley

This definition of a poem by the English Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley is one that is definitely true also for the South African poetry in this study. Here too, the very image of life is expressed in the lines of the poems: honestly, truthfully and openly. Shelley’s definition agrees with how poet and editor Robert Berold describes South African poems: “personal and public histories, physical and psychic landscapes, pieces of music, stories, moods, prophecies, confusions”.¹⁵¹

As this and later chapters on performance poetry and poets show, poetry has a long history in South Africa. It has its roots in African traditions and is a vehicle for personal but also social and, to a very special degree, political expression and dialogue. The rule of the National Party in the 1950s and 1960s brought with it a strict censorship and control of literature. The government banned numerous books and enlisted, prosecuted and arrested or restricted the movements of various writers. Through this, in the 1970s, art became a part of – and even synchronized with – the struggle against oppression and for independence. Quoting Serote:

South African literature will not be judged by how writers chose words sensitively to say what they wanted to say... It will be judged by how it recorded and portrayed the struggle of our people for liberation, and by how much it contributes to the enhancement of a struggle.¹⁵²

While poetry in Europe was losing its standing, in South Africa, the struggle resulted in a mere poetry boom. The pioneering collection of poetry, Oswald Mtshali’s *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum*,¹⁵³ was so popular that it even made a profit. But, what Serote alludes to, not all poetry written in support of the cause was high quality.

¹⁵⁰ John Higgins. “The Sole Measure of Poetic Value: A Response to Kelwyn Sole”. *Protocols: literary and cultural studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2003. 97-102. 101.

¹⁵¹ Berold (2002: “Editor’s Note”).

¹⁵² Adams and Durham (1995: viii).

¹⁵³ Oswald Joseph Mtshali. *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum*. Johannesburg: Renoster Books, 1971.

In 1984, Njabulo Ndebele wrote a critical essay about the state of South African literature, in which he warns that with their writing, South African writers rather consolidate the situation and ossify complex social problems into symbols.¹⁵⁴ He says the human anonymity of their literary characters

becomes the dialectical equivalent of the anonymity to which the oppressive system confines millions of oppressed Africans. Thus, instead of clarifying the tragic human experience of oppression, such fiction becomes grounded in the very negation it seeks to transcend. [...] The result is not knowledge but indictment; and indictment, because it assumes an accusatory stance, evokes a defensive attitude which may prevent the oppressor from reforming the system.¹⁵⁵

For him, good narration/telling is the only way to subvert clichés.

As to a certain extent already the exile Arthur Maimane in 1972, Albie Sachs then ignited a debate after the end of Apartheid, in 1990, by publishing his explosive paper “Preparing ourselves for Freedom”.¹⁵⁶ In this paper, Albie Sachs articulates, whether, after the installation of a democratic system, the writers’ tasks were now finished and if their mission as political activists was fulfilled. In the debates set off, other writers now asked themselves what remained for them to write about. For many of them, it seemed that all the primary topics such as the struggle, the fight against discrimination and for racial equality as well as for freedom and independence were no longer relevant. The response to Albie Sachs’ paper was so big that Ingrid de Kok and Karen Press even edited a collection of responses in *Spring is Rebellious – Arguments about cultural freedom*.¹⁵⁷

Another view on South African literature was stated at a conference in 1993, from which Anthony Adams quotes two statements concerning South African writing. One is by James Wood who said that “South Africa’s literature has been conquered by apartheid” and needed to be “freed”. The other is by J.M. Coetzee, who suggested that “South African literature is a literature in bondage. It is a less than fully human literature... It is exactly the kind of literature that you

¹⁵⁴ The title of the essay is “Turkish tales and some thoughts on South African fiction” and is included in Ndebele’s *Rediscovery of the Ordinary*, on pages 17-40.

¹⁵⁵ Njabulo S. Ndebele. *Rediscovery of the Ordinary – Essays on South African Literature and Culture*. Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006. 28.

The essay “Turkish tales and some thoughts on South African fiction”, from which this quote is taken, was first published in *Staffrider* in 1984.

¹⁵⁶ Ingrid de Kok and Karen Press, eds. *Spring is Rebellious – Arguments about cultural freedom by Albie Sachs and respondents*. Cape Town: Buchu Books, 1990. 19-29.

¹⁵⁷ de Kok and Press (1990).

would expect people to write from a prison.”¹⁵⁸ Yet, Adams argues that some of the “most successful literary works skilfully entwine political and personal elements”¹⁵⁹ and describes this in reference to the short stories in his anthology:

[The] stories written at the height of the most troubled period, from the 1950s onwards until the 1980s, are, for the most part, bitter, angry and often violent. From the mid-1980s onwards, however, much South African writing takes on a new tone. You can almost sense that, as the apparatus of apartheid started to crumble, South African writers began to abandon social and political concerns and returned to the more mainstream literary themes of personal and family relationships. [...] Obviously, in many modern South African writers the political concerns and references are still there but, as changes take place and a more optimistic mood emerges, they are frequently treated differently.¹⁶⁰

These quotations make it clear that with the 1994 elections, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the South African land reform and the struggle to overcome the country’s racist past, the first attempts at defining a new identity were made. Many, amongst them especially the new generation of formerly oppressed writers, saw that there was more to write about. The new topics chosen were post-colonial and post-Apartheid communal issues, abuse, values, and as formerly, praise and discontent. According to Kelwyn Sole,

South African poets have assumed the burden of bearing witness to their country’s most intractable social dilemmas.[...] Vonani Bila echoes Sole in remarking, “perhaps the duty of the poet is to ask embarrassing questions, to express deepest analysis and feelings regarding the extent of development in our country”.¹⁶¹

Fine examples for an attempt to deal with the heritage of Apartheid in novels are J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*¹⁶² and Zakes Mda’s *The Madonna of Excelsior*.¹⁶³ Despite all the above mentioned doubts, the writers’ work could still

¹⁵⁸ Adams and Durham (1995: xiii).

¹⁵⁹ Adams and Durham (1995 :xiii).

¹⁶⁰ Adams and Durham (1995: xiii).

¹⁶¹ David Alvarez. 2006. “Review of Robert Berold, ed. *South African Poets on Poetry: Interviews from New Coin 1992-2001: Practicing Poetry in an Interregnum: Poets in Post-Liberation South Africa*”. *H-SAfrica, H-Net Reviews, February 2006*. <<http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=201611143482152>> (accessed August 8, 2008). 156.

¹⁶² J.M. Coetzee. *Disgrace*. London: Vintage, 2000 (first published by Secker & Warburg in 1999).

¹⁶³ Zakes Mda. *The Madonna of Excelsior*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press Southern Africa, 2002. 179-180.

be politically and culturally motivated. One of the writers' new tasks is what Malika Ndlovu calls "Healing through Creativity", another is the exploration of the South African society and of course the re-writing of history, which carries a special importance for the formerly oppressed and voiceless.¹⁶⁴

Poetry in South Africa has a strong presence in society as the various poetry awards, festivals, circles, publications such as journals and books demonstrate. Further, media such as television and the internet help poetry to be spread and offer poets new outlets to publish their works, and thus provide easy access to poetry (e.g. Michelle McGrane's <<http://peonymoon.wordpress.com>>). It is amazing to see how deeply rooted poetry is in South African society.

Poetry is now rapidly strengthening its presence in society, in poetry groups, poetry books, journals and websites, and on television. There is poetry in the speeches of politicians, in the world of advertising, in school-grounds and street-corner cyphers, and poetry is still the preferred language of love and romance. Indeed, in contemporary South Africa poetry very much reflects and invigorates popular culture.¹⁶⁵

From a similarly broad understanding of poetry, the South African writer Angifi Dladla asserts "the people regard poets in high esteem [...] at the lobola [bride price] ceremonies, at the weddings, at parties for the initiates from the mountain school, at the school concerts and debates-poetry is there. Even at political rallies, poetry is there".¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Saying this, does not mean ignoring "that that Black South Africans have always had a voice, that it was the ear that was lacking". Anthea Garman. "The Mass Subject in Krog's *Country of My Skull*". *Power, Politics and Identity in South African Media*. Eds. Adrian Hadland et al. Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2008 (first published in 2006). 11.

¹⁶⁵ Peter Rorvik, Director of the Centre for Creative Arts in the Programme of *Poetry Africa 2006*. "Ten years", a word of welcome. 10th Poetry Africa Festival. Johannesburg 6-7 October, Durban 9-14 October 2006. Centre for Creative Arts, University of KwaZulu Natal. Department of Arts and Culture, Republic of South Africa. 1.

¹⁶⁶ Alvarez (2006: 182).

III.1 'Institutions'

III.1.1 Poetry journals

Most of the women poets featured in this study first published their poems in one of the many poetry journals in South Africa.¹⁶⁷ The more successful of these poets, who went on to become well known names, eventually published collections of their poems, some of these with notable publishers. During the Apartheid era, South African writers customarily aligned themselves with different traditions or camps: a more radical one based in the Transvaal and a more liberal one in Cape Town. These two main camps had their own institutions, too. For example, the two most prominent South African literary magazines are *Staffrider*, founded in 1978 under the auspices of Raven Press, and *New Contrast*, which publishes poetry and prose in four issues per year. The Transvaal camp published with publishers like Raven Press, in pro-ANC magazines like *Staffrider* and felt close to the ANC-aligned writing organisation Congress of South African Writers (COSAW). The more liberal Capetonians preferred magazines like *Contrast*, which after its fusion with the small magazine *Upstream* became *New Contrast*. Nowadays, the division is not as strong as it once was. The former camps have moved closer together and the poets publish in each other's magazines. The magazines themselves have changed, too, and these days include a wider range of topics and not only politically motivated and militant work.

The annual journals are *Fidelities*, which publishes poetry, as do the multilingual *Timbila*, *Kotaz*, which publishes poetry and prose in English and Xhosa, and *Botsotso*,¹⁶⁸ which has been publishing poetry, fiction, drama, essays and reviews since 1995. *Green Dragon*,¹⁶⁹ by Dye Hard Press, has been

¹⁶⁷ The *South African Writers Network* provides a list of the names and addresses of these poetry journals and publishers, which are discussed below. Cf. "Who publishes poetry in South Africa?". *South African Writers' Network*. <<http://www.sawn.co.za/publishpoetry.htm>> (accessed August 8, 2008).

¹⁶⁸ For more information, see "About Botsotso". *Botsotso – Contemporary South African Culture*. <<http://www.botsotso.org.za/>> (accessed August 8, 2008) or *South Africa Writing* 2 (April 2006: 58-59).

¹⁶⁹ For more information, see *South Africa Writing* 3 (June 2006: 50-51).

publishing South African and international poetry, fiction and essays once a year since 2002.

One of the most established and influential journals for poetry in South Africa is *New Coin*, which is published twice a year by the Institute for the Study of English in Africa at Rhodes University.¹⁷⁰ Between 2000 and 2004 *New Coin* was published by Joan Metelerkamp, a poet featured in this dissertation. Two university lecturers, Sally-Ann Murray and Wendy Woodward, have published some of their poetry in the Durban-based magazine, *Agenda*, which brings out four issues a year and which is a “feminist media project committed to giving women a forum, a voice and skills to articulate their needs and interests”.¹⁷¹ Other quarterly magazines are *Journeyings* and *South Africa Writing*, which is edited by Jason le Grange and Kim Donnelly and gives space to creative writing including poetry, short stories and information on publishing and writing in South Africa.¹⁷² The relative newcomer Michelle McGrane has published her poetry in *Newsart KZN*, the official journal of the (KwaZulu)Natal Society of Art. Among other publications, *Afro* is a literary magazine which contains short stories, articles and poetry from South African writers all over the country. It is published twice a year, one number in June/July and one in November/December. *Carapace*, with its seat in Cape Town, brings out six issues of poetry a year.

Chimurenga, a Pan-African quarterly publication based in Cape Town, has been in print since 2002.¹⁷³ Its subjects include poetry, essays, stories, arts, culture and politics. *Chimurenga* can also be read on the internet.¹⁷⁴ The internet offers a new way to publish poetry: *LitNet* exclusively publishes English and Afrikaans

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Anne Kellas. No date. “The state of writing in South Africa”. *The Write Stuff* 1 March 31, 1995. <<http://www.the-write-stuff.com.au/archives/vol-1/articles/zawriting.html>> (accessed August 8, 2008).

¹⁷¹ See the details at Africa Book Centre (London). No date. “Women and Gender Studies and Sexuality. *Agenda* Journal”. *Africa Book Centre On-line Catalogue*. <http://www.africabookcentre.com/acatalog/index.html?http%3A/www.africabookcentre.com/acatalog/AGENDA_MAGAZINE.html&CatalogBody> (accessed August 8, 2008).

¹⁷² See the magazine’s website: *South Africa Writing*. <<http://www.southafricawriting.com>> (accessed December 27, 2007).

¹⁷³ For more information, see *South Africa Writing* 1 (January 2006: 30-31).

¹⁷⁴ See the magazine’s website *Chimurenga* <www.chimurenga.co.za> (accessed August 8, 2008).

poetry and fiction on the internet.¹⁷⁵ This site, furthermore, provides space for lively debates and exchanges, just as the promising online art magazine *Nokka* does. It was launched in 2007.¹⁷⁶ Until *Donga* discontinued its service, this online magazine published poetry and prose, too. With the great number of printed journals still available to poets and readers, South Africa is comparatively well served with a functioning publishing network, in print and online.

III.1.2 Contemporary women poets and publishers

In the early 1970s,

small South African publishers began to break the monopoly of British multinational publishing houses, and some truly independent South African publishers began to emerge - David Philip in Cape Town, Ravan Press and AD Donker [and Renoster Books founded by Lionel Abrahams] in Johannesburg, for instance. They made possible the publishing of a different kind of local writing.¹⁷⁷

It is interesting to see that, on the one hand, those well-established South African women poets (Finuala Dowling, Ingrid de Kok, Antjie Krog, Joan Metelerkamp, Karen Press) who have had the chance to be published more than once are all white. An exception to the rule is Gabeba Baderoon, the winner of the prestigious DaimlerChrysler Award, who is coloured and married to an American. On the other hand, these ‘established women poets’, led by Antjie Krog, have had more than one collection of poetry published by the same publisher, or at least by those publishers with the ‘big names’. Just as **Ingrid de Kok** did with her latest volume of poetry, *Seasonal Fires: new and selected poems*,¹⁷⁸ **Antjie Krog** published her two English collections of poetry with Random House: *Down to my Last Skin* in 2000, and *Body Bereft* in 2006 with Umuzi. *the stars say ‘tsau’*, which is a

¹⁷⁵ See the magazine’s website *LitNet* <www.litnet.co.za> and *OuLitNet* <oulitnet.co.za> (accessed August 8, 2008).

¹⁷⁶ See the magazine’s website *nokka* <<http://www.nokka.biz>> (accessed August 8, 2008).

¹⁷⁷ Anne Kellas. No date. “The state of writing in South Africa - Publishing”. *The Write Stuff* 1 March 31, 1995. <<http://www.the-write-stuff.com.au/archives/vol-1/articles/zawriting.html#PUBLISHING>> (accessed August 8, 2008).

¹⁷⁸ Ingrid de Kok. *Seasonal Fires: new and selected poems*. Roggebaai: Umuzi, 2006.

collection of /Xam poetry selected and adapted by Antjie Krog, was published in 2004 by KWELA Books.¹⁷⁹ **Gabeba Baderoon**'s two collections of poems, *The dream in the next body* (2005) and *A hundred silences* (2006), were published by KWELA Books/Snailpress after she won the DaimlerChrysler Award for Poetry. **Ingrid de Kok** published *Transfer* and *Terrestrial Things* with KWELA Books/Snailpress and Snailpress. **Joan Metelerkamp** brought out several of her collections of poetry with Gecko Poetry, **Karen Press** with Buchu Books and Heinemann-Centaur. Then each one published with Gecko Poetry and Snailpress. **Finuala Dowling** saw her first collection of poetry *I flying* in print in 2002 with Carapace Poets, an imprint of Snailpress. Penguin Books of South Africa (which opened its first office in the country in the early 1970),¹⁸⁰ brought out Dowling's novel *What Poets Need* in 2005 and welcomed her back with her second collection of poems, *Doo-Wop Girls of the Universe*, in 2006.

The other poets publish their poetry with different publishers each time, in fact they do get the chance to publish more than once. Especially for newcomers it is difficult to get poetry published. Even though there is an extensive array of publishers in South Africa, they only take the "risk of publishing poetry"¹⁸¹ by poets with already well-known names, as there is little potential for material profit in poetry for their pains. So, many women poets resort to self-publishing. The website of the Centre for the Book in Cape Town offers helpful advice and links, and amongst them is *A rough guide to small-scale and self-publishing*¹⁸² written by Colleen Higgs in 2005. Higgs also founded the publishing label Hands-on-Books. The magazine *South Africa Writing*, too, has a special column in which Colleen Higgs and Gary Cummiskey give advice on submitting manuscripts,¹⁸³ publishing them,¹⁸⁴ "small-publishing",¹⁸⁵ distribution¹⁸⁶ and much more.

¹⁷⁹ For more information, see *South Africa Writing* 1 (January 2006), 32-33.

¹⁸⁰ For more information, see *South Africa Writing* 2 (April 2006), 56-57 or Penguin Books South Africa. <<http://www.penguinbooks.co.za>> (accessed August 8, 2008).

¹⁸¹ For more information, see Arthur Attwell. No date. "How to publish your poetry". *Arthur Attwell*. <http://www.arthurattwell.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=15&Itemid=27> (accessed August 8, 2008).

¹⁸² Colleen Higgs. *A rough guide to small-scale and self-publishing*. Vlaeberg: Centre for the Book, 2006 (first published in 2005).

¹⁸³ Gary Cummiskey, in: *South Africa Writing* 3 (June 2006: 19-20).

Among the small and local presses, Oshun Books¹⁸⁷ focuses on women but ordinarily does not publish poetry.¹⁸⁸ Still, they brought out **Lebogang Mashile's** first collection of poems *In a Ribbon of Rhythm* in 2005, together with co-publisher Mutloatse Arts Heritage Trust. **Makhosazana Xaba**, who is considered one of the country's great new talents, had her first collection of poetry, *these hands*, published by the Timbila Poetry Project in 2005. **Sally-Ann Murray** published her 2006 collection of poetry with HardPressd in Durban. **Malika Ndlovu's** *Born in Africa but* was brought out by Educall Publishers in Cape Town in 2000. The University of Natal Press in Pietermaritzburg is a quality publisher of scholarly works and books on general subjects and also is a distributor for the independent Deep South Publishing, which brought out *Requiem* by **Joan Metelerkamp** and also *ants moving the house millimetres* by **Nadine Botha**, a collection that I excluded from this study due to its sexist and weird contents.

We can see, therefore, that there is a broad range of publishing possibilities available to South African poets, and that there are many poets who have been able to avail themselves of these possibilities. Whether or not all the best talent has found its way to the surface, that is, has come to the attention of the reading public, is difficult to know.

III.1.3 Poetry awards and their recipients

It is particularly interesting to note just how many literary awards there are in South Africa and how poets and publishers respond positively and send them their poetry.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁴ Colleen Higgs, in: *South Africa Writing* 1 (January 2006: 7).

¹⁸⁵ Colleen Higgs, in: *South Africa Writing* 1 (January 2006: 12-14).

¹⁸⁶ Colleen Higgs, in: *South Africa Writing* 2 (April 2006: 13-15).

¹⁸⁷ For more information, see *South Africa Writing* 3 (June 2006: 21-23) or Oshun Books. <<http://www.oshunbooks.co.za/>> and <<http://oshun.book.co.za/>> (both accessed August 8, 2008).

¹⁸⁸ Oshun Books. No date. "Publish with Oshun Books – How to submit a manuscript". *Oshun Books*. <<http://www.struiknews.co.za/oshunbooks/publish.html>> (accessed August 8, 2008).

¹⁸⁹ Detailed and current information can be found on the internet.

Antjie Krog especially has received numerous honours for her work. Amongst these is the most prestigious award in Afrikaans literature, the annually awarded **Hertzog Prize** (Hertzogprys), which she received in 1989 for her epic poem “Lady Anne (Barnard at the Cape)”,¹⁹⁰ of which a fragment was later translated and published in English. In 1990, Antjie Krog received the same prize for the best poetry volume. The Hertzog Prize, established as far back as 1914, is awarded in the categories of poetry, prose and drama to Afrikaans writers by the South African Academy for the Sciences and Arts.

In 1999, for her book *Country of my Skull*,¹⁹¹ Antjie Krog also received the **Alan Paton Award**, conferred annually for non-fictional work since 1989. Those who receive the award represent the most esteemed of contemporary South African writers. Their work is judged to “demonstrate compassion, elegance of writing, illumination of truthfulness, especially those forms of it which are new, delicate, unfashionable, and fly in the face of power, and intellectual and moral integrity”.¹⁹² The award is sponsored by the *Sunday Times*, a Johannesburg weekly.

Finuala Dowling received the renowned **Ingrid Jonker Prize** for the best debut work of Afrikaans or English Poetry for her collection of poetry, *I Flying*¹⁹³ (2002). The prestigious yearly prize is alternately awarded to an Afrikaans or English poet who has published a first volume within the preceding two years and it was instituted by Ingrid Jonker’s friends in her honour after her death in 1965. In 2003, Finuala Dowling was co-winner of the **Sanlam Award for Poetry**. This award was won by Sally-Ann Murray for her first collection of poetry called *Shifting*¹⁹⁴ in 1991, by the Spanish born Arja Salafranca for *A life stripped of illusions* in 1994, and by Isobel Dixon for *Weather Eye*¹⁹⁵ in 2001. *Shifting* also carried off the **Arthur Nortje/FNB Vita Award**, for the latter of which Malika

¹⁹⁰ Krog (2000: 61-80).

¹⁹¹ Antjie Krog. *Country of my Skull*. London: Vintage, 1999.

¹⁹² Wikipedia. 2008. *Wikipedia*. “Alan Paton Award”. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alan_Paton_Award> (accessed August 8, 2008).

¹⁹³ Finuala Dowling. *I Flying*. Plumstead, Cape Town: Carapace Poets, 2002.

¹⁹⁴ Sally-Ann Murray. *Shifting*. Durban: Carrefour, 1992.

¹⁹⁵ Isobel Dixon. *Weather eye*. Plumstead, Cape Town: Carapace Poets, 2001.

Ndlovu's play *A Coloured Place*¹⁹⁶ received three nominations. Antjie Krog received the **FNB Award** for best poetry volume for the year 2000 for *Down to my Last Skin*.¹⁹⁷

In 2003, Ingrid de Kok received the **Herman Charles Bosman Award** for English Literature for her volume *Terrestrial Things*. In the same year, Michelle McGrane won the **South African Writer's Circle (SAWC) Hilde Slinger Poetry Trophy** and the **SAWC Quill Award**, and in 2004 she was the winner of the **SAWC Quill Award** for Professional Writer of the Year.

In 2005, Gabeba Baderoon was awarded the **DaimlerChrysler Award for South African Poetry**. This award was established in 1999 and is now the highest endowed cultural award in South Africa. Every year the DaimlerChrysler Arts Award is given to a different category. For now these are: Art, Jazz, Sculpture, Choreography, Photography, Poetry and Architecture. The category Fashion Design will be introduced in the future. The DaimlerChrysler Arts Award supports young, talented and innovative South African artists under 40 years of age who are making a first appearance in an international context in addition to giving presentations in South Africa. The aim of the award is to promote the artistic and cultural life of South Africa and to raise and promote the profile of the artists nationally and internationally.

The **Noma Award for Publishing in Africa**, sponsored by Kodansha Ltd, Japan, is a Pan-African annual prize of US\$ 10,000. Awarded for the first time in 1979, the Noma Award is open to African writers and scholars. This prize is given for an outstanding new book in the categories "(i) scholarly or academic [work], (ii) books for children, and (iii) literature and creative writing",¹⁹⁸ written and published in local or in European languages in Africa. In 2006 it was awarded to Lebogang Mashlie for her poetry collection, *In a Ribbon of Rhythm*.¹⁹⁹ Another South African winner of the Noma Award was the Afrikaans poet Marlene van

¹⁹⁶ Kathy A. Perkins, ed. *Black South African Women – An Anthology of Plays*. Rondebosch, Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press and New York: Routledge, 1999. 9-22.

¹⁹⁷ Antjie Krog. *Down to my last skin - Poems*. Johannesburg: Random House, 2000.

¹⁹⁸ Noma Award. No Date. "The Noma Award for publishing in Africa". *Noma Award*. <<http://www.nomaaward.org/>> (accessed August 8, 2008).

¹⁹⁹ Lebogang Mashile. *In a Ribbon of Rhythm*. Johannesburg: Mutloatse Arts Heritage Trust and Cape Town: Oshun Books, 2005.

Niekerk for *Triomf*²⁰⁰ in 1995. Honourable Mentions were received in 1995 by Tatamkulu Afrika for *Maqabane*²⁰¹ and in 1999 by Antjie Krog for *Country of My Skull*.

Yet, once more it is significant that the most important prizes for poetry were awarded to either white women or, without wanting to deny those poets' talents, women with connections to the media and with the United States, as in the case of both Gabeba Baderoon and Lebogang Mashile.

Further prizes South African writers are awarded are the **Cain Prize for African Writing**, which, however, is only given for fiction; the **Olive Schreiner Prize**, won by Antjie Krog for *Country of my Skull* as the best work of prose published between 1998 and 2000; the **BookData/South African Booksellers' Book of the Year Prize**; the **Sydney Clouts Prize**; and the **DALRO Prizes**, for the three poems judged the best to appear in *New Coin*. This long list of prizes gives one an idea of the enormous breadth of literature in South Africa.

III.1.4 Poetry festivals around South Africa

While Ingrid de Kok admits that for written poetry “writing and reading [...] [lyrical] poetry is solitary and demanding”,²⁰² the large number of poetry festivals around South Africa prove that poetry and performance poetry especially are very popular. Unlike in Germany, poetry performances and festivals in South Africa in general have large audiences which consist of people of all origins and, surprisingly, all age groups. The famous poetry festivals profit from the attention they can get with the help of the modern media and they help to provide platforms for poets, to popularise poetry, and to draw public and media attention to poetry. The bigger and more famous the festivals become, the more they manage to generate cultural as well as intercultural exchange between poets and their audiences, which themselves become more and more diverse. Popularisation is, furthermore, intended to inspire the poets of tomorrow.

²⁰⁰ Marlene van Niekerk. *Triomf*. Cape Town: Queillerie Publishers, 1994.

²⁰¹ Tatamkhulu Afrika. *Maqabane*. Bellville: Mayibuye Books, 1994.

²⁰² Robert Berold, ed. *South African Poets on Poetry – Interviews from New Coin 1992-2001*. Scottsville: Gecko Poetry, 2003. 117.

The most famous art festivals attracting the highest visiting numbers are

- the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, yearly since 1974 (except for 1975),
- the Poetry Africa Festival, which is organised by the Centre for Creative Arts, sponsored by the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC), and hosted by the University of KwaZulu Natal in Durban in October each year,
- the yearly SPIER Poetry Festival on the famous wine estate in Stellenbosch, and
- the Franschhoek Literary Festival, sponsored by the Solms-Delta Wine Estate, yearly since 2007.

In addition, there are



2007 CTown Book Fair Flyer.

- the Cape Town Book Fair, which took place for the 2nd time in June 2007,
- celebrations of World Poetry Day on March 21st, by chance being Human Rights Day and, therefore, a public holiday in South Africa,
- the Cape Town Festival, several weeks in March, in and around Cape Town,
- the Time of the Writer sponsored by the DAC, and
- weekly poetry circles in all major towns.

Poetry festivals are very popular in South Africa. The question remains of the reason for South African poets' producing so much and feeling so comfortable with performance poetry. Plainly, this has to do with the oral traditions on the African continent. This might also explain the large numbers of black and coloured performance poets.²⁰³ Pamela Dube confirms this finding:

²⁰³ Dube (1997: 13).

Furthermore, the popularity of this form of expression [performance poetry], more among the peripheral suppressed groups in comparison to the mainstream creative forms, points to a politics of difference and raises the discourse of centre/margins, them/us oppositions, ideologically as well as geographically.²⁰⁴

It would be interesting to further research whether or not in South Africa it could be the case that in poetry there is a clash of cultures. It really seems that Blacks, Coloureds and Whites still have different ways and preferences for expressing themselves, with white poets preferring a, to them, more traditional style and predominantly written poetry. Examples are Antjie Krog, Ingrid de Kok, Sally-Ann Murray, Finuala Dowling, Colleen Higgs, Michelle McGrane and Crystal Warren, plus the exception, the coloured poet Gabeba Baderoon. Black and coloured poets have the greater talent and confidence in performing, especially Malika Ndlovu, Lebogang Mashile, Gcina Mhlophe and Lisa Combrinck. Of course in some cases poets combine both, but the overall tendency seems to be that poets' preferences are predictable according to their background. How far "nepotism" is a factor when it comes to the fact that Whites appear to publish more than Blacks and Coloureds, deserves another interesting study.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ Dube (1997: 13).

²⁰⁵ For the Wellington Underground Poets, an influential poetry movement based in Wellington, New Zealand, nepotism always was a big topic. The Wellington underground poets went on record with such unguarded statements as that

the poetry of the established literary hierarchy (*literati*) [were] nepotistic and mediocre, [and] many considered that such work was not poetry at all but instead was 'academic masturbation'. (Capital Times, 9 November 2005). [...] The Wellington underground poets saw themselves as the true carriers of the torch and recognised that the most vital role of the artist was to be a visionary who challenged both the state and society. They understood that whether a poet was published or not published in mainstream literary media in New Zealand did not depend upon one's talent or ability, but was a matter of whom one knew or did not know amongst the literati; a matter of whom one had offended and not offended; and a matter of with whom amongst the literati one had slept. (Paraphrased from speech by Darryl Ward to Porirua Community Arts Council's public meeting about arts policy for general election candidates, November 1999).

The passage quoted is first of all an indication of the tensions between poets, other than those related to ethnicity and skin-colour. The accuracy of such hearsay information is, as always, another matter.

As quoted from Wikipedia. 2008. *Wikipedia*. "Wellington underground poets". <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wellington_underground_poets> (accessed August 8, 2008).

In addition, it is important for the popularity of performance poetry that the poet considers the audience which shall be addressed and reached through the performance. The same texts can have very different effects when they are performed and when they are printed and distributed. Audible words attract different people than written ones, and so they appeal to a very different audience. In a stage play, you reach the local communities. If you publish a book you mainly reach a white or rich and much smaller readership, but possibly one abroad. These groups are more likely to spend money on a book. Yet, “Poetry [...] should not have to choose always between either the street or the study (both forms of exclusion and marginalisation in their different ways)”.²⁰⁶

Performance poets overcome all these problems. The audio-visual dimension increases the interest and the understanding of the public. In performing their poetry wherever they get a chance, performance poets reach the greatest variety of audiences, and through eventually publishing their collections of poetry, they reach another and different ‘audience’, too. In discussion with the publisher and poet Gus Ferguson at the celebrations of the 2007 World Poetry Day in Cape Town, Lucille Greeff made an interesting observation when she said that “in South Africa it is easier to make money in performing poetry than in publishing it”.

What does a poet have to consider finding his or her perfect or ideal audience? During the above mentioned celebrations of the 2007 World Poetry Day in Cape Town, Gus Ferguson pointed out that a poet who wants to publish always has to make sure how best he can reach his audience before the launch. In his opinion, with African languages, publication mostly has to be done over the radio, which leaves the printed medium to the English readership which can afford to buy it. This could be the reason why more printed poetry is published in English. English poetry already has a readership, yet poets in African languages and local poets first have to get their work and their name known before it makes sense for them to publish at all: otherwise they would not have a market.

²⁰⁶ Jeremy Cronin in: Alvarez (2006: 130).

III.2 Performance poetry in South Africa

The appellation ‘performance poetry’ dates back to a press release on the revived popular style of the 1980s’ American performance poet Hedwig Gorski, “whose audio recordings achieved success on spoken word radio programs around the world”.²⁰⁷ Using this term, Hedwig Gorski tried to differentiate her art form from other forms of performance art popular in the early 1980s. It is pop culture, more than the literary tradition, which offers a frame of reference for performance poetry. Meanwhile, the term is used widely for all kinds of literature written or composed for or during performances and became famous through the success of poetry slams in the mid-1980s.²⁰⁸ At the same time in South Africa oral poetry developed accompanying the struggle against Apartheid in the form of praise poetry. Famous South African praise poets, *Iimbongi*, were and are Mzwakhe Mbuli, Alfred Qabula and the woman poet Nise Malange.



Two famous contemporary South African iimbongi, Jessica Mbangeni (left and middle, in traditional Xhosa garment) and Mandisa Phandliwe (right). Durban, Poetry Africa Festival 2006. Photos: Isabelle Vogt.

²⁰⁷ Wikipedia. 2008. *Wikipedia*. “Performance poetry”. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Performance_poetry> (accessed August 8, 2008).

²⁰⁸ Poetry slams were invented by Marc Smith, mainly featuring performance poetry, rap poetry and storytelling. Cf. Ko Bylanzky. 2007. “Das ABC des Poetry Slam – P wie Performance Poetry”. *Ko Bylanzky's tour de slam & Rayl Patzak der poesie-dj*. <<http://www.poetry.claudio.de/2007/03/30/das-abc-des-poetry-slam-%E2%80%93-p-wie-performance-poetry/>> (accessed August 8, 2008).

The role of the *imbongi*, praise poet, has the important and responsible function of being the conscience and memory. *Imbongi* is a Xhosa word and usually translates to praise poets, even though their poetry, *isibongo*, means not exclusively praise but also pondering and even critique for the traditional chief of the tribe. An *imbongi* has to articulate the feelings of the community and reformulate these sentiments in poetic phrases. Just as with jazz music, the lines of the *imbongi* are never fixed but improvised on each occasion. The techniques of *isibongo*, praise poetry, have been incorporated in the poems of modern African writers.

Yet performance poetry itself is by no means a phenomenon of the 20th century. With speech being the means of human communication, oral performance of poetry already had its place in pre-literate cultures since before Homeric times and was memorized with the help of stylistic devices such as rhyme, alliterations and repetitions, and passed down as faithfully as possible from generation to generation.

A vigorous oral tradition has existed throughout South African history, and in many ways represents our truly original contribution to world literature. In spite of this, oral literature is largely absent from accounts of literary history in this country.²⁰⁹

The situation only changed with the advent of printing and therefore the cheap distribution of texts. The poet's role in society was no longer that of a mere entertainer, he now provided written poetry that could be read in private. This also meant that in a European context, the public performance of poetry became more and more restricted to the singing of song lyrics, and to the production of verse plays.²¹⁰ The recital of poetry was pushed back into a familial context, where readings from printed books could take place in small private circles.

With numerous technological innovations and the help of artists like Hedwig Gorski and Marc Smith, the 1980s brought a revival of oral poetry. In her pertinent study on South African (and Canadian) performance poetry, Pamela Dube defines the genre as follows: what counts to create a good piece of

²⁰⁹ Duncan Brown. *Voicing the text – South African oral poetry and performance*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1998. 1.

²¹⁰ For example in the cases of Elizabethan madrigalists or Robert Burns. Wikipedia. 2008. *Wikipedia*. "Performance poetry". <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Performance_poetry> (accessed August 8, 2008).

performance poetry is the ideal combination of text and performance before a live audience. Performance poetry is audio-visual. The poem is presented orally through the major components of word, voice and intonation, often accompanied by “other art forms like music, song, [and] dance”.²¹¹ The body, too, plays a role with gestures, mime and the targeted movements of the poet. Other devices used are music, song and dance, sounds, objects, images or special effects which are not restricted to our preconditioned conceptions about the spoken word. This synaesthetic product is then presented dramatically to the audience, whose role is very important. After all, the success of the poem can be seen in the immediate reaction of the audience. Some poets even admit to modifying their poetry in content and style to meet the audience’s expectations.²¹²

The difference between traditional and contemporary poetry performances and poetry readings is, that in the former, featured poets read from their printed books of poetry to a live audience. Performance poets literally perform. They are not mere entertainers, they take on different roles. So, throughout history they, amongst them Keamogetsi Joseph Molapong, a Namibian performance poet, have often taken on the role of activists or agitators. The performance poets’ goal is to get their audiences, as well as their readers, to reflect on situations or problems with a fresh sense of purpose and justice. Actually, live audiences are, more often than not, actively rather than passively involved. For Keamogetsi Joseph Molapong, it is important that the “audiences are urged not only to think from the head, but to respond from the heart. [The performance poet] unleashes, from the stage in performance, an urgent call for change”.²¹³ In some ways, performance poets resemble mediums. They are the link between the event and their audience and their voice is their instrument.²¹⁴ They address communal issues and want to evoke a change in the thoughts and/or in the real lives of their audience. Therefore, as performance pieces, the poems are only complete when they are embodied in a good performer.

²¹¹ Dube (1997: 14).

²¹² Dube (1997: 29).

²¹³ Keamogetsi Joseph Molapong. *Come talk your heart*. Windhoek: New Namibia Books, 2005. x.

²¹⁴ Dube (1997: 37).

All of these aspects are most relevant for the poet and the poem. This is why many people doubt if performance poetry, its style, as mentioned before, being less conducive to print and better suited for oral presentation, can exist in printed form at all, when it is not expressly written for print distribution. It is true that much performance poetry does not work well when printed on paper, and therefore many performance poets have been criticised for not being academically trained to write 'good' poetry. The fact that, sometimes, performance poets are denied recognition by academics is frequently a result of "intellectual snobbery on the part of other kinds of poets"²¹⁵ or of jealousy.²¹⁶ For performance poets are able to build and attract larger audiences for their poetry as they communicate to and attract a broader target group.

Pamela Dube discusses this issue within the framework of what she calls the "orality-literacy polarity".²¹⁷ She quotes Walter Ong, who argues that "writing enhances orality and should not necessarily be seen as an oppositional, destructive phenomenon to the oral mind".²¹⁸ Moreover, Pamela Dube cites Jacques Derrida with his "belief that writing is a different performance altogether and 'not a supplement of the spoken word'".²¹⁹ She argues that "However, the evidence that early written poetry everywhere, 'it seems, is at first necessarily a mimicking in script of oral performance', [and] does not necessarily testify to the process of writing as detrimental to the oral creative genius, but more to a direct transcription of thought".²²⁰ Albert Lord on the other hand

²¹⁵ Wikipedia. 2008. *Wikipedia*. "Performance poetry". <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Performance_poetry> (accessed August 8, 2008).

²¹⁶ A group of poets which highly criticised the system of the established literary hierarchy (*literati*) were the above mentioned Wellington (NZ) Underground Poets of the early 1980s, with their productive peak in the mid 1990s, and who still exist today. They are a group of performance poets who criticised and fought against the *literati*'s nepotism and mediocrity. They see it as the poets' task to challenge society and state.

Wikipedia. 2008. *Wikipedia*. "Wellington underground poets". <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wellington_underground_poets> (accessed August 8, 2008). More information can be found on the net.

²¹⁷ Dube (1997: 11).

²¹⁸ Dube (1997: 11).

²¹⁹ Dube (1997: 11).

²²⁰ Dube (1997: 11).

seems to believe that learning to write and read disables the oral poet since writing introduces control of the narrative and interferes with the oral composition process and Ong confirms that written words are isolated from the context in which the spoken words come to existence.²²¹

Still, for Ong, literacy did not reduce orality but even enhanced it in many ways.²²² So, given the fact that many poets did write before they performed or vice versa, and that others do both, it does not make sense to separate the oral and the literary poets into different traditions.²²³ Yes,

it seems that orality and literacy can survive side by side, dependent on or independent of one another. As Ong maintains, despite the fact that oral expression can exist and mostly has existed without any writing, and that writing would not have existed without orality, it remains paradoxically clear that without literacy, the importance of orality could probably never have been identified.²²⁴

But most convincing is the argument that “a good poem has to work on page and on stage”.²²⁵

More on the theories on oral South African Literature in Africa can be read in Chapter II.4, “African Literary Orientations”, in Horst Zander’s *Fact – Fiction – Faction*,²²⁶ in which he introduces the theories of Jeff Opland and Ruth Finnegan.

As this study is dedicated to women poets, it is important to mention the significant role of women in oral tradition.

Women’s communal performances, vital to cultural life in Southern Africa, include fables, legends, and songs (both ritual and occasional), as well as proverbs and riddles.²²⁷

They contributed greatly to the tradition of stories and other pieces of oral literature, such as poems. Historically, poetry played an important role in

²²¹ Dube (1997: 11).

²²² Dube (1997: 11).

²²³ Dube (1997: 15).

²²⁴ Dube (1997: 11).

²²⁵ Ko Bylanzky. 2007. “Das ABC des Poetry Slam – P wie Performance Poetry”. *Ko Bylanzkys tour de slam & Rayl Patzak der poesie-dj*. <<http://www.poetry.claudio.de/2007/03/30/das-abc-des-poetry-slam-%E2%80%93-p-wie-performance-poetry/>> (accessed August 8, 2008).

²²⁶ Zander (1999: 163-196).

²²⁷ Daymond, Driver et al. (2003: 6).

traditional South African environments, and it did later in anti-Apartheid gatherings, too.

The use of poetry during the struggle strengthened the social and political credibility of the poetic arts, and found a natural ally in the rich oral traditions of this continent, whose importance was vividly emblazoned on the national psyche at all the celebrations following the launch of our new democracy.

The interface between performance poetry and theatre has meanwhile tightened, along with poetry in jazz and other music forms, and the explosion of hip-hop and other rap-derivatives.²²⁸

Furthermore, Apartheid fuelled the oral tradition²²⁹ due to persecution and censorship.

While the particular oppressions of South African political life have certainly contributed to the exclusion of [the] oral form (which are largely associated with black societies), the suppression of the oral in favour of the printed text is a feature of literary studies worldwide, and appears to be related to the critical practices that have been dominant in universities and schools for most of this century. [...] My aim is to re-establish a line of continuity in South African poetry and performance from the songs and stories of the Bushmen, through the praise poems of the African chiefdoms, to the development of Christianized oral forms, the adaptation of the oral tradition in 'Soweto' poetry of the 1970s and the performance of poems on political platforms in the 1980s.²³⁰

In 1963, the *Publications and Entertainments Act* was put in place, which, in the 1970s, allowed the banning of 'undesirable' publications such as the "'Black Power Poetry' of the Soweto Poets".²³¹ During these days, poets such as the famous praise poet Mzwakhe Mbuli found a platform and an audience for their poetry when they performed at funerals and other gatherings, which became increasingly politicised. Yet the rise of the international and colourful poetry festivals, which were open to all and were distinct from political rallies on the one hand and intellectualism on the other, only started after the fall of Apartheid.

²²⁸ Peter Rorvik, 10th Poetry Africa Festival 2006 (2006: 1).

²²⁹ Adams and Durham (1995: xiii).

²³⁰ Brown (1998: 1).

²³¹ Sharon L. Joffe. "African American and South African Poetry of the Oppressed". *Peace Review* Vol.13 no.2: 201–208. London: Routledge, 2001. 203.

Last but not least, in her study, Pamela Dube dedicates an entire, very well-elaborated chapter to the discussion of different forms of contemporary performance poems. She distinguishes between

- the ‘Dub Poem’, a form of poetry with Reggae rhythm or, in the South African context, African drumming,
- the ‘Praise Poem’, deeply rooted in African every day life was mainly popularised in South Africa by Mzwakhe Mbuli and Alfred Qabula during the revival of the performance poetry tradition in Apartheid South Africa. As quoted in Pamela Dube’s study, Ong observes that “expression of praise is one aspect of orality found in almost all oral or residually oral cultures, ranging from classical antiquity²³² through the 18th Century to present day praise poems”²³³,
- the ‘Narrative Poem’, a form of prose poetry that narrates a story (tales, biblical stories, etc.). Narrative poems are often educational and not infrequently moral in content. They can be performed or accompanied by music,
- the ‘Sound Poem’ which can only be fully experienced during performance. Sound poems play with words and technical possibilities to slow them down or speed them up, mix them with sounds and sounds and special effects, and finally
- poetry readings which lift the poetry from the cold print and energize it. “Reading a poem aloud is a total performance process on its own. The word, sound, voice production and the body are the essential elements. The reading is not necessarily a hindrance”.²³⁴

All of these styles can be found in South African performance poetry, as can be observed in, for instance, the choice of CDs mentioned in the bibliography.²³⁵

²³² The Greeks distinguished two types of poetic creation and theory: the conservative and educational form *mimesis* (creative act of imitation) and *agon* (competition). *Agon* creativity and poetry both encouraged individual originality and competitive creativity. Dube (1997: 9-10).

²³³ Dube (1997: 10).

²³⁴ Dube (1997: 35).

²³⁵ Lebogang Mashile: *In a Ribbon of Rhythm*, 2005; Mzwakhe Mbuli: *All the Hits*, 2003; Malika Ndlovu: *Womb to World: A Labour of Love*, 2001; and *Off the Wall*, 2003.

III.3 The poets' style

[T]he English that we use in our poetry is not the Queen's language that you know as written by, say, Wordsworth or Coleridge. It is the language of urgency which we use because we have got an urgent message to deliver to anyone who cares to listen to it. We have not got the time to embellish this urgent message with unnecessary and cumbersome ornaments like rhyme, iambic pentameter, abstract figures of speech, and an ornate and lofty style. We will indulge in these luxuries which we can ill-afford at the moment when we are free people. Only then shall we write about bees, birds and flowers. Not the harsh realities that are part and parcel of the black man's life.²³⁶

Even though this quote dates back as far as 1976, when a "global movement towards a non-elitist poetry of ethical power"²³⁷ took place, it still seems to be true for contemporary South African poetry. Just as the poets of the Black Consciousness Movement, who rejected "traditional European poetic genres and [used] the African traditions of oral poetry and the *izibongo* (praise poems)",²³⁸ the contemporary women poets, especially in performance poetry, primarily use simple diction which is clear and understandable and which relies on repetition and the vernacular, or the language of the people.²³⁹

In fact, the early Soweto poems were written initially for an audience of white liberals and took traditional Western forms. This changed, following the example of the Black Arts movement in the United States, and the new Soweto poetry of the 1970s became poetry of resistance in both content and form.²⁴⁰

It is fascinating to see the new kinds of expression which have emerged in South Africa's contemporary poetry. "[M]ost of the poets who are active in forging this new poetry wish to combine sociopolitical commitment with a concern for appropriate poetic style".²⁴¹ What attracts attention to the work of these poets is the "simultaneously uncompromising and gentle stance [used to

²³⁶ Oswald Mtshali. "Black Poetry in Southern Africa: What it Means". *Soweto Poetry – Literary Perspectives*. Ed. Michael Chapman. Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2007. 110. Essay first published in 1976.

²³⁷ On the blurb of Michael Chapman (2007: 110).

²³⁸ Joffe (2001: 202).

²³⁹ Joffe (2001: 203).

²⁴⁰ Joffe (2001: 202-203).

²⁴¹ Kelwyn Sole. "Bird Hearts Taking Wing: Trends in Contemporary South African Poetry Written in English". *World Literature Today* 70: 1, Winter 1996. 25-31. 25.

confront] the negative in a society that has only recently emerged from the cruelty of its political nightmare”.²⁴² Altogether there seems to be a new centre of interest in South African poetry: after the long years of Apartheid during which poetry was used as a means of protest, another important issue for South African writers, the re-telling and re-writing of history, in the sense of ‘writing themselves into it’, becomes an unavoidable topic,²⁴³ which is important for the search for identity.

This long-awaited, post-Apartheid cultural syncretism could be the reason for the formal changes in recent literature, a ‘modernisation’ of writing. Whereas written poetry during Apartheid was dominated by Whites and the European poetic traditions, a situation which may have been caused by the fact that for a long time only poets conforming to the system were published and distributed, more and more coloured and black writers get their work published today. Modern South African poetry, and theirs in particular, is often not only influenced by the European literary tradition, but the black and coloured poets’ texts frequently show a change in subject focus and the addition of poetic techniques from oral genres. Even in written form, more and more poetry, performance included, uses traditional African influences, such as the methods of time-honoured African story-telling, call and response, acting and singing, etc., but also Afro-American musical styles like Rap.

According to Kelwyn Sole, a professor at the University of Cape Town and himself a poet, white writers write much more intellectually. On the same page in *South African Poets on Poetry*, his colleague at the University of Cape Town, Ingrid de Kok, says about her poetry:

Some of the poems in *Familiar Ground* are also quite formal, and I still write some sort of free narrative verse. There probably is a shift, after all it’s a ten year period. But I’m not sure what the shift is or what it means except that I’m attracted to tight expression and always have been, even before *Familiar Ground*. I know the contemporary arguments in favour of looser, experimental, exploratory forms, and I respond to numerous examples of that word. But I think one can be as experimental within inherited forms.²⁴⁴

²⁴² Sole (1996: 10).

²⁴³ Cf. Malika Ndlovu, whose motto is “Healing through Creativity”. Cf. Michelle McGrane. No date. “Malika Ndlovu”. *LitNet*. <http://www.oulitnet.co.za/relax/m_ndlovu_in.asp> (accessed August 8, 2008).

²⁴⁴ Berold (2003: 113).

The poetry of many performance artists, however, was primarily composed to be performed and immediately understood when heard, and it was written down only later. J.M. Coetzee is known for discussing issues such as these that are important to him in his novels. In this respect the comments of the narrator in Coetzee's autobiographical narrative *Youth* take the side of poetry that does not fit into the accepted elitist and intellectual picture:

He does not see why verse has always to be rising to a declamatory pitch, why it cannot be content to follow the flexions of the ordinary speaking voice – in fact, why it has to be so different from prose.²⁴⁵

When Keamogetsi Joseph Molapong talks about his performance poetry, it becomes clear that his style, his image of poetry is very different to that of Ingrid de Kok mentioned before:

More subtle are the performance cues of blank spaces surrounding short words and separating short and long stanzas on the page, structuring with silence and gaps, musical rests and phrasing.²⁴⁶

Nowadays, hardly any of the modern South African poems follow conventional rules when it comes to style, metre, rhythm, verse form and rhyme. Kelwyn Sole notices a

stylistic inclination to mix conversational language and street slang with more heightened, “poetic” speech [...]. Others favour enjambment as a way of alluding to the characteristic cadences, modulations, and slurrings of sentences in South African English, as well as a means of inducing more complicated rhythmic patterns in their poems. There is a general willingness to borrow from a variety of traditions and styles. For example, the Soweto-born Lesego Rampolokeng (“rapmaster supreme”), perhaps the best known of the new generation of poets, speaks of the mixed influence of Sotho song styles, traditional praise poetry, rap, and metropolitan writers such as William Burroughs in his work.²⁴⁷

This renunciation of traditional European poetic forms goes so far that when rhyme and traditional forms are incorporated, they are used to serve the poet's purposes and intention. Ingrid de Kok says about this trend: “the rap stuff which

²⁴⁵ J.M. Coetzee. *Youth*. London: Vintage, 2003 (first published by Secker & Warburg in 2002). Chapter 3, 21.

²⁴⁶ Molapong (2005: x).

²⁴⁷ Sole (1996: 3).

took over from worker poetry has helped because it has loosened form, and re-introduced linguistic and performance playfulness”.²⁴⁸

But not everyone sees this trend so positively. Karen Press (born 1956) critically states that in poetry, she is very interested in style, form, vocabulary and technical excellence.²⁴⁹ “I do skim a lot of avowedly ‘political’ poetry to see where the poetry and the politics meet, but mostly it is in the usual place of simplistic politics and less than stunning technique, so I don’t feel it helps me to take my own work with that political focus much further”.²⁵⁰ This harsh statement about political poetry shows she has different goals than poets of colour, as is confirmed by the following quote:

nothing I’ve ever done with what I’ve written, has been about trying to get to an audience in a deliberate sense of wanting to write so that people would like what I wrote or even so that people would read what I wrote because the starting point is something you really need to write about. [...] For me writing is something you want to make. It’s almost like a physical craft. You want to make this object with your hands and when you’ve made it, then there comes another stage which is thinking about publishing it.²⁵¹

This truly differentiates her from performance oriented poets, as those definitely think right from the start about how the audience will respond to their poetry.

It can be seen that turning away from the traditional also results in the fact that upcoming South African poets are often criticised by other poets and critics for their seemingly simple or irreverent style and for their confessional tone. Robert Berold complains:

Too often in South African poetry one looks for the poem and finds the author instead. Some authors are saying things elegantly or passionately, but still just saying things, without the consciousness that they’re giving birth to something separate from themselves.²⁵²

It is true, much poetry is written in a confessional way and the style of South African woman poets is often very personal. It is frequently very difficult to

²⁴⁸ Berold (2003: 116).

²⁴⁹ Berold (2003: 15).

²⁵⁰ Berold (2003: 16).

²⁵¹ Berold (2003: 17).

²⁵² Berold (2003: 16).

separate their poems from auto-biographical, social and other subjects. They write about experiences they have had and about crises they have gone through, and therefore their poems are very authentic and profound, but not necessarily and consciously 'artistic'. Hélène Cixous, who coined the term *Écriture féminine* in her essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" in 1981, and who demanded that "Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies",²⁵³ would be pleased to see that many South African woman poets "offer sustained women's voices, a general characteristic being a reversal of the 'masculine' concept of the poem as product. Instead, we [South Africans] have poems as processes of experience".²⁵⁴

Equally, this reminds us of the ideas of the *Écriture féminine*, as this strain of feminist literary theory places experience before language. In several cases, one can go along with what Menan du Plessis said in 1989 in the introduction to *Siren Songs*, edited by Nohra Moerat: "it would be absurd to pretend that these poems in any way aspire to being 'high art'. They should be read, I think, for what they are: the speaking voices of South African Women. They say a lot about our country".²⁵⁵ At the same time, 'simplicity' is not only to be found amongst women writers. In an interview from December 1994, Mzi Mahola says about his poetic style:

It is very deliberate. When I write something I always want to be simple. I don't believe in using flashy terms. Even when I talk with people I never use words that are going to obscure my meaning. I like to be simple.²⁵⁶

Besides the notion of *Écriture féminine*, which to a certain degree influenced South African women writers, Sharon L. Joffe argues that even earlier, there was a strong influence from the American 'confessional poetry' of the 1950s on the African Black Consciousness Movement, which still lingers today.

²⁵³ Hélène Cixous. "The Laugh of the Medusa." *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*. Eds. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1991 (first published in 1981). 334-349. 335.

²⁵⁴ Chapman (2002: 502).

²⁵⁵ Menan du Plessis. "Introduction". *Siren Songs – An Anthology Of Poetry Written By Women*. Ed. Nohra Moerat. Athlone: BLAC Publishing House, 1989. No pagination.

²⁵⁶ Berold (2003: 45).

Poetry and politics mutually influence one another within certain societies. It is completely impossible to read the poetry of black South Africans and African Americans during the years of the struggle for civil rights and political representation without considering the common bond of politics that gave rise to these poems of the oppressed.²⁵⁷

The Black Arts Movement in the United States definitely was a model for political empowerment. “Black Consciousness leaders stressed the importance of poetry as a medium for both political change and for black cultural assertion”.²⁵⁸

Growing like a tree, South African poetry has evolved, from the sturdy stock of traditional oral poetry, with numerous influences including traditional story-telling, English written poetry, the possibilities offered by printing and the sense of urgency coming from the desire for political change. All of these influences and the poets’ attempt to write non-elitist poetry are reasons why many modern poems seem to be simple structured. Poetry is now meant to be for everybody. Yet one must not forget how challenging it is to live up to the standards of such an aesthetic principle, whereby poetry has to remain at the same time simple yet profound.

²⁵⁷ Joffe (2001: 207).

²⁵⁸ Joffe (2001: 201).

III.4 Language and its impact on the creation of an identity

This study concentrates on South African poetry written in English, even though a number of South Africans believe that the African languages and Afrikaans are more suited to poetry than English. Amongst these is Robert Berold, an expert on poetry who says that, compared to Afrikaans, “English [...] is not so resonantly written. That is changing slowly as Africa breathes into it, but it’s still relentlessly flat, the language of commerce and politics”,²⁵⁹ to which the poet Karen Press adds: “...and of polite cowardice”.²⁶⁰ Yet, even though Afrikaans used to have its own, stable readership due to the numerous and famous Afrikaans poets and their poetry, according to Anthea Garman, even poets like Antjie Krog are “pragmatically conscious that [English] has greater reach and acceptability both in South Africa and internationally”.²⁶¹ Poets like her, therefore, have started to write in or translate their poetry into English to make it accessible to a wider audience and to additional markets: “I longed to interact as a poet with South Africans who do not read Afrikaans – in the same way that I was communicating with an enthusiastic Afrikaans audience”.²⁶² In the acknowledgments to *Body Bereft*,²⁶³ Antjie Krog states that, as a solution, to feel integrated with her poems published in English, all are first written in Afrikaans and later translated “keeping the underlying Afrikaans structure and rhythm intact”. She further notes that the translations “sometimes [differ] from the original Afrikaans in content and/or form”.²⁶⁴ For this reason, as well as for the fact that “the idiosyncratic – and well known – voice that Krog has cultivated as a poet is strongly evident in the text”,²⁶⁵ I consider her English versions to be on an equal plane to her Afrikaans poetry, and they are therefore included in this study.

²⁵⁹ Berold (2003: 16).

²⁶⁰ Berold (2003: 16).

²⁶¹ Anthea Garman. “The Mass Subject in Krog’s *Country of My Skull*”. *Power, Politics and Identity in South African Media*. Eds. Adrian Hadland et al. Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2008 (first published online in 2006). 19.

²⁶² Antjie Krog. *Down to my last skin*. Johannesburg: Random House, 2000. 3.

²⁶³ Antjie Krog. *Body Bereft*. Roggebaai: Umuzi, 2006.

²⁶⁴ Both quotes in Krog (2006: 112).

²⁶⁵ Garman (2006: 19).

The choice of language is very important in South Africa, in and out of literary contexts. As poetry is a genre which has a reputation for not being commercially profitable, the choice of language is a very important factor for publishers, audiences, buyers, etc. English, as the emerging South African voice, is the best selling language for poetry in South Africa. Afrikaans, by comparison, does not sell worse, but it is confined within the borders of South Africa. Further, Afrikaans poetry is essentially restricted to a mainly white (and a small coloured) audience or readership and to intellectuals, whereas modern South African writers and publishers in English have a wider, even an international audience in mind.

Ironically, whereas the Apartheid government had purposely promoted the African languages, the Blacks themselves saw English as their language of liberation. Thus, contrary to Karen Press' remark quoted above, in South Africa, English has been used in many powerful poems that were outspoken against political injustice. In performance poetry, English functions as a *lingua franca* when at a performance all the audience does not share the same mother tongue. The aim in using this *lingua franca* is to do the best to make the whole audience understand and share the same message. Performance poets in South Africa, therefore, mostly perform in the dominant language, English. Depending on the milieu and on the audience, the English these poets are familiar with and which they use for their poetry is often mixed with Afrikaans, sometimes in the form of the Gauteng pidgin language, *Tsotsi-taal*; or the Cape Coloured's dialect, which was often called *Gam-taal*, but has now been 'upgraded' to *Kaapse taal*; or the largest African languages Sotho, Zulu or Xhosa. The use of other languages or even a mix often serves to punctuate the English and to lend authenticity. This is not surprising, if one considers the fact that most South Africans grow up multilingual (mentioned in Chapter I), and that even, or in fact especially, poor children in the townships are multilingual and speak a black language plus English and/or Afrikaans from an early age on. In the Caribbean context, Jean Jacques Weber writes: "Many of them use Creole English as a way of disidentifying from Standard English. [...] One thing they all have in common is an attempt to challenge monolithic, restrictive conceptions of identity – Whether it is Caribbean or British identity".²⁶⁶ This also could be true for South African poets.

²⁶⁶ Childs, Weber and Williams (2006: 179).

Nevertheless, for the formerly oppressed, Afrikaans had and still has the stigma of the oppressors' language that many people try to avoid. English, therefore, has always been the more acceptable language. (In comparison, Adrienne Rich's struggle with the *English* language is portrayed in the following, logical lines: "this is the oppressor's language/ yet I need it to talk to you".²⁶⁷) The conflict with the Afrikaans language is expressed in the novel *The Madonna of Excelsior*, when Zakes Mda's character Viliki confronts his sister Popi who states that "Afrikaans is the language of the oppressor" with the following words:

Afrikaans cannot be the language of the oppressor. It is the language of many people of different colours who are themselves oppressed. Even in its origins it was not the language of the oppressor. The oppressor appropriated it and misused it. The slave masters' language was Dutch. The slaves took that Dutch and used it in their own way, adding structures and words from their own original languages... the languages of the Malay people...or the Khoikhoi people...of many other people. Afrikaans was a hybrid...a creole spoken by the slaves. The slave masters took it and made it their own. As far as I am concerned, today's coloured people have more right to the Afrikaans language than the people who call themselves Afrikaners. The true Afrikaners are the coloured people.²⁶⁸

There is much truth in this view, and yet there are the well-known and tragic events of the uprisings against Afrikaans as the first language in all South African schools and against Apartheid's Bantu Education policies: the Soweto Uprising in 1976, which post-Apartheid South Africans commemorate on June 16th, Youth Day, is the most well-known of these events.

Black African languages have not yet asserted themselves in (written) poetry. Poetry magazines and journals do print poetry in black African languages sporadically, but it is rare for entire poetry collections to get published in a black African language only. Black African language literature sells even more poorly than poetry in Afrikaans, and therefore publishers do not often take the risk. The readership is not big enough and the chance of finding buyers of collections of poetry in a black African language is even smaller than it is in English or Afrikaans. Instead, the spread of black African language literature is achieved over the radio or through performance poetry at live gatherings.

²⁶⁷ As quoted in Jan Montefiore. *Feminism and Poetry – Language, Experience, Identity in Women's Writing*. London, Chicago, Sydney: Pandora Press, 2004. 196.

²⁶⁸ Mda (2002: 179-180).

You told me

by Makhosazana Xaba

You told me you speak French,
took lessons evening after evening.
It was important to you that,
when you go on your dream holiday in Paris,
you can communicate
because the French are hostile
when you do not speak their language.

You told me you speak Yiddish
because your grandparents spoke it to you,
you learnt it as a child and, surprisingly,
you still can speak it,
decades later.

You told me you've had
Black friends since 1976,
since the struggle days,
because you were involved
in the struggle for that long.
You drove comrades to their homes
after meetings, at night,
braving the drive back to your own suburb.
You met your comrades' parents,
their families.
You even baby-sat their children.

You told me that
you loved your nanny with all your heart
because she raised you like her own.
In fact, you told me
you used to run to her
in her servants' quarters, at the back,
when your big house in front felt lonely
and your parents were having a fight.

Yes, you even said,
you said you preferred her company
to that of your parents
and your parents' friends
because she sang songs to you
put you on her lap
and rocked you to sleep
while your family
had arguments around the dinner table.

As a consequence of the ambivalent feelings of the poets about their use of English as a literary language, language itself often becomes a central theme in their poems. Makhosazana Xaba's poem "You told me"²⁶⁹ for example deals with the fact that some South Africans brag about the languages they have learnt in the course of their lives and yet, all of these are European languages and have nothing to do with the African context. In this poem Makhosazana Xaba mentions the languages of the colonisers, English and French, and here additionally Yiddish.

It strikes Makhosazana Xaba as incongruous if someone claims they are trying to immerse themselves in a culture or, as here, says he/she was "involved/ in the struggle for that long" yet still is not interested in the language of the people.

The poem's addressee is characterised by the stance that "It was important to you that,/ when you go on your dream holiday in Paris,/ you can commu-

²⁶⁹ Makhosazana Xaba. *these hands*. Elim Hospital, Limpopo Province: Timbila Poetry Project, 2005. 35-36.

You have academic degrees,
articles published in peer-reviewed
international journals.

You are a true South African.
Dedicated your life to the struggle.
You told me you even had black lovers
because colour never meant anything to you.

You also told me you have taken
so many Zulu lessons in your life
you've lost count,
but the lessons were too didactic,
the language too tonal,
time too tight,
struggle meetings took too much time,
you still cannot speak Zulu.

nicate”, while the addressee remains unable to communicate with the people back home, including their former nanny. The lyrical speaker (who appears to be the poet) criticises the false pride in being multilingual, educated and tolerant. It appears to seem ironic to Makhosazana Xaba, the black writer, when her

lyrical speaker says: “You are a true South African./ Dedicated your life to the struggle./ You told me you even had black lovers/ because colour never meant anything to you.” And yet, as the poem’s last stanza shows, there are many excuses when it comes to learning the language of the oppressed people, which should be one of the priorities to someone who is really motivated and interested in their cause: “but the lessons were too didactic,/ the language too tonal,/ time too tight,/ struggle meetings took too much time,/ you still cannot speak Zulu.”

The poem makes clear that one’s use of language stands for much more. It is through language that one gains real insight into a society. No matter how engaged someone is, not knowing the language of one’s partner in the struggle is a barrier to a sympathetic co-operation between equals: in this context, English becomes synonymous for superior, for those choosing to fight in the struggle. Zulu becomes a synonym for those who have no choice but to fight. Once more, the white person addressed in the poem was engaged, but from an outsider’s perspective, without really ‘understanding’ the situation and its realities. The other conflict, which becomes visible, is that even a conscientious poet such as Makhosazana Xaba writes her poems in English and not in Zulu.

The Naming Journey

by Lisa Combrinck

My journey has only just begun.

Through the rough roads of the city,
the pathways of the countryside.

I am only makoti
the daughter-in-law
from afar

a stranger to these parts
to this bare landscape
to this hard earth and high air.

My ears are not attuned to the sounds I hear.
Everyone speaks in tongues I do not understand.
I know nothing of the talks,
the reasons behind the laughter.

I know only the warmth of smiles
and the gestures that accompany conversations
I tread carefully on the cowdung floor of the shed.
I drink water with wonder from a calabash.

I stand on the stoep
and look down to where you point
at the dam below.

I look and want so much to understand
but I cannot even begin to imagine
our children growing up in these parts.

I cannot see them swimming here
and playing on this hard, dry earth.
I see only blood-stained little knees,
body parts scraped and bruised by the
hardness of everything.

Indeed this is a land of hard earth
and people who are as strong and old as stones
wisened by time and life.

This ambiguous relationship with and the dependency on the English language also becomes clear in Lisa Combrinck's poem "The Naming Journey".²⁷⁰ The poem describes the literally 'far' journey, from the city to the countryside, of the lyrical speaker, who describes herself as "only makoti/ the daughter-in-law/ from afar". The stanzas in the middle that contrast the countryside with the home of the lyrical speaker skilfully and beautifully conceal a declaration of love for the city of Cape Town. The lyrical speaker's attempts to find her²⁷¹ place in her husband's familiar, rural environment fails as she is "a stranger to these parts/ to this bare landscape/ to this hard earth and high air.// My ears are not attuned to the sounds I hear./ Everyone speaks in tongues I do not understand./ I know nothing of the talks,/ the reasons behind the laughter."

²⁷⁰ Lisa Combrinck. *An Infinite Longing for Love – A Collection of Poetry*. Pretoria: Skotaville Media Publications, 2005. 76-78.

²⁷¹ In this study, the lyrical speakers are mostly identified as female speakers, which makes sense when one considers the fact that women poets mostly write from a personal background.

I stand here
with your seed from the previous night
still planted in my womb
still uncertain of its destination.

No, I am not even a visitor here,
not yet makoti,
only a fumbling, stumbling stranger
to these parts.

I smile shyly at your grandmother.
I tell her about my life at the coast
how the weather changes three times a day
from sun to wind to rain.

I mean to say that I miss
the protective presence of mountains
and the sweet perfume of the sea air.

I miss hearing the gulls overhead
and breathing the heavy, wet air
that weighs me down but also wakes me.

I want to say that I come from a land of wind
and forests and fynbos and mountain daisies

where you can hide all your life
in the caves of the heart
where the sea swallows your soul
and you become at one with the rain.

This is what I should have said to your
.....grandmother
When she instructed me to speak:

I am nothing
I am no-one
not even makoti
I am only a silent visitor
with an unpalatable tongue
ignorant of the speech of these parts
I stutter and stammer
with smiling faltering syllables
in the only language I know.

Nikhono
I am only a stranger to these parts.

The lyrical speaker admits “I know only the warmth of smiles/ and the gestures that accompany conversations”, and as in Makhosazana Xaba’s poem, the language, the understanding, forms a double barrier: “I look and want so much to understand/ but I cannot even begin to imagine/ our children growing up in these parts.” The last two stanzas show that the lack of language skills keeps the lyrical speaker from integrating, excludes her from belonging: “I am nothing/ I am no-one/ not even makoti/ I am only a silent visitor/ with an unpalatable tongue/ ignorant of the speech of these parts/ I stutter and stammer/ with smiling faltering syllables/ in the only language I know.// Nikhono/ I am only a stranger to these parts.” These lines show how crucial language is when it comes to belonging and how insufficient English is in South Africa, when one leaves the modern towns behind.

The two poems at hand are both in free verse, and yet they are clearly cohesive units, a result which the two poets accomplished in very different ways.

To create cohesion, Makhosazana Xaba's poem uses repetitions at the beginning of her stanzas, namely, the recurring "You told me". In "The Naming Journey", it is the rural setting, the landscapes and the word "Makoti", which permeate the text, thereby providing cohesion. Makhosazana Xaba's stanzas are coherent units, almost in a traditional way, while Lisa Combrinck's poem does not have any stanzas in a traditional sense. Her units, rather, are regulated by the reader's breath²⁷² and the thought or idea. Both poems are narrative and, when 'heard', very close to prose, and yet they differ greatly: Makhosazana Xaba's poem is 'piercing', it reminds one of an oration or a speech to convince those in the audience of their hypocrisy. Her poem builds up tension till the denouement in the very last line. "The Naming Journey", on the other hand, resembles a monologue, as this poem is in a much more pensive and withdrawn mood. These two poems represent two different ways of dealing with the problems surrounding the subject of language in the South African context.

A third representative poem for the language issue is "born in africa but",²⁷³ which will be discussed in detail in Chapter VI.1. It deals with the difficulty for Coloureds of accepting English as their mother tongue: "born in africa but/ breastfed another mother tongue/ put to sleep on foreign lullabies". "born in africa but" raises the issue, just as "You told me" and "The naming journey" do, of whether or not one may be truly African and find one's identity, without speaking an African language.

²⁷² Cf. the US American "Beat Poet" Allen Ginsberg and his notion of the length of a verse.

²⁷³ Ndlovu (2000: 11).

IV. South African poets

IV.1 Male poets in South Africa: setting the scene

It is said
that poets write of beauty
Of form, of flowers and of love
But the words I write are of pain and of rage²⁷⁴ – James Matthews 1972

While the focus of this study lies on women poets, the male poets must not be forgotten and shall be given credit in this chapter. A division of male poets of the 20th Century into those before and those after 1994 would be an arbitrary one as many of those writing before this year, in which the first democratic elections took place, continued to write after 1994, and some are still writing today. Male poets have been anthologised for decades. As an example, in the most influential anthology, Michael Chapman's *The New Century of South African Poetry* (2002), there is a broad variety of male poets represented: poets writing in English, in Afrikaans and in African languages, poets of all skin colours, poets from every type of profession. Originally at least published poets were predominantly male – and white. Yet great changes, as alluded to in the few lines of James Matthews above, took place in poetry in the second half of the 20th Century, especially in the 1970s. It is significant that until then, hardly any black poets had been published in South Africa. The struggle against Apartheid and the rise of the Black Consciousness Movement, however, demanded new ways of expression and new subject matters, and this definitely helps to group poets into

- mostly white poets writing in English, many of whom left South Africa,
- poets of the Black Consciousness Movement,
- white poets in the struggle against Apartheid, and
- those male poets who have had their creative peak since 1994.

The purpose of this chapter is to summarise the history of South African men's poetry, which, due to the common neglect of the women poets, is treated in detail in numerous books in order to sketch the 'background' against which the women poets discussed in this study write.

²⁷⁴ Matthews and Thomas (1972: Poem "1").

There is a long tradition of English poetry in South Africa, dating back to the pioneer²⁷⁵ **Thomas Pringle**, 1789-1834. From early on, poetry was often a vehicle of social criticism. This chapter starts with the poets of the first half of the 20th Century who are still well known and read today. Since colonial times, these poets have mostly styled their poetry after the example of British, and in particular of Victorian poetry, even when they tried to find their own style and voice, unique to South Africa. At first, there were the ‘old’ writers of the traditional English school, many of whom were educated in or emigrated to England later. **Francis Carey Slater** (1876-1959) started the search for a distinctive symbolic South African poetic language and voice, distinct from the British and American poetic traditions, and became known for his knowledge of the Xhosas whom he often described in his poetry, which was rich in images and rhythm. **Herbert Isaac Ernest Dhlomo** (1903-1956)²⁷⁶ also concentrated on portraying African life in his poetry. He is considered the first great black poet, and a pioneer in black theatre. Even though his own poetry, written for an educated white audience, is geared to the English and Western literary tradition, which can be seen in his poetry’s style and form (e.g. his use of rhyming couplets), in his critical essays, Dhlomo pleaded for something which the Soweto Poets realised in the 1970s: a poetry which suited the black reality. Yet, according to Michael Chapman, **Roy Campbell** (1901-1957) was the “first South African poet of true stature”.²⁷⁷ A Durbanite, he fell out of favour with the press due to his pro-fascist statements during the Spanish civil war, and also with the at the time famous writer Sarah Gertrude Millin, because he had no “solid white South African values”²⁷⁸ and because of his “satiric treatment of General Smuts”.²⁷⁹ He finally left South Africa in 1927. His friend **William Plomer** (1903-1973) also spent only a few years of his life in KwaZulu-Natal, but

²⁷⁵ For Dorothy Driver the pioneer is Lady Anne Barnard (1750-1825). Chapman et al.(1992: 454).

²⁷⁶ Not anthologized in Michael Chapman’s *The New Century of South African Poetry*.

²⁷⁷ Chapman, Michael. 2004. “Roy Campbell: Selected Poems Blurb.” Michael Chapman. <http://www.michaelchapman.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=39&Itemid=25> (accessed August 8, 2008).

²⁷⁸ Sally-Ann Murray and A.E. Voss. “Roy Campbell’s *Adamastor* - Reading and Re-reading the South African Poems”. *Perspectives on South African English Literature*. Eds. Michael Chapman, Colin Gardner, Es’kia Mphahlele. Parklands: AD Donker, 1992. 95.

²⁷⁹ Murray and Voss in: Chapman et al (1992: 95).

these years were very creative and productive. After his first novel criticised racially segregated South Africa, he was considered a rebel together with Roy Campbell and the novelist Laurens van der Post. With these two he had founded and run the satirical magazine “Voorslag” for three issues till it was obliged to close down because of its radical views. In his mid-twenties, he travelled to Japan and later emigrated to England.

Their KwaZulu-Natal friend and founding member of the later forcibly dissolved South African Liberal Party, **Alan Paton** (1903-1988), a well-known novelist, is often forgotten to have written poetry as well, and so is Peter Abrahams. “Could you not Write Otherwise?”²⁸⁰ shows Alan Paton’s clear anti-Apartheid attitude, which he always expressed through peaceful opposition rooted in his deep Christian-liberal views. The work of **Peter Abrahams** (1919-2001) deals with racial oppression which he met as a Coloured in South Africa. He left for England in 1939, and later moved on to Jamaica. For his style and diction he turned to Afro-American poetry. Michael Chapman found himself tempted to discover in Abrahams and Dhlomo “the origins of a characteristically Soweto style”.²⁸¹

²⁸⁰ “Could you not write otherwise, this woman said to me

Could you not write of things really poetical?

Of many-coloured birds dipping their beaks

Into many-coloured flowers? [...]

Must you write always of black men and Indians,

Of half-castes and Jews, Englishmen and Afrikaners,

Of problems insoluble and secret fears

That are best forgotten? [...]

Really, Madam, I do not like to mention it

But there is a voice that I cannot silence. [...]

It was with unbelieving ears I heard

My artless songs become the groans and cries of men.

And you, why you may pity me also,

For what do I do when such a voice is speaking,

What can I speak but what it wishes spoken?” Chapman (2002: 127).

²⁸¹ Michael Chapman (2007: 14).

Guy Butler (1918-2001) began writing very fine and elaborate poetry during his World War II military service. After that he studied at Oxford University, but returned to South Africa after graduating in 1947. He became a professor and Head of English at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, where he stayed till his retirement. As a highly regarded intellectual, he was known for his interest in promoting South African poets and poetry in English, but his “insistence upon ‘standards’ [known as “Butlerism”] was seen as yet another, if more subtle, means of excluding black expression during the peak years of apartheid”.²⁸² He seemed to have had no regard for committed and political poetry and found it difficult to acknowledge the new black poetic voices of the 1960s. The marine bacteriologist **Douglas Livingstone** (1932-1996) wrote outstanding and exhilarating poems on birds, animals, nature, people and love. Together with Sydney Clouts and the woman poet Ruth Miller they were “considered the ‘Radicals’ of the Imagination”.²⁸³ Even though poems like “Eland about Station 17” show his moral conscience, expressed in lines such as “There is much I cannot forgive my race”,²⁸⁴ Livingstone was, like Guy Butler, accused of overlooking the verbal skills in the “Polit-Lit”²⁸⁵ of the new black poets. He was further criticised for being reluctant to use his well-known name and talent in the resistance to Apartheid and for disappointing the expectation that his poetry might be politically engaged. **Sydney Clouts** (1926-1982) “made distinctive use of an anti-humanist aesthetic to protest against the appropriation, or ‘colonisation’, of others’ lives”.²⁸⁶ Yet liberal and individualistic views were controversial in the Apartheid 1960s, and so Clouts emigrated to London in 1961.

²⁸² Dennis Walder. 2001. “Guy Butler”. *The Independent* May 4. <<http://news.independent.co.uk/people/obituaries/article35249.ece>> (accessed August 8, 2008).

²⁸³ Cf. Cecily Lockett’s essay “Douglas Livingstone, Ruth Miller and Sydney Clouts: ‘Radicals’ of the Imagination” *Perspectives on South African English Literature*. Eds. Michael Chapman, C. Gardner, Es’kia Mphahlele. Parklands: AD Donker, 1992.

²⁸⁴ Dirk Klopper. No date. “A libidinal zone: The poetic legacy of Douglas Livingstone (45)”. *Unisa Online* <http://www.unisa.ac.za/default.asp?Cmd=ViewContent&ContentID=11850&P_ForPrint=1> (accessed August 8, 2008).

²⁸⁵ Douglas Livingstone. “Africa within us”. *Poetry South Africa: Selected Papers from Poetry 74*. Eds. P. Willhelm and J. Poley. Johannesburg: AD Donker, 1976. 142. And: Dirk Klopper. No date. “A libidinal zone: The poetic legacy of Douglas Livingstone (45)”. *Unisa Online* <http://www.unisa.ac.za/default.asp?Cmd=ViewContent&ContentID=11850&P_ForPrint=1> (accessed August 8, 2008).

²⁸⁶ Chapman (2002: 497).

Even though he belonged to the group of exiles, **Dennis Brutus**' (b.1924) must be seen as a poet of the era of the outspoken anti-Apartheid critics. Classified as coloured, he left South Africa in 1966, after his 18 month sentence to hard labour on Robben Island. His collection of poetry, *Letters to Martha*, which was inspired by this time in prison, was banned. Even in 1986, poems from it could still not be included in *New Inscapes*, edited by Robin Malan, even though the latter applied for permission from the Director of Security Legislation.²⁸⁷ The strategy of Dennis Brutus' poems remained to give expression to a campaign to negotiate on behalf of the oppressed. From exile, he kept on fighting against Apartheid.

Like Dennis Brutus, his former teacher, **Arthur Nortje** (1942-1970) wrote from the perspective of a Coloured in exile. He left South Africa for Oxford in 1965 and went on to Canada in 1967, trying in both countries to obtain citizenship in order to avoid being sent back to South Africa. Similarly to many of the women poets presented below, in his poetry, Arthur Nortje speaks of exile and his suffering from the alienation and stigmatisation of being classified a Coloured. In the end, Arthur Nortje died from a drug overdose in Oxford; his poetry was first collectively published posthumously.

Dennis Brutus delivered the funeral oration, saying that Nortje 'knew the hardships and squalor of ghetto existence on the fringes of society', but that he 'never accepted the denials that apartheid society tried to impose on him'. He went on to say that Nortje 'lived life fully, relishing it, perhaps over-compensating for the denials he had known in his motherland and with an irreverence logical for one who had been denied cultural roots in his own society'.²⁸⁸

This was a very tragic end to a very promising young poet, who could otherwise one day have witnessed the years of firm and active resistance and even the end of Apartheid, and who then could have returned to South Africa to make peace with the country which had caused him so much pain.

²⁸⁷ Robin Malan, ed. *New Inscapes*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press Southern Africa, 2007 (first published in 2001). 104.

²⁸⁸ (funeral oration, 17 December 1970, Unisa). Dirk Klopper. 2004. "Arthur Nortje: a life story". *Arthur Nortje: Poet and South African*. Eds. Craig McLuckie and Ross Tyner. 1-28. Pretoria : Unisa Press. And: Unisa Online Library. No date. "library: arthur nortje - biographies". *Unisa Online* <<http://www.unisa.ac.za/Default.asp?Cmd=ViewContent&ContentID=18339>> (accessed August 8, 2008).

In the 1950s, the 'Drum Decade', the anti-Apartheid struggle was rather sporadic and easily suppressed, in literature the years are called the 'Silent Sixties'. Yet in the late 1960s, the Black Consciousness Movement emerged as a response to the massacre in Sharpeville and with it a new generation of black²⁸⁹ writers. The poets of the Black Consciousness Movement started to develop a new, an insistent, outspoken voice which was very different artistically, crying out loud for change, relying more on being rooted in the African environment and traditions and using stylistic devices from African oral tradition. Their

anger cannot be contained in "unnecessary and cumbersome ornaments" but bursts forth in words akin to Walt Whitman's "barbaric yawp." Political protest and the desire to escape from society's constraints are directly linked to the movement away from the Western literary tradition.

By altering the diction, form, and meter of their poetry, Soweto poets were able to turn away from standard Western poetic forms and mould their work into a formal embodiment of their desire for protest and change.²⁹⁰

At the beginning influenced by the Black Consciousness Movement in the United States,²⁹¹ black South Africans started a struggle for political rights, political empowerment and self-determination. The political protest went hand in hand with the rejection of pre-Modernist Western poetic traditions, for example by turning to free verse poetry. So the new black poetry of resistance expressed itself not only in its content, but also in its unconventional form.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Soweto poets gained influence as the spokespeople for their cause²⁹² and were supported by the Black Consciousness leaders who recognized the value and importance of poetry as a medium in the struggle for liberation, for political change and for black cultural consciousness and assertion. They turned to poetry as the traditional means of expression compared to novels, which are associated with Western individualism. Also, poetry allows for a community experience, for communalism. It is significant that

²⁸⁹ At the time, all 'non-white' writers tended to call themselves black, especially the Coloureds, thereby showing their disapproval of the term that classified them. For Richard Rive, one was not black biologically, but politically, when suppressed.

²⁹⁰ Joffe (2001: 203).

²⁹¹ Joffe's study points out, hereby, that the influence was mutual as the struggle against segregation brought about a kind of brotherhood. This is seen in the works of US American poets like Baraka and Hughes, which deal with South Africa, Apartheid and the racial problems involved.

²⁹² Joffe (2001: 201).

many of those poets who had been active in the struggle for freedom were later rewarded with posts in the ANC political structure after the end of Apartheid.

Indeed, the Soweto poets promoted liberation and motivated the people to action. It went that far that in 1977, the then Minister of Police, Jimmy Kruger, warned a “National Party congress of the threat posed by ‘Black Power Poetry’”²⁹³ and thus by the Soweto poets. This led to the banning of numerous collections of poetry written by black South African poets, such as James Matthews and Gladys Thomas’ *Cry Rage!* in 1972 and in 1980 Oswald Mtshali’s *Fireflames*.²⁹⁴

The South African literary renaissance in general was brought to life by the fictional works of Alex la Guma, Can Themba, Nat Nakasa, Richard Rive, Bloke Modisane, Casey Motsisi, Todd Matshikiza, Arthur Maimane, Peter Clarke, Lewis Nkosi, Es’kia (Ezekiel) Mphahlele as well as Athol Fugard, a well-known white dramatist. It is interesting that in the 1960s only two black women published books in English, Bessie Head and Noni Jabavu, and both did so from outside the country.²⁹⁵ The most important poets of the Black Consciousness Era in South Africa, between 1967-1984, were Oswald Mtshali, James Matthews, Sipho Seplama, Mafika Gwala and Mongane Serote. Their more and more black-oriented vision and the stress they placed on being African, can be seen in their dropping their English names in favour of their African ones.²⁹⁶

After **Mbuyiseni Oswald (Joseph) Mtshali** (b.1940) had published his *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum* in 1971, for a while it looked like the forceful conviction with which he and the other black writers wrote had left white writers feeling superseded and voiceless. In rejecting the “Western poetic form and structure”,²⁹⁷ Mtshali was instrumental in the change of what had been simple protest into the uplifting spirit of Black Consciousness.²⁹⁸

²⁹³ Brown (1998: 177).

²⁹⁴ In general, novels are more easily banned, while poetry, which can be ‘passed by word of mouth’, is next to impossible to suppress.

²⁹⁵ Dorothy Driver. “*Drum* magazine (1951-99) and the spatial configurations of gender”. *text, theory, space – land, literature and history in south Africa and Australia*. Eds. Kate Darian-Smith, Liz Gunner and Sarah Nuttall. London: Routledge, 1996. 231-242.

²⁹⁶ Chapman (2007: 12).

²⁹⁷ Joffe (2001: 203).

²⁹⁸ Pordzik (2000: 290).

The protest of **(Sydney) Siphso Sepamla** (1932-2007) also included the use of a South African mix of languages without compromising fundamental poetic aesthetics. The Zulu poet **Mazisi Kunene** (1930-2006) became famous for re-writing history in his epic poem on *Emperor Shaka the Great*, which is inspired by the famous Zulu leader. **Mafika Gwala** (b.1946) also writes from the perspective of a Zulu background. His language is rich and rhythmical. He was very active in the anti-Apartheid struggle and in the definition of 'Black Standards'.

For Don M. Banned

by Mongane Wally Serote

It is a dry white season
 dark leaves don't last, their brief lives dry out
 and with a broken heart they dive down gently headed for the earth
 not even bleeding.
 it is a dry white season brother,
 only the trees know the pain as they still stand erect
 dry like steel, their branches dry like wire,
 indeed, it is a dry white season
 but seasons come to pass.



M. W. Serote.²⁹⁹



Don Mattera.³⁰⁰

Mongane (Wally) Serote (b.1944), too, was politically very active in Soweto and was arrested and held in solitary confinement. His 1972 *Yakhal' Inkomo* can be considered one of the most important works of the new black era. In 1974, he left the country. Like Mtshali's, his widely-read poetry was crucial in the creation of Black Consciousness writing and in the revival of black writing in general in the 1970s. His coloured friend **Don Mattera**³⁰¹ (b.1935) was equally engaged in the struggle and banned as well as put under house arrest for several years.

²⁹⁹ Photo: Mongane Wally Serote <homepages.compuserve.de/PeterRHorn/belle.htm> (accessed August 8, 2004). Inspired by Serote's poem, *A Dry White Season* later became the title of André Brink's famous novel.

³⁰⁰ Photo: Don Mattera <http://www.ukzn.ac.za/ccca/PA2003/Don_Mattera_PA2003_web.jpg> (accessed August 8, 2004).

³⁰¹ Don Mattera <http://www.baeng-2000.de/Unsere_Themen/Afrika/Don_Mattera/don_mattera.html> (accessed August 8, 2004).

The most prominent coloured protest poet within South Africa, the Capetonian **James Matthews** (b.1929), was a fairly important and popular figure in the Black Consciousness Movement during the 1970s and the resistance movement of the 1980s, and he is still active in the literary scene today. His and Gladys Thomas' joint publication *Cry Rage!* was the first collection of poetry to be banned. His greatest popularity came before the triumph of poetry as a genre during political rallies of the 1980s. Two of his socio-critical poems will serve as illustrations: His poem "10" criticises "Family Day" as "Another of white man's mockeries" for it "Has no meaning for us as/ we suffer",³⁰² and his poem 23 "the virgins of manenberg" is timeless. Today it can be read in connection with the spread of HIV/Aids in South Africa.

Further names of Coloureds or Indians mentioned in the context of the anti-Apartheid struggle nation-wide are that of **Achmat Dangor** (b.1948),³⁰³ who was banned from South Africa for several years; **Donald Parenzee** (b.1948), who tellingly dedicated his haunting first collection of poetry "to those who work below the surface";³⁰⁴ **Shabbir Banoobhai** (b.1949), a very fine poet influenced by Islamic poetry, and faith; and the medical doctor **Farouk Asvat** (b.1952), whose poetry was so highly political that he was under house arrest for several years.

The poems which especially brought Farouk Asvat into conflict with the regime were his poems on the 'defenestrations' and other events at John Foster Square in Pretoria. In other poems, such as "O that we should tolerate this", he criticised the injustices of the Apartheid system such as political murders and the suppression of freedom of speech. He also wrote on being a poet, in "The Poet",³⁰⁵ and on the situation of Coloureds, such as in "Part of Africa",³⁰⁶ where the lyrical speaker says that his mother wants him "to look like a whiteman", when he actually does not want to "socialize with a whitey" and instead would rather "mix with the darkie boys from Soweto". Farouk Asvat also portrayed the

³⁰² James Matthews in Matthews and Thomas (1972).

³⁰³ Unfortunately this poet is not included in Michael Chapman's *The New Century of South African Poetry*.

³⁰⁴ Donald Parenzee. *Driven To Work*. Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1985.

³⁰⁵ Farouk Asvat. *The Time of our Lives*. Fordsburg: A Piquant Publication, 2007. 43.

³⁰⁶ Asvat (2007: 68).



Chris van Wyk.
SPIER Poetry Festival.
Stellenbosch 2007.
Photo: Isabelle Vogt 2007

time of Apartheid in South Africa and the revolution's coming, in, for example, "The Pseudo-Intellectuals".³⁰⁷

Christopher (Chris) van Wyk (b.1957) was another popular and award winning activist of his time. Similarly, his subject matter is as provocative as, for one, that of Farouk Asvat's "In detention".³⁰⁸ His humour is well known and very much in evidence in his writings portraying life in coloured communities.

There were white writers too who were active in the struggle against Apartheid because their conscience did not allow them to simply accept the political system of the country. These white writers form a movement that Ralph Pordzik called the "White Consciousness".³⁰⁹

The Afrikaans poet **Breyten Breytenbach** (b.1939) is one of the most famous white writers speaking out against the Apartheid system. He went so far as to renounce his blood links to the 'white tribe'. In 1975, he was charged under the *Terrorism Act* and imprisoned for seven years for terrorist activities. He had used a false passport after having been forbidden to enter the country due to his marriage to a 'non-white' French woman. His most famous book probably is *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* dating from 1985. He remains a prolific and successful writer today and has received many of the highest literary awards within and outside South Africa.

Lionel Abrahams (1928-2004) is considered a 'humanist'. Even though he did not speak out against Apartheid himself, Lionel Abrahams' Renoster Press published two of the Black Consciousness writers who started off the new era: Oswald Mtshali with *The Sound of a Cowhide Drum* and Mongane Wally Serote with *Yakhal' Inkomo*. The poets Lionel Abrahams and **Stephen Gray** (b.1941) are

³⁰⁷ Asvat (2007: 14).

³⁰⁸ "In detention" by Chris van Wyk. In: Robin Malan, ed. *A poetry companion to Worldscapes and New Inscapes*. Cape Town: Oxford Uni Press Southern Africa, 1998. 290.

³⁰⁹ Pordzik (2000: 217).

also well-known as literary critics. Lionel Abrahams criticised sloganeering and always stood for excellence in poetry. **Patrick Cullinan** (b.1932), **Geoffrey Haresnape** (b.1939), a professor for poetry at UCT, whose own poetry is rich in intertextual references to other artists and to the white South Africans' dilemma, and editor **Robert Berold** (b.1948) are poets who need to be mentioned as they did a lot for English language South African poetry, but they were not active in the struggle.

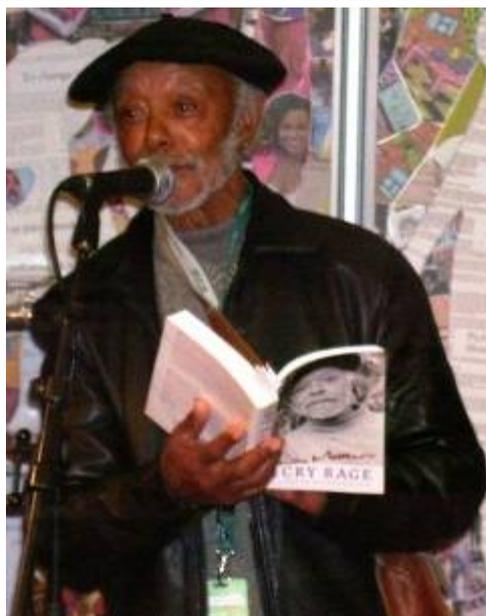
Very active as the 'white conscience' of South Africa, were the Czech-born **Peter Horn** (b.1934), a prolific and thought-provoking writer and, in addition, a literary critic; **Jeremy Cronin** (b.1949), who even got imprisoned for his activities; and **Wopko Jensma** (b.1939, missing since 1994). This last published three volumes of poetry: *Sing for our Execution* (Ravan Press 1973), *where white is the colour where black is the number* (Ravan Press 1974), and *i must show you my clippings* (Ravan Press 1977). Wopko Jensma, who had himself reclassified as black, has been called 'The first South African' as he combines diverse cultures and experiences. Later he retreated from the public eye into psychological care. Those who also made a name for themselves in the anti-Apartheid struggle are the academics **Keith Gottschalk** (b.1946), **Kelwyn Sole** (b.1951) and Durban-based **Ari Sitas** (b.1952).

Additionally, amongst the committed poets there are especially two male performance poets who have to be mentioned in regard to performance poetry: the praise poets **Mzwakhe Mbuli** and **Alfred Qabula**, both of whom combine "Poetry, Politics and Performance".³¹⁰

Since 1994, very few publications exclusively focused on poetry have been brought out in South Africa. Certain anthologies, however, were published after this date and have interesting forewords. As already mentioned, the most important of them all is *The New Century of South African Poetry* by Michael Chapman from 2002. This anthology is certainly very comprehensive, and it already differs much from its preceding version of 1981, yet in a few years it will surely need to be updated again, when the full extent of post-Apartheid poetry has become visible.

³¹⁰ Brown (1998: 213).

There are household names that one meets regularly when talking about post-1994 poetry. First of all there is the lively **James Matthews** (b.1929), who paradoxically sticks out just because in person he is so short, and looks so small, so brittle and vulnerable, that one wonders how someone like him could have survived a South African prison. **Tatamkhulu Afrika** (1920-2002), who was actually educated as a white adopted child and renamed himself later, only started writing and publishing poetry at a



James Matthews reading from Cry Rage! C.Town Book Fair. Photo: I. Vogt. 2007.

very late age, after Apartheid. Then, there are still the scholars **Peter Horn** (b.1934) and **Chris Mann** (b.1948), whose written verse as well as his performance and multi-media poetry is influenced by different South African languages and won several awards. Further, there are **Kelwyn Sole** (b.1951), a Capetonian poet and academic at the University of Cape Town, and **Allan Kolski Horwitz** (b.1952), member of the performance poetry group “Botsotso Jesters” and editor of the poetry journal *Botstotso*.

The pharmacist **Gus Ferguson** (b.1940) is known for his humorous poetry and caricatures. His poem “Traders of the Lost Ark”³¹¹ (with its pun on the title of Steven Spielberg’s blockbuster film featuring Harrison Ford) shows parallels to the works of contemporary women poets. The poem describes the beautiful touristic Waterfront in Cape Town, but also the danger that South Africa could become an entirely superficial, capitalistic and materialistic country losing her roots, customs and spirituality on her way to modernity and globalisation. In our fast paced world, more and more people are in conflict with their inner being and their search for themselves. In “Traders of the Lost Ark”, Gus Ferguson criticises our pursuit of worldly wealth and the delusion of the ‘American Dream’, which is the questionable role model for the poor. The third stanza introduces a change, “All needs are met. Yet, things are missing” a thought which is echoed in Malika

³¹¹ de Kok and Ferguson (2001: 34).

Ndlovu's poem "Full Circle", which describes the moment when she reached exactly this point at which she too found that something was missing in her life spiritually.

Black contemporary voices are those of **Mzi Mahola** (b.1949), a guest at the Poetry Africa Festival 2006, who, when asked earlier whether he was pessimistic about the future, had said:

Yes, very pessimistic towards the future. That is where the contradiction lies, because we have money and we are educated, but education is taking us away from our traditions. We do not want to be seen with those customs. But no nation can have a future without customs. We are going to lose out.³¹²

There is a pessimistic tone in this warning which is surprising in the atmosphere of perseverance usually encountered amongst South African writers, but here, Mzi Mahola has found an important point which will surely be found and discussed more often in future poetry. **Lesego Rampolokeng** (b.1965), the "Rap Master Supreme", and **Seithamo Motsapi** (b.1966), who likes puns and points out the continuing problems people face in a world of "politricks" (from the Rastafarian vocabulary), "politishams", "thievings of land", and "computers",³¹³ make up a new generation of rapping poets. Their 'colleague' in the Western Cape is **Sandile Dikeni** (b.1966), who was very active as a student leader and activist in the 1980s.

Paarl born **Rustum Kozain** (b.1966) is definitely one of the rising stars in South African poetry. The recipient of the 2006 Ingrid Jonker Prize for *This Carting Life*, Kozain is in many ways the male counterpart to Gabeba Baderoon, and this is not only because they are both Muslim and UCT intellectuals³¹⁴. Rustum Kozain's poetry is full of intertextual references; constantly struggling with religious and sexual identity. Even though Kozain's sexual allusions are

³¹² Berold (2003: 52).

³¹³ All in Sole (1996: 27).

³¹⁴ Gabeba Baderoon's poetry is very intellectual. Compare her works on writing poetry, like the poem "Shards" from *The Dream in the Next Body – Poems*. Roggebaai: Kwela Books and Plumstead: Snailpress, 2005. 53, to that poetry on art studied in Chapter VIII.

Rustum Kozain was my lecturer during my semester abroad at the University of Cape Town in 2003. When I met him again at the Poetry Africa Festival in Durban in 2006, I told him about my dissertation and that "unfortunately, I'm writing on women only", he answered that I should have a look at his latest collection of poetry and his poem "The woman I am". I acknowledge his position, even though I remain more impressed by women writing from a women's perspective.

more distinct and even in a way aggressive, his poetry offers, like Gabea Baderoon's, insights into family life in "Conversations with my father" and into religious conflicts, "Brother, who will bury me?". Other interests he articulates are globalisation and capitalism, as in "Maitland, Cape Town".³¹⁵

It can be seen that amongst the male poets introduced, for example Mongane Wally Serote, Farouk Asvat and the still relatively unknown Kaizer Nyatumba, whose poem "Words" would fit perfectly into Chapter VIII.2, there are several poets who wrote on the same topics that are at the heart of this study of women's poetry. The men sometimes, too, write on issues such as belonging to a

<p><u>Words</u></p> <p>by Kaizer Nyatumba</p> <p>on their own they look like lost sheep on a precipice: meaningless unimportant and vulnerable but shepherd them cull them carefully adorn and string them together and they will sing.</p>
--

certain racial group ("For Don M. banned" by Serote, "A Part of Africa" by Asvat and "Can the white man speak for me" by Matthews), religion ("Traders of the Lost Ark" by Ferguson), parenthood ("Mulberry in Autumn" and "Growing-up Daughter" by Haresnape), being an artist ("Words" by Nyatumba and "The Poet" by Asvat) and using one's art to write the true South African history (*Emperor Shaka the Great* by Mazisi Kunene).³¹⁶ Yet these topics, which are also treated by women, read or sound different when written about by men.

Looking at the number of famous male poets' names above and at anthologies, one sees that South African publications have mostly focused on male poets. Yet women writers always existed, and do so even more today. To put right this omission, if only in part, the next chapters are dedicated to them alone.

³¹⁵ All in: Rustum Kozain. *This Carting Life*. Roggebaai: Kwela Books and Plum-stead: Snailpress, 2005.

³¹⁶ The examples given are only a random fraction of what could be mentioned here.

IV.2 Women poets in South Africa before 1994

It is a pity that in English there is no better and less dismissive word than ‘poetess’ for ‘women poets’ to distinguish them from men poets or mixed groups of poets, who are all called ‘poets’. Unfortunately, English, unlike German, has no specific word like *Dichterin*, and instead one has to use the long winded ‘woman poet’ to make the gender clear.

The South African women writers of today write against a literary background of some depth. Their work is not the result of a sudden ‘Third Millennium blossoming’ but is part of a tradition going back to the social and political movements of the 19th and early 20th Centuries. Some of the female poets mentioned in this study had already written or published poetry before 1994, yet this study focuses on poetry published after that turning-point. The most famous South African women writers before 1994 were/are Olive Schreiner (1855-1920), Sarah Gertrude Millin (1888-1968), Ruth Miller (1919-1969), Nadine Gordimer (b.1923), also Bessie Head (1937-1986) and Gladys Thomas (b.1944) – as the only coloured writers – and the Afrikaans writers Ingrid Jonker (1933-1965) and Antjie Krog (b.1952). Amongst them, the only poets with a lasting reputation were and are white:³¹⁷ Ruth Miller, a poet writing in English only; Ingrid Jonker, who wrote poetry in Afrikaans; and Antjie Krog, who still writes in Afrikaans, but who since 2000, after long hesitation, has finally published her two first collections of (translated) poetry in English, which are part of this study.³¹⁸

However, as all of these women writers became role models and formed part of a feminine literary tradition, the individual hallmarks of their work deserve to be briefly described, regardless of genre. Olive Schreiner (1855-1920) was an outspoken feminist, pacifist and political activist and became famous for her novel *Story of an African Farm*. She was opposed to the influence of the church and, as a friend of Karl Marx’s daughter Eleanor, she belonged to the socialist Democratic Federation, which later became the Labour Party. For her opposition to the (Second) Boer War (1899-1902) and to Cecil Rhodes (see her satirical allegory *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*, 1897) as well as for being in

³¹⁷ Bessie Head and Gladys Thomas are both known more for their non-poetic work.

³¹⁸ Cf. Chapter III.4 Language and its impact on the creation of an identity.

favour of more rights for Blacks and women, she came under heavy criticism from her fellow white South Africans.

Sarah Gertrude Millin (1888-1968) went from being “one of the most popular English-language novelists in South Africa”,³¹⁹ to being one of the most criticised. As the topics of her books, like her most famous and successful novel *God’s Step-Children* of 1924, often centre around the ‘sins of the fathers’ and the ‘tragedy of mixed blood’, Sarah Gertrude Millin is regarded as the ‘arch-racist’ of English South African literature: her books display a “characteristic obsession with interracial relations, biological determinism, and racial segregation”.³²⁰ For her, the only beauty there is, is white and European. A further great success in her career was the publication of the biographies of Cecil Rhodes and Jan Smuts. As she was a contemporary witness especially the “biography of Cecil Rhodes is still considered to be an authoritative source of information on the Diamond Magnate’s life”,³²¹ the man that Olive Schreiner had opposed.

The poet Ruth Miller (1919-1969) is a very tragic figure in the literary world. Unhappy in her marriage after the loss of her son, she wrote very personal poems on cultural and individual situations. She died of cancer in 1969, after long years of illness. Michael Chapman sees “Miller’s survival [...] guaranteed by the strength with which she conveyed an essentially private vision of love, exasperation, yearning, grief, dread, compassion and delight”.³²² And yet, even though Miller’s poetry became more confessional by the mid-1960s, she “never fully surrendered her ‘impersonality’”.³²³

The first South African winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, Nadine Gordimer (b.1923), has always been known as a political activist. Her novels, stories and essays portray Apartheid’s harmful effect on all groups of the

³¹⁹ Wikipedia. 2008. “Sarah Millin”. *Wikipedia*. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/S._Gertrude_Millin> (accessed August 8, 2008).

³²⁰ Hutchinson encyclopedia article. No date. “Millin, Sarah Gertrude (1889-1968)”. *The Free Dictionary by Farlex*. <<http://encyclopedia.farlex.com/Millin,+Sarah+Gertrude>> (accessed August 8, 2008).

³²¹ Wikipedia. 2008. “Sarah Millin”. *Wikipedia*. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/S._Gertrude_Millin> (accessed August 8, 2008).

³²² Michael Chapman. 2006. *Art Talk, Politics Talk – A Consideration of Categories*. Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press. 58.

³²³ Chapman (2006: 58).

population. In 1974, Nadine Gordimer had already received the Booker Prize for the even-handed critical spirit of her work. During Apartheid, her speaking out against social injustice and for freedom of speech resulted in her being blacklisted and being unable to publish in her home country. Her pen was her weapon, and her fame protected and helped her to overcome both censorship and Apartheid.

Ingrid Jonker (1933-1965) was a very well-known anti-establishment poet writing in Afrikaans. She was an active member of *Die Sestigters* (The Sixty-ers), a group of anti-establishment writers and poets, which included Breyten Breytenbach, André Brink, Adam Small and Bartho Smit, all of whom had taken it upon themselves to challenge the conservative literary norms of the time. In 2004, she was posthumously awarded the The Order of Ikhamanga in Silver for “her excellent contribution to literature and a commitment to the struggle for human rights and democracy in South Africa”.³²⁴ She and Ruth Miller “lend for the first time in South African poetry intense and complex power to the individual woman’s psychological experience. Parallels are found more in poetry abroad [...]: e.g. Plath, Sexton”.³²⁵

Bessie Head (1937-1986), who, amongst the big names before 1994, is the only famous Coloured with international acclaim, wrote for the magazine *Drum* at a young age. Later she joined the Pan Africanist Congress, or PAC, and became involved in Pan-African politics, eventually having to emigrate to Botswana as a refugee in 1964. There, she combined her interests as a social and cultural historian of Botswana village life and as a writer of fiction, often on the same topics or with an autobiographical and a feminist edge.³²⁶ In another act of re-canonisation, she was awarded posthumously in 2003 the Order of Ikhamanga in

³²⁴ “The Order of Ikhamanga is awarded to South African citizens who have excelled in the fields of arts, culture, literature, music, journalism or sport.”

The Presidency – Republic of South Africa. “The Order of Ikhamanga”. <<http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/main.asp?include=orders/main.html#ikhamanga>> (accessed August 8, 2008). And: The Presidency – Republic of South Africa. “The Order of Ikhamanga in Silver”. <http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/orders_list.asp?show=288> (accessed August 8, 2008).

³²⁵ Chapman (2002: 497).

³²⁶ See her critical comments on the mythologizing of the ‘happy lives of the Coloureds’ of District Six in: Bessie Head. *The Cardinals - With Meditations and Short Stories* (1900-2). Cape Town: David Philip, 1993 (posthumously published). 16.

Gold for “exceptional contribution to literature and the struggle for social change, freedom and peace”.³²⁷

Although Gladys Thomas (b.1944) is best known as a short-story writer, a playwright and the author of several children’s stories, “she is well known for her powerful ‘struggle’ poetry”, too.³²⁸ In 1972, she co-authored *Cry Rage!* with James Matthews, her debut anthology of poetry, which “holds the distinction of being the first book of poetry to be banned in South Africa”.³²⁹ In 2007, she received the Order of Ikhamanga in Bronze for “outstanding contribution to poetry and short stories through which she exposed the political injustices of and human suffering under the Apartheid regime and for raising international consciousness about the ravages of Apartheid”.³³⁰

Even in a study of English South African poetry, when it comes to poetry written by women before 1994, one cannot but mention, besides Ingrid Jonker, the Afrikaans writer Antjie Krog (b.1952), who by 1994 had published 11 collections of poetry in Afrikaans (by now thirteen), the first of which, *Dogter van Jeftha*³³¹, appeared when she was 17. Well before publication, Antjie Krog’s poetry managed to create a big uproar as it left no doubt about the Afrikaner girl’s criticism of the Apartheid system.³³² Today, many of her poems are part of the curriculum at South African schools. Her first English collection of poetry only appeared in 2000. As she believes that she can express herself better in Afrikaans, her two collections of poetry in English mainly consist of poems translated from Afrikaans. These will be considered in later chapters.

³²⁷ The Presidency – Republic of South Africa. “The Order of Ikhamanga in Gold” <http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/orders_list.asp?show=172> (accessed August 8, 2008).

³²⁸ Iziko Museums of Cape Town. 2001. “South African National Gallery’s Newsletter. bonani: 2nd quarter 1999. Natale Labia Museum”. *South African National Gallery – Publications*. <http://www.iziko.org.za/ac/resources/pub/1999/2_nlm.htm> (accessed August 8, 2008).

³²⁹ The Presidency – Republic of South Africa. “The Order of Ikhamanga in Bronze”. <http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/orders_list.asp?show=369> (accessed August 8, 2008).

³³⁰ The Presidency – Republic of South Africa. “The Order of Ikhamanga in Bronze”. <http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/orders_list.asp?show=369> (accessed August 8, 2008).

³³¹ Antjie Krog. *Dogter van Jeftha*. Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1970.

³³² Cf. “My mooi land” by Antjie Krog. Krog (1970).

These then are the few women, and theirs the work, which have served, if not as an inspiration and example, at least as a backdrop to South Africa's women poets and their poetry at the turn of the 21st Century, the subject of this study.

The preceding would be a nice sentence with which to summarise and end the chapter. One has to consider, however, the fact that contemporary South African writers were additionally exposed to other influences.

It might come as a jolt at this point, if one quotes the words of Michael Chapman about Ruth Miller, saying that the contemporary South African poets are "influenced by a male world of poetry".³³³ Yet, this is not supposed to sound as if South African women poets were 'shadows' of the men poets. It is simply a fact that many more male poets get published than women poets, which easily becomes clear when one pages through poetry anthologies.

Actually, one has to mention that in the globalised world of today especially the coloured and black South African women writers are very much influenced by overseas writers like Anne Sexton (1928-1974), Maya Angelou (b.1928), Adrienne Rich (b.1929), Sylvia Plath (1932-1963), Alice Walker (b.1944) and Grace Nichols (b.1950). That South African women poets are influenced by overseas' writers does not mean that they were copying American or English poets, but it proves the open-mindedness and the rich stylistic and thematic influences in contemporary South African women's poetry.

³³³ Chapman (2006: 71).

IV.3 A personal view on Africa, past and present: Malika Ndlovu

IV.3.1 Biographical context



*Malika Ndlovu.*³³⁴

During my semester abroad at the University of Cape Town in 2003, I became fascinated by the ‘colourful’ poems of the freelance artist Malika Ndlovu, on whom I later wrote my Magister thesis.³³⁵ What got me so interested, as a non-South African, was her insider portrayal of the situation of the Coloureds and Blacks, the women and artists in South Africa. I ‘met’ Malika Ndlovu for the first time in her poem “Distinguished Umbrella”,³³⁶

which nicely mirrors Malika Ndlovu’s search for herself and the question of her actual belonging. Through the poem “Distinguished Umbrella”, the word ‘coloured’ acquired a new and special meaning for me, and it changed my view of South African society. In its own way, the poem makes one aware of grievances in South African society and points at the often forgotten group of the Coloureds, to which Malika Ndlovu, according to Apartheid classification, belonged.

What is so striking about Malika Ndlovu is that she does not shrink from any subject. The contents of her poems are mainly concerned with topics which deal with women and their contribution to society. She writes about the most varied situations of every-day life, her own experiences, love, pregnancies and motherhood, but also about ‘difficult’ topics like miscarriages, sexual abuse and

³³⁴ Photo: Perkins (1999: 6).

³³⁵ It was due to Professor Geoffrey Haresnape that I was introduced to South African poetry, and especially to Malika Ndlovu, whom I was able to interview in person in the Observatory suburb of Cape Town on 7 June 2003. On this occasion, Malika Ndlovu gave me some newspaper articles, flyers, links to reliable websites and two audio-cassettes with interviews, which were all greatly appreciated as a contribution to the research I did on her as a poet.

³³⁶ “Distinguished Umbrella” by Malika Ndlovu. In: Kok and Ferguson (2001: 29-30) and Ndlovu (2000: 54-55).

violence towards women. A further concern of her poetry is the process of reconciliation, which happens for her by way of “healing through creativity”.³³⁷

The story of Malika Ndlovu’s individual life and career as a poet, though of course not wholly representative, may nonetheless complete the picture with regard to some of the aspects and issues which have been treated so far or which will be treated later on in this study. Malika Ndlovu was born Lueen Conning, which leads to occasional confusion when collecting background information on her. For several years she combined her names differently, nowadays she officially calls herself Malika Lueen Ndlovu. She was born in Durban in 1971 as the first child of a coloured family. Her parents are the plumber Michael Conning and his wife Cecilia Dunn,³³⁸ a nurse and social worker. Malika Ndlovu’s mother tongue is English as both her parents grew up with English as well and her family for generations “didn’t cultivate Zulu much, English made them more mobile”. Malika Ndlovu’s parents come from very religious, Christian families. Her father had seven siblings, her mother eleven. Both families were rather poor. Malika Ndlovu describes her father as a lovable man who plays the harmonica and all kinds of wind instruments, her mother as “a storyteller of note. She’s a real actress”. Both parents encouraged any kind of creativity on the part of their children and so the family always had a piano, and all three children took piano lessons from self-taught teachers from the area at some point in their lives.

Malika Ndlovu grew up in the suburbs of Durban designated for Coloureds. She describes her parent’s house as a very religious and stable place, which influenced her in terms of togetherness and creativity from a very early age onwards. Malika Ndlovu started writing poetry at the age of eight years (about her teeth and her fear of the dentist). At that time, however, her true love was dancing. Amongst the family and friends who came to the weekly prayer circles in the

³³⁷ Shelley Barry, Malika Ndlovu and Deela Khan, eds. *ink@boiling point – A Selection of 21st Century Black Women’s Writing from the Southern Tip of Africa*. Cape Town: WEAVE Publishing, 2002. 172.

³³⁸ From the famous Dunn family in Natal: John Dunn (1834-1895) was a settler of Scottish descent, a hunter and a diplomat. Being fluent in Zulu, he befriended many Zulu chiefs. Additionally to his wife Catherine, he accepted almost 50 Zulu wives as gifts of hospitality and fathered 117 mixed children. These children’s descendents form a big part of the coloured community of Durban today.

When not mentioned differently, the information on Malika Ndlovu’s life comes from my recorded interview with Malika Ndlovu from 7 June 2003.

Connings' house she found an interested and willing audience for any kind of performance.

As Malika Ndlovu's parents were not really politically active, "my mother far more than my father", she only got to know about the Apartheid system through conversations with her mother. During these conversations, which she had when she was about twelve years old, she learnt that the societal situation of South Africa was unjust and that her country's political system was criticised around the world. As she puts it, "the world is kind of small when you're younger. [... But] my mother is very strong about identity. She was not at all at peace with the term ['coloured']".

Malika Ndlovu thinks she started writing "really concrete and consistent" poems at the age of 15. At first she wrote a diary, what became a "first form of therapy", as she started at an early age to ask about the meaning of life. "I often felt much older [than] I actually was. People often said: You're so mature. You think so deeply... I couldn't really relax. While other kids were still very young, I had all these deep philosophical conflicts". Until the age of 15 she attended the public schools for Coloureds, but the classes were frustrating:

As an individual I was not acknowledged as an artist. My creativity was seen as a hobby that you couldn't make a career out of. There was no subject that related to art. English was my only source of expression. I was highly frustrated because I realized that there were so-called white schools or private schools that offered drama as a subject. And I wanted to study that badly. I knew from an early age that I wanted to perform and that I was an artist.³³⁹

It was at that time that she first realised what her position in Apartheid society was supposed to be: She was supposed to become an inconspicuous woman, a mother, and if she were to work, then as an employee, serving the Whites. Malika Ndlovu says about herself, "I was fifteen and angry", because she wanted the same education and the same opportunities as Whites and she wanted to prove to the others that she could perform as well as Whites. She also did not let anyone distract her from her goal of becoming an artist. Her strong sense of purpose helped her when even other coloured people did not believe that as a Coloured she could and would be successful. She even went to the theatre when others did not dare go because they were afraid of being discriminated against.

³³⁹ From the Foreword to *A Coloured Place* in: Perkins (1999: 6).

This is why she convinced her parents to do all that was possible to enable her to attend one of the few “multi-racial all-girls schools”, because she did not want to wait for drama classes till university, which she possibly would not be able to afford anyway. She was very lucky: she was accepted at the private catholic Holy Family Convent School, which, towards the end of Apartheid, also accepted some black and coloured pupils. At this racially mixed school, Malika Ndlovu noticed that racism, ignorance and ‘a lack of first hand acquaintanceship’ are related, because as long as you do not know someone it is easy to see the other as a “monster”. Indeed, she noticed that many of the white children did not even know about the deep differences between the lives of Whites, Coloureds and Blacks.

In 1989, Malika Ndlovu received the **Mavis Wayne Cup** at the Convent High School in Durban for Outstanding Dramatic Performance.³⁴⁰ The year after finishing high school, she spent far away from home, in Johannesburg. There she worked as a freelance actress, founded her own drama group to stage her own first pieces and toured with the famous Theatre for Africa Company. She even had the prospect of a scholarship for studies in the USA, but as she became a single mother at the age of 19, she went back to Durban, where she could count on the help of her family. There she decided against studying at the university and, as acting was her priority, for studying at the Technikon where the focus was on the Performing Arts. From 1991 to 1993 Malika Ndlovu studied at the Natal Technikon and graduated in 1993 with a National Diploma in Performing Arts, after receiving several awards for her academic performances such as the **Edna Mc Chanik Award** of the SA Society of University Women, in 1992. After a few years as an actress she wrote her own theatre productions and even directed pieces herself. In 1995 she took part at the Michael Kaiser’s Arts Administration Course of the USIS at the US Embassy in Durban, and in 1996, she received a certificate and the **Most Outstanding Student Trophy** at a Playhouse Co. Arts Management Course.

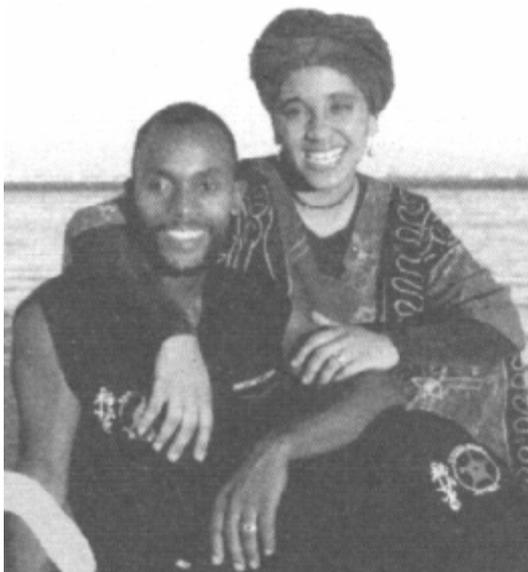
This year, 1996, became a turning point in Malika Ndlovu’s life. Her one “(wo)man” piece *A Coloured Place* was nominated for three **FNB Vita Awards**

³⁴⁰ These awards for acting, which are mentioned in the following paragraphs and highlighted in bold print, are in addition to the awards referred to in Chapter III.1.3

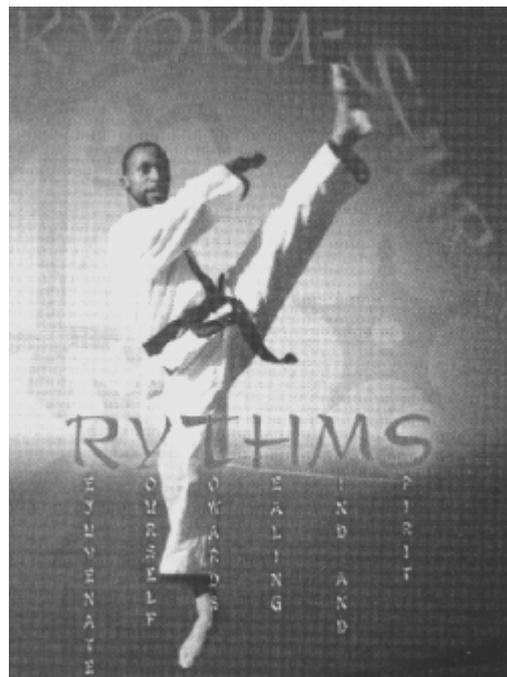
and received amongst others the **Vita Award** for the best original script of a new South African play. The play was subsequently published in *Black SA Women: An anthology of plays*. Finally she was taken seriously. Towards the end of 1996, Malika Ndlovu moved from Durban to Cape Town.

In 1997, Malika Ndlovu was in charge of the Artists-in-Residence Programme at the Robben Island Museum and co-organized the exhibition “Engaging the Shadows”, which was commissioned by the Arts & Culture programme of the island. In the same year, she was a guest participant at the Poetry Africa '98 International Festival, together with Mongane Wally Serote. In 1999 she was a guest speaker in Cape Town at the SACCE/UCT launch of the *English Alive'99: a national youth poetry anthology*.

In 1999 und 2000 she studied for the first time outside South Africa, taking a three month intensive course in Amsterdam at DasArts, the Dutch Institute for Advanced Theatre Research in Amsterdam. Her studies dealt with the issues, “Reconciliation and Storytelling” and “The Makable Truth”. For Malika Ndlovu, these topics were closely linked to the Truth and Reconciliation Hearings in South Africa. After that, in April 2000, she was commissioned to write and speak *Two Halves of the Whole*, a BBC World Service Radio Programme that was recorded in Amsterdam. During this time she also took part as guest at the Between the Lines literature festival in Belfast.



Malika & Thulani Ndlovu.



Photos: Risk-Flyer.

Since 2000, Malika Ndlovu is happily married to Thulani Ndlovu, a professional stuntman who has specialised in martial arts. In a move which is unconventional and which at the same time testifies to her personal approach, she has collaborated with her husband Thulani in several projects, such as *Risk*, in which they performed Malika's poems with dance and martial art choreographies. Husband and wife, with their different fields of interest, met in a presentation of 'rhythms' and of 'risks', joining verbal and bodily forms of expression.

Malika Ndlovu had to face many stereotyped assumptions about herself, and so her gift for writing could and had to help to absorb these facts of her life and to put them to good use by elaborating upon them in her work. From firsthand experience, she knows the preconceived notions about Coloureds: that they are unable to achieve anything, end up as criminals and produce too many children far too early. The keyword is "teen pregnancy", something that Malika Ndlovu lived through herself. Those who are prejudiced call this the typical destiny of a Coloured. In her special case, many thought "another promising young woman lost", for after all, she was one of the few Coloureds who had obtained a good education. When Malika Ndlovu became a mother at the age of 19, nobody believed from then on that she could do anything else but marry and stay at home. She did not, however, let these prejudices unsettle her and wanted to prove to herself, her family and all the sceptics that she could still study and get somewhere. Here she keeps on underlining the support of her parents.

As is typical of the works of many women authors of postcolonial literature, Malika Ndlovu's writing is almost exclusively autobiographically influenced and mostly tells of things which clearly reflect her own experience, such as "Distinguished Umbrella" or "born in africa but". She also wrote commissioned works like *Two Halves of the Whole* and many poems which were written for a special occasion, such as the below mentioned "Out of Now-here", "Bonteheuwel" and "Shuttle", the last of which invites the reader to 'travel' to a township, like Gladys Thomas' poem did many years before.³⁴¹ With this background knowledge in mind, Malika Ndlovu's poems can always be checked

³⁴¹ Cf.. the lines "Come, take my hand/ Stop touring and go slumming with me" from "Haunted Eyes" by Gladys Thomas. Matthews and Thomas (1972: Poem "79"). No pagination.

for possible links to her own life when interpreting them: Malika supports the view of many female artists, especially that of the rarely very feministic black African female writers and the *Écriture féminine*, that it is best to write on things which one has experienced for oneself. In an email I asked Malika Ndlovu directly, how she positions herself toward literary feminism. On 20 March 2004, she answered, also in an email:

I never consciously aligned myself with any feminist movement socially or in the literary/arts field. It was more a case of recognising/realising over time that my individual struggles and experiences were common to many other women in my environment and across the globe and whose work as writers echoed so much of the same issues and concerns. For this reason several other people who have interviewed me or looked at my work, have drawn their own conclusion that I am a feminist. I have even been published by feminist organisations or publications. I don't completely reject this, but I prefer to avoid labels on my identity (even like "coloured"), especially if they are projected at me rather than the ones I claim for myself (like I claim: "Black/African"). Besides all our identities are not static, since we go through changes/development all the time.³⁴²

Here we find a couple of issues addressed that are relevant to this study. Identity-formation is dealt with in Chapters II and VI, the subject of 'Feminism' / 'Womanism' is treated in detail in Chapter VII.

Many of Malika Ndlovu's poems deal with the search for an identity of her own. Relating herself to the term 'coloured' still presents a problem for her. On the other hand, she has never completely abandoned the term. She believes that "if you dig the label – wear it with pride and know what it means for you".³⁴³ In one of her many radio interviews, she says, personally, she'd rather be seen as a "human being" or "South African". Other Coloureds, such as the filmmaker Vanessa Jansen, prefer the term 'mixed-race'. Vanessa Jansen does not connect any bad memories with this term, and it makes her free to say:

I am a unique individual because I am mixed. At the same time you are not lumped with a group of people who have this presumption that we are all the same; gangsters, or come from the Cape Flats, [that we are all speaking Afrikaans,] etc.³⁴⁴

³⁴² Malika Ndlovu in an email to me on Saturday, 24th March, 2004.

³⁴³ Malika Ndlovu 1999 in a newspaper article by Iman Rappetti, *Mail & Guardian*.

³⁴⁴ Vanessa Jansen 1999 in a newspaper article by Iman Rappetti, *Mail & Guardian*.

For Malika Ndlovu, “‘everything that is not White, is Black.’ (March 2001)”.³⁴⁵ Her point is that the position of the Coloureds in South African Society after 1994 merely changed from being coloured in a white world to being coloured in a black world, meaning she is better off calling herself black. In the same interview from March 2001 she said:

I was very defensive about being called ‘coloured’. It is an oppressor’s term, a no-name brand term stuck on me. I thought I am much bigger than someone else’s label. [...] Writing about the struggle of how you’ve been labelled, made me confront my fears.³⁴⁶

I consider myself African. But this is not a general coloured perception. In fact a lot of coloured people deny their African heritage. There is an aspiration toward white beauty although it’s not overtly stated, but they furiously straighten their hair so you can’t see the African kink, they still consider a straighter nose, thinner lips, lighter skin as beauty. And that’s the aspiration. Apartheid still lives in our minds.³⁴⁷

In 2000, Malika Ndlovu published her first collection of poetry called *Born in Africa but*, and she was co-editor of the anthology *ink@boiling point* by WEAVE, a collaboration of black and coloured female poets and writers. With *Womb to World: A Labour of Love* in 2001, she published a collection of poetry around pregnancy and the process of becoming a mother. For the CD which comes with this collection, she worked together with the music-improviser Garth Erasmus.

At the Cape WOW (Women of the World) Festival in 2002, Malika Ndlovu together with New Moon Ventures, presented *Voices of Nisaa* (Arabic for women), works of Muslim women of the international multi-media Nisaa Project. In 2002, she also was in the jury of the SPIER/PANSA New Writing Festival and together with Antjie Krog and André Brink, she was guest at the international symposium on *History, Memory & the Future*, which was hosted by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) and the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study (STIAS).

³⁴⁵ Fiona Tobin. *Negotiating the ambivalent construction of ‘coloured’ identity in relation to the work of Malika Ndlovu and the Cape Town-based black women’s writers collective, WEAVE*. MA thesis in English at the University of Cape Town, 2001. 5.

³⁴⁶ Tobin (2001: 24).

³⁴⁷ From the Foreword to *A Coloured Place* in Perkins (1999: 6).

Malika Ndlovu is known especially in the Cape Town area as a poet, author of plays, “Performance Artist and Poet” and manager of arts projects. Her poems were and are printed in many national and international magazines and publications, they were included in important anthologies, such as *The New Century of South African Poetry* in 2002 and the Austrian anthology *Imagination in a Troubled Space* in 2004,³⁴⁸ and broadcast on the radio. She is much sought-after as a guest-poet and is frequently invited for formal discussions with other artists. She also performs her poetry and has played to audiences at many festivals.



Flyer advertising the *Womantide* show in 2007.

In 2006 and 2007, Malika Ndlovu performed the music and poetry show *Womantide* together with Tina Schouw and Earnestine Deane. In 2008, her new play, *Sister Breyani*, inspired by her mother and her four sisters, will be staged at Cape Town’s Baxter Theatre and she plans to publish two more solo collections of poetry, *Exits and Entries - a mother’s journal through stillbirth* and *Let’s Wait to Praise You When You’re Dead - a collection of South African Tributes*. WEAVE is trying to reprint *ink@boiling point* and to bring out another collection called *Love in The Making – love and erotica poetry*. Also in 2008, she is the curator of the SPIER Poetry Festival on the famous wine estate in Stellenbosch.

It is Malika Ndlovu’s personal motto not to suppress experiences, but to exploit and develop them. She calls the process of her work “healing through creativity”.

³⁴⁸ Borzaga and Steiner (2004).

IV.3.2 'Healing through creativity'



Malika Ndlovu. Risk-Flyer.

People in South Africa, no matter of which skin-colour, are “struggling to find identity for themselves, individually and collectively, within the shadows still cast by their country’s brutal history”.³⁴⁹ More and more poets develop mottos for themselves. Malika Ndlovu formulated a clear and very appropriate motto during our interview in June 2003 when she described what takes place during the process of writing as “Healing through Creativity”.³⁵⁰ And it is not only in Malika Ndlovu’s

poetry, where one feels this attitude, she noticeably lives her motto.

Malika Ndlovu makes use of her experiences, her energy and her creativity first as a freelance artist, then together with the women poets’ collective WEAVE, once again in the community of other women artists of colour, furthermore in collaborations with Garth Erasmus and, last but not least, with her husband Thulani by combining poetry, experimental music, and dance, or martial art choreographies in her performances. In 1997, she founded New Moon Ventures,³⁵¹ in collaboration with six other “Capetonian playwrights”. She does not, however, support any kind of extreme feminism. The topics for her literary work are taken from her environment. Her ideas are linked to her life and reality and are often auto-biographical. In “Wrapped Up”, “Confirmation in Crimson” and “Woman Being”, Malika Ndlovu and many of her female fellow poets “offer sustained women’s voices, a general characteristic being a reversal of the ‘masculine’ concept of the poem as product. Instead, we have poems as processes of experience”.³⁵² Her style is purposely clear. It is her goal to be understood, and

³⁴⁹ Garman (2006: 19).

³⁵⁰ Michelle McGrane. No date. “Malika Ndlovu”. *LitNet*. <http://www.oulitnet.co.za/relax/m_ndlovu_in.asp> (accessed August 8, 2008).

³⁵¹ ‘New’ stands for vital, daring, fresh, innovative, courageous, original, ‘Moon’ for powerful, energy, women-centered, universal, magical, wild, und ‘Ventures’ for discovery, adventurous, unknown, beyond boundaries.

³⁵² Chapman (2002: 502).

to encourage people to start thinking on their own. In our interview in 2003, she explicitly said: “I want my people to understand me”.

In the “Writer’s Note” for her collection of poetry, *Born in Africa but*, Malika Ndlovu describes her relationship to writing and how she experiences the healing effects of art:

Poetry for me began as an intimate and immediate journal of expression. Here was one place where I could whisper, sing, shout, mourn and mutter to myself in *reflection*, in states of pain or conflict and even moments of awe at the visions, the worlds this path of expression led me to. I could retreat and mentally roam free of the *boundaries of what was expected* of someone *my age, my gender, my nationality* at any point in time. Like a child on a bicycle, I have pushed my own boundaries and taught myself some tricks only through practice, passionate continuous practice and the nourishment of other poets’ work. Writing is a process of surrender and demands the deepest kind of *listening*. Over time I realised that what began as *writing “to myself”* was *actually writing “from the Self”*. From this perspective I can receive, rather than dictate these messages and most importantly, let them go, just as they are – share them with you.³⁵³

Malika Ndlovu has been chosen as the ‘sharp end’, as an introductory example for this study as she represents the epitome of what the women poets of South Africa contribute to the world of art and literature. She views poetry as being part and parcel of life and experience. With her concept of poetry as process, not product, and especially with her vision of her art as “healing through creativity”, she sees her poetry, as coming “from the Self”, and as an empowering therapy, to challenge and to stimulate.

To say it in the words of Anne Schuster, Freelance Editor Creative Writing Facilitator: “Malika Ndlovu’s voice is strong and true – whether you read her poetry as words on a page, or listen to her as an accomplished performer”.³⁵⁴ I can subscribe to Anne Schuster’s quotation, as it expresses exactly what fascinates me, too, with Malika Ndlovu’s poems: the directness and precision, with which Malika Ndlovu manages to capture pictures in order to present them to the public, as well as her ability to describe specific situations in a way that the reader can read his own feelings and experiences into them. This ability is impressive and says something about her poetic ability and sensitiveness. Her themes allow new perspectives and are transferable to many societies and proceedings.

³⁵³ Ndlovu (2000: 3), emphasis added.

³⁵⁴ Anne Schuster on the blurb of *Womb to World: A Labour of Love* by Malika Ndlovu. Cape Town: Malika Ndlovu, 2001.

V. Memories of Apartheid in women's poetry

One of the most frequently anthologised poems from the Apartheid era is that of a male poet, Mongane Wally Serote. In "City Johannesburg", he describes a black man's feelings upon entering the white town. The women's poetic treatment of the subject, however, is less well known. Even though some are relatively young, most of the women poets have memories of Apartheid and have therefore written poetry dealing with this period. At this point, before looking at their post-Apartheid counterparts, I want to present a few poems which deal with events and scenes which took place during Apartheid.



Gladys Thomas, recipient of a Literary Lifetime Achievement Award at the 2007 SA Literary Awards, Vodaworld, Johannesburg.^{355b}

Gladys Thomas was born of mixed parentage in 1944. Therefore, her family was affected by the *Group Areas Act* of 1950. When Simonstown, the last town on the way to the Cape of Good Hope, was declared a white group area, Gladys Thomas' family was removed from there to the township with the wonderful sounding but misleading name of 'Ocean-view' on the outskirts of Simonstown, where the only seas that could be seen were "seas of sand", a "desert" for all.³⁵⁵

According to Gladys Thomas, the forceful poem "Fall tomorrow"³⁵⁶ was written in one single train ride on the day of the Thomas' removal in the 1950s, as an immediate reaction to this dreadful experience.

³⁵⁵ Daymond, Driver et al (2003: 334).

^{355b} Gladys Thomas by BOOKphotoSA. <<http://www.flickr.com/photos/booksa/2097365861/>> (accessed August 8, 2008).

³⁵⁶ Daymond, Driver et al (2003: 334). This study can also be consulted for further information on the poem and the poet.

Fall tomorrow

by Gladys Thomas

Don't sow a seed,
don't paint a wall,
tomorrow it will have to fall.

Let the dog howl and bark,
tomorrow he will
sleep in the dark.
Let the cock crow,
let the hen lay,
tomorrow will be their last day.

Let the children chop trees,
let them break,
let the destructive little devils
ruin and take;
for tomorrow they know not their fate.

Don't sow a seed,
don't paint a wall,
tomorrow the yellow monster will take all.

Let our sons dazed in eye
rape and steal
for they are not allowed to feel.
Let our men drink,
let them fight,
let what is said about them
then be right,
for they are not allowed to think.

So bark, howl, crow,
chop, break, ruin,
steal, drink, fight.
Let what's made of us be right.

Tomorrow we gaze at a new view,
seas of sand given by you.
And we say:
sow the seed,
paint the wall,
be at home in our desert for all.
You that remade us
your mould will break
and tomorrow you are going to fall!

Using rhythmical anaphoras, “Don't”/ “Let”, the poem illustrates the gloomy atmosphere just before the forced removals and just before the physical destruction of the unwanted neighbourhoods. Underlined by the anaphora of “tomorrow”, the future of the many people so forcibly uprooted is, thereby, ruined, turned into a bleak and barren desert. The “yellow monster” is a metaphor for the bulldozers which destroyed what once were people's homes and with them family histories and dreams. According to the lyrical speaker, a lot more than their homes is taken from the relocated people: their pride and dignity, their right to think.

Like the “But” in a sonnet, the “So” in the second to last verse paragraph marks the start of a turn. In exasperated desperation the poet issues a challenge to the white community suggesting her people should do their best, drink and fight, to justify the poor reputation they have been given. The poem ends with the certainty that retribution will follow: “You that remade us/ [...] will break/ and tomorrow you are going to fall!”

Together with Jennifer Davids, Gladys Thomas was one of the first women poets of colour to make her voice heard in South Africa during Apartheid. It is interesting to see the changes which took place on the literary scene since, in

1981, Vernon February wrote about the situation of the coloured poets, and Gladys Thomas as

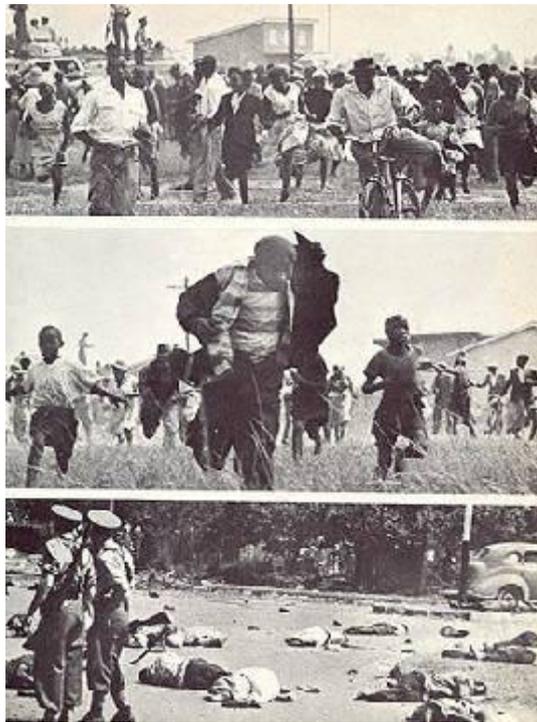
one of the few 'coloured' women, if not the only hitherto, who has seen fit to give expression to her unfreedom poetically. No doubt there are very real reasons why the 'coloured' woman in South Africa has not yet announced her presence on the literary scene.³⁵⁷

It is especially pleasing to see that today, some 25 years later, women of colour are now so prominent on the South African literary scene.

Interestingly enough, both the white poet Ingrid de Kok and the coloured poet Malika Ndlovu write their poems on Apartheid with distinct autobiographical references, even though they belong to two different generations: Ingrid de Kok was born in 1951 and Malika Ndlovu only in 1971. They, however, explore the topic of Apartheid from two very different perspectives.

"For many who have not seen it, Sharpeville is a date, not a place."

- Prakash Diar³⁵⁸



*Sharpeville.*³⁵⁹

³⁵⁷ February (1981: 174).

³⁵⁸ 5x5Media and African Images. (1996-2008). "The Sharpeville Massacre". *Black History Pages*. <<http://www.blackhistorypages.net/pages/sharpeville.php>> (accessed August 8, 2008).

For many South Africans, Ingrid de Kok's poem "Our Sharpeville"³⁶⁰ is one of the first literary confrontations with this part of South Africa's history. This is because the Apartheid government did not wish to teach the 'whole truth' about South African history, such as what had happened at Sharpeville on March 21st 1960, or the protests and tragedies which took place in Langa, Nyanga or Vanderbijl Park. During my research on the poem "Our Sharpeville", I came across the following quote of Prakash Diar, the South African Indian lawyer and defence attorney for the "Sharpeville Six"³⁶¹ clients: "*For many who have not seen it, Sharpeville is a date, not a place.*"³⁶² This quote is striking for its appropriateness and holds true also for Ingrid de Kok's poem. "Our Sharpeville" retells, in the past tense, the events at Sharpeville in 1960 from a political, subjective, white perspective, which distinguishes Ingrid de Kok's poem from other poems written by South Africans. Through the poem, the first-person narrator expresses her³⁶³ feelings and memories of this event.

Ingrid de Kok writes "Our Sharpeville"³⁶⁴ based on a 'white childhood' experience and tries to deal with it. She witnessed the moment when the uprisings in Sharpeville and other towns finally reached her town and how violence spread. Yet, "Our Sharpeville" is anything but a mere poem describing the happenings in Sharpeville from the perspective of a typical white girl. What looks like loyalty may only be so superficially, and is more likely to surface as opposition to occurrences such as "Sharpeville" or Apartheid. Analysing the five rhymeless stanzas of the poem, one notices the abundance of warnings and of criticism.

³⁵⁹ Sharpeville Photo. <<http://www.beleven.org/feesten/afbeeldingen/dagdiscriminatie.jpg>> (accessed August 8, 2008).

³⁶⁰ The title of the poem, and the thinking behind it, will be examined later.

³⁶¹ For more information on the massacre, see Wikipedia. 2008. *Wikipedia*. "Sharpeville Six". <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sharpeville_Six> (accessed August 8, 2008).

³⁶² 5x5Media and African Images (1996-2003).

³⁶³ In the case of most South African women poets, amongst them Malika Ndlovu, one can say that they identify with their lyrical speakers in their poems. This is why the lyrical speaker will be referred to throughout as 'she'.

³⁶⁴ "Our Sharpeville" by Ingrid de Kok. In: de Kok (2006: 19-20), Daymond, Driver et al (2003: 397/398) and Ingrid de Kok. 2002-2008. "Poet - Poetry". *Ingrid de Kok*. <<http://www.ingriddekok.co.za/poetry.html>> (accessed August 8, 2008).

Our Sharpeville

by Ingrid de Kok

I was playing hopscotch on the slate
when the miners roared past in lorries,
their arms raised, signals at a crossing
their chanting foreign and familiar,
like the call and answer of road gangs
across the veld, building hot arteries
from the heart of the Transvaal mine.

I ran to the gate to watch them pass.
And it seemed like a great caravan
moving across the desert to an oasis
I remembered from my Sunday school book:
olive trees, a deep jade pool,
men resting in clusters after a long journey,
the danger of the mission still around them,
and night falling, its silver stars just like the ones
you got for remembering your Bible texts.

Then my grandmother called from behind the front door,
her voice a stiff broom over the steps:
"Come inside; they do things to little girls."

For it was noon, and there was no jade pool.
Instead, a pool of blood that already had a living name
and grew like a shadow as the day lengthened.
The dead, buried in voices that reached my gate,
the chanting man on ambushed trucks,
these were not heroes in my town,
but maulers of children,
doing things that had to remain nameless.
And our Sharpeville was this fearful thing
that might tempt us across the wellswept streets.

If I had turned I would have seen
brocade curtains drawn tightly across sheer net ones,
known there were eyes behind both,
heard the dogs pacing in the locked yard next door.
But, walking backwards, all I felt was shame,
at being a girl, at having been found at the gate,
at having heard my grandmother lie
and at my fear her lie might be true.
Walking backwards, called back,
I returned to the closed rooms, home.

Ingrid de Kok uses many expressive words and various obvious stylistic means to underline what she says. In the first stanza, the lyrical speaker gives a description of what is going on around her: chanting miners roar past in lorries. The poem is written from the perspective of a lyrical speaker who is a young girl in 1960. Knowing that Ingrid de Kok herself was born in 1951, confirms the poem's authenticity. To substantiate her young age, the lyrical speaker mentions that she "was playing hopscotch". Hopscotch is called "Himmel und Hölle" (heaven and hell) in German. It might sound farfetched, but for me, the very first line directly alludes to the ambiguity of the whole of South Africa. For some it is and was heaven, a paradise on earth. For the others this country

meant suppression and hell. Another ambiguity of South Africa becomes obvious when the narrator, who evidently identifies with the region she comes from, describes the Transvaal like a living body with "arteries" and a "heart"; what she does not see as a child is that this romantic view of work in the mines is not

realistic. The miners do not see any of the wealth they produce: hard work does not pay for everyone.

The poem plainly uses stylistic devices from Western lyrical tradition. The repetition of 's' in lines 1-3 and the consonance of 'f' in line 4 can be interpreted as the sounds the girl produces when she plays "hopscotch on the slate". This sound grows dimmer and dimmer as the stanza progresses. Then she gradually neglects her game and becomes curious. With the long sentences, Ingrid de Kok surely intended to strengthen the picture of the passing lorries. This device also maintains the poem's seemingly narrative character.

The second stanza gives many hints of a white person's life in 1960. The girl talks about Sunday school and about remembering Bible texts for which she got silver stars. This whole aspect of the poem, the allusions to the stories from the Bible, the mentioning of education in general and rewarding with silver stars, emphasises the perspective of white people in a small town, their lives, schools and faith. Ironically, however, they forget the charitable principles they have been taught. The second stanza also tells the reader about the girl's natural curiosity about the agitated men around. She finally ceases playing and gives in to her curiosity to get to know what is going on even though this might go against her upbringing. Using her childish fantasy, not caring about the reality, she yet lingers in a daydream, romanticising the rebellious purpose of the "caravan", which might indeed not be clear to the girl. The desert is a metaphor for what it looked like in her region. For the rest she does not know how close her dream is to the reality, with "the danger of the mission still around them": Blacks who were politically active were always in great danger, always fearing people could find out about their double lives.

The third stanza brings the girl back to reality, when the grandmother interrupts the girl's daydreams by calling her to "come inside; they do things to little girls". She calls from the security "behind the front door". Her voice is described as a "stiff broom". Stiff can have many meanings, from inflexible to resolute and stubborn, harsh, severe, stilted and even dead. This, without mentioning the grandmother's features, gives the reader a picture of what she might look like: this old, white South African, approving of the Apartheid regime, who frightens her granddaughter with prejudices, sexualising political knowledge. She calls her back to the secure house, ignorantly threatening her that the Blacks

might do “things” to her, when she actually only fears they could arouse a feeling and desire for justice in her and make her stop denying her knowledge.

After the grandmother's interference, the fourth and longest stanza transforms the picture of the second stanza into a nightmare of blood and violence. This is initiated by an abrupt change: The idyll created in the second stanza is completely destroyed. The girl realizes that it is not a romantic night with stars in the sky, and that there is no jade pool. Although protected, she finds out that “Instead there is a pool of blood that already had a living name”: Sharpeville.

What she means by line 22 can be clearly seen: Parallel to the sun going down, as the shadows lengthen, the numbers of the dead rise. The dead are left to lie, in the open, exposed to the sun, “buried in voices” only. Saying that the voices even reached her gate, the lyrical speaker dissociates herself from the crowd. When the girl talks about “the chanting men” who were “no heroes in [her] town” it is not clear if this is also her opinion, or if this is what she learned, that they are “maulers of children”. She was told there is nothing positive about any of them, all they do are bad “things”. The child knows that the “things” have to be something very bad as they “had to remain nameless”. But she also mentions, that “Sharpeville was this fearful thing”. That makes her curious and “might [even] tempt [her] across the well-swept streets”. These well-swept streets, provide us another unconscious association with the white man's world.

The poem ends when the girl is “called back” and, obeying her grandmother, the girl returns, albeit ashamed, back to the closed rooms, to her home. The whole last stanza is full of hints at the whiteness of the girl's family, a world in which everything is reported subjectively and calls for interpretation. They have curtains, not only “sheer net ones”, but also “brocade curtains”. The neighbours have “dogs pacing in the locked yard”, and finally the girl returns to the typically closed rooms which are home to white South Africans. “Closed” can mean locked and secure, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, it can refer to eyes closed to the world outside. Thought of like that it symbolizes ‘the first world’ within South Africa shutting itself off from the poor.

Ironically, however, there are spying eyes “behind” the curtains and one can feel Ingrid de Kok's criticism of this, for the poet's “[De Kok's] home has no

walls. What happens outside is inseparable from what is inside".³⁶⁵ Still the poem ends catching the older generation at closing the curtains to reality, only peeping through them from the security of the white world, possibly ashamed about the denial of their knowledge of the reality. All that the little girl "felt was shame". In this more general sense, the girl's continuing to walk "backwards" could stand for the attitude of the younger generation some of whom, maybe unconsciously, kept their eyes open facing the reality and walking with their backs to their own kind. For informed, yet less brave people, this moving backwards means being unable to avert one's eyes from what is happening and still acting as is expected of one. On the other hand, retiring in this way symbolically reveals the fear of many white people: Many were not strong enough to swim against the current. Cowardly and ashamed they returned to their closed rooms, to claim ignorance because to deny knowledge of what was going on became increasingly difficult.

All this reflects a conflict between the generations concerning curiosity, openness and tolerance. Between the lines, the narrator, or rather the poet herself, struggles with the Whites' superiority and ignorance. She mentions the shame people felt when they were found being curious and when they asked questions, and she criticises their holding back the obvious questions and the lying which took place in people's everyday lives. Through her poem, Ingrid de Kok accuses white people of too easily suppressing their feelings and falling back on life's everyday tasks, symbolized by the ever-sweeping grandmother.

[S]he writes often about children scarred by emotional and physical violence in a society riven by inequality. 'Our Sharpeville,' like other poems of De Kok's about her Stilfontain years, probes the sensitivity of a child who is made complicit in the injustices perpetrated by her adult protectors in the name of her own safety, even while she feels drawn toward the forbidden world her own community excludes. [...] The political significance of the events at Sharpeville was not something that the young child could have recognized. The child in the poem, like so many of the children of apartheid's beneficiaries, lives inside a cocoon of protective adult strategies designed to keep the brutal political actions of their leaders, and the human misery they produce, far out of sight and consciousness. 'Our Sharpeville' is less a poem about this one historical event than a depiction of entrapment of a child by the adult values that govern her life, the dreadful bargain with the devil of adult love that every child makes in order to honor her parents and their vision of who she is, what she ought to be.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁵ Yvette Christiansë. 1996. *New Coin – South African Poetry: Reviews*. "At the fault line – Writers in the Shadow of Truth and Reconciliation." <<http://www.ru.ac.za/institutes/isea/newcoin/docs/96/R96dec.htm>> (accessed August 8, 2008).

³⁶⁶ Daymond, Driver et al. (2003: 397).

This quote explains and summarizes the delicate situation underlying the poem, the partly conscious, partly unconscious conflict in the mind of the child and the evolution of the attitudes of white South Africans to the Apartheid system.

In the documentary film *Crossings - Three Cape Town Poets*,³⁶⁷ Ingrid de Kok reads the poem “Our Sharpeville”, while at the same time, one watches matching films and pictures of the time. After seeing this film, I understood parts of the poem more clearly. The arms mentioned in line 3 refer to the triumphant gestures of the black people on the lorries, although they could also be understood as rifles if you just see the word and think of this revolutionary time the poem is set in. Maybe the use of the word “arms” suggests exactly this; even if the Blacks were not allowed to carry weapons, they still became strong, by starting to organize themselves. The phrase, “signals at a crossing”, symbolizes for the Blacks that their time to take action has come.

Yet, even without seeing the film *Crossings*, there are several reasons which bring the reader to the already mentioned conclusion that the lyrical speaker in “Our Sharpeville” is to a great extent identical with the author Ingrid de Kok: firstly, Ingrid de Kok was a girl of nine when the massacre in Sharpeville took place, which matches the age of the lyrical speaker. Furthermore, Ingrid de Kok's critical and ironical poem reflects her personal attitude towards Apartheid, something which the film makes quite clear.

Ingrid de Kok lived in Canada from 1976 to 1983. “Our Sharpeville” was first published in *Staffrider* in 1988 and in the same year, it appeared in her collection of poetry called *Familiar Ground*. The collection confirms an awakening of a South African conscience. The power and strength which Ingrid de Kok reveals in it must have come with her return to South Africa after experiencing real democracy.

In the documentary film *Crossings*, Ingrid de Kok briefly outlines the background of her poem “Our Sharpeville” and her intentions. The use of the possessive pronoun “our” is suspect, ironic, and perhaps satirically sarcastic, as nothing is shared between the races or layers of South African society. Yet Ingrid de Kok says, she deliberately called it “*Our* Sharpeville” although the experience

³⁶⁷ Debbie Priestly and Martin Phillips, eds. *Crossings: Three Cape Town poets*. Exeter: Devon County Council Devon Curriculum Services, Media Education Centre, 2000/1.

of ordinary white families in relation to the massacre was definitely different to that of the people suffering in the townships, which the Whites created by moving the black people out of their former homes. She remembers how the races were kept apart, so ironically Blacks were “foreign and familiar”, and she remembers being struck by the difference between the Blacks and Whites in her town: in white families it was often only the father who worked, among the Blacks all tried to work. Additionally, the black miners were not allowed to bring their families but were packed into inferior accommodation.

For the Whites, according to Ingrid de Kok, ‘when Sharpeville came to her town’,³⁶⁸ it represented danger, whereas for the Blacks it was a sign of strength and the possibilities for rising up. Her family restricted the girl’s freedom by identifying (all) black men as very dangerous. So, in her poem, Ingrid de Kok tries to explore all these childhood experiences.

In March 1960, just as the ANC was finalizing preparations for its passive resistance campaign against the pass laws, Robert Sobukwe – who two years earlier had led his followers into [...] the Pan African Congress [...] – called for demonstrations against the pass laws throughout the country. [After the massacre in Sharpeville] violent demonstrations followed every-where.[...] A few days later, the government banned the PAC and the ANC, declared a state of emergency and arrested hundreds of whites and “non-whites”, holding them in prison without trial for several months.³⁶⁹

What was the poets’ task and reaction to all this arbitrariness and violence? “Since the early 1960s [and Sharpeville] there has been an accelerated awareness in South Africa”.³⁷⁰ Literature, along with the arts in general, was a perfect medium to convey a political message into the people’s homes. When “Our Sharpeville” was composed in 1988, long after the time in which it is set, the author was grown-up and well informed, and had been out of the country for many years. Although much time had passed, the poem was still written to tell the

³⁶⁸ Ingrid de Kok grew up in Stilfontain, a small mining town in the Transvaal, constructed under Apartheid in the early 1950s. In *Crossings*, she tells about the violence she remembers and how for example her brother got beaten up several times on their way to school.

³⁶⁹ Jacques Alvarez-Pereyre. *The Poetry of Commitment in South Africa*. London, Ibadan, Nairobi: Heinemann, 1984. 11.

³⁷⁰ Michael Chapman. *South African English Poetry - A modern perspective*. Johannesburg: AD Donker and Cape Town: Delta House, 1984. 9.

truth and to summon people to awake. Through their poems, poets could then and can now show that they are committed to bring about change. Especially

in South Africa, commitment is not a problem. You don't have to be a hero to be committed. You are involved in a situation so fraught with evil that you are brought into collision with it.

The role of a writer-prophet has all along been that of the white poet whose eyes have been sufficiently open for him to 'have seen', whose conscience has been stirred to 'want to speak' before it is too late".³⁷¹

The latter must be Ingrid de Kok's principle and exactly this might be the reason for M. J. Daymond to write that, "Against the tenderness in these lines, Ingrid de Kok's work is often ruthless in its analysis of the brutal history of oppression which has also constructed her white subject position".³⁷²

In "Our Sharpeville" Ingrid de Kok wants to inform, exhort, warn and in a way accuse³⁷³ her readers of responsibility for the deplorable state of affairs in South Africa. Through the irony in the poem, she reminds them to be attentive at all times and she underlines how important knowledge and the development of a consciousness through the "restoration of the cracked heirloom"³⁷⁴ is. As the poet's role consists of speaking out to awaken the dormant conscience³⁷⁵, I think that it is Ingrid de Kok's greatest concern that people do not forget what happened on the 21st of March 1960: namely, that 67 black Africans were killed, most of them shot in their backs while trying to flee, and another 186 were injured when police opened fire on a peaceful protest against laws which stood for racial discrimination, the *Pass Laws*.

"Our Sharpeville" proves that the things that remain unsaid still find their way to the surface. Leaving them unsaid does not mean they are forgotten, and the

³⁷¹ Alvarez-Pereyre (1984: 254, 253).

³⁷² Daymond (1996: xxvi).

³⁷³ This accusation is mainly brought against those white people who knew they were supporting an unjust regime and who nevertheless did nothing to change it.

³⁷⁴ Ingrid de Kok. "Cracked heirlooms: memory on exhibition". *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa*. Eds. Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee. Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1998. 57-71.

³⁷⁵ "South African committed poetry does not limit itself to revealing the facts of the situation and to emphasizing where the responsibility lies: it also aims to warn and to exhort. The first of these tasks is assumed chiefly by the white poets, the second by the blacks; for both of them the aim is to make known the urgent need for change." Alvarez-Pereyre (1984: 252).

poem shows the reader how the denial of knowledge affects one's conscience through the feeling of shame. Through her poem, Ingrid de Kok shows the impact of the past on one's identity and warns her readers of being oblivious to reality. She begs them not to close their eyes to unfairness, but to overcome the old and classic failures of communication. The truth about Apartheid must be told, that hereby Sharpeville may serve as an example that should never be forgotten and may always act as a deterrent, so that history does not repeat itself and Sharpeville does not become another date.

Some people compare the fall of Apartheid with the fall of the Berlin wall in the same year. So even though South Africa is one of those very few countries which can say of themselves that they lived through a bloodless revolution, the change of government was preceded by many bloody confrontations like that in Sharpeville. Malika Ndlovu's poems "COLD FIRE AT CROSSROADS" and "Peace Plight" reflect these experiences of raw violence in the townships.

Malika Ndlovu (b.1971) was still quite young during Apartheid. Nevertheless she got a distinct taste of the time and its effects, mainly through the experiences, anxieties and stories of her elder relatives and friends. She, however, not only introduces her experiences of Apartheid into her work, but also those of the post-Apartheid era, including the new influences which pour into South Africa. One such influence which does not stop at South African borders, is globalisation, which goes hand in hand with increasing American influence that may lead to a loss of values and traditions.

COLD FIRE AT CROSSROADS

by Malika Ndlovu

Furnaces of hatred
Burn the rubber
Flames creep and leap
Across the flesh
Petrol ensures the path
Over back
Into Hair
Down to toes
And fingertips
Fire eats away
At a person
A human being
Is sacrificed

The ones who chant
Dance and stoke the fire
The ones who film and photograph it
Human beings too

What does this mean
To a child
Heart racing
Breath caught
Eyes fixed
To the TV screen

(After watching 1980's SABC
news broadcast)

Malika Ndlovu experienced the bloody riots referred to in her poem in her teenage years. She wrote "COLD FIRE AT CROSSROADS"³⁷⁶ in 1986/87. It tells about the Blacks' campaign of retaliation against other Blacks who were accused of being police informers. The act of violence, described in the poem, is similar to the case of Maki Shosana who was knocked down and burnt to death in front of running TV cameras. The most feared method of revenge was the 'collar' or 'necklace', a car tyre filled with petrol which was laid round the victim's neck and then set on fire. Malika Ndlovu, being coloured, was affected by Apartheid differently than Ingrid de Kok was. She never, however, complains about herself in her interviews. She knows that other people had a much worse time than she had, as

she at least had the chance for a good education. Many of her poems benefit from her own experiences, for factual information and inspiration.

The capital letters of the poem's title "COLD FIRE AT CROSSROADS" on the one hand read like a headline, on the other hand the title sounds like the breaking news of the SABC news broadcast which Malika Ndlovu mentions in the footnote to her poem. The three verses come up with three different perspectives on the cruelties and the 'sacrifices' of Apartheid: first the view of the victims; second the one of the spectators, journalists and reporters; and third the one of a child in front of the TV. This child could be Malika Ndlovu herself. She told me that she wrote the poem approximately two years after the transmission of the

³⁷⁶ Malika Lueen Ndlovu. *poetry-in-progress from period 1986-2002* (unpublished). Crossroads is a township in Cape Town.

programme, at which time she was about 15 years of age. During the Apartheid regime only reports of violent Blacks were reported, but according to Malika Ndlovu, today, the media are more trustworthy than in earlier times.

Peace Plight³⁷⁷

by Malika Ndlovu

tough boots trudging
checking through
the wreckage
no longer above
but inside the maze
of unpaved streets
all forsaken
except for
gutted cars
broken furniture
shattered glass

the trudging halts
something catches
the young soldiers eye
there it lies
nested in cinders
an infants shoe
almost new
but sprayed
with a dull
drying
red
his tears fall
rain upon his rifle
its barrel empty
its targets
dead

The poem "Peace Plight" dates from 1988/89 and alludes to the turbulent pre-liberation days in South Africa as well as to theatres of war elsewhere. It consists of two verse paragraphs and criticizes the destruction of cities, along with the homes of many families, and the abuse of people in war. The first paragraph describes a soldier who combs through the wreckage of houses in a deserted street, destroyed by war, searching for imagined enemies. But all he finds is an infant's shoe covered in blood (second paragraph).

The first verse paragraph presents a picture of destruction. The region, described as a "maze", is abandoned, lifeless. All that remains is burnt-out cars, broken pieces of furniture and glass splinters. It is significant that the soldier in this paragraph appears only as "tough boots". Soldiers are frequently perceived as only being instruments, not as human beings with feelings, who often have to carry out their duties against their will and who suffer as well.

But when the picture of the heavy boots is taken up again in the second verse paragraph and when these

stand still, the human being in the soldier appears. He feels sorry for the many innocent victims which wars leave behind. The future symbolically lies "nested in cinders". Tears fall and patter like rain on his empty rifle, which has not missed its intended target. The only rhymes, "shoe" and "new", as well as the words "red" and "dead", which stand out in stark isolation, lend these words a special weight, making the war look more grotesque. The title "Peace Plight" criticizes the so-called "wars for the sake of peace".

³⁷⁷ Malika Lueen Ndlovu. *poetry-in-progress from period 1986-2002* (unpublished).

I, the Unemployed³⁷⁸

by Nise Malange, 1985

I'm here
Living under a Black cloud
Here, living in thinning light
Here
Freedom is nailed to a tree
To die.
Here I am living: in a match box.

I am here dying of hunger
And my country is also dying
My children are dying too
[...]

And then there are poems like “I, the Unemployed”, from which an excerpt is given here. Already at the time, the anti-Apartheid activist and performance poet Nise Malange, wanted to raise awareness, speak out and help the underprivileged not to be forgotten but to become visible. Here, she works with the picture of “Living under a Black cloud [...] in thinning light” and paints the picture of the poor who are dying, just as the country is dying as well as “Freedom is nailed to a tree/ To die”.

Written from different perspectives on history and from opposite ends of the social spectrum all of the above poems deal with Apartheid experiences. The first three poems even have the viewpoints of little girls in common. Rather than to say that the poets discussed in this chapter have a ‘social conscience’, it would be better to describe them as artists who are aware of and sensitive to the enormity and effect of the events unfolding in their midst, and then quite naturally reflect and express their inner feelings to their countrymen and women. Thus all three poets criticize violence towards innocents, no matter in what form. They also disapprove of a ‘hunger’, which in a literal and figurative sense ravages the country, morally indefensible armed conflicts, and internal struggles or civil wars as occurred in the 1980s in South Africa. In describing them, these poets help to fill the gaps in South African history and to re-write and correct it – in the form of verse.

Rewriting literary history inevitably implies a process of re-canonization. In itself there is nothing wrong with such an endeavour provided it aims at being as inclusive as possible.³⁷⁹

At the same time the poets are making an appeal as their poetry is transferable to other places and situations.

³⁷⁸ Chapman (2001: 321).

³⁷⁹ Steward van Wyk. “Canonizing the Other, or an Approach to Black Afrikaans Writing: The Case of Adam Small”. *Constructing South African Literary History*. Eds. Elmar Lehmann, Erhard Reckwitz, Lucia Vennarini. Essen: Die Blaue Eule, 2000. 142.

Further good examples for the representation of Apartheid in South African women's poetry are Gladys Thomas' poems in *Cry Rage*.³⁸⁰ Especially the following show the terror and humiliations experienced under Apartheid:

[...]
 Oh, mother bird why did you lay
 Your eggs in this tree
 Where you know I cannot be free
 Where my nestlings are disturbed at play
 My nest hunted night and day
 My nestlings' worms taken away

These vultures are my enemy
 Why do they fly so after me
 These vultures they are my enemy

Time has come to migrate
 To a land away from here
 A land where the grass is greener
 Where my feathers will not stand out in fear
 I must take flight to where I will be free
 To make my nest in any tree [...]

Poem 71, "Flight", printed in abbreviated form on the left, possesses an elaborate rhyme scheme and a recurring refrain. In "Flight", the lyrical speaker describes her despairing within her own country of origin. In a metaphor, the first stanza alludes to a cuckoo which has taken over the nest of others and the original owners being "Kicked out of their nests and worms taken away".

"Haunted Eyes" (Poem 79), "Leave Me Alone" (Poem 77, "I tear my hungry babe from my breast/ To come and care for yours") and "To Live in Fear"

[...]
 They say you don't need love
 They say you don't need passion
 They say you don't need sex
 They say you don't long for your children
 They say you don't know the meaning of compassion
 They've made you half a man [...]

(Poem 72) describe the situation of black and coloured workers during Apartheid: "Fear to go beyond the fence at night"/ Fear of a knock on his door/

Hide your wife/ Or she must go on that long train ride". These poems also show the attitude and incomprehension of the white masters when it came to their workers' needs.

To love in fear
 is to love like I love.
 This child now growing in my womb
 Conceived without response, [...]
 Hold me in your white arms, my love
 We must save our child, my love
 Take him from this hell, my love
 Save him from this fear, my love
 Or must I kill him in my womb! [...]

Last but not least, also amongst Gladys Thomas' poetry, there are poems that deal with the *Immorality Act*. Like Poem 75, they tell of "Immoral Love" and the related fears.

³⁸⁰ Matthews and Thomas (1972). No pagination.

The search for identity in post-Apartheid poetry

The following three chapters are the heart of this study. Working with the primary texts, the poems themselves, they focus on different aspects of identity which are major topics in South African poetry in general, and they look into the most obviously recurring themes of contemporary South African women's poetry:

- ethnic identity, the identity within a certain group of society and the depiction of the relations between the ethnic groups, is treated in Chapter VI,
- gender identity, a discussion of gender problems and womanhood and motherhood, in Chapter VII and
- professional identity, being an artist, a woman poet, in Chapter VIII.

VI. Skin-colour and belonging

The whole conception of ethnic groups is so complex and so vague that it might be good to abandon it altogether – Max Weber, sociologist, 1922

Max Weber's quote sounds very convincing, but South Africa is far from being able to manage without its racial categories. These are so influential that the topic still³⁸¹ finds its way into literature. This chapter proposes to find out how South African women poets deal with their ethnic heritage in post-Apartheid times. This is made possible by the fact that many poems deal with or hint at belonging to one or the other racial group as defined by the former Apartheid regime. It is remarkable that even though all agree that the negative implications of ethnic classification should disappear, the struggle against it makes the cohesion within those groups stronger.

Another point which this study wants to illustrate is that it appears that white poets are interested in or preoccupied primarily with topics other than those their fellow-writers of the same age but different ethnic groups are concerned with. Those who used to belong to the suppressed skin colours seem to be more interested in finding or creating a new identity, a place to belong. Therefore, amongst the works of poets of colour, the topics of race, skin-colour and belonging are frequently encountered. White poets do not seem to broach the issue of their whiteness as often as coloured or black people do their affiliation to a certain racial group. This does not necessarily mean that white poets live in denial of the past, it only confirms that the numbers of coloured and black poets who work with their past are much higher. Possibly white writers find it inappropriate and offensive to write – so close to the moment of change – about the difficulties they, the former oppressors, encounter after they lost their dominant positions. One rare exception is J.M. Coetzee's novel *Disgrace* (2000), in which this issue takes centre stage. It is rather unlikely that the white South Africans do not write about the Blacks' suffering out of respect for them (see Ingrid de Kok's "Small Passing" in Chapter VII). It is more likely that white

³⁸¹ In Germany, even more than 60 years after the end of World War II, the topic is still more than present in literature.

poets, especially, are all too influenced by the attitude that Apartheid has ended years ago, so why should they still bother instead of moving on. The comparison of various poets' biographies and poetry collections shows that Whites have a much greater tendency to remain apolitical and write more poetry about romantic love and landscape themes, also referred to as "'veld and vlei' poetry – an adaptation of the mores of English romanticism to the South African context".³⁸² The situation is comparable to post-war Germany, in which hardly any German wanted to talk or write about the Holocaust. Coloured and black writers on the other hand take the first opportunity to speak out. For them, finally, the time to speak their minds has come.

This makes it even more surprising that Zakes Mda, himself a black writer, picks white Africanness as a subject in his novel *The Madonna of Excelsior*. Zakes Mda lets his character Adam de Vries speak about what belonging still means (and has always meant) for an Afrikaner:

Long before anyone else called themselves Africans, my people called themselves Afrikaners. Africans. Unlike the English-speaking South African, the Afrikaner does not look to England or any European country as the mother country. His only point of reference is South Africa. He does not see South Africa as a colonial outpost. He is deeply rooted in the soil of South Africa. How dare you question my Africanness?³⁸³

The character's words show, how tricky racial relations are and how difficult it is to clarify the question of belonging in South Africa.

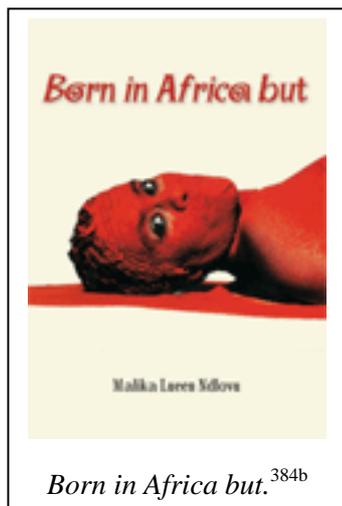
Furthermore, in South Africa, identity has a lot to do with politics. The poems chosen, therefore, are mainly political or have at least a political aspect to them. Even though many up and coming (mostly black and coloured) South African poets have been criticised for sounding as if they were 'sermonising' in their political and autobiographical poetry, I must admit, that it is exactly that, that made South African poetry so interesting for me: its portrayal of politics and, through that, society and history.

³⁸² Cecily Lockett. "South African Women's Poetry: A Gynocritical Perspective". *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*. Vol. 11, No. 1, Spring 1992. 51-61. 54.

³⁸³ Mda (2002: 252).

VI.1 Being black and a new voice

The problem of race and identity amongst coloured and black writers has often been one of defining their own culture and heritage. Especially amongst the so-called Coloureds, including Indians and Asians, it was very common for them to distance themselves from the Whites during Apartheid. As a result of this and also because of the injustice of being lumped together in a third, 'coloured' category despite having cultural backgrounds which were the most varied of all, the tendency was for Coloureds to 'go black'. Especially after their disappointment with the new government, which may, for some people, have changed a few things for the better but without doing anything for the rights of the Coloureds, Coloureds now find it important to define their own identities. However, the Apartheid era tendency, which poets like Malika Ndlovu shared, to say 'everybody who is not white is black', has now been discarded as everybody wants to be seen as an individual.



The poem quoted in the title of this dissertation is "born in africa but"³⁸⁴ from Malika Ndlovu's collection of poetry of the same name. Discussed at greater length in the centre of the dissertation it opens the chapter on race, skin-colour and 'belonging' in post-Apartheid South Africa. "born in africa but" gives voice to and expresses the doubts about and the struggle with the conflicting emotions that many South Africans have towards or with their mother country:

- They are black and therefore belong to the vast majority, but were oppressed for years and still suffer from the effects of Apartheid.
- They are white, but born on African soil and still are not accepted and not always welcome.
- They were classified as coloured or belonging to the Indian or another minority, but lost their roots over generations of shame in which they were taught that they were inferior.

³⁸⁴ Ndlovu (2000: 11).

^{384b} Scanned cover of *Born in Africa but*. Ndlovu (2000).

Many of Malika Ndlovu's works such as "born in africa but" capture

the essence of Ndlovu's multifaceted disapproval of past and present South Africa and the tension which arises out of not knowing your own heritage, [...] She makes visible the trauma of being born in Africa but having been robbed of a heritage, robbed of a history, robbed of a culture and worst of all, robbed of pride. The anger of being born in Africa but 'breastfed' another language, another religion, not an African language and religion, but a foreign Colonial language and religion. Ndlovu resents being born in Africa but having been fed lies, taught someone else's history and someone else's views of who you are. Born in Africa but not being called 'African', labelled 'Coloured', a racist, inadequate term. Born in Africa but robbed of all political rights, and classified as a second-rate citizen, a 'half-caste', 'out-caste' and 'motley crew'.³⁸⁵

"born in africa but" is a powerful political poem which clearly has links to Malika Ndlovu's own life. Born into a so-called coloured family in Durban, and being classified as a Coloured, the most heterogeneous racial category consisting of Cape Coloureds, Cape Malays, Griqua, Indians, Chinese, Other Asians and Other Coloureds, she was put into a box with people of widely differing backgrounds. Obviously, the classification was completely artificial and devoid of respect for the interesting mixes amongst the so-called coloured South Africans.

"born in africa but" touches on the politically explosive subject of the long-term effects of racial segregation. By pointing out contradictions, "born in africa but" raises various important points that need to be clarified in order to define one's identity and to be able to answer the question of personal belonging or non-belonging. Thus, "born in africa but", describes the theme of post-colonialism and its obvious effect on South African society and languages.

Firstly, there is the problem of English as the language of poetry as already discussed in depth in Chapter II. 4 (cf. Makhosazana Xaba's "You told me" and Lisa Combrinck's "Naming Journey"). Further, in a very personal way, the lyrical speaker³⁸⁶ complains about the fact that she was controlled by external forces throughout her whole life and that being labelled 'coloured' is racist and has

³⁸⁵ Tobin (2001: 32).

³⁸⁶ In the case of most South African women poets, amongst them Malika Ndlovu, one can say that they identify with their lyrical speakers in their poems. This is why the lyrical speaker will be referred to as 'she'. In the case of Malika Ndlovu see Tobin (2001: 15): "Being called 'coloured' is something Ndlovu tries to avoid. She says [...], 'Relating myself to the term Coloured has always been a problem for me' [...]. Ndlovu does however consider herself 'African' [...] She herself 'wanted the term [coloured] to be obliterated from my vocabulary' (July, 2001)".

deprived generations of their traditions, religions, history, their rights, pride and their own, distinct identity.

“born in africa but” captures the complex disapproval of the past and present South Africa. It describes the tension which develops, when people are uncertain about their origin. Malika Ndlovu shows the trauma of being born in South Africa, but being deprived of one’s heritage, and what is worst, of ones pride. “born in africa but” shows the anger of the Coloureds, who, even though they were born in South Africa, speak a European, and not an African language, and have a European religion and not a traditional African faith. Already as children, they were brought up with the language and religion of the colonial masters as pointed out by Fiona Tobin above. This problem with their own ethnic identity is faced by many coloured South Africans like Malika Ndlovu. Although English and Afrikaans are both languages with an origin foreign to the African continent, they are preferred by Coloureds, very few of whom speak an ‘indigenous language’. Malika Ndlovu herself grew up speaking English and considers Zulu her second language and one she knows imperfectly at that. In the poem, she criticises this state of affairs through her lyrical speaker.

In “born in africa but” the lyrical speaker laments that she grew up on the lies and the history of others, but above all on the judgement of others about who she should be and become. To be born in Africa, but not as an African, and labelled ‘coloured’, is something the lyrical speaker deplores as something similar to being born in Africa while deprived of all political rights and to be seen as a second class citizen. After all, the Coloureds were considered half-castes, cast out from the big racial groups, discriminated against by the almighty Whites. Yet still being privileged over and above the Blacks made them disliked by them too. Due to their special position between white and black, the Coloureds were often referred to as ‘God’s stepchildren’,³⁸⁷ a term coined in the novel of that name by Sarah Gertrude Millin.

³⁸⁷ Millin (1924).

born in africa but

by Malika Ndlovu

born in africa but
breastfed another mother tongue
put to sleep on foreign lullabies
praying for a jesus-heaven
when i die

born in africa but
into a designated cultivated patch
flung far from the indigenous tree
strategy for carving out my destiny

born in africa but
mixed equals inferior
rearrange that exterior
scorned for the secret
exposed by my skin
enslaving beliefs
this child was bathed in

born in africa but
i have died to
the hiding
dividing
fearful deciding
of what i am
who i should be

born in africa but
a self made prisoner
i release captivity
i am free to unfold the sacred map
no other will dictate my individual destiny
born in africa but
living before and beyond
a universe awakens in me

The first stanza of the poem “born in africa but” expresses the poem’s anger in the sounds it creates. It is full of plosives, especially at the beginning of the verses: “born...but”, “breastfed”, “put” and “praying”. Together with the fricatives in “africa”, “breastfed”, “foreign” and “for” this gives the first stanza a disdainful, almost aggressive tone.

In the second stanza alliteration is employed in “flung far from”. The entire second stanza criticises the homeland politics of Apartheid, the word “patch” is used onomatopoeically, it refers to the tiny, unfertile locations which the legitimate heirs of the country, “flung far from the indigenous tree”, were allocated and which had a great influence on their personal destinies and careers.

The third stanza works with rhymes between “inferior” and “exterior” and “skin” and “in” and underlines the criticism of the education which claimed that one could measure the worth of a person according to their skin colour or race. “dividing” divides the fourth stanza and thereby expresses the pain of the search for identity. The broken self-esteem of the lyrical speaker is mirrored in the lower case letter ‘i’ for ‘I’.

All stanzas begin with “born in africa but” and list instances of discrimination. The words “born in africa but”, however, are picked up again in

the last stanza, in the third to last line. It is here, where a more positive undertone resonates and where “i”, “my” and “me” accumulate, an optimistic outlook strengthened by the anaphora “I release captivity/ i am free”. And so, as most of Malika Ndlovu’s poems, “born in africa but” also ends with a positive outlook. The lyrical speaker notices that she makes herself a prisoner, that she needs to become active and that there are opportunities that she never thought of. The lyrical speaker claims new rights for herself and recognizes her new chances: “a universe awakens in me”.

The following poem by Malika Ndlovu, “Distinguished Umbrella”,³⁸⁸ is also strongly socio-critical. Its interpretation is hardened as Malika Ndlovu on the one hand fights for the rehabilitation of coloured pride, on the other hand she does not want to be affiliated with this term. Still, in the poem, she comes out of the closet on behalf of those, who, as Coloureds, were unfairly denied an identity of their own choice and writes from their perspective. It is important to know “Distinguished Umbrella”, if one wants to understand Malika Ndlovu and her dilemma. The poem deals with race and identity and the popular understanding of the term ‘coloured’.

In “Distinguished Umbrella”, Malika Ndlovu broadens the readers’ horizons and draws them towards a critical perspective. She confronts them with an enumeration of different expressions which all try to describe those who, during Apartheid, were arbitrarily summarised under the coloured label and she tries to acknowledge the existence of those who were unfairly deprived of their identity. In the history of colonisation, the phenomenon of a ‘trisection’ of society can only be found in South Africa. It is only here that between the much more influential and larger groups of the Blacks and Whites, a third group has been constructed. It is of further interest that the term ‘Coloured’ which refers to such a heterogeneous group with which very few can and want to identify (“The word is out”) has stuck for so long, while the terms ‘Native’ and ‘Bantu’ have long disappeared.

³⁸⁸ Ndlovu (2000: 54-55).

Distinguished Umbrella

by Malika Ndlovu

Coloured
The word is out
Does the label stand
Can I stand the label

Coloured in
Coloured out
What is coloured all about

So-called Kleurling
Amakaladi
Bushi
Euro-African
St. Helenan
Mixed
Mauritian
Malay
Korrelkop
Kroeskop
Darkie
Play-white
Other Coloured
Cape Coloured
Bastard
Bruinou
Bushak
Khoi-Khoi
San
Gazi
Outie
Stekkie
Lightie
Bra!

Coloured pride
The great divide
The face we show
The roots we hide
To escape the truth
The fears inside

Black by day
White by night
Stuck in the wings
While the rest take flight

Coloured
Rich combination
Blend of race
Face of nation
Oneday
Coloured
A celebration.

In the first two stanzas of the poem “Distinguished Umbrella” the lyrical speaker tries to find out if she wants to identify with and relate herself to a label that has been imposed on her. The lyrical speaker discusses whether or not she wants to carry the burden of being labelled with such a ridiculous term and asks about the status of being coloured.

The poem’s third and longest stanza resembles a spontaneous variation on the term coloured. Some of the expressions used for and amongst South African Coloureds listed are more or less neutral, many are derogatory, others only derogatory when used by or for certain people. The “Bra!” sums them all up as brothers in the new South Africa. The next two stanzas set the reader thinking about the vague definition of the racial group, ‘coloured’, into which people were enrolled when they did not fit into the larger groups, Black or White. Finally, the last stanza provides an answer for the beginning, and draws a line under the subject. It answers the question of what being coloured is all about: Being coloured, in terms of full of colour and being a “Rich combination” as well as representing the face of a nation together with all the other racial groups, should not be a source of shame but should and will “Oneday” be “A celebration”. The poem underlines how important it is to know ones own real roots, heritage and identity.

A close reading of the beginning of the poem reveals that Malika Ndlovu works with many traditional stylistic devices. The first one can be found in lines 3 and 4 of the poem. “Does the label stand/ Can I stand the label” forms an interesting chiasm. It underlines the negative connotations the lyrical

speaker feels when she comes to being labelled 'coloured', and she raises the question of the need to maintain such labels. In lines 5 and 6, Malika Ndlovu plays with the word coloured, using an anaphora or a parallelism to underline the importance of the question "What is Coloured all about". Malika Ndlovu's playing with the word 'coloured' encourages the reader to wonder if everybody might not somehow be coloured. This reminds one of the 1996 video clip by Tongue Forest featuring LaMont Humphrey called "You Got The F... Nerve To Call Me Coloured",³⁸⁹ in which the coloured speaker complains about being called coloured when white people are born pink, turn red when they are in the sun, green when they are sick, blue when they are cold and violet when they die.

The third stanza uses several rhymes ("Euro African"/ "St. Helenan", "Mauritian"), alliterations ("Mixed"/ "Mauritian"/ "Malay", "Korrelkop"/ "Kroeskop", "Bastard"/ "Bruinou"/ "Bushak") and parallelism ("Other Coloured", "Cape Coloured"). As mentioned above, the poem's third and longest stanza resembles a variation on the word coloured, how it has been referred to and what it can actually mean in South Africa. Such words were often used, mainly by the Afrikaners to insult and humiliate coloured people during Apartheid, to tease and annoy those to whom the expressions were applied. "Kleurling" is a word coloured people use referring to themselves jokingly, but like the word "nigger" used for blacks by black people, "Kleurling" cannot be used by anyone who is not coloured. The same is true for "Bushi" but this expression is rather derogatory. There are also words black people used for coloured people like Amakaladi, which does not have a negative connotation. "St. Helenan", "Mauritian" and "Malay" are the only words referring to the actual origin of people, even though this did not necessarily have to be true. Hereby "Malay", for example, refers to the desirable light skin and dark and silky hair. "Euro-African" and "Mixed" are just expressions for mixed descent. "Korrelkop" and "Kroeskop" are two words coloured people use for themselves as insults for those who have undesirable frizzy and curly hair. "Darkie" was originally used by Blacks for Blacks, so, its use for coloured people is rather questionable, as correctly used it alludes and

³⁸⁹ Tongue Forest feat. LaMont Humphrey. "And You Got The F... Nerve To Call Me Coloured". Label: BMG, Logic Records, 1996.

applies to people with almost black skin. A “Play-white”³⁹⁰ was someone who pretended to be white, for example, in order to be allowed to live in white suburbs and get into cinemas.

The Apartheid system of classification led to absurd extremes. When during times of Apartheid ‘non-white’ people were classified as Coloureds, they could, according to their skin tone and texture of hair, not their origins, be classified as “Cape Coloured” or “Other Coloured”. “Bastard” is probably one of the most obviously pejorative words as it implies illegitimacy. “Brouinou” stands for a brown man. As they are used according to physical appearance, the tribal names “Khoi-Khoi” and “San”³⁹¹ referring to Hottentots and Bushmen are very insulting for people who do not belong to these tribes. “Gazie”, meaning ‘blood’, as well as “Outie”, which means ‘old man’, are used for friends, buddies, pals. If it has Germanic roots, the word “Stekkie” could well refer to skinny boys, while “Lighty” is used for young boys. Finally there is the concluding “Bra!”, meaning ‘brother’, which will be referred to later in this chapter. Those terms mentioned for Coloureds which are insulting do not belong in the new South Africa, yet they linger on.

The next stanza starts with the statement “Coloured pride/ The great divide”, a feeling which is well known to Malika Ndlovu herself. She does not want to be referred to as coloured whereas there are other Coloureds who are proud of being coloured. Fiona Tobin’s dissertation states that for Malika Ndlovu “‘everything that is not White, is Black.’ (March, 2001)”.³⁹² It is interesting that the poet does not say ‘Everything that is not Black is White’. Obviously, she does not want to align herself with the former oppressors but still she wants to belong to a large group and not only to a minority. Like that she wants to avoid being underprivileged and forgotten again: First being coloured in a white, now being coloured in a black world. Malika Ndlovu said in an interview in March 2001:

I was very defensive about being called *Coloured*. It is an oppressor’s term, a no-name brand term stuck on me. I thought I am much bigger than someone else’s

³⁹⁰ Cf Fanon’s documentation of experiences, feelings of dependency and inadequacy of Blacks in a white world described in *Black Skin, White Masks*.

³⁹¹ “San” is a term which was used derogatively by the Khoi-Khoi for the Bushmen. For more information see introduction to this study.

³⁹² Tobin (2001: 5).

label. [...] Writing about the struggle of how you've been labelled, made me confront my fears.³⁹³

In lines 31 to 38 another repetition of words, to be precise the word “The”, follows. Paradoxically, this repetition of the definite article strengthens the inner conflict of the “I”, and it gives the readers the feeling that they were actually involved in a conversation with the thoughtful lyrical speaker. It is in line 35 that the narrative point of view changes from “I” to “we”. This use of the plural gives the readers the hint that the lyrical speaker is not alone with her feelings and problems, but that there are more coloured people trying “To escape the truth” and the fears of not being desired and welcome in society. The fifth stanza underlines this feeling of still not belonging, this feeling of still not being recognized as ‘real’ South Africans and of still being part of a group of outsiders. To express this, Malika Ndlovu uses the example that by day Coloureds are usually seen more as black, by night as white people, which pleases no-one. The lines “Stuck in the wings/ While the rest take flight” underlines the poet’s statement that coloured people still do not have equal rights when compared to black and white people. These lines remind one of a line in Gladys Thomas’ poem 39 in *Cry Rage!*³⁹⁴, “held hostage within the colour of my skin”, which gives expression to the same phenomenon.

The last stanza encourages all Coloureds by saying that their time will come, the time when being coloured will also be recognized and highly prized, and be referred to as a “Rich combination”, ‘although’ being, maybe in fact, a “Blend of race”. This is a very different tone to Bessie Head’s description of her own colouredness at a time in which the term coloured was rejected, when “she describes her identity in terms of lack”:³⁹⁵

Not now, not ever, shall I be complete [...]. What do I do now that your face intrudes everywhere, and you are yet essentially *ashamed* of me as the thing of nothing from nowhere? Nothing I am, of no tribe or race, and because of it full of a childish arrogance to defend myself against all of you. (*The Cardinals*, 121).³⁹⁶

By contrast Malika Ndlovu prophesizes that “Oneday” the time will come, when this “Rich combination” will provide a reason for “A celebration.”.

³⁹³ Tobin (2001: 24).

³⁹⁴ Matthews and Thomas (1972).

³⁹⁵ Wicomb (1998: 96).

³⁹⁶ So quoted in Wicomb (1998: 97), my italics.

What is very striking is that Malika Ndlovu uses no punctuation marks except two: an exclamation mark after “bra!” as well as a full stop at the end of the poem, “A celebration.” She does not use question marks which could have been used at the end of lines 3, 4 and 7 or a colon after “So-called” in line 8. This gives the poem an uninterrupted flow, and it gives more freedom for interpretation and for reading the poem (silently or aloud). The words “bra!” and “celebration.” of course do get a certain weight through the rare use of punctuation marks. All the people listed above “bra!” form one nation, they are all South Africans and ‘brothers’. To remind the reader of this fact is probably the reason why Malika Ndlovu put in an exclamation mark. The full stop at the end of the poem underlines the conclusion and the certainty of the fact that the time for coloured people will come.

All these stylistic devices bring order to the listing of these terms and create a rhythm inside one’s head that reminds the reader of modern musical styles like Rap. Such an idea is by no means farfetched as Malika Ndlovu is also involved in the music business where she is “known for her rich original text and performance poetry”.³⁹⁷

When it comes to the heading of the poem “Distinguished Umbrella”, one can only guess what Malika Ndlovu felt when she chose it. To her, coloured is an ‘umbrella term’ which needs to be distinguished. When one reads the poem, one is reminded of the multicoloured object that protects one from the rain.³⁹⁸ Transferred to the image used in “Distinguished Umbrella”, every colour represents coloured people and their personal backgrounds. Everybody is an individual and unique, no one is identical to anyone else. This is the same for all the people of the “Rainbow Nation” in Cape Town or in South Africa. Usually the colourful bits on umbrellas have the same size, so they are all of the same value

³⁹⁷ Artscape – Resource Centre Event Archive. No date. “*Risk: Dance and Poetry meet*”. *Artscape*. <www.artscape.co.za/event_archive.php?eventid=114> (accessed April 2, 2003).

³⁹⁸ The poem “Distinguished Umbrella” reminds one of two different pictures. The first is, that when twisting an umbrella over one’s head, the colours lose their borders and melt into a colourful umbrella without transitions. The second association is Andrew Lloyd Webber’s Musical *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat*. Joseph’s multicoloured coat is impressive in the way in which it combines all the colours.

and in the figurative sense have the same rights. All of them are needed to make up a whole, functioning umbrella.³⁹⁹

As the note at the end of it shows us, the poem “Distinguished Umbrella” definitely originates from post-Apartheid times. Malika Ndlovu says it was written in June 1998 and it is closely linked with her play *A Coloured Place*,⁴⁰⁰ written the same year. Furthermore, Malika Ndlovu states that the poem also is “inspired by a conversation with [her] African-American friend Kathy Perkins, in which [she] attempted to articulate the multiplicity of meanings the word ‘coloured’ has within the South African context”.⁴⁰¹

The poem “Distinguished Umbrella” underlines the importance, diversity and richness of everyone’s roots and history. The word ‘coloured’, when referring to the importance of these factors, is an effective ‘umbrella term’. In the poem, Malika Ndlovu “exposes the negative labels associated with ‘Coloured’ people and explores the celebration of a ‘Coloured’ identity of a different kind. She calls for the celebration of the richness of ancestry that will lead to a specific identity”.⁴⁰² Malika Ndlovu succeeds very well in making the reader aware of a problem that is not so obvious, namely, what it is like to have to consider oneself as a brand with no name, like generic products, after having fallen through a screen that separates Blacks and Whites and that discriminates against people who do not fit neatly into one of these two categories, thereby ignoring cultural backgrounds. The poem ridicules all attempts to divide a country’s people by their colour of skin and putting all those who did not fit into the bigger categories of Black, White or Indian together in one fourth group. “Distinguished Umbrella” encourages everyone who had simply been labelled as coloured to overcome their fears and feelings of insecurity and to search for their roots, to be proud of their descent, and to hope and work for an equal future. Malika Ndlovu wants her readers, to be aware and proud of their diversity and so to be part of the ‘distinguished umbrella’.

³⁹⁹ If one had to locate the poem in Cape Town, one would notice that it fits very well into the picture of the Capetonian districts of Observatory, the artist-friendly district where Malika Ndlovu actually lives, or the picturesque Bo-Kaap where many coloured Muslim people (‘Malays’) live.

⁴⁰⁰ This play is included in the anthology of plays by Kathy A. Perkins (1999).

⁴⁰¹ “Distinguished Umbrella” by Malika Ndlovu. de Kok and Ferguson (2001: 30).

⁴⁰² Tobin (2001: 32).

A very similar topic is discussed in Deela (Dilaram) Khan's poem "Black Woman

Black Woman Poet: The Eternal Outsider

by Deela Khan

It's not possible
To have Identity & Equality
At one Shot –
The Wild One has to Expunge
Identity
In order to enjoy Equitability
Difference has always been a Prison –

Woman, you declare, you don't perceive
My Oppression as Markedly
Different to Yours.
With pomegranate eyes
Spewing a shower of sparks
You pathetically implore:
Black Women don't run a Monopoly on Pain!
White Women have Suffered too.
White Women are Hurting now.
White Women have Burned always.
Try to listen.
You've gotta understand!

Taken aback, I mutter,
"For Heaven's Sakes,
Suffering is exact!"

I listen to the relentless
Fall of your Barbs
As they Bore into my Nerve-ends –
My inner-ear hears you ask
How many times
I've been Raped –
How much could I,
Safely,
Reveal to You
Uncircumcised Sister?
You hold the Powerglass.
You could make my Words
Become the very Sjamboks⁴⁰⁶
You'd lash my ass with!

Poet: The Eternal Outsider"⁴⁰³.
Deela Khan (b.1952), the author of
*So Hard to Heal in a Hard Age*⁴⁰⁴
and *Engaging the Shades of
Robben Island*,⁴⁰⁵ studied amongst
other subjects English and Creative
writing in the Western Cape and
New York. It is obvious that her
language differs in many respects
from that of Malika Ndlovu's
poems. Deela Khan uses many
more foreign words, especially
words of French origin. The result
is that it is more difficult to
understand her poetry and its
meaning, and with such demanding
poetry, in performances, she may
not reach as wide a South African
audience as some others of her
colleagues from the women's
collective WEAVE.

Maybe this difference hints
at the fact that the poem was not
written to be performed, as most of
Malika Ndlovu's poems are, which
are even written down only after
being performed as a performance

⁴⁰³ Barry, Ndlovu and Khan (2002: 138).

⁴⁰⁴ Deela Khan. *So Hard to Heal in a Hard Age*. Kentucky, USA: White Fields Press, 1994.

⁴⁰⁵ Deela Khan. *Engaging the Shades of Robben Island*. Athlone: Realities, 2002.

⁴⁰⁶ Snakelike whip made from rubber.

Violated,
 I was,
 Right from Conception,
 I cry out enraged –
 Borne into Our
 Dog-Eats-Dog World
 Of Imperialist Debt
 Eating into my Brittle Spine
 My life has been
 A Perpetual Ache –
 I've spent my Time
 Militating against this Hump
 That has been refracting
 My Gaze into the Dirt
 Since the eerie hour
 My Thought Began to Sprout –
 Ken jy vir my?
 (Do you know me?)
 Kaffir-Coolie Meid,
 Hotnot-Moor,
 Kaapse Boesman,⁴⁰⁷
 Dogsboddy Half-breed,
 Vitriolic Afrikan-Know-all!

My Hallmarks
 Fuel my Creative Flare –
 A Poet-Vixen
 I dwell
 Dangerously
 On the
 mined
 Peripheries –

poem. It is possible that her poetry was developed 'at the drawing board' as print-poetry, meant to be read. It may also be that Deela Khan uses encryption and sophisticated language as part of a tactic to 'prove' her own intellectual powers to possible sceptics (for example critics and publishers).

What Deela Khan's poem conveys very clearly is the feeling that identity and equality can stand in each other's way. "The Wild One has to Expunge/ Identity/ In order to enjoy Equitability". For her, to be different always meant to be restricted: "Difference has always been a Prison".

In the second stanza, Deela Khan strikes an aggressive tone.

The lyrical speaker obviously starts arguing with a most likely white female counterpart as "you don't perceive/ My Oppression as Markedly/ Different to Yours". The lyrical speaker is outraged and at the same time silenced by the barbs of the metaphorically "Uncircumcised Sister" who did not undergo the 'initiation' and suffering of someone whose ways were fated from birth. She is convinced that their situations cannot be compared, as, in her opinion, a white person, even as a woman, still has much more power: "You hold the Powerglass". It is in this stanza that one notices why the lyrical speaker is so unsettled and why she does not know whom she can trust. She is worried that what she says could be used against her afterwards. "You could make my Words/ Become the very Sjamboks/ You'd lash my ass with!"

⁴⁰⁷ Derogatory expressions for people of colour.

Just as in “Distinguished Umbrella”, the lyrical speaker lists swearwords with which she has to or had to cope: “Kaffir-Coolie Meid [roughly: black Indian girl],/ Hotnot-Moor,/ Kaapse Boesman,/ Dogsboddy Half-breed,/ Vitriolic Afrikan-Know-all!”. Being coloured with an Indian family background, she feels violated “Right from Conception” and is in the middle of a permanent deep identity crisis. This crisis, she sees as a product of the “Dog-Eats-Dog World/ Of Imperialist Debt” and the double marginalisation of being a woman and being of colour in a society stamped with the indelible imprint of Apartheid. Yet it is also this challenge, the need constantly to deal with prejudicial “Hallmarks”, which ignite the creativity of the lyrical speaker, which “Fuel my Creative Flare”, and she talks of herself as of a ‘dangerous conscience’ which remains there in the “Peripheries”, even if unseen, by the powerful, threatening to remind them of unpleasant truths.

Another very popular performance poet in South Africa at the moment is the already mentioned performance artist and TV presenter Lebogang Mashile. Lebogang Mashile was born in 1979 and lived in exile in America until she returned from there in 1995. This needs to be mentioned as this poet has a very different ‘accent’ to genuine South African poets. Yet, the poems in her collection *A Ribbon of Rhythm* (published as a poetry collection and on CD) and their topics are representative as they form the subject matter treated by most other female performance poets. Topics of her poems are: rewriting history (as in “Tell your story”), identity (as in “I knew a girl once”, “Kedi’s song”), womanhood (as in “Sisters”), and the effects of colonisation (as in “My imagined Community”).

Two outstanding poems dealing with the subject of the burden of being coloured are, interestingly enough, written by the black poet Lebogang Mashile, “I knew a girl once”⁴⁰⁸ and “Kedi’s song”.⁴⁰⁹ In “I knew a girl once”, the lyrical speaker also alludes to prejudices that Coloureds often have to deal with, such as the narrow-mindedness of people who consider them illegitimate: “But to the world she glowed/ Like the moon and sun’s origins/ Wrapped up in someone else’s skin/ That’s when the whispers begin/ That she was coloured by incest/ Coloured by date rape”.

⁴⁰⁸ Mashile (2005: 49-50).

⁴⁰⁹ Mashile (2005: 8-9). Title also included on the CD as track nr. 20, special historical introduction to “Kedi’s Song”: nr. 19.

The poem “Kedi’s Song” is very interesting as it takes up the same topic as Zakes Mda’s novel *The Madonna of Excelsior* (2002). The deeply racist community of Excelsior in the Free State was shaken by a scandal in the 1970s, when prominent white men were found to have fathered children with black women and therefore offended against the *Immorality Act*. These, to the system, immoral relationships left behind a newly formed coloured generation in Excelsior. The coloured children’s skin, which was obviously neither black nor white, was visible to everyone: “Her skin will always sing” and thus betray Kedi and the others. Lines as “Suckled on hushed voices/ Shaded by history’s sins” express how the children grew up with the shame of their mothers and with lies surrounding their identities.

What is interesting is that it is the skin that ‘sings’ throughout two stanzas, trying to explain first its colour and then all the pains and sufferings it, and thus Kedi, has to live through.

Kedi’s song

by Lebogang Mashile

When profanity clamoured unto seduction’s breast
When power devoured and nightfall offered no rest
These women sweep the whispers beneath their children’s skins
Suckled on hushed voices
Shaded by history’s sins
Even as her voice is captive,
Her skin will always sing:

“I am the colour of fresh bread
The colour of winter leaves
The colour of memories burned
The colour of my misdeeds
The colour of earth stolen
The colour of pride broken
The colour of secrets spoken
The colour of pale tokens

But when I sing
It’s with the sun on my tongue and Sesotho beating in my chest
When I sing
It’s for the love of a life I can’t touch without fingers of regret
I sing
For what I can’t remember but my body won’t let me forget
I sing for the embers of legacy
I sing because I have nothing left”

The poem’s last lines are very thoughtful and tragic: coloured people are judged for something they have not even contributed to themselves. It is through her skin that Kedi sings “with [...] Sesotho beating in my chest [...] For what I can’t remember but my body won’t let me forget” - one of the most touching lines.

As young black South African women, we are truly fortunate to have been born into these exciting times. South Africa today [...] is a country that actively embraces women and their contributions and encourages them to achieve what, previously, they could never even have imagined was possible. This is not to discount the problems of being female in a country with one of the highest gender abuse and AIDS statistics in the world. But, too often, so much focus is given to these negatives that it is easy to overlook the positives of what has been achieved. As women, ours is a path filled with challenges, but also with opportunities and many, many possibilities. The onus is on us to face up to the challenges with courage, grab onto the opportunities with enthusiasm, and use the many possibilities to shape our destinies and make something big of our lives. [...] The voices represented here are voices that, until very recently, were forced for reasons of social or cultural pressure to remain mute. Now let out, they speak up with courage and frankness.⁴¹⁴

The self-explanatory quote lists several points which give hope to women and women authors in post-Apartheid times. The poem itself makes it clear that the younger generation of poets use many stylistic devices, such as assonances in the case of “What makes me an African”⁴¹⁵ by Pumeza Tyoda.



Not included in Rose Mokhosi’s collection of poetry, yet definitely sharing the same ideas, is Lebogang Mashile’s “The way we love”.⁴¹⁶ The opening lines are: “Being African is/ Being part of an unseen force/ That speaks to the mind/ That created the earth”. The poem praises the rootedness of the Africans in their soil which gives their love a unique strength. Together with this love, Lebogang Mashile mentions hope and the basis for better times, a “forgiving earth”: “Love is held together by fragile hopes/ That forge a path on the forgiving earth”.

⁴¹⁴ Mokhosi (2006: vii-ix).

⁴¹⁵ Mokhosi (2006: 62).

⁴¹⁶ Mashile (2005: 27). Title also included on the CD as track nr. 11.

Alien in Amsterdam⁴¹⁷

by Malika Ndlovu

Will I ever peel this black an white
veil from my eyes
blinding polar view
Dutch sites and scenes
nauseatingly familiar
boer faces, names and places
a blurring recurring image
die klein vasberade volk
fixated with the fatherland
violators of one after another
motherland

Against this dense cityscape
colours and shapes blend
below a shadow-grey sky
often I must step back
resist being sucked in
remember to look up
knowing that in this very instant
another reality lies
beneath the same awesome sky
a magic blue free of shadows
way across the equator
in a city not built on water
but where two oceans meet
where the history of my world
begins and ends
wind woven
polarised
vine valley'd
intoxicating
blasted and blessed

Cape Town
25 to 42° there
some days maybe 10°
but most days below zero here
same day
one hour's difference
yet opposite poles
on the flipside of the equator
two halves of the whole

“Alien in Amsterdam”⁴¹⁸ belongs to the socio-critical poems which Malika Ndlovu wrote in 1999 during a 3-month intensive study course at DasArts, the Dutch Institute for Advanced Theatre Research in Amsterdam. Her studies focussed on ‘Reconciliation and Storytelling’ and on ‘The Makable Truth’, about how art can be used to manipulate and promote certain truths. Seen from a different angle, the poem was written during the time in which the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission took place. In the radio production “Two Halves of the Whole”, which was recorded during the same stay in Amsterdam which inspired her to write “Alien in Amsterdam”, Malika Ndlovu remembers how, with the help of the Dutch media, she followed the fates and feelings⁴¹⁹ of fellow South Africans whom she knew first hand. In the interview, Malika Ndlovu describes the odd feeling she had following these hearings, while far from home, amongst the Dutch. She remembers seeing the beauty and diversity of the Netherlands and the Dutch, but being unable to reconcile all she saw there with her

⁴¹⁷ Barry, Ndlovu and Khan (2002: 189-191).

Cf. as well: Malika Ndlovu. “Two Halves of the Whole.” *RADIO JOURNEY for BBC World Service, African Performance*. Ed. Penny Boreham. Amsterdam, 2000.

⁴¹⁸ By Malika Ndlovu. Barry, Ndlovu and Khan (2002: 189-191).

⁴¹⁹ Even Archbishop Desmond Tutu was shown on television crying, referred to in the poem, “The archbishop chairs the first session”. de Kok (2002: 22). Cf. Chapter I.1.

There are no seasons for grapes
oranges, mangoes, strawberries
or bananas here
they import everything
from almost everywhere
for consumption
shipping them in
carting them out
like the Savannah giraffes
or the three Asian elephants
in the Amsterdam zoo
cargo cut out of their cycle
uprooted from home
now part of a splendid display
day after day after day

I try
to balance the scale
question veil upon veil
though the silence hangs thick
in contact our eyes make it clear
no matter how much we travel
no matter how much we touch
too much is missing

I speak
they do not hear
I am making African noises
not to them
but at them I think
they think

I do
they do not see
I am making African gestures
not toward them
but for them I think
they think

I tell myself
It[']s no longer true
there must be more
we couldn't possibly be back
at this invisibility black
the abc boxing of humanity
our weakest
saddest
lowest point

experiences and background in South Africa.

Thus, the poem "Alien in Amsterdam" gives expression to the fact that, after making negative experiences, one might be able to learn and forgive, but it is not so easy to forget. In "Two Halves of the Whole"⁴²⁰ Malika Ndlovu describes this melancholically and symbolically, expressing it as follows: "There's a sea within me and the waves always come back, and the waves of pain that come back won't leave me".

"Alien in Amsterdam" illustrates Malika Ndlovu's feelings on the Netherlands, a subject so important for South Africans, as that country is inextricably connected with their own history. The Netherlands and South Africa are "two halves of the whole". For, on the one hand, the Dutch are important in the history of South Africa. As they were the first Europeans to settle at the Cape, many white and coloured South Africans have Dutch ancestors and Dutch as a language is still present in the form of the widely spoken Afrikaans. On the other hand, many Blacks and Coloureds think of the Netherlands as the mother country of the Boers or Afrikaners, by whom they were oppressed for so long.

This is why, for Malika Ndlovu, just

⁴²⁰ Malika Ndlovu. "Two Halves of the Whole". *RADIO JOURNEY for BBC World Service, African Performance*. Ed. Penny Boreham. Amsterdam, 2000.

as for many other formerly oppressed South Africans, it is especially painful to see, in the Netherlands, the equality and peaceful co-existence of Whites, Coloureds and Blacks for which the South Africans have had to fight for. In “Two Halves of the Whole” Malika Ndlovu describes South Africa and the Netherlands as “So near, so close, yet forever continents apart”, and she does not only mean the geographical distance, but also the worlds which lie between the two countries in the figurative sense. In “Two Halves of the Whole”, Malika Ndlovu declares she finds it inexplicable, that she must still carry around this subconscious feeling of a “blinding polar view”: the inescapable tendency to notice differences in skin colours, even after Apartheid, and even though she has good relations with people of all backgrounds.

The poem “Alien in Amsterdam” consists of seven stanzas. The first stanza starts rather aggressively with this problem. It describes the view of the lyrical speaker, who, even far from the South African home, cannot restrain her race-distinguishing gaze “Will I ever peel this black and white/ veil from my eyes”, as if she wore a veil which, like some bi-polar lense, accentuates the colour differences. This negative “veil” is emphasized by an enjambement. The lyrical speaker of the first stanza becomes rather claustrophobic, and panics, when she sees the number of Dutch names and buildings all around her all of which remind her of her own home country. It is conspicuous that in this ominous stanza, Malika Ndlovu uses Afrikaans, which she had detested so much, to express her emotions better towards “die klein vasberade volk”, the small ambitious nation. Of further interest here is her use of the contrasting poles “fatherland” and “motherland”. The line, “violators of one after another”, attests to the bad experiences which the lyrical speaker had with the “boer faces, names and places” (internal rhyme enforces the disdain). These confusing sights and feelings turn the impressions into “a blurring recurring image”, which tempt the lyrical speaker to lump the Dutch together with the stereotypical Afrikaners or Boers.

In the second stanza, the lyrical speaker succeeds in bringing herself back to reality and in distracting herself from her dark thoughts under the grey skies. In the process, she affectionately thinks of Cape Town, which lies “beneath the same awesome sky” where the heaven is “a magic blue free of shadows”. This picture makes clear the fact that the first stanza is a memory of a time in the past, a horrible day-nightmare, and that the South Africa represented by Cape Town,

which is described as “blasted and blessed/ intoxicating”, is now beginning to bloom. The lyrical speaker, however, does not forget to mention the extremes, “blasted and blessed”, which Apartheid left behind. Here, “the history of my world” alludes to the fact that the history of South Africa, for Apartheid-politicians, only started in the year 1652 with the foundation of a “refreshment station” by Jan van Riebeeck. The history of the country before this date was viewed with disdain and was never found important enough to be taught.

The third stanza criticises the European consumer behaviour; “they import everything/ for consumption/ gratification all year round” and the narrator suffers especially in sympathy with the non-indigenous animals, the elephants and giraffes, which have been “uprooted from home/ now part of a splendid display/ day after day after day”. Fruits and animals are symbols for the trapped lives of the Blacks and Coloureds abroad, in “Amsterdam”, or in the ‘white’ South Africa of Apartheid. Like the fate of the animals in the Netherlands, for the Blacks and Coloureds, life often meant a gauntlet, starting with the aspirations of many to lighter skin and straighter hair (see *A Coloured Place*). This is where the title “Alien in Amsterdam” comes in. In her thoughts, the lyrical speaker feels acutely aware of the situation of being an outsider, especially due to the omnipresence of the ‘Boers’. In noticeable contrast to our interview in 2003, in the year 2000 Malika Ndlovu still said about herself that she would love to think she were beyond racism.⁴²¹

In form and content, the last four stanzas are connected. They all begin with the word “I”: “I try”, “I speak”, “I do”, “I tell myself”. In the fourth stanza, the lyrical speaker notices that she, as a person conscious of tradition, simply misses too much when far away from home. The stanza draws our attention through the parallelism “no matter how much we [...]”, which underlines the pointlessness of the attempt to feel at home. Furthermore, there is an accumulation of the nasal continuant ‘m’, which is possibly the use of onomatopoeia to represent thinking. The stanzas 5 and 6 also give evidence of the uncertainty of the lyrical speaker at being an “African” in the Netherlands. As a result of the many impressions she has had, she feels self-conscious and has the odd sensation

⁴²¹ Malika Ndlovu. “Two Halves of the Whole.” *RADIO JOURNEY for BBC World Service, African Performance*. Ed. Penny Boreham. Amsterdam, 2000.

that, unlike the Boers in her home country, she is not at home, yes, even misunderstood, as if she were talking past the others. That is, even though Malika Ndlovu had studied Afrikaans at school and even though she could understand most of what was being said around her in Dutch. The lyrical speaker, furthermore, has the vague feeling that she stands out in everything she does, for example in her gesturing. This is why the lyrical speaker remains uncertain of herself and “alien”. Both stanzas end with “I think/ they think” showing low self-confidence of the personal speaker and alluding to the othering processes which are taking place on both sides.

One sentence in Malika Ndlovu’s radio programme, “Two Halves of the Whole”, sounds especially ironic. The lyrical speaker talks of the irrigation and drainage expertise of the Dutch, and says, “These people know how to structure the land”, which leaves an aftertaste. This is where memories of Apartheid and the classification of people into different groups come up. Still, the last stanza shows that the lyrical speaker once more breaks away from her bleak thoughts, “I tell myself/ it[’]s no longer true” and, finally, she deplores “the abc boxing of humanity”, which she castigates as the “saddest/ lowest point”. For Malika Ndlovu’s goal is to convey an “umbrella feeling” and tolerance and she says in “Two halves of the Whole”: “Look at how beautiful we can be when we can be in one place at one time”.⁴²² One can learn from “Alien in Amsterdam” that one needs, on the one hand, to remember, to be able to prevent history from repeating itself, but, on the other, one has to give the new and different future a chance.

The following poem, “Shuttle”, was written by Malika Ndlovu for the “Poetry Bus” tour of the “In Touch Project” in the year 2000. During these poetic bus trips of the “Vodacom In Touch Project”, the visitors or ‘participants’ of the festival were shuttled between the extremes of Cape Town and the townships Khayelitsha and Manenberg.

The poem “Shuttle” has its own, very soft, flowing rhythm, which gives it a ‘swaying’ character. The lyrical speaker takes the lead (“Come with me”). The journey into the other districts is supposed to take place smoothly and softly

⁴²² Malika Ndlovu. “Two Halves of the Whole”. *RADIO JOURNEY for BBC World Service, African Performance*. Ed. Penny Boreham. Amsterdam, 2000.

Shuttle

(for the Cape Town Festival 2000 Poetry Bus)

by Malika Ndlovu

Come with me
Into the next moment
Let me shuttle you
But not too fast
And not too slow
'Cos some of these scenes
You've already seen and been
City to township
Mountain to flatland
Desert to sea
Yet each day is a chance to uncover
Another piece of the puzzle
We may have missed before
Some part of the picture we didn't see
Back into our collective memory
Let me shuttle you
Back and forward
With the beat and the feel of poetry
Celebrating our landscapes
Our inheritance
Our differences
Our common ground

(1.4/5). Even though one thinks one is prepared to see certain things, like townships located on the poorest land, the reality, when met with, can be disturbing: "You've already seen and been/ City to township/ Mountain to flatland/ Desert to sea". Consequent to the *Group Areas Act*, in Cape Town, the Coloureds and Blacks were deported to the Cape Flats, the infertile, sandy and industrial regions. The fertile, green areas, Table Mountain, the town centre, seaside and the beaches were reserved for the Whites.

Yet the poem gives the participants a chance: It is never

too late to uncover a piece of the jig-saw puzzle of reality or to relive a piece of the collective history: "Yet each day is a chance to uncover/ Another piece of the puzzle/ We may have missed before/ Some part of the picture we didn't see".

The "Vodacom In Touch Project" made this possible by shuttling people to and fro. Line 16 urges us once more to get on the "bus", and advertises its good purpose, "Let me shuttle you". There is no risk involved as the return trip is included: "Back and forward". How else could one have the chance to tour the home country 'with the beat and the feel of poetry' and to celebrate all its landscapes, shared heritage and differences on this shared earth. These last four lines are supported by the quadruple anaphora of the word "Our". South Africa is trying to get past the times of division, everybody has to work together and see and cherish the things all have in common.

"Shuttle", which was definitely written in post-Apartheid times, ends as so many of Malika Ndlovu's poems positively, with optimism for the future of South Africa. Optimism and hope seem to be wide-spread amongst South Africans. Even though the poem admits that there are difficulties in coping with the past and



achieving permanent and drastic changes, it does not forget to talk of a shared hope: “each day is a chance”.

Meanwhile there are many projects in Cape Town which attempt to help the inhabitants to get to know the “common ground”, to lose their fears and to overcome their inhibitions vis-à-vis inhabitants from different areas. For tourists, all over South Africa, various township-tours are offered. These are very useful for an insight into the

South African reality. Without these tours it would be impossible, if not dangerous, for tourists to visit these so often forgotten or overlooked places which are home to the people one meets in towns and cities every day. With the help of township-tours, tourists can get to know the way of life of the millions of people who live there.

Other projects are supposed to help to improve the situation and living conditions of the underprivileged. One of these organisations is SHAWCO, the Student’s Health and Welfare Centres Organisation of the University of Cape Town, as well as regularly appearing magazines like *Impilo* (= health for all), which give diverse tips on subjects from health to gardening. The magazine *The Big Issue* helps to create a small income for those who sell it on the streets.

All these projects not only improve the understanding and the communication between the privileged outsiders and the underprivileged in South Africa, they also contribute to a better general understanding between South Africans. Even Malika Ndlovu says of herself that prejudices towards people of different skin-colours will last for a long time.



Township along the N2 outside Cape Town. Photo: Isabelle Vogt. 2003.

The poem “Bonteheuwel”⁴²³ is dedicated to the people “behind the Bonteheuwel Multi-Purpose Centre”. Bonteheuwel is a coloured township in Cape Town, and

Bonteheuwel

by Malika Ndlovu

Dedicated to people behind the
Bonteheuwel Multi-Purpose Centre

Bonteheuwel
Another forever anchored ship
That was never meant to sail
Hear that stale and haunting tune
Of apartheid lives
Set on different tracks
And the many ways they tried
To break our bonds
Our spirits and our backs

Bonteheuwel
Colourful hill
Spilling over Modderdam Road
Into Valhalla Park
Lost locations
For people born in the mix

so its Afrikaans name, meaning “colourful hill”, is telling. The name shows the arbitrariness of the restructuring of the towns and the pitiless establishment of townships during Apartheid. Just as in Bonteheuwel, people all over South Africa were arbitrarily jumbled together.

To overcome Apartheid, not only do prejudices need to be broken down as in the poem, “Shuttle”, analysed above, but South Africa also needs an infrastructural adjustment to her poor residential areas to bring them up to the standards of the white areas, and to create equal opportunities. This is why the multi-purpose halls and

⁴²³ Malika Lueen Ndlovu. *poetry-in-progress from period 1986-2002* (unpublished).

With roots elsewhere
Some all the way back to District Six
Like those dumped in Man[n]enberg
Lavender Hill
Hanover Park

Bonteheuwel
Rough and big hearted
Home to so many
Territories marked by poverty
And brave-gangsta-graffitti

Bonteheuwel
Where English as a lingo
Is generally a no-no
Djy praat'ie taal
Djy ken 'ie style

Bonteheuwel
Lifting its head
Bonteheuwel
Bright spark
Coming out of the dark
Talents brimming over
Finding their way out
Shifting the Cape flats cloud

Bontehuewel
Changing its rhythm
Coming out proud
On a brand new platform
For making a difference
For making a fresh start.
A space for recovery
A centre with the people
Of Bonteheuwel at heart

centres are of great value. They offer leisure time facilities and informative meetings and serve as centres of communication and information with telephone and internet connections.

In this poem all six stanzas start with the 'heading' "Bonteheuwel". The poem reminds us of a brainstorming exercise on the topic 'township'. Its rhythm is calm and thought-provoking and makes us sympathetic to the plight of township residents. To describe the bleakness and hopelessness of a township, Malika Ndlovu starts the poem "Bonteheuwel" with a picture: she compares Bonteheuwel with "Another forever anchored ship/ That was never meant to sail". For, growing up in a township means having worse chances in life.

Bonteheuwel is described as an execrable place, a place, where people were deported during Apartheid and where they were offloaded and left as if on a

garbage dump "With roots elsewhere/ Some all the way back to District Six". The District Six was, as described in the section on "Distinguished Umbrella", a place close to the city centre of Cape Town, where many nationalities and skin colours used to live together. This was a thorn in the side of the government, and under the pretext of crime prevention and of closing down illegal businesses, as well as for reasons of security, District Six was cleared and all inhabitants forcibly removed to the newly created and existing townships.⁴²⁴ Malika Ndlovu describes

⁴²⁴ The District Six Museum collects and exhibits stories connected to these removals. One particularly touching one is of a man of District Six who kept pigeons. Before being forced to move he took the precaution of taking his pigeons to his new location

this act as “dumped in Man[n]enberg/ Lavender Hill/ Hanover Park”, townships. The only beautiful coloured area in the centre of Cape Town which could not be destroyed and survived due to its world wide reputation for its bright, colourful little houses is the Malay quarter with the name Bo Kaap.



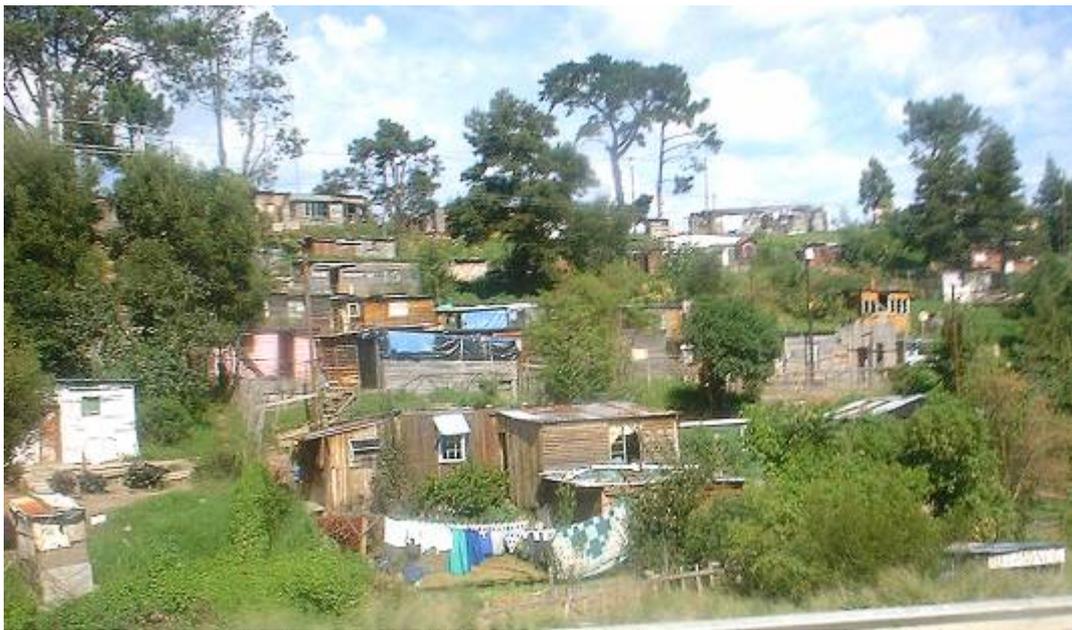
Bo Kaap, Cape Town. Photo: Isabelle Vogt 2002.

The third stanza depicts Bonteheuwel, despite its stark and simple houses and bleak surroundings, as the home of many. Affected by poverty and gangsterism, it is a place in which many people live in a small space, and where life is hard and difficult. Bonteheuwel is further described as an area, where English is either taboo or gibberish, used, at most, as a special language. To describe the style of the English in the townships, Malika Ndlovu falls back on an English-Afrikaans mix.

Nowadays there are many projects busy with the improvement of the living conditions in townships. As mentioned in the discussion of the poem “Shuttle”, there are projects for the fight against crime and abuse, for HIV/Aids education and contraception. Other projects try to bring trade and industry into the townships or to provide better connections with the towns, for until now, there has only been very little public transport, and few public busses and trains. This is why thousands of people have to cover distances walking or by taking a crowded mini-bus-taxi every day.

to get them accustomed to it. When he finally decided to take them somewhere to let them fly home, none of the pigeons returned. On a trip to town he passed District Six and his heart was broken when he saw his pigeons on the lot where his house had formerly stood but was now empty. They had found ‘home’.

Other poems on townships are: Malika Ndlovu's "Pick a Ghetto"⁴²⁵, with the key word "suffocation"; "The Virgins of Manenberg"⁴²⁶ by James Matthews; "Mid-night Owl"⁴²⁷ by Tatamkhulu Afrika (1920-2002), "Along the N2"⁴²⁸ by Beverly Jansen; "Maitland, Cape Town"⁴²⁹ by Rustum Kozain, which treats "escapism" and foreign influences, and the poem "The Corner of Modderdam Road and Route 300 to Kuilsriver"⁴³⁰ by Wendy Woodward, which also refers to 'globalisation'.



Township along the road. Photos: Isabelle Vogt 2003.

In South African poetry, one further finds poems dealing with the search for a religion which is not forced upon one as alluded to in "born in africa but". The following poems deal with exactly this topic.

⁴²⁵ Barry, Ndlovu and Khan (2002: 182-185).

⁴²⁶ de Kok and Ferguson (2001: 17).

⁴²⁷ de Kok and Ferguson (2001: 6-7).

⁴²⁸ Barry, Ndlovu and Khan (2002: 127).

⁴²⁹ de Kok and Ferguson (2001: 20-21).

⁴³⁰ de Kok and Ferguson (2001: 18-19).

In the poem “Full circle”,⁴³¹ Malika Ndlovu deals with her very personal search for religion. In the interview which I recorded in June 2003 she recounted her year-long search for a religion fulfilling her expectations. Malika Ndlovu grew

Full Circle

by Malika Ndlovu

Black
Muslim
Woman

Fatal combination
See the separation
Float to surface
Slip out from within
Feel the cracks
Of sudden conclusions
The thud of dead frames
Falling into place
Diminishing all that I am
All that we are
To an other
A definite outsider

Black
Muslim
Woman

Turning away
Journeying within
When the third call home had come

For one so long on the run
So full of questions
So riddled with doubt
Humbled

At the abundance laid out
For one eternally a child
Waking up only
When resistance and reasoning
Fell down
And the mind grew quiet
And the heart was in flood

up in a Catholic family and later attended a Catholic mission school, but she always felt exploited and threatened by the Catholic Church. “Do this and you will go to heaven, don’t do it and you will end up in hell”.⁴³² It may be she was brought up so strictly in the mission school that she lost her faith in Christianity, for she must in fact have suffered from the demands of Catholicism there: “For one so long on the run/ So full of questions/ So riddled with doubt”.

At some point she found herself searching for a different religion which would suit her more. She went through a period of evolution lasting for several years which led her from Hinduism, which was widespread among Durban Indians, to Taoism, Buddhism, to many New Age cults.

She said she would never have believed that she would find what she was looking for in Islam, particularly as her two brothers had converted to Islam before her and she at that time still thought she would keep her distance from this, for her, woman-despising religion: “I had such a prejudice and resistance towards Islam”. Muslims are a minority in South Africa.

⁴³¹ Malika Lueen Ndlovu. *poetry-in-progress from period 1986-2002* (unpublished).

⁴³² All: Malika Ndlovu in our interview in June 2003.

Cf. also “godtalk” by Malika Ndlovu. Borzaga and Steiner (2004: 134-135).

<p>Black Muslim Woman</p> <p>By birth By choice By cosmic design Divine intervention By conscious declaration</p> <p>Black Muslim Woman</p> <p>One of many One on her own</p>

She, too, nevertheless, became a Muslima – a bizarre situation for her Christian parents who “When the third call home had come” had ‘lost’ all three of their children to another religion. In the interview, however, Malika Ndlovu says the same thing about her parents as she says about her husband: “In terms of personal growth, Thulani and I have never stood in each other’s way”.⁴³³ Finally she even took on, as a sign of her complete conversion, a different name, Malika, with which the so far unpublished “And again

she was born” from *poetry-in-progress* deals.

In the poem “Full Circle”, written in 2000, the lyrical speaker describes her way to Islam as “Waking up only/ When resistance and reasoning/ Fell down/ And the mind grew quiet/ And the heart was in flood”. As also described in the poem, Malika Ndlovu knew right from the moment she chose her new religion that from then on she would belong to an even smaller minority, that she would be a “Black/ Muslim/ Woman”, “A definite outsider”. With a sad smile she names this a “Fatal combination”. This time, though, she had herself, “By conscious declaration,” chosen where she wanted to belong, and was not, as she was at her Catholic baptism, left out in the decision making. That is why the lyrical speaker calls her finding a new religion a stroke of “Divine intervention” and emphasizes this as being not “By birth” but “By choice”. The lyrical speaker also realizes that there are many “Black/ Muslim/ Wom[e]n” and that she is “One of many”. Yet, at the same time, she remains “One on her own”, and her own life story is uniquely personal.

The poem “Full Circle” may be a very personal poem, but it is applicable to all the people who are in search of a suitable belief. Its effect is to provide hope and strength: There are people on earth who voluntarily make themselves outsiders. Especially among the supposedly invisible minorities the bond and solidarity and sense of community are very distinct.

⁴³³ All: Malika Ndlovu in our interview in June 2003.

A very interesting poem, with which to compare “Full Circle” by Malika Ndlovu, is her performance poet friend Khadija Heeger’s “Some Speak”, track 11 on the 2005 *Off the Wall* CD.⁴³⁴ In this poem, which is accompanied by the singing of Arabic tunes, Khadija Heeger, too, has stories to tell of her converting to Islam, the response of those around her and the prejudices she encountered. Unfortunately, Khadija Heeger has not published her own collection of poetry so far. The poetry which she performs on stage, however, would fit very well into the present dissertation.⁴³⁵



*Khadija Heeger.
World Poetry Day. Cape Town 2007.
Photo: Isabelle Vogt 2007.*

The poem “Wings”⁴³⁶ talks of freedom and growing up. As an example, the lyrical speaker cites her belief in being able to fly with her own wings. According to the lyrical speaker, children are still creative and free. Adults, however, have to live up to artificial standards. They lose their wings, or at least their belief in flying, and thus are in danger of losing their creativity and freedom.

Bit by bit even the lyrical speaker lost her belief in flying, forgot how it works: “I lost my wings at twenty-one/ When I was supposed to be an adult”. In South Africa one reaches the age of majority at 21,⁴³⁷ is given a symbolic front door key and celebrates the occasion with a big birthday party.

⁴³⁴ Khadija Heeger. *Off the Wall* CD. *Off the Wall: Open Mike Sessions: Poetry 2005: A Touch of Madness, Cape Town*. Recording: Simon Malherbe. Production: Graham Ellis. 1 compact disc (55.46min). Cape Town: Digital Forest Studios, 2005.

⁴³⁵ Compare the titles of two of those unpublished poems “Black label” and “Citizen minus”.

⁴³⁶ Ndlovu (2000: 79).

⁴³⁷ Cf. Finuala Dowling’s poem “21st birthday: key not found” in Dowling (2006: 46-48).

Wings

by Malika Ndlovu

At five years old I knew I had wings
Children have right to such things
I could fly to places I'd never seen
Believe in the magic of flying
At five I knew I had wings
I knew and I flew
Flying high

I think I dropped my wings at sixteen
Or seventeen or eighteen
When there was no room for flying
I began to forget how to fly
To doubt that I ever did
To doubt that I ever could
Fly
Forgetting my wings at sixteen

I lost my wings at twenty-one
When I was supposed to be an adult
Supposed to be achieving
Delivering, proving
And everyone and everything
Was about judging
When I was supposed to be
Supposed to be, supposed to
Be

When I was thirty-two
I wasn't even thinking of wings
I was drowning in thoughts
Of a million of other things
I was thinking of drowning
I was drowning, drowning
Watching the water rising
Up over my head
Days when I couldn't get out of bed
Get out – let put
I never thought of flying
I think I gave up on my wings
I think I forgot that I flew

I think I lost my wings in the Catholic church
Under the weight of sins I committed
And the sins I forgot to mention
I think I lost my wings in the Catholic church
On my knees in front of that bleeding crucifix
Pouring down its guilt
Or in the confessional booth
Where my innocence didn't count
Where a man behind the shadows
Would plead on behalf of me

Then the time of reason, the time in which one is “supposed to be” something, begins. At the end of the third stanza, the surrender of the child inside to the new adult is symbolized by the solitary final “Be”.

At the age of 32 the lyrical speaker undergoes a life crisis and drowns in her own thoughts. The direction in which the poet is headed always becomes clear in the last lines of each stanza: “I knew and I flew/ Flying high”, “To doubt that I ever could/ Fly/ Forgetting my wings at sixteen”, “When I was supposed to be/ Supposed to be, supposed to/ Be”, “I never thought of flying/ I think I gave up on my wings/ I think I forgot that I flew”, “I saved myself/ Found my wings/ And I flew”, “Because wings then seemed ridiculous things/ Childhood things/ And I couldn't remember/ The feeling of wings”, “Maybe then/ I could fly”. There are quite a few rhymes, also within the lines: “wings”/ “things”, “knew”/ “flew”, “sixteen”/ “eighteen,” “achieving”/ “proving”/ “everything”/ “judging”, “Darkness”/ “Forgiveness”, “flying”/ “dying”, which ensure cohesion and support the rhythm as well as the message of the poem and the bubbly spirit of the lyrical I.

Darkness
Forgiveness
Masculinity
Yes, I think I lost my wings in the Catholic church
Then one day
One Sunday
I flew
Turned in the opposite direction
To the cows being herded
The sheep in their flocks
Being called by the 10 o'clock bell
And I flew
On a Sunday
In the opposite direction
I saved myself
Found my wings
And I flew

By forty-five I was still alive
But cynical
Critical and I definitely had lost faith in flying
Maybe it was because I was too busy thinking of dying
Because wings then seemed ridiculous things
Childhood things
And I couldn't remember
The feeling of wings

Maybe
Maybe if I went back to
When I was thirty-two
When I was eighteen
Or seventeen or sixteen
Or five
Maybe if I went to those places
Where I knew how to fly
When I knew I had wings
I could begin to remember
The magic
The innocence
Of wings and such things
Maybe I would remember
And forget about dying
And maybe; maybe; maybe then I could fly

Much weight is placed on the longest, the fifth stanza which has a strong ironic undertone. "I think I lost my wings in the Catholic church/ Under the weight of sins I committed/ And the sins I forgot to mention". Malika Ndlovu's experiences with the Catholic Church and her aversion to confession and absolution speak to us out of this poem: "Where my innocence didn't count" and "Where a man behind the shadows/ Would plead on behalf of me". The lyrical speaker is critical of "Darkness/ Forgiveness/ Masculinity", which prevail in the Catholic Church and which limited the development of her personality. She then finds salvation "In the opposite direction".

A further topic of this poem is existential fear: "Maybe it was because I was too busy thinking of dying", "And forget about dying", "drown". The lyrical speaker's aim is to encourage the readers to discover themselves anew, to be able to fly again, to be creative and free once more. Such an aspiration will be familiar to many adults caught up in their roles, their religion, their daily routine or the rigid story of their lives. Having arrived at this point, many people wish to rediscover the light-heartedness of their childhood and to dream again.

Why not

by Malika Ndlovu

Why not
Why
Sometimes I wish I had wings
Why do wings
Seem like such impossible things

Why not walk out
When you've had enough
Why not
Why not
Why not walk in
And take what you need
Why not
Why not
Why not go crazy
Why not make a fool of yourself
Why why
Why not
Why not be like a child
Why not be 82 and a child
Why not be 21 and a child
Why not be 45 and a child
Why not you
A child

Wish I had wings
Not so that I could escape
Not so that I could fly across the sky
Wings so that I could fly deep
Deep
Within
Me
Where I could be
Whatever I choose
This today and that tomorrow
This today that tomorrow
Why not
Like being in a foreign country
Where you have no history
Where nobody knows your name
A place where it is ridiculous
To explain
Previously classified as Coloured
It's quite a ridiculous thing to explain
In a place like that
Where nobody knows your name
Where you can be this
And you can be that

The poem wants to tell its readers that it is not ridiculous to take the example of children and to hold onto dreams. No matter how (un-)realistic dreams are – see the frequent “Maybe” – they inspire and give stability. Only if one is or becomes a child again, is one free and enabled to ‘fly’.

Flying and wings are often cited by artists as a metaphor for their emotions and their creativity. In “Why not”,⁴³⁸ too, wings play a central role. One can well imagine the poem as the words of a song.

The lyrical speaker wishes to have wings which would help her to find herself, but she realizes that “wings/ seem like such impossible things”. The second stanza asks why people hold onto rules, why they do not just leave when they cannot take any more. Why do they not just take what they need, be crazy or make a fool of themselves? Why are adults not allowed to behave like children now and then? These questions, expressed by the words “Why not”, are the beginning of all but two lines in the second stanza.

In the last stanza the lyrical speaker illustrates that she does not only need wings to flee or to fly for selfish reasons, but also to dive into herself. This deep diving into oneself is visually emphasized by splitting up the three words “Deep/ Within/ Me” to three lines.

⁴³⁸ Ndlovu (2000: 64).

The lyrical speaker seems to see the only place “Where I could be/ Whatever I choose” in her own inner being, where personal history, name and origin do not matter. Finding one’s own self and identity, especially as an artist, is an important subject for Malika Ndlovu. Her suffering is revealed by the line “Previously classified as Coloured”. Some lines of the poem, like “That time has passed”,⁴³⁹ take up the same topic. Malika Ndlovu says: “Yet this is the time for innovating/ Generating/ But it does not come/ Without Blood/ Like any baby”.⁴⁴⁰ Any attempt to come to terms with oneself and to find one’s own identity is at first painful – see “Through”.⁴⁴¹

Through

by Malika Ndlovu

There is a place of rage
a place of mourning within
to which I must go
cross the valley of fear
and rise on the other side
where I will stand
in the centre of this place
face to face with me
where I can begin the work
the joyful release
that has been calling persistently

I must walk alone
there is only one way
I will come through
But I may never come back

The poem “Through” comprises only two stanzas, the first consists of eleven lines, the second of only four. While referring to “a place of rage/ a place of mourning”, in an allusion to South Africa, this poem, too, depicts a journey into one’s inner being. It starts the conclusion of this section on the search for identity through (religious) freedom. Many strong emotions are connected with this journey: “rage”, “mourning” and “fear”. The lyrical speaker witnesses her artistry in “Through” as a path on which she has to walk alone. There are no alternatives, she knows that she will master this path, but is not sure that

she will return. In spite or maybe even because of this uncertainty, the lyrical speaker experiences her work and her journey “within” as a relief. This feeling of self-purging and personal growth is not one familiar only to the lyrical speaker, which is why the poem can be interpreted in a more general way and be applied to many artistic processes and different situations. Experiences and their ‘digestion’ change people, one continues developing, but without necessarily returning to the starting point, a fact which should not be a disadvantage.

⁴³⁹ Ndlovu (2000: 68).

⁴⁴⁰ One is here reminded of Mongane Wally Serote’s novel *To every birth its blood*.

⁴⁴¹ Ndlovu (2000: 22).

The two following poems could be placed in any of the three chapters. The strikingly short poem “What if”⁴⁴² from the year 1999 presents a brief reflection about what might be if we were free. Freedom here is defined as it is by Immanuel

What if

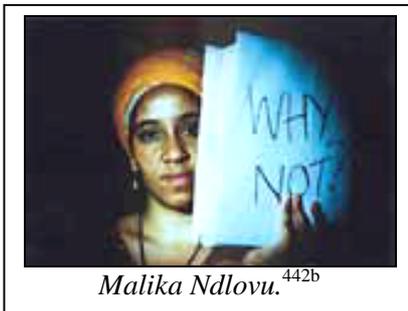
by Malika Ndlovu

What if there were no expectations
What if there were no limitations
What if we were free to be
What if we could let go
Do you see
Are we free
Can you see me
What if there were no expectations
No limitations
Free

Kant: as self-determination. Asking “What if there were no expectations” and restrictions, indicates the search for answers. Everybody knows barriers which hinder him or her on their way to a free development and to self-determination. This leaves the search for answers up to the reader. The reader is allowed to read into “What if”, whatever narrows down the choices of paths to self determination.

In the life of an artist and mother these expectations are the expectations that her fellows have of her with regard to her children, her family and her art. To others they might be professional or social expectations. The suffering resulting from these high hopes is also reinforced stylistically: The first four of the ten lines begin with “What if”, and there are several internal and end rhymes between “free”, “be”, “see” and “me”. In lines 3 to 7 one notices an accumulation of the vowel ‘i’, an assonance, which lends the poem a weepy, despairing undertone.

“What if” is also a poem which deals with a very existential question of life, namely the question: “Can you see me”? This question has overtones of



doubt, whether the person opposite sees the true ‘I’ hiding behind the expectations and restrictions. Everybody can understand and sympathize with the wish to be free and to be unconstrained, in order to do and be something, somebody of one’s own choosing. The poem comes to an end with the word “free”.

⁴⁴² Ndlovu (2000: 73).

^{442b} Photo: Brandon A. Coetzee 2002. <<http://www.artthrob.co.za/03feb/reviews/blac.html>> (accessed August 8, 2008).

Possibility

by Malika Ndlovu

We are not sitting in the darkness
We are in the dark
From which the light comes
Peeling in from the periphery
Can you see
This is a place of great possibility
Not probability
But a place of possibility
Possibility

The poem “Possibility”⁴⁴³ from 2002 is the shortest treated here. Its core message “We are not sitting in the darkness/ We are in the dark/ From which the light comes” arouses hope through a change of perspective, and inspires the pessimists of South Africa and the world with courage. The picture conveyed is of people not sitting in the dark but in a place light

comes from, a place of hope, emphasized by “this is a place of great possibility”.

Of course, the speaker concedes that one will always be an outcast somewhere, and that there will be places where one will never really seem to belong: “the periphery”. In the middle of the poem, however, the rhetorical question, “Can you see”, turns up. The realization that there is a possibility, and not only a probability, seems to be very important to Malika Ndlovu because she repeats the message “But a place of possibility”. The poem ends, as it is often the case with Malika Ndlovu’s poetry, with a single promising word: “Possibility”.

Furthermore, the poem establishes a dialogue between “we” and “you”, even if the “you” does not get a say. This means that the person addressed is not alone. The “we” offers consolation. In comparison, it describes “probability” as being less probable, something that either just happens or not, and less optimistic, unlike a “possibility” which one can grasp and shape as one likes.

“Possibility” is one of the poems which apply to many situations in life. This poem appears to have been written to provide encouragement. The picture which emerges from the line, “We are [not] in the darkness”, encourages those who think they are the only ones who meet obstacles in life.

Malika Ndlovu, being the eternal optimist, never gives up. Thus, by offering the right picture, she manages to console others and to raise their hopes in desperate situations.

⁴⁴³ Ndlovu (2000: 60).

VI.2 Being a white woman in South Africa, yesterday and today

A comparison of South African poetry shows that white poets unmistakably write about discrimination from their point of view. As an example, Antje Krog's and Ingrid de Kok's poems speak very clearly about how they, as white girls and women, experienced living on African soil, how they lived and suffered in their skin, visibly trapped, unable to change anything. For the 'white Africans', their identity has always been a question of belonging and non-belonging, of in some way being unfit for the African environment. For another example see also Finuala Dowling's attempt to compare her shy self to her emotional, dancing countrywomen in "I have been undemonstrative since birth".⁴⁴⁴ Among those who were already writing during Apartheid, the struggle with their white identity often shows in more or less hidden political topics and criticism. Especially white *women* writers, too, used their work to speak out about the injustices taking place in their country of birth: some of them more obvious and louder than others.

One writer who has been "Characteristically aware of her politically and socially privileged position as a white South African – her ability to speak when others have been silenced" is Nadine Gordimer, who "thus metaphorically hands over the act of writing to the historically disenfranchised people of South Africa".⁴⁴⁵ Ahead of her time, still during Apartheid but protected by her international fame, Nadine Gordimer once said: "My message to the self-appointed guardians of our culture is: There can be no such thing as South African Literature if it excludes Black Literature – and it does at the moment."⁴⁴⁶

The answer of Ingrid de Kok, upon being asked her views about the ongoing debate in South African poetry on the responsibility of the writer, the relationship between poetry and social activism and whether the poet or the writer has any specific responsibility to his or her community, sounds less committed:

I think the poet's responsibility is to write a good poem. It's a social responsibility as well as an individual responsibility (if indeed it is possible to

⁴⁴⁴ Dowling (2002: 38). More poems which state her 'whiteness' are "White men and the trek fishermen" and especially "Spending the dividends", both in Dowling (2006: 9, 37-39).

⁴⁴⁵ Daymond, Driver et al. (2003: 468).

⁴⁴⁶ February (1981: 175).

distinguish between the two). I think that's how you respect your readership, engage with your community, make a 'contribution' – by doing your best piece of work.⁴⁴⁷

This means, Ingrid de Kok puts art higher than the possibility for political protest. She also states that politics should not be the reason why certain topics are not to be found in the work of certain poets:

I don't share the view that certain topics are the province of certain people whether by gender, by race, suffering or by origin. In South Africa this argument is intense [...]. I think it's dangerous for art, I think it's dangerous for morality. Of course people, black or white, do appropriate experience. I can see historically, why and where the strong feelings about artistic appropriation originate, and I do think those of us who are white, who were beneficiaries of apartheid, should negotiate with an appropriate sensitivity to the past [...].

Black people have gone through massive suffering and humiliation and appropriation. It behoves white people to be a little restrained, respectful, suspicious of themselves as knowers of reality. But I'm against literary ghettos, homelands, apartheid reproduced in ideas and expression.⁴⁴⁸

Yet, as a liberal white, Ingrid de Kok does give a statement about her anti-Apartheid views and says about her political experience:

Like most of my contemporaries, my political experience was obviously powerfully anti-apartheid. Therefore, perhaps of necessity, also powerfully judgmental. It was bracing to go to a place [Canada] where even the people who were on one's side, on what one assumed was the correct side, had a variety of views. And where the atmosphere was not punitive, but exploratory.⁴⁴⁹

Also on the subject of poetic topics, another Capetonian poet, Karen Press, critically states that she sees the difficulties involved in recording history:

it's a strange thing about South African poetry, especially in the struggle culture: people have been offered or have been forced into an artistic identity which is about reporting – you know what Ndebele was saying: reporting the reality around you is a replacement for art.⁴⁵⁰

Despite the truth in the statement, nowadays, in post-Apartheid times, “reporting the reality around you” is no longer a “replacement for art”, it has become a new form of art and a strength, especially amongst writers of colour, and luckily a few white writers have even during Apartheid recorded the true history of the old South Africa.

⁴⁴⁷ Berold (2003: 111).

⁴⁴⁸ Berold (2003: 116).

⁴⁴⁹ Berold (2003: 111).

⁴⁵⁰ Berold (2003: 17).

Thus this chapter on South African identity in poetry is not complete without one of the oldest and most famous of the outspoken anti-racist poems, “my beautiful land” (“My Mooi Land”), surprisingly written by a white, Afrikaans poet. The poem, written in 1969 by Antjie Krog, is not just interesting for its ‘fine sentiments’. It is of especial interest for the fact that it conveys the spirit and direction of the women’s movement and poetry as they have progressed over the past half century. Its author, Antjie Krog (b.1952) was born into a family of writers in Kroonstad in the Free State. She started writing poetry at a very young age. From the beginning, her poetry stirred public discussions.⁴⁵¹ So, in 1969, at the age of 17, she published “My Mooi Land”, which, at the time, caused a huge scandal.⁴⁵² Although the poem

disappeared from Krog’s oeuvre in South Africa, the poem lived a telling life of its own after the stir it had initially caused. When the first political prisoners were released from Robben Island, Ahmed Kathrada read it to an audience of thousands at a mass rally in Soweto at the end of October 1989, mentioning the hope that the words of an Afrikaans child had instilled among those held captive on the island.⁴⁵³

Translated into English as “my beautiful land”,⁴⁵⁴ the poem was included by Antjie Krog herself in *Down to my last Skin*, her very first English collection of poetry published in 2000. Even if some of the poems were translated into English before, they were collected for the very first time in this independent poetry collection. Besides their timelessness this is the reason why these poems by Antjie Krog written before 1994 are quoted in this chapter.

Up to today, Antjie Krog has published 13 collections of poetry and won almost all the poetry awards there are to win in South Africa. Till 1993, she worked as a teacher. Then, already a widely acclaimed and famous Afrikaans poet, she was chosen to be the journalist to investigate and comment on the truth

⁴⁵¹ More about the story may be read in the “Publisher’s Note” to Krog (2000: 4-5).

⁴⁵² Another big scandal was caused by the release of her collection of poetry, *Body Bereft* (2006), with the picture of a naked elderly lady’s body on the cover. No one has found out whose body it is, or if maybe Antjie Krog posed for the photo herself. Whatever the reaction to it, the picture matches the contents of this volume of poetry, containing mostly intense and meditative poems on ageing and the love between a long married couple, written in the provocative language for which Antjie Krog has become known.

⁴⁵³ “Publisher’s Note”. Krog (2000: 5).

⁴⁵⁴ Krog (2000: 11).

and reconciliation hearings, after which she was commissioned to write a book on her experiences at the hearings, the novel *Country of my Skull*.⁴⁵⁵ Currently, Antjie Krog works as a lecturer at the University of the Western Cape. As the private person, not the poet, she is known as Antjie Samuel (or Samuel-Krog).

It is indicative of Antjie Krog's influence on the literary scene that Anthea Garman quotes her as saying in *Country of my Skull*, "that maybe writers in South Africa should shut up for a while. That one has no right to appropriate a story paid for with a lifetime of pain and destruction..." and remarks that Antjie Krog is "keenly aware of the connection of the Afrikaans language with the perpetration of atrocities in South Africa and uses [...] references to indicate her own struggle with her mother tongue".⁴⁵⁶

One notices that poems by white women poets, if they do not only dedicate themselves to a-political topics, often have to do with 'language', 'land', 'skin' or 'blood'. Sometimes even guilt speaks from their poems. As the focus of this study

my beautiful land (1969)

by Antjie Krog

look, I built myself a land
where skin colour doesn't count
only the inner brand of self

where no goat face in parliament
can keep things permanently verkramp

where I can love you,
can lie beside you in the grass
without saying "I do"

where we sing with guitars at night
where we bring gifts of white jasmine

where I don't have to poison you
when foreign doves coo in my hair

where no court of law
will deaden the eyes of my children

where black and white hand in hand
can bring peace and love
in my beautiful land

is contemporary South African women poetry, only a few very expressive older poems by shall be treated in detail.

To achieve textual cohesion in "my beautiful land", Antjie Krog works with a few rhymes ("land"/"brand", "you"/"do", "hand"/"land" etc.), anaphoras ("where"), and a rhyming parallelism ("where we sing [...] / where we bring"). One has to wonder just where a 17-year-old Afrikaner girl would, so surprisingly, get the idea and strength of character from, to write a poem like this, so critical of the system, at the height of Apartheid.

The lyrical speaker does not only mention the wish for a "land/ where skin

⁴⁵⁵ Krog (1999).

⁴⁵⁶ Both in Garman (2006: 17).

The use of this metaphor by a young girl is surprising, and it makes for an impressive poem that is still of interest today. The poem exemplarily portrays the problems, which a white girl, born in South Africa, has with her identity, and how being white, no matter how desirable it was at the time, became a burden to her.

Another prolific white poet besides Antjie Krog is Karen Press.⁴⁵⁸ She says she does not dare to judge and describe poetry as lasting, good or not, but she has very philosophical views on this:

I just don't know what is permanent and what is not, or whether the stuff that is regarded as permanent is better because certain strands of taste and power have combined to perpetuate certain things. I would never conflate what I think is aesthetically good with what a society should or is going to validate. Reality is an agreement between two people; so is good poetry."⁴⁵⁹

Her poem "Tikoloshe"⁴⁶⁰ portrays the terror that went on in Apartheid South Africa. It talks about an old African woman who is convinced that the "tikoloshe", a bad African spirit, killed her child. When a policeman shouts at her and tells her it was him who actually killed the child, the lyrical speaker narrates how the old mother touches his hand and says "You poor creature, you do not know/ what spirit haunts you". At first, the policeman does not understand, but then "In his cell he wept for a long time,/ because it was true". While the poem shows how Whites could idly stand by and witness the oppression of Blacks, it also hints at the fact that many of the oppressors of the time suffered from their consciences and that behind the mask of cruelty, sometimes the wisdom of the suffering touched their hearts. This poem shows how ambivalent feelings of South Africans could be.

"In the cradle of humankind"⁴⁶¹ by Karen Press' is another poem by a white poet which deals with the question of identity and belonging and non-belonging. The poem is written in the conventional form of a Petrarchan sonnet and thus shows the poet's awareness of form mentioned in Chapter II.3.

⁴⁵⁸ Cf. Chapter I.1 and III.3.

⁴⁵⁹ Berold (2003: 17).

⁴⁶⁰ Berold (2002: 11).

⁴⁶¹ Karen Press. *The Canary's Songbook* Manchester: Carcanet, 2002. No pagination.

In the cradle of humankind

by Karen Press

Geological time locates us
at the crossroads of hominids and democracy,
wiser or younger or older or more harmonized
than the non-miraculous nations of the world.

We used to be teeth like grubby stones
packed solid in warm earth.
Our teeth were enough to tell
the fossilised story of our lives.

Something unearthed us,
broke us open, flung us out
into the big black nowhere of the universe.

Something rearranged the coal dust of our souls
so that we could have the momentary radiance of flowers,
and become rubies more precious than blood.

The first two stanzas of the poem allude to the excavations of Olduvai Gorge in East Africa, where Mr Louis and Mrs Mary Leakey discovered the remains of the earliest known hominids. Some of these remains were only “grubby teeth” which could, however, be identified as hominid and dated according to the

geological layer in which they were found.⁴⁶² Karen Press links this to 1994, the year when South Africa finally met democracy: “Geological time locates us/ at the crossroads of hominids and democracy”.

The triplet “Something unearthed us,/ broke us open, flung us out/ into the big black nowhere of the universe” shows the dilemma of the former ruling Whites who now find themselves unsettled in a new South Africa that is about to re-arrange and partly turn around the rules, which used to be in favour of the Whites. This happens despite Karen Press’ saying “I find it almost impossible to work with or to spend any time talking about this ‘as a white South African, as a black South African’ business. I have no sense of responsibility to any of these constructed identities”.⁴⁶³ And then again she says that

at a very intellectual level, or I suppose at a very rational level, the identities within which people define themselves in this country, the racial identities, are constructed things, and they’ve been constructed for political reasons, they’re policies... it’s not a simple thing. The interface between people’s psychological collaboration in identities and the fact that identities are created by social means, is not innate: nobody’s innately white or black or coloured or cape coloured or griqua, you know, but those things are real in the sense that people live them, and

⁴⁶² Erosion in the gorge uncovered the remains so the Leakeys could find them. Early hominid remains are found in many places in Africa, including South Africa, where the conditions are the same as those in East Africa.

⁴⁶³ Berold (2003: 19).

believe in them and act upon them so I don't pretend for a moment that they don't exist in that daily texture of people's lives.⁴⁶⁴

This quotation by Karen Press gives us a vivid picture of the deep imprint left on the South African psyche by the Apartheid system of classification, which only time will erase. The last triplet again opens the possibility for a second chance for all South Africans, as the black "coal dust of our souls", which is set against the redness of the rubies possibly alluding to suffering and blood, has been "rearranged".

The form of "In the cradle of humankind" shows what Karen Press quoted in Chapter II.3 that she, rather like some of the white male poets, dedicates herself to 'excellence' more than to 'political relevance'. She sees the importance of her poem not in relevance to the present time, the time of publication, but in timelessness and its value to posterity. The poem, however, also shows what Karen Press means when she says "poetry is about having to tame certain things by writing about them", the reference is to "engaging with something that's quite wild" to "find the resonance of that wildness in yourself, that makes you strong enough to deal with it".⁴⁶⁵ In this point she is very close to her fellow poets of colour who write to overcome fears and to grow and heal. She also admits that poets of all skin colours share the same human pain, that "there's all that mysterious human pain that goes beyond just being 'an oppressed member of your class'. Needing love, needing a kind of home that the universe doesn't offer you – that lies under everything".⁴⁶⁶

The following two poems mention explicitly the link between belonging and land and/or blood. In "incarnate eternity",⁴⁶⁷ Karen Press writes about the ritual to claim land, a possibility to claim the place where one belongs and lives:

the ritual is to pour a cup
of someone's blood onto the land,
this is your way of claiming your home,
your political truth, your existence

⁴⁶⁴ Berold (2003: 20).

⁴⁶⁵ All: Berold (2003: 19).

⁴⁶⁶ Berold (2003: 20).

⁴⁶⁷ Berold (2002: 163).

kiss me, my lips are full of it, I live here

red river, you smell of freedom
as the new grass smells of my father's bones.

For her, it is enough to *know* that the land is hers as she lives here and that “the new grass smells of my father's bones” – what should it need more.

land

by Antjie Krog

under orders from my ancestors you were occupied
had I language I could write for you were land my land

but me you never wanted
no matter how I stretched to lie down
in rustling blue gums
in cattle lowering horns into Diepvlei
rippling the quivering jowls drink
in silky tassels in dripping gum
in thorn trees that have slid down into emptiness

me you never wanted
me you could never endure
time and again you shook me off
you rolled me out
land, slowly I became nameless in my mouth

now you are fought over
negotiated divided paddocked sold stolen mortgaged
I want to go underground with you land
land that would not have me
land that never belonged to me

land I love more fruitlessly than before

By comparison, Antjie Krog's poem “land”⁴⁶⁸ shows the ambivalence of feeling at home on the African soil as a white South African. There is always a conflict between being wanted and unwanted as can be seen right from the first line, where it is described how the ancestors took possession of the land, namely by occupation. The lyrical speaker is aware of the fact that the land, which is a metaphor for the soil and its people, never wanted her and could

never “endure” her and that “time and again you shook me off”.

Finally, the lyrical speaker accepts that the “land that would not have me” also “never belonged to me”. And still, she offers the land her help as it is being “fought over/ negotiated divided paddocked sold stolen mortgaged”, as it is still her only home and because she loves it “more fruitlessly than before”.

In terms of form, the free verse poem “land” is in distinct contrast to the poetry of Karen Press who is so fond of ‘excellence’ in form and structure.

⁴⁶⁸ Berold (2002: 41).

This chapter shows there is a crisis taking place amongst all South Africans. As the South Africans of colour are looking for ways to define their 'new' identities, the white South Africans also struggle with the conflict of having their only home somewhere where they are often unwanted. Being asked how South Africa could get out of its crisis, Joan Metelkamp offers this advice: "The first bit is accepting where you are. [...] In the suburbs, in the white suburbs. I am. Ja, I accept it. Mothering in the white suburbs".⁴⁶⁹ She speaks from a white perspective, but still there is some truth to her solution. One only becomes happy within one's own skin when one accepts who one is. One needs to accept that the South African society is and will stay a complicated hybrid of Africa and the West.

⁴⁶⁹ Berold (2003: 14).

VII. Womanism

God, Death, Love, Loneliness, Man
are Important Themes in Literature
menstruation, childbirth, menopause, puberty
marriage are not⁴⁷⁰

These lines from the poem “God, Death, Love” by Antjie Krog are the reason for dedicating an entire chapter to exactly these topics which elsewhere were not considered to be fit subjects for poetry. It is evident but not astonishing that, in contrast to socio-critical poetry in the previous chapter, these particularly feminine topics are equally important to women of all backgrounds. As all women have them in common, the ‘wonders of womanhood’, mentioned in Antjie Krog’s poem, seem to inspire the poetry of the South African women poets generally.

Topics from a typical but at the same time modern woman’s environment have, therefore, also found their way into South African poetry. More and more middle class, as well as domestic life topics become the central themes of poems. The poems studied in the second half of this chapter discuss what is involved with ‘being a woman’, from banalities to experiences such as menstruation, giving birth, motherhood, menopause,⁴⁷¹ love⁴⁷², sex,⁴⁷³ breaking taboos,⁴⁷⁴ and also adoption,⁴⁷⁵ loss of children⁴⁷⁶ and abuse.⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷⁰ Krog (2006: 20).

⁴⁷¹ Cf. “Eight menopausal sonnets” in different sonnet forms discussing menopausal woes like “hot flushes”, “hrt”, “vaginal atrophy and incontinence”. In *Body Bereft* Antjie Krog uses various traditional forms which is unusual for her who ordinarily writes in free verse. Here, too, poetry still does without rhymes though. Krog (2006: 13-19).

⁴⁷² Cf. the modern love poems with occasional rhymes “The idea of you” and “The falling feeling”. Dowling (2002: 22, 2006: 19). Or: the “extraordinary love poem” entitled “Praise Poem” by Sally-Ann Murray. Borzaga and Steiner (2004: 126).

⁴⁷³ Cf. the intimate poems “In the moonlight” and “The journey”, as well as other poems by Lisa Combrinck. Combrinck (2005: 4, 30). Or for the deadly danger that lurks in seduction: “Pizza and red wine” by Lebogang Mashile. Mashile (2005: 37-38).

⁴⁷⁴ Concerning these topics, an interesting poetry collection of so far mostly unknown South African women poets is *isis X*. Cf. Sumeera Daywood’s “(Untitled)” on religious hypocrisy. In: Allan Kolski Horwitz, ed. 2005. *isis X*. Braamfontein: Botsotso Publishing. 40. Then of course there are the poems of Antjie Krog like “marital psalm” or “stripping” Krog (2000: 30, 31 and 2006 etc).

⁴⁷⁵ Cf. “Joni Mitchell now” from the chapter “Feeling of falling and fleeing”. Finuala Dowling. *Doo-Wop Girls of the Universe*. Johannesburg: Penguin Books, 2006. 28.

We Are at War

by Gcina Mhlophe

Women of my country
 Young and old
 Black and white
 We are at war
 The winds are blowing against us
 Laws are ruling against us
 We are at war
 But do not despair
 We are the winning type
 Let us fight on
 Forward ever
 Backward never

Women of my country
 Mothers and daughters
 Workers and wives
 We are at war
 Customs are set against us
 Religions are set against us
 We are at war
 But do not despair
 We are bound to win
 Let us fight on
 Forward ever
 Backward never

[...]

One of the poets who prepared the way for contemporary South African women poets is Gcina Mhlophe. She has written and performed poetry and stories for a long time. Gcina Mhlophe's work has always encouraged women to hold on or "Say No"⁴⁷⁸ when injustice was committed against them and when they were expected to be quiet and to do as they were told. It is therefore not surprising that, in 1989, she openly performed her poem "Praise poem" in honour of Nokukhanya Luthuli, the widow of Chief Albert Luthuli, the past president of the ANC in the 1950s and the Nobel Peace Prize winner in 1961.

One poem which also dates back to this time of struggle is "We Are at War".⁴⁷⁹ Like many other poems in this chapter, it explicitly mentions that "Customs" and "Religions are set against us". With the slogan "Forward ever/ Backward never", it encourages women of all

colours and ages not to despair and always to look forward. It thus is a testimony to the existence of an African feminist movement.

And the poetry of Phillippa Yaa de Villiers, a trans-racial adoptee, in: *Taller than Buildings*. Cape Town: Community Publishing Project, 2006.

⁴⁷⁶ Cf. "Small Passing", on the 'value' of a dead white baby, by Ingrid de Kok dedicated to "a woman whose baby died stillborn, and who was told by a man to stop mourning, 'because the trials and horrors suffered daily by black women in this country are more significant than the loss of one white child'.", in: M.C. Andersen, S.G. Kossick and E. Pereira, eds. *A New University Anthology of English Poetry*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press Southern Africa, 1993. 267-269. Further: "Miscarriages" by Malika Ndlovu (2000: 82-83). And: "It will be like this" from the chapter "My family as asylum". Dowling (2006: 55).

⁴⁷⁷ Cf. "To the doctor who treated the raped baby and who felt such despair" Dowling (2002: 16). See also the anthology of poetry written by abused women: POWA, ed. *Breaking the Silence – Positive Survivors: POWA Women's Writing Competition 2006*. Sunnyside, Auckland Park: POWA, 2007.

⁴⁷⁸ Gcina Mhlophe. *Love Child*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2002. 45-46.

⁴⁷⁹ Mhlophe (2002: 73-75).

VII.1 Being a woman in South African poetry

They say women learn from their predecessors. When I searched frantically for mine there was nothing but a void.⁴⁸⁰

During Apartheid, not much note was taken of South African women and their issues. It is a fact that “the poetry of all women, black and white, has been suppressed and their voices largely silenced”.⁴⁸¹ Feminist endeavours had to take a backseat to the struggle for freedom and equality. Still in 1990, for instance, Christine Qunta, “was able to claim, ‘I take the view that we are Africans before we are women’, as if racial identity obliterated gender difference, as if a subjectivity specific to African femininity did not after all exist”.⁴⁸² Yet South African women have always been active, important and influential. Colleen O’Brien’s study “The Search for Mother Africa – Poetry Revises Women’s Struggle for Freedom” concludes with the myth surrounding the passive nature of South African women’s participation in the struggle against Apartheid. It is one which erroneously assumes that women, who had to undertake almost complete responsibility for the welfare and survival of their families, were so limited by being passive, nurturing and motherly that they could not at the same time be powerful, independent and politically active.⁴⁸³ Luckily, though, there are poems such as Shabbir Banoobhai’s “for fatima/ so much love” which portray the strength of a woman: “they have taken you away/ and left you untouched/ they have locked you up/ and set you free/ they have silenced your voice/ and proclaimed your message”.⁴⁸⁴ As “Fatima” illustrates the lot of many women in a general sense, these last lines also apply more particularly to the condition of South African women writers: Because they were formerly silenced, their work is all the more interesting nowadays.

⁴⁸⁰ Miriam Tlali in Daymond, Driver et al. (2003: 50).

⁴⁸¹ Lockett (1992: 52).

⁴⁸² Dorothy Driver. “Drum magazine (1951-99) and the spatial configurations of gender”. *text, theory, space – land, literature and history in south Africa and Australia*. Eds. Kate Darian-Smith, Liz Gunner and Sarah Nuttall. London: Routledge, 1996. 231-242. 240.

⁴⁸³ Colleen O’Brien. “The Search for Mother Africa – Poetry Revises Women’s Struggle for Freedom”. *African Studies Review*. Vol. 37, Nr. 2. September 1994. 147-155.

⁴⁸⁴ “for fatima/ so much love”. Banoobhai (1980: 42).

Yet, it is not the primary intention of all women poets to speak out for others. Many speak from and of their own experience and for their own personal healing.

Women poets today often write poetry that is rooted in the material realities of women's lives. Feminist poets may present to readers a politically pertinent and possibly disturbing articulation of women's experience. In daring to speak freely, impudently, even presumptuously about their bodies, their sexuality and their relationship to cultural forms, women poets are seriously calling into question the conventional logic of patriarchal discourses.⁴⁸⁵

South African women poets, too, strive to take as their themes the subjects of their every-day lives, which are familiar to all women. They want to let the public know how they feel and in this way, reach their immediate audience within the country, most of whom will have had similar experiences. Post-Apartheid women's poetry can be used as an illustration of women's voices. Not only did the dismantling of Apartheid in South Africa create broader and more complex political groupings, but the change also brought with it more possibilities and opportunities for social mobility etc. One can read about this at length in the article on Ruth Miller from *Art Talk, Politics Talk*.⁴⁸⁶

As mentioned earlier in Chapter III, South African women's poetry resembles and draws ideas and strength from various influential theories, summarised below. Among these are some of their most famous representatives, such as Hélène Cixous and her variety of feminist literary theory known under the name of *Écriture Féminine* (writing from the woman's perspective), which originated in France in the 1970s. Then, many similarities can be found between the writings of South African women poets and the black American writers of the 1980s and between the findings of academics such as Louise O'Brian and Kirsten Holst Peterson. In her study "First Things First: Problems of a Feminist Approach to African Literature", Kirsten Holst Peterson discusses what she introduces as "The African Dilemma",⁴⁸⁷ the double burden and marginalisation of women, first

⁴⁸⁵ Liz Yorke. *Impertinent Voices: Subversive Strategies in Contemporary Women's Poetry*. London: Routledge, 1991. 1.

⁴⁸⁶ Michael Chapman. "Breaking Silences? Ruth Miller, the Women's Poet." *Art Talk, Politics Talk*. Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006. 58-72.

⁴⁸⁷ Both: Kirsten Holst Petersen. "First Things First: Problems of a Feminist Approach to African Literature". *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. Eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. London and New York: Routledge, 1995. 251-254.

for reasons of colour or race and also because of their gender. On the webpage of the ANC, one reads exactly the same in the case of the South African women:

Women suffered a double burden under Apartheid as they suffered both racial and gender discrimination. They had very little or no legal rights, no access to education and no right to own property.⁴⁸⁸

But then, one is surprised to read in the anthology *Women Writing Africa – the Southern Region* a more qualified judgement:

‘Doubly oppressed’ black women may have been, but the recognition of these race and class oppressions gave black women recourse to dual identifications and redefined feminism in terms of a political struggle of race and class. In this way Black Consciousness led readily, if not smoothly, into a feminist consciousness (the word ‘womanist’ also began to be used). Although a later generation of writer-critics would rebel against the discourse of motherhood, seeing it as limiting and insulting rather than enabling, women’s alignment with Black Consciousness was with a Black Consciousness constantly redefined through their presence. [...] Under Black Consciousness, then, gender dynamics were often muted through gestures of political and psychological solidarity between men and women, and public critiques of sexist behaviour were minimal.⁴⁸⁹

In sum then, during the Black Consciousness era, women’s voices, actions, and political courage were directed towards black solidarity, a masculinist movement in that men elevated themselves to the executive level of Black Consciousness, and relegated women to a culturally and politically marginal role, while at the same time, motherhood was represented as central, both iconically and as practice.[...] Women were the custodians of familial and communal morality, continually enjoined to... women’s cultural agency.⁴⁹⁰

Meanwhile, South African women have more and more managed to release themselves from being mere family beings and supporters of men. They finally address topics that are important to them alone and that are not dictated by a political situation that required solidarity. Thus, as the following quote states, one must be grateful to all artists for their recording the status quo, no matter in which way:

While songs and stories do not provide unbroken access to the past, they do provide information about how women were – and still are – expected to behave as daughters, wives, and mothers. Experiencing orature as informative does not diminish it.⁴⁹¹

⁴⁸⁸ From the ANC/FSAW official website: No author. No name. “Women’s Charter Adopted at the Founding Conference of the Federation of South African Women. Johannesburg, 17 April 1954”. *African National Congress*. <<http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/women/wcharter.html>> (accessed August 8, 2008).

⁴⁸⁹ Daymond, Driver et al. (2003: 47).

⁴⁹⁰ Daymond, Driver et al. (2003: 49).

⁴⁹¹ Daymond, Driver et al. (2003: 6).

Another important name in the field of postcolonialism is Chandra Talpade Mohanty (b. 1955). She became famous after publishing her ground-breaking essay in the field of postcolonial and trans-national feminist theory called “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses”⁴⁹² in 1986, alluding to Joseph Conrad’s novel, *Under Western Eyes*, which was written in 1911. In this essay, Chandra Talpade Mohanty condemns the attempt (or even the projected political aim) of Western feminism to construct a grouping called the ‘Third World women’ and to treat them as a unit. Chandra Talpade Mohanty criticises the fact that Western feminisms have neglected to differentiate between the diverse and disparate situations of Southern women, whom they treat as ‘Others’. She argues that history and culture, as well as geography, contribute to the most varied and dissimilar experiences of oppression.

All this results in the fact that the threshold countries’ feminist movements differ from the Western influenced feminist discourse. In general, feminists believe in the goals of feminism, the equality of men and women in family and profession. Yet feminists like Chandra Talpade Mohanty (her latest work is *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*⁴⁹³), Trinh T. Minh-ha (“Infinite Layers/Third World?”⁴⁹⁴ and *Woman, Native, Other. Writing postcoloniality and feminism*⁴⁹⁵) and Gayatri Spivak (“Can the Subaltern Speak?”⁴⁹⁶) all see white feminists principally as women who want to speak for women from developing countries, instead of allowing those women to speak for themselves. In a similar fashion, Jean-Paul Sartre started his foreword to the book *The Colonizer and the Colonized* by saying that only the Southerner [the colonized] is competent to discuss certain things, as he alone is the expert.⁴⁹⁷ One finds this superior attitude of first world people thinking of themselves as experts

⁴⁹² Chandra Talpade Mohanty. “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses” *Feminist Review* 30, Autumn 1988 (first published in 1986). 61-88.

⁴⁹³ Chandra Talpade Mohanty. *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003.

⁴⁹⁴ Trinh Minh-ha. “Infinite Layers/Third World.” *Social Theory: The Multicultural & Classic Readings*. Ed. Charles Lemert. Boulder: Westview Press, 1993. 543-548.

⁴⁹⁵ Trinh Minh-ha. *Woman, Native, Other. Writing postcoloniality and feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989.

⁴⁹⁶ Spivak (1988: 609-614).

⁴⁹⁷ Jean Paul Sartre in Memmi (1965: 17).

in everything, condemned by Sartre, mirrored in the highly critical lines of the poem “Three People Talk Politics In A Belgian⁴⁹⁸ Restaurant In Cape Town”⁴⁰⁷ by the Capetonian poet Chantel Erfort: “she takes pride in her white view on a black world/ she takes pride in her first world answers to third world/ questions”.⁴⁹⁹

Indeed it has always been difficult for Whites, and for some educated Africans, too, to write about women from developing countries without labelling them as ignorant, poor, uneducated, traditional, family oriented victims. By so doing, many women, amongst them even feminists, in their minds put themselves on a higher and more privileged level. This is why the poets discussed in this study are so valuable. They usually succeed in not being presumptuous and pompous, and they principally do not look down on their countrywomen. Without a doubt, the women poets treated here can be said to be down to earth and write for, from and of the people, even though they are aware of racial issues and distinctions, too.

Concerning the autobiographical approach of many of her own poems, in our 2003 interview about Maya Angelou and others of her role models, Malika Ndlovu said of these women writers:

they write biographical stuff which is clearly for their own healing and on their own journey of identity, but it has such universal appeal. It's poetic, it's strongly women-driven, it just felt like recognizing lots of myself from the problems and the aspiring. I think, as woman, there's not much of a difference and especially at the level of a black woman.

The quote makes clear that to her, being black provides another element connecting women poets and binding them together in addition to their shared love of poetry. She also talked to me of her concerns about feminism, a concern she shares with many self-confident women in Africa:

Feminism is a dubious term, because someone from the United Kingdom talking about “us” sisters does not fit. There is a big division between us. Many women of colour around the globe feel that we are not part of the feminist movement for many reasons. While I'm not saying we should have been, the idea of feminism has evolved in many different ways in different places. Someone who has books

⁴⁹⁸ Possibly alluding to the brutal colonial regime in the Congo.

⁴⁹⁹ “Three People Talk Politics In A Belgian Restaurant In Cape Town” by Chantel Erfort in the Programme of the 10th Spier Arts Summer Season. Dec '05- Mar '06. Spier Open-Air Poetry Festival Curated by Antjie Krog. <www.spierarts.org.za>.

of theory on feminism is very different from a rural woman in India or Africa. It's got to do with where you're at with your level of education, whether you were exposed to feminism as a theoretical and intellectual concept, or a historical concept. Someone in Africa may bow when the man enters the room and be at home with the fire and the children, but has a very clear place, and feels a strong sense of purpose with maintaining her family unit. This woman may not look at her role as a slave role, but as an empowering role. It's all about the woman's perception of herself.⁵⁰⁰

Instead, many South African women poets, amongst them Malika Ndlovu, seem to be supporters of 'Motherism' or 'Womanism', terms which are overlapping each other and which can be used almost synonymously. The term 'Motherism' was coined in 1983 by the black American writer Alice Walker (b.1944). It refers to a stand taken especially within the black or African position in the feminist movement. This black or African position seeks not to define gender relations between the sexes as confrontational. Similarly the 'Black' or 'African feminism' also does not primarily focus on conflicts, but on the cooperation between men and women, and is not intended, as feared by many African women, to ruin the positive relations between African women and men. 'Motherism' distances itself deliberately from the Western, the white feminism, which is accused of misandry, condescension and a patronising attitude towards the African women's movement.

Supporters of 'Motherism' do not limit themselves exclusively to women-related topics and their experiences and liberation. Other important topics for 'Motherism' are partnership, cooperation, tolerance, love, understanding, and patience. The supporters of 'Motherism' love and respect all people, without regard for or judgement of their skin colour, race, religion or origin. Audre Lorde pointed out the necessity, though, of thinking and talking about these differences, so that they would not be divisive, but become a source of power and of a deeper bond.

The struggle with cancer now informs all my days, but it is only another face of that continuing battle for self-determination and survival that black women fight daily, often in triumph.⁵⁰¹

'Womanists', for Alice Walker, are the representatives of Africa's alternative to Western feminism. A Womanist is defined as a black feminist, who continues the heritage of brave black American activists supporting

⁵⁰⁰ Both: Malika Ndlovu in our interview in 2003.

⁵⁰¹ FemBio. 2006. "Audre Lorde". *FemBio*. <<http://www.fembio.org/biographie.php/frau/biographie/audre-lorde/>> (accessed August 8, 2008).

comprehensive social change, the liberation of the Blacks and more broadly, the whole of mankind.⁵⁰²

Womanists write in the hope not only of reaching women, but also men, may not always have a good idea of the needs and the realities of women's existence. Womanists like Maya Angelou, Audre Lorde, Ama Ata Aidoo or Bessie Head, on the one hand, distance themselves from the forms of white feminism, as they find it important to preserve their 'black culture', but on the other hand, they write with incisive insight on female topics. Already Bessie Head (1937-1986) complained that not a single colonial power ever supported the predominantly black population, which is why the Blacks had few opportunities during Apartheid and little chance of a good education especially if they were women.

Although she claimed to be vehemently non-political in her actions, Head's writings dwell on injustice and oppression in the political arena in South Africa, and her hopes for social change and peace in the future.[...] It is impossible to guess how the revolution will come one day in South Africa. But in a world where all ordinary people are insisting on their rights, it is inevitable. It is hoped that great leaders will arise there who remember the suffering of racial hatred and out of it formulate a common language of love for all people.⁵⁰³

Unfortunately, Bessie Head did not live to see the changes which, in some areas definitely more successfully than in others, took place in South Africa.

For Ama Ata Aidoo, the goal was to empower through her works African women socially and politically in the face of the traditionally patriarchal society. If one thinks about how important a role women played in the resistance and liberation struggle, it is surprising that it was and unfortunately often still is so difficult for them to draw attention to their artistic achievements. Wrongfully, women in Africa have been portrayed as dumb, or speechless, and invisible members of society. It is therefore an important task of black women writers, to portray and make others aware of the reality of the African woman or rather African women.

The poets of this study give considerable importance to showing as broad as possible an audience how women, and especially 'women of colour', live in

⁵⁰² Meanwhile, the term 'Womanism' also has religious connotations, most likely coming from the love of many black American women for the spiritual side of life.

⁵⁰³ Kate Bissell. 1996. "Bessie Head". *Emory University* <http://www.emory.edu/ENG_LISH/Bahri/Head.html> (accessed August 8, 2008).

post-colonial times because they were completely passed over before. So they stand up to the typical colonial and male idea that women, like children, should be seen and not heard, and that the subjects open to women in the arts should be limited and ‘appropriate’. One reads in *Women Writing Africa – The Southern Region* the programmatic statement:

Women need to place themselves as “women” in order to function politically as part of such a grouping, even while they may not actually share among themselves the same conception of “womanhood. [...] gender must always be defined through race, class, ethnicity, culture, and other coordinates in order to achieve any meaning.⁵⁰⁴

My concern in this chapter is with the way in which South African women poets reflect on the lives of women. The following poems show the women poets’ self-image of being on the one hand mothers, and on the other hand women who can stand on their own two feet. While their work carries cultural values it is “explicitly female in the sense that the writers have chosen to explore experiences central to their sex and to find forms and styles appropriate to their exploration”.⁵⁰⁵ These writers are, I believe, challenging and transforming the history, future and even the direction of predominantly male poetry.

For most South African women poets, to be a woman means to be able to experience the wonders of giving birth, of keeping a family together, and to be able to pass on traditions, to be vulnerable and sensitive but also to assert oneself in a world which is very often dominated by men and money. For them, there is no contradiction between being a mother and taking a position against patriarchal attitudes, as Malika Ndlovu does, for example, in her poem “Next door”. Motherhood and political action are not mutually exclusive. This ‘ambiguity’ is something which is also typical for the ‘Black Feminism’ in the USA. About the true calling of women, Malika Ndlovu writes in her poem “Instruments”:⁵⁰⁶

Portals of love
Makers of peace
Creators of beauty
We are healers
We are born to bring light
To honour the blessing of each day.

⁵⁰⁴ Daymond, Driver et al. (2003: 1).

⁵⁰⁵ Alicia Suskin Ostriker. *Stealing the language: The Emergence of Women’s Poetry in America*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1986. 7.

⁵⁰⁶ Barry, Ndlovu and Khan (2002: 192).

Confirmation in Crimson

by Malika Ndlovu

Sudden wet whisper on her thighs
Is that mine
Her innocence cries
Before she can grasp
The miracle
It's passed

Granny recommends sugar for the shock
Cynical aunties pretend not to mock
Mother sighs
Childhood good-byes
Her box of remedies now applies

No vigorous celebration
No uniting of the clan
Not a joyous evolution
From girl to woman

It's a secret
Take a tablet
They can smell it
Wear a long skirt
Feeling faint
Call the nurse
Every woman's curse
They convincingly say
The pain of your life
Till its very last day

In another poem entitled “Confirmation in Crimson”,⁵⁰⁷ Malika Ndlovu describes the change from girlhood to womanhood. The precondition for being a woman physically is the first menstruation which is celebrated with big festivities in many African traditions.

The four stanzas of the poem are held together by some anaphoras and rhymes. The first stanza describes the discovery of the physical change. The second stanza speaks of the female relatives, grandmother, aunts and mother who give their advice. The third stanza notes and complains about the fact that the “evolution” from girlhood to womanhood is less appreciated nowadays and is no longer considered a cause for celebration in big gatherings.

On the other hand, the fourth stanza shows what ‘becoming a woman’ means in a world shaped by the West. It is a secret, one takes a pill to reduce the pain, dresses oneself with a long skirt, hides oneself. Prejudices are passed on from generation to generation: “They can smell it”. It is ordained to be the burden of all women, the “curse” of life they have to endure.

Only after experiencing this curse may women also experience the miracles of motherhood. Yet, the first menstruation is also a precondition for the complete change to being a woman. It concerns all women and is something, a secret that unifies them.

Womanhood and motherhood are something which concern Malika Ndlovu a lot and to which she gives a place of honour in her poems.

⁵⁰⁷ Chapman (2002: 354).

Ancient Eyes

by Malika Ndlovu

I left my fluid envelopment
 So long ago
 Soon you, my baby
 Will leave yours
 My mother never knew
 That I would inherit her ancient eyes
 But I now know
 That you in time
 Will fatefully inherit mine
 If this is to be
 Then you
 Just like me
 Will instinctively see
 So much
 So clearly
 So soon

Malika Ndlovu wrote the poem “Ancient Eyes”⁵⁰⁸ in 1990, at the age of 19, for her still unborn son Rayne and for her own mother who also gave birth to her at the age of 19. In “Ancient Eyes” the lyrical speaker describes how an emotional depth and clear sight, here symbolized by the “ancient eyes”, are passed on from generation to generation. It is a dialogue with the still unborn child, see the tender “you, my baby”, which reflects the loving motherly feelings of the lyrical speaker.

Considering the youthfulness of the poet in 1990, the first two lines almost

seem exaggerated: “I left my fluid envelopment/ So long ago”. But the lyrical speaker probably alludes to the age she feels she is. She has already experienced a lot and, with the “ancient eyes” inherited from her mother, has seen much injustice in her own country, particularly as in 1990 the official end of Apartheid was not yet a certainty, and the movement towards it had barely started.

The lyrical speaker knows that the child, too, could inherit grandma’s “ancient eyes”, and that through this transmission, the gift of perceiving injustice would be passed on and not be lost. The contents of the poem remind us of Malika Ndlovu’s statement that, as a child, she could never just play with other children, but was always busy with profound philosophical conflicts within herself and that she was much more mature than young people of her age.⁵⁰⁹ The expectant mother in the poem thus describes the passing on of the “ancient eyes” as fateful, for it means not being able to lead an easy-going life because one can never turn off one’s thoughts.

In the last five lines, emphasized by a rhyme (“me”, “see”) and the use of parallism and anaphora (“so”), the poet alludes through the lyrical speaker to her own gift to see things realistically and clearly, and to her ability to judge fairly.

⁵⁰⁸ Malika Lueen Ndlovu. *poetry-in-progress from period 1986-2002* (unpublished).

⁵⁰⁹ Malika Ndlovu in our interview in June 2003.

Pregnancy

by Sally-Ann Murray

I am expecting
to feel I don't know what,
as now and then you knock, softly,
like a student entering the presence of authority,
until grown with the weeks insistent you butt in more
and still more and more confident.

Nok knock!
Who's there?
A good question that, unanswered
in the mirror's muteness, and the held hands' bolstering.
To what can I refer for the knowledge that I seek? Doctors? Books? Other women?
Nothing, except to each week's waiting which throws me back upon my body.

Knock nok.
But I know nothing about the knowledge that you seek –
Life, or some quest equally as large –
though each week my body bellies its figurehead more fully,
breasting a cargo through erratic waves.

Of course I am said to bloom, my dear, and blossom.
But I have never been a flower, and do not now intend to pistil into motherhood.

And always my power is limited as I try to hold but refuse your shape:
cutting the elastic of familiar clothes;
determinedly craving nothing out of the ordinary;
pleasuring my body – my body – as I will.

You will not lie still but I belie your presence,
and think of customs where mothers bind their daughters' feet,
and fathers celebrate the birth of boys in bars.

Just wait, people say ironically.
(Well what else can I do, with this intimate living that happens all despite me?)
Your time will come;
we cannot wait to see you, as the Bible puts it, big with child.

So I refuse to hold your shape,
slathering the jut of ourselves with salve;
waking nightly to the darkness;
flushing the bladder yet another time.

And always another knock
a kick
a funny flick
a shiver
and a funny glide
Suddenly
That slides
across the flesh.



*Sally-Ann Murray,
Poetry Africa Festival'06.
Photo: Isabelle Vogt 2006.*

Past the belly bulge you wait,
taking things slowly,
circling the date declared to make you present.

Lying low beneath a swell
you show your shape in moments:
my elation and sadness,
your peaks and dents,
movements that irreverently decline your future.

Motherhood is a very important topic for South African women poets of all backgrounds. In the poem “Pregnancy”,⁵¹⁰ just as several others in the collection of poetry *open season*, which sticks out for its ambiguous,

sexually allusive cover,⁵¹¹ the Durban-born Sally-Ann Murray (b.1961) describes her experiences during her pregnancy with her first and only son. Here, pregnancy is described as something which is associated with mood swings. In “Pregnancy” Sally-Ann Murray experiments with poetic forms. This can be seen in the very atypical form of the poem into whose bulgy shape one can almost ‘read’ the curves of a pregnant woman in profile.

The lyrical speaker’s emotions vary between “elation and sadness”. She learns to deal with the fact that her life and her body are now not only hers any more and she is “determinedly craving nothing out of the ordinary;/ pleasuring my body – my body – as I will”. The soon-to-be mother struggles with the balance of power between herself and the unborn child: “And always my power is limited as I try to hold but refuse your shape:/ cutting the elastic of familiar clothes; [...] flushing the bladder yet another time.” Then, “Nok knock!/ Who’s there?” is a playful way of marking the ‘dialogues’ between mother and unborn baby. Yet, the whole poem has an ironic and sarcastic undertone as can be seen from the following lines: “Of course I am said to bloom, my dear, and blossom./ But I have never been a flower, and do not now intend to pistil into motherhood.”

Sally-Ann Murray’s poetry reveals an outspoken feminist. It criticises the attitude of critics who say “Women poets should be contained in their euphoria”.⁵¹² For her, women are the “quiet masters of many arts/ [...] / Who successfully adapt/ Who sell themselves short/ Who find their lives exchanged for

⁵¹⁰ Sally-Ann Murray. *Open Season*. Dalbridge, Durban: HardPressd, 2006. 44.

⁵¹¹ In fact, the cover shows men climbing around on a dead whale. Yet, at first glance, one could mistake the picture for one of a giant vagina being inspected by several men.

⁵¹² “Durban poet making Durban do (it all)”. Murray (2006: 11).

what-have-you”.⁵¹³ Sally-Ann Murray has an unwavering confidence in women “since a woman is endowed with the diverse charms/ of multi-tasking for the asking”⁵¹⁴ and thereby anticipates what Finuala Dowling writes in her “Doo-wop girls of the universe”.

Birth Poem⁵¹⁵

by Joan Metelerkamp

I keep thinking I will write a poem
for my children, song for their births, record
of their births, knowing that there are too few
poems of birth (plenty of death);

I keep

musing
why are there so few birth poems
so few women writing poems of their
children;

[...]

Twice I thought I would squeeze a child out.
into the world; twice, at the last moment,
the men did it for me: they were all there,
G.P., anaesthetist, obstetrician,
and paediatrician; and the women,
accomplices, there, holding the scalpel,
passing the swabs.

Twice I thought I would tell
it adequately, go against the grain
of woman’s silence,
and again my wound
is closed on my stomach like a red seam
tightening the hard pod of my silence.

But first the “Birth Poem” by Joan Metelerkamp, who is a generation older (born 1956), is, as is typical for this poet, free of a typically poetic form. To her, the freeing of the poetic voice is most important and this poetic voice is much more important than form and style. “I must say the emphasis on text at the expense of voice in academe not only pisses me off, I find it philosophically scary. Its emphasis is on absence and loss and substitution rather than on presence and possibility and reality (things are as they are, not as metaphors)”.⁵¹⁶

Still, despite her criticism of the focus on text, this poem does have a certain visible form. Yet, in this case, the form is related to metre and breath, so to the “voice” mentioned in the quote.

⁵¹³ “Within reason”. Murray (2006: 27).

⁵¹⁴ “Within reason”. Murray (2006: 26).

⁵¹⁵ Chapman (2001: 416-418).

⁵¹⁶ Berold (2003: 12).

A lot of Joan Metelerkamp's poetry emphasizes the imbalance of male and female voices.⁵¹⁷ In "Birth Poem", too, she talks about her feeling of incompleteness and failure as a woman, subordinated to men, even when it comes to her giving birth, as twice "at the last moment/ the men did it for me". Thus she feels forced to play 'second fiddle' to men, even when she herself is giving birth.

The excerpt from this poem opens the collection of poetry talking about pregnancy, giving birth and motherhood, all topics that can be found in women's poetry all around the world, but also especially in Africa, where giving birth is traditionally considered the ultimate entry to womanhood.



Photo: Isabelle Vogt 2006.
Poetry Africa Durban'06.

Finuala Dowling (b.1962) was born in Cape Town as the seventh of eight children to parents involved in radio broadcasting. She is a single parent of a daughter born in 1993. In 1996 she completed and published a doctorate in English Literature on Fay Weldon's fiction. Finuala Dowling lives in her hometown Kalk Bay and works as a teacher, freelance educational material developer and lecturer, and besides her two collections of poetry (*I flying*⁵¹⁸ and *Doo-wop girls of the universe*⁵¹⁹), she

has written short stories, comedies and two slightly autobiographical novels (*What Poets Need*⁵²⁰ and *Flyleaf*⁵²¹).

The poem "Doo-wop girls of the universe"⁵²² praises, like so many poems before, women for what they are. Rap-like, the first of five stanzas lists the professions in which "the women you know" excel. In the second stanza, the lyrical speaker describes how "almost every woman I've ever known" (which is later tempered with "Look, I'm known to generalise"), no matter what job she

⁵¹⁷ Berold (2003: 11).

⁵¹⁸ Dowling (2002).

⁵¹⁹ Dowling (2006).

⁵²⁰ Finuala Dowling. *What Poets Need*. Penguin Books, 2005.

⁵²¹ Finuala Dowling. *Flyleaf*. Penguin Books, 2007.

⁵²² Dowling (2006: 78).

Doo-wop girls of the universe

by Finuala Dowling

I know something you don't know
about the women you know –
those makers of decisions,
physicians, rhetoricians,
amiable stage technicians,
indignant politicians,
formidable statisticians,
quiet dieticians
and the non-icians too,
the lovely -ists:
the linguists,
lyricists,
artists,
activists.

Almost every woman I've ever known –
whether she be -ician or she be -ist –
has told me once or shown
she'd really come into her own as
a doo-wop girl.

So put her in the footlights,
put her at the backing mikes,
right up there on the dais,
maybe slightly out of focus
while some man sings his opus
the undisputed locus
of attention.

Then while the main man
belts out the main track
she'll be in the back
going like so –
shoulders, head and toes –
hips, chest, east, west.
Best way to describe her pose
is "biding",
she's biding time on the sidelines
waiting for the best lines –
the reprise –
the one we're born cooing
ooby shooby doo
right on cue.

Look, I'm known to generalise
but I'd like to emphasise
that every woman has inside
doo-wop girl.

normally does, has "a doo-wop girl" in her. The women are lovely and wittingly represented by the neutral endings "-icians" and "-ists".

In the third stanza, the lyrical speaker describes how women may support or even steal the show from men "the undisputed locus/ of attention".

The lyrical speaker goes on to describe how women are patient, "biding time on the sidelines/ waiting for the best lines" and providing the back up, till "right on cue", their time to fulfil what they were born for has come. This is a picture which is well transferable to other situations than singing in the background on stage.

In the fourth stanza, the lyrical speaker goes on to encourage her fellow women. She calls "Give her the mike, Mike/ or..." and tells her "Sisters" to leave their chores for a while, "we be free", to bring out their true selves, to be "doo-wop girls of the universe".

Knowing that Finuala Dowling comes from a very big family, the lines "or I'll call my sisters,/ 'cause I got sisters" have a tongue-in-cheek tone. This is a feature which distinguishes her novels, too: the entertaining,

Give her the mike, Mike
 or I'll call my sisters,
 'cause I got sisters,
 and I'll say: "Sisters,
 you hang up those rubber gloves
 you freeze that chicken
 you unplug that iron
 you come with me
 we be free
 we be threeness
 we be supremes
 we be the unforced
 force of fourness
 not sad, not terse:
 doo-wop girls of the universe."

delightful light style, which Finuala Dowling always combines with a good sense of humour.⁵²³

Various rhymes, internal rhymes, assonances, alliterations and run-on-lines demonstrate the poetic ability of the author, contribute to textual coherence and add a pinch of wit and a fiery spirit to this rap-like poem.

As a working woman and mother herself, Finuala Dowling, knows of the exhausting tasks, the burdens and sorrows of a working mother as we can see in her poem "Last straw".⁵²⁴ The next poem, "Domestic Revolution" by Malika Ndlovu, takes us back to the topic of motherhood. It has an attitude towards women equally as positive as that of Finuala Dowling's poems. In "Domestic Revolution", the talk is of mothers who turn into super-women when they have to care for a family.



Malika and Kwezi Ndlovu.
 Photo: Ndlovu 2004.

In January 2004 Malika Ndlovu became mother of her third son. The proud parents then sent email announcements to all their friends, together with this picture and a long letter. In the email was a copy of the poem "Domestic Revolution" which Malika Ndlovu had written earlier after the birth of one of her older sons and which was

published in her book *Womb to World: A Labour of Love*.⁵²⁵

Her second pregnancy then became the inspiration for the above mentioned book *Womb to World: A Labour of Love*, an entire book full of poems

⁵²³ Cf the poem "Straight men of Cape Town" by Finuala Dowling. Dowling (2006: 1-2).

⁵²⁴ Dowling (2006: 59).

⁵²⁵ Ndlovu (2001).

concerning pregnancy and giving birth. There she says in the poem “Motherhood”: “I chose motherhood / I chose you”. This also goes for all of her three children, for although her first pregnancy was not planned, she immediately decided to become a mother and to embark on a new life with a child.

With the dedication of the book *Womb to World* to her two sons at that time and “in the honour of mamas, papas and babas around the globe”, Malika Ndlovu makes clear how important she regards motherhood and how seriously she takes the task parents are faced with. She thus leaves no doubt about her positive attitude towards “Motherism”.

The poem “Domestic Revolution”⁵²⁶ describes the revolutionary changes which take place in a family when a child is born. Pregnancy offered material for new poems to Malika Ndlovu, as well as to other female authors. With her first son everything was still different, firstly because that pregnancy and the delivery was a completely new experience for Malika Ndlovu, and secondly because at that time she had to deal with many prejudices like those against teenage pregnancies and unwed or single motherhood.

Her turning to the topic of “Domestic Revolution” in the poem of that name so soon after the birth of her third son, to give expression to her feelings and her situation, speaks for the transferability and applicability of the poem and her renewed or continuing domestic “revolution”. The possibility of universalizing her poems is very important for Malika Ndlovu, and this poem is a good example of this, because many parents, no matter what their origin or colour, are bound to identify with the feelings she describes.

The five stanzas of “Domestic Revolution” are written in lower case letters and make use of only one punctuation mark, the thus stressed question followed by the question mark at the end. At the time of the birth of her third son, this poem contrasted the “we” as the so far existing family and the “you”, while the old “we” was on the way to a new “we”, an aspired to new family. This results in an anaphora of the word “we” and to assonances around the English vowel sound u, as in “we knew you were coming”.

⁵²⁶ Ndlovu (2001: 31).

Domestic Revolution

by Malika Ndlovu

we expected you
 we knew you were coming
 actually we waited for you
 we thought we were prepared
 still your arrival
 on our home planet
 has been a revolution
 your landing has made me
 toss out half my plans
 life before you
 is subtly fading from view

somewhere behind
 the un-raised blinds
 the neglected garden
 the dishes and washing
 piling up
 somewhere in-between
 the breast-feeding
 phone ringing
 baby bathing
 supper cooking
 never-ending
 nappy-changing
 late-night rocking
 to sleep

yes, it's true
 we expected you
 we knew you were coming
 we thought we were prepared
 but since your arrival
 we've had to review
 exactly who it is
 that calls the shots
 it's blatantly clear
 who's the boss
 nowadays even your cries are not
 that sniffing-puppy-tiny-whining-
 sound
 but a howling loud hailer
 or the break-of-dawn shock
 of a brutal alarm clock
 yet we knew you were coming
 we thought we were prepared

The first four lines of the first stanza rationally describe the lyrical speaker and her environment before the birth of the child: “we expected you/ we knew you were coming/ actually we waited for you/ we thought we were prepared”. Remarkable is the tone of the fourth line. It leads to the “still” in the fifth line which describes the reality, namely the fact that even if one, over the nine months of pregnancy, becomes accustomed to the idea of the new child and, even if one expects it, the actual arrival of the child can be considered a domestic “revolution”.

The first stanza thus announces the changes which go along with “your landing/ in our home planet” and which bring a mother “to toss out half of my plans”. This disappearing into thin air of the life and life style before the birth of a child is made vivid onomatopoeically by the accumulation of the fricative f: “life before you/ is subtly fading from view”, “ffff” – and it was gone.

somehow
 since you arrived
 without lifting a hand
 you've streamlined our lives
 re-organised our schedules
 blossoming in the limelight
 as we orbit around you
 the new centre of our universe

and even though it's been
 challenging
 and at times
 downright rough
 there's a level of love
 that carries us through
 a love that often makes us ask
 what would we do without you?

The stanzas 2, 4 and 5 describe the new and frenetic activity in which, “somewhere”, the memory of the time before the arrival of the child fades. They also describe the hectic atmosphere which makes one forget one's old life and which only allows one to think of the ‘now’.

In the second stanza Malika Ndlovu symbolically uses the pictures of the not yet pulled up blinds, of the neglected garden, the heaped up laundry

and the piled up unwashed dishes in the kitchen. The character of rattling off a list of things to do is reinforced by the anaphora of the word “the” and the parallel phrase building. “Piling-up” gains a special significance, as it ‘visually’ divides the stanza into two parts. It produces a pause, like a sigh, and underlines the feeling that the lyrical speaker, on behalf of most of the brand new mothers, may lose control of the situation and that she risks not being able to cope with it.

In the second part of the second stanza the lyrical speaker details her new daily routine. Noticeable is the use of multiple verbal nouns in this verse, seven in all. All the days' neglected activities must wait, wait for the baby to sleep for a while. Therefore the “late-night rocking/ to sleep” is emphasized. When the baby sleeps the family gets a short rest and the postponed chores can finally be dealt with.

Chorus-like, the poem repeats “we expected you” and “we thought we were prepared”. The third stanza takes up this theme again, and is, in effect, a ‘refrain’. Even without knowing the recording on the CD attached to *Womb to World* in which “Domestic Revolution” was first published, a slight, amused head-shaking can be read into this stanza. The “yes, it's true” at the beginning confirms their expectations before these are contrasted with the reality in the fourth stanza.

This fourth stanza is designed with a strong reliance on onomatopoeia. It demonstrates the acute powers of observation of the women poet: “(not) that sniffing-puppy-whining-sound/ but a howling loud hailer/ or the break-of-dawn

shock/ of a brutal alarm clock”. In addition Malika Ndlovu fits in a rhyme: “shock” and “clock”. This rhyme of a hard, monosyllabic word underlines the startling force of the alarm calls of the baby and compares these cries to a merciless alarm-clock.

In the fifth stanza, Malika Ndlovu comes back to the picture of the “new boss” in the house, “the new centre of our universe”, who “somehow”, all of a sudden, is the centre of attraction just as the sun is in the solar system. The lines “without lifting a hand/ you’ve streamlined our lives/ re-organised our schedules” are beautiful, too, and they show how quickly a family adjusts to the new situation.

The last stanza presents the climax of the poem. It describes the fact that one gladly accepts all the trouble a baby brings with it, due to the love which one develops towards the baby before and after its birth. The form of this stanza is striking. The “even though” in the first line is like a last breath taken before the final listing of the chores still to be done. The word “challenging” stands on its own and thus forms a visual contrast; this pays tribute to the admission that, for parents, educating children is certainly not child’s play, but a rigorous challenge. The word “rough” is used onomatopoeically, in order to emphasize the efforts and strains of motherhood. It contrasts with the soft word “love” in the subsequent line. The following verses get broader, longer, line by line, and so finally the poem ends, leading up to the affectionate query “what would we do without you?”

As well as the following poem, “Domestic Revolution” shows how precious Malika Ndlovu considers the family. She holds it in an esteem which surely originates from her African roots and which is well-founded in her family tradition.

Warrior Marks

by Maganthrie Pillay, WEAVE

If only stretch marks
 Were marks of honour
 Warrior marks of love
 If only we marvelled
 At the miracle of birth
 In all its splendour
 And all that remains
 Glorious stretch marks
 On stomach
 Thighs and buttocks
 If people ululated when they saw
 A woman's body marked
 With the labour of love
 If they would form a circle around her
 Dance their joy and appreciation
 For what she has achieved
 Conceived and they received
 A new little person
 To give love and be loved!

If only stretch marks
 Were marks of honour
 And not marks of shame
 Wearers of which
 Swath and conceal them
 From all eyes
 Even their own
 Some never recover
 From the quiet consuming loathing
 Envy of smooth-skinned shapely forms
 Hating their forever changed bodies
 Used as a vessel
 And little reward
 But years of exhaustion
 And some smiles
 Sometimes.

The mirror tells no lies
 The lover says
 You are as beautiful as ever
 While his wandering gaze
 Hovers on women not marked
 But these warrior marks of love
 Are for us, for you
 For our little one
 Following his eyes with hers
 Knowing her baggy shield
 She must eventually shed

Just as being a woman brings with it the ability to bear children, bearing children brings with it changes of the body which often distance men from the mothers of their children. Maganthrie Pillay and Michelle McGrane make the female body the theme of their poems “Warrior Marks”⁵²⁷ and “wearing my bikini”. Like Malika Ndlovu, the South African Indian WEAVE member Maganthrie Pillay was born in Durban in 1971. The resemblance to Malika Ndlovu’s poetry in Maganthrie Pillay’s poem, “Warrior Marks”, is striking. This likeness involves mainly language and humour. For example, Maganthrie Pillay uses what is, at first glance, a ridiculous-looking theme, which, however, makes a feminist statement: When a woman is to produce a child, her man has to accept that changes will result. Maganthrie Pillay’s idea of comparing women’s stretch marks with male “Warrior Marks” to elevate their status, becomes progressively more convincing in the course of the poem. Her lyrical speaker wishes the detestable stretch marks were respected. Just as warrior marks are valued in many cultures, stretch marks might just as well become symbols of achievement and should be allowed to be shown with pride.

⁵²⁷ Barry, Ndlovu and Khan (2002: 207).

The mirror tells no lies
 The lover says
 You are as beautiful as ever
 While his wandering gaze
 Hovers on women not marked
 But these warrior marks of love
 Are for us, for you
 For our little one
 Following his eyes with hers
 Knowing her baggy shield
 She must eventually shed

But if stretch marks
 Were marks of honour
 Warrior marks of love
 She would be bold
 Bear them as proof of her love
 Of her gift of life itself
 If people danced around her
 And celebrated her gift to them
 She would know
 She was a warrior
 Of unconditional love
 She would replace the loathing
 With wondrous joy
 She would stand proud

As a warrior of love.

The first stanza revels in and dreams of how it would be “If only stretch marks/ Were marks of honour” and “Warrior marks of love”, if the changes in the body would provoke enthusiasm within oneself and amongst those in one’s surroundings. Here the lyrical speaker dreams of a typically African picture, the one of a community dancing and cheering in a circle.

The second stanza however makes clear what stretch marks, representative of all the physical changes connected with pregnancy, mean to a woman. She tries everything to hide all these physical changes and does her utmost in order to reverse them. So obviously, one has difficulty coming to terms with giving birth to a child while feeling ashamed of being “marked” long-term, and one covers up the happy event of pregnancy and birth which is truly connected with a miracle. This goes so far that some

women feel hurt that they are not acknowledged and honoured “as a vessel”.

The fourth stanza illustrates how this feeling of disappointment is even reinforced when one’s own beloved partner looks around for “women not marked”, then the woman knows that something has to be done about her “baggy shield”. The last stanza regrets that this acceptance of mothers and motherhood does not in practice exist. Otherwise the lyrical speaker would present herself proudly, like a “warrior of love”. Yet by mentioning the subject, the poem at least initiates a shift in thinking in the readers.

Like many South African women poets, Maganthrie Pillay dedicates numerous poems to female friends or relatives, see the poems “Mother”⁵²⁸ and “Auntie”,⁵²⁹ or her screenplay “Dilemma”.⁵³⁰ This community aspect is bound to

⁵²⁸ Barry, Ndlovu and Khan (2002: 210).

⁵²⁹ Barry, Ndlovu and Khan (2002: 211).

⁵³⁰ Barry, Ndlovu and Khan (2002: 212).

lead to women being more highly respected and valued in all the situations of their lives and will bring honour to womanhood and document all that goes with it.

For, the female members of an African family are, normally, the point of departure for the leap forward, which means that women in African societies often play a principal role in the evolution of society. The women's role in bringing up and educating the children in the home as well as in transmitting traditions has already been mentioned. Furthermore, equality brings with it better chances for a better education which in turn leads to the push for advancement and better opportunities for all the family. Important issues thus depend on women, not only that of the continuance of the family, which is no insignificant matter in itself.

A very similar topic is described in Michelle McGrane's poem "wearing my bikini".⁵³¹ As Maganthrie Pillay's relatively well-crafted poem "Warrior Marks" is stylistically much more elaborate and uses many more poetic devices. It makes the narrative poem "wearing my bikini" look simplistic, yes, even mundane. Yet the differently shaped poems illustrate the fact that the poets Maganthrie Pillay and Michelle McGrane are concerned about similar issues even though they come from different cultural backgrounds.



Michelle McGrane.^{534b}

Michelle McGrane was born into a white family in Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia) in 1974. After spending her childhood in Malawi, her family moved to South Africa when she was fourteen.⁵³² Since then she has lived there and worked in Pietermaritzburg. This poem was published in 2003 in her second collection of poetry, *Hybrid*,⁵³³ following upon *Fireflies & Blazing Stars*⁵³⁴ which came out in 2002.

⁵³¹ Michelle McGrane. *Hybrid*. Pietermaritzburg: Trayberry Press L / Alexander House, 2003. No pagination.

⁵³² No author. 2005. "Michelle McGrane". *Zulu Kingdom* South Africa <<http://literature.kzn.org.za/lit/79.xml>> (accessed August 8, 2008).

⁵³³ McGrane (2003).

⁵³⁴ Michelle McGrane. *Fireflies & Blazing Stars*. Pietermaritzburg: Trayberry Press L / Alexander House, 2002.

wearing my bikini

by Michelle McGrane

today, i stride
the length of the beach
wearing my bikini,

it's a matter of principle.

if men can strut proud,
up and down
the promenade,
exposing hairy backs,
minuscule sausage-bags
stuffed under
oversized guts,

why should women
feel obliged
by a sense of propriety
to hide cellulite,
scars, stretchmarks,
under boardshorts or
billowing sarongs.

today, i decide
what is good
for one,

is good for
the other.

today, i am
wearing my bikini.

“wearing my bikini” questions the shame, unnecessary shyness and “sense of propriety” that women feel about their bodies, while men seemingly do not have to bother with what are to them superficial trivialities. This is nicely expressed through the different verbs Michelle McGrane uses for her lyrical speaker, who shyly “stride[s]/ the length of the beach”, whereas “men can strut proud/ up and down/ the promenade”. In her poem, the lyrical speaker wears her bikini as “a matter of principle”.

The poem is a challenge for equal rights between women and men. In a very active mental process, the lyrical speaker decides that “what is good/ for one,// is good for/ the other” – a very emancipated statement. The comparison of the poems proves that women of different backgrounds and even cultures (Michelle McGrane being a white South African and Maganthrie Pillay being a South African Indian) seem to be concerned with the same problems concerning both men and their own bodies.

Here then is the place to mention, if only as an aside, one poem that cherishes women and their bodies: Lebogang Mashile’s “Sisters”.⁵³⁵ In this poem, the lyrical speaker celebrates the beauty of African women and finds good qualities in their ample bodies. The poem opens with the lines of praise “I see the wisdom of eternities/ In ample thighs”, lines which almost remind one of the surprising openness and zest for life of Grace Nichols, the award-winning Caribbean poet and author of *The Fat Black Woman’s Poems*.⁵³⁶ In the second verse paragraph of

^{534b} Photo: Michelle McGrane <http://www.oulitnet.co.za/relax/images/michelle_mcgrane.jpg> (accessed August 08, 2008).

⁵³⁵ Mashile (2005: 51). Title also included on the CD as track nr. 8.

⁵³⁶ Grace Nichols. *The Fat Black Woman’s Poems*. London: Virago Press, 1984.

“Sisters”, Lebogang Mashile’s lyrical speaker goes on to say “Blessed am I to be loved/ In the temple of my own skin”,⁵³⁷ and therefore experiences something Maganthrie Pillay and Michelle McGrane’s lyrical speakers in the above poems are longing for. “Sisters” ends with encouraging lines beautifully laden with African symbols which pray for the happiness of others and which praise the beauty of African women: “So I pray to the voices/ That whisper in my soft curves/ For the lionesses of my blood/ [...] to know the embrace of freedom in nourishing silences/ Where their radiant ebony vessels are reflections of their souls”.⁵³⁸

The Suitable Girl

Michelle McGrane

The suitable girl is not temperamental,
does not throw tantrums, have rages
in public places,

or swear.

She does not take drugs or
stay out late, she is the daughter
of family friends.

She does not phone you drunk
in the middle of the night or ignore
your calls, she does not

make you happy.

After this short excursus to Lebogang Mashile, another of Michelle McGrane’s provocative poems, “The Suitable Girl”,⁵³⁹ shall be mentioned here briefly. It plays with and dissects the expectations which society has of “suitable girl[s]” and women. According to the lyrical speaker, these women are “not temperamental”, do “not throw tantrums, [or] have rages in public places”, they do not “swear”, “take drugs or/ stay out late”. On the contrary, they are the model daughters-in-law, for

Michelle McGrane ideally “the daughter/ of family friends”. Yet, even though this kind of girl “does not phone you drunk” or ignore calls, the lyrical speaker surprisingly argues that the seemingly perfect “Suitable Girl” does “not// make you happy”.

Thus, the poem “The Suitable Girl”, like “wearing my bikini”, sympathizes with human flaws and failings, yes, it virtually celebrates human imperfection. It is these imperfections that make everyone so unique. Aptly, the poem consists of three imperfect, non-rhyming stanzas of three lines each. The

⁵³⁷ Possibly alluding to the Caribbean novelist George Lamming and his first autobiographical novel *In the Castle of My Skin* (1970).

⁵³⁸ Mashile (2005: 51). Title also included on the CD as track nr. 8.

⁵³⁹ McGrane (2003).

two single lines, coming after a pause following their preceding stanzas, correspond to ‘timing’ in the art of speaking. The first single line, after the first stanza, is a mere addition to the stanza, whereas the second one at the end of the last stanza is a run-on-line, a punch line, which changes the meaning of the entire poem. The ending of the last stanza, “she does not”, leads the reader to expect another negation of a negative habit or attribute, which is why the negation of a positive attribute, “[does not] make you happy”, comes completely unexpectedly. This unpredictable ending to the poem “The Suitable Girl” causes the reader to think over and to reflect on their own expectations of a partner.

Betrayal of the body

by Crystal Warren

Each month an egg
leaves my body.
A part of myself
lost forever,
flushed away.
And I feel the pain
as my body protests
this forced removal.
My womb weeps
tears of blood
for another body
that will never be.

“Betrayal of the body”⁵⁴⁰ is written by Crystal Warren (b.1969). She lives in Grahamstown and works for the National English Literary Museum (NELM). Her collection of poetry *Bodies of Glass*⁵⁴¹ is full of beautiful and melancholic poems on unrequited love as well as a longing for a relationship.

In “Betrayal of the body” the lyrical speaker bemoans the fact that she is not a mother yet and that every month she is mercilessly reminded of this. The picture given is very strong. The fact that “Each month an egg/ leaves [her] body” is described as “A part of myself/ lost forever,/ flushed away”. The lyrical speaker calls this a “forced removal” due to which her “womb weeps/ tears of blood”. Further, the lyrical speaker explains, “And I feel the pain/ as my body protests” as “another body”, which she was ready to welcome with open arms, “will never be”.

“Betrayal of the body” raises the issue of many women who long for but cannot have children for the most varied of reasons. These reasons, which can extend from infertility to the mere fact that one does not have a partner, are, all of them, terrible strains on the women or couples concerned. What was formerly an impossible and hushed up topic, menstruation and its implications, is now made socially acceptable and presentable. Nothing is out of the question any more just because it concerns women only.

⁵⁴⁰ Warren (2004: 2).

⁵⁴¹ Crystal Warren. *Bodies of Glass*. Grahamstown: Aerial Publishing, 2004.

Woman Being

by Malika Ndlovu

Hierarchy lacks a habitat here
 This is a circle
 Territory of balance
 Where moon tempers womb
 Roots of generations
 This is woman being

Incarcerated by male-spawned ideals
 Brutalised, deterred from consciousness
 Mocked at our re-awakening
 Here, where thigh-bred gratification is no Mecca
 This is woman being

Engendered with sacred fertility
 Miracle of life in a waterbag
 World carrier
 Inherent listener to the riversong of emotion
 This is woman being

Soft receptions
 Infant guide
 Male equivalent
 Twin power on the planet
 Shorn of apathy, dormancy
 This is woman being
 Woman being
 Re-ascending

The poem “Woman Being”⁵⁴² written at the beginning of the 1990s, also deals with womanhood. Fertility as well as various dependencies determine the lives of many women. “Woman Being” tries to specify how much “woman being” can mean, and wants to acknowledge the tasks involved. Malika Ndlovu also draws attention to the fact that many women put up with (domestic) violence while fulfilling their duties, and through her poem she attempts to return to these women a bit of their honour.

For, in “Woman Being”, the woman is described as a “Territory of balance” and as a “World carrier”, as she gives birth to the

future. Apart from this, the poem pays tribute to women as emotional beings who can listen, bring up and educate children and who are, because of their manifold activities and abilities, an equivalent to men.

The second to last line repeats and emphasizes “Woman being”, as if to say that a “Woman being” also is a “human being”. At a time when Apartheid was just abolished, the last line, “Re-ascending” announces, that the ascent of women, the ‘epoch of the woman’ has already begun. The end of the poem, with the strength of its conviction and its spirit, reminds one of “Still I rise”⁵⁴³ by Maya Angelou, a distinct role model for Malika Ndlovu. Both are ‘women of colour’ and both had to suffer discrimination; that is why both poets can offer encouragement to other women.

⁵⁴² Chapman (2002: 354).

⁵⁴³ Maya Angelou. *And Still I rise*. New York: Random House, 1978. 41.

VII.2 A place called 'home'

The home, in South Africa, has always played an important role. As one lives there, many things take place in a home or at home: one loves, one remembers, one suffers, one wants to return to it. The poetry presented in this chapter is as diverse as the many different feelings one has for one's home.

She comes swimming

by Isobel Dixon

She comes swimming to you, following
da Gama's wake. The twisting Nile
won't take her halfway far enough.

No, don't imagine sirens – mermaid
beauty is too delicate and quick.
Nor does she have that radiance,

Botticelli's Venus glow. No golden
goddess, she's a southern
selkie-sister, dusky otter-girl

who breasts the cold Benguela, rides
the rough Atlantic swell, its chilly
tides, for leagues and leagues.

Her pelt is salty, soaked. Worn out,
she floats, a dark Ophelia, thinking
what it feels like just to sink

caressed by seaweed, nibbled by
a school of jewel-plated fish.
But with her chin tipped skyward

she can't miss the Southern Cross
which now looks newly down on her,
a buttress for the roof of her familiar

hemisphere. She's nearly there.
With wrinkled fingertips, she strokes
her rosary of ivory, bone and horn

and some black seed or stone
she can't recall the name of,
only knows its rubbed-down feel.

The two poems "She comes swimming",⁵⁴⁴ published by Isobel Dixon in 2000, and "Take me home"⁵⁴⁵ by Malika Ndlovu, which are put side by side here, voice the feeling of being homesick and the yearning for the "South". It is fascinating how everybody can feel totally at home in an African country. If one asks white South Africans what they think of themselves as, one surely counts on their saying 'English, Dutch or Germans in Africa'. The reality is that white South Africans see themselves as real Africans and not as Europeans on the wrong continent.

Isobel Dixon was born in Umtata 1969. She grew up in the Karoo, studied in Stellenbosch and Edinburgh and is now living in England. So Isobel Dixon's love for her home country is just as legitimate and justified as Malika Ndlovu's homesickness. In the rhymeless triplets in "She comes swimming", Isobel Dixon depicts the journey of a woman swimming to the Cape.

⁵⁴⁴ de Kok and Ferguson (2001: 1).

⁵⁴⁵ Malika Lueen Ndlovu. *poetry-in-progress from period 1986-2002* (unpublished).

And then she thanks her stars,
the ones she's always known,
and flips herself, to find her rhythm

and her course again. On, southwards,
yes, much further south than this.
This time she'll pay attention

to the names – not just the English,
Portuguese and Dutch, the splicings
and accretions of the years. She'll search

for first names in that Urworld, find
her heart-land's mother tongue.
Perhaps there's no such language,

only touch – but that's at least a dialect
still spoken there. She knows when she
arrives she'll have to learn again,

so much forgotten, lost. And when
they put her to the test she fears
she'll be found wanting, out of step.

But now what she must do is swim,
stay focused on each stroke,
until she feels the landshelf

far beneath her rise, a gentle slope
up to the rock, the Cape,
the Fairest Cape. Her Mother City

and its mountain, waiting, wrapped
in veils of cloud and smoke.
Then she must concentrate, dodge

nets and wrack, a plastic bag afloat –
a flaccid, shrunk albino ray –
until she's close enough to touch

down on the seabed, stumble
to the beach – the glistening sand
as great a treasure as her Milky Way –

fall on her knees and plant a kiss
and her old string of beads,
her own explorer's cross

into the cruel, fruitful earth at last.
She's at your feet. Her heart
is beating fast. Her limbs are weak.

Make her look up. Tell her she's home.
Don't send her on her way again.

The first nine stanzas tell about the trip of the “southern/ selkie-sister/ dusky otter girl”, a dark Ophelia (intertextual reference) on her way to the South, “following/” the explorer “da Gama's wake”. Isobel Dixon possibly alludes to herself because she is neither “Botticelli's Venus”, nor a “golden goddess”, but a white South African who spent much of her life outside South Africa.

Her route becomes clear by referring to geographic and celestial clues, like the cold Benguela current in the Atlantic or the Southern Cross.

In the following six stanzas the picture which “she” used to have of her home country, to be precise, the picture of a colonized place is revised. She realizes she must bring her memories up to date, that much has changed since she was last home and that, when she arrives, “she'll be found wanting, out of step”. She knows there is now a new reality. This is symbolized by hearing names other than the English, Portuguese and Dutch names of the colonial masters, and it is transformed and realised by changes of names of families, streets and places into “her heart-land's mothertongue”.

The last eight stanzas describe the arrival at the Cape, “the Fairest Cape”, as Sir Francis Drake called it, and “Her Mother City”, that is Cape Town, where she comes out of the water at the beach and, like Pope John Paul II, greets, as an expression of love and reverence, her home country by falling to her knees and kissing the earth. She exhaustedly discovers that the soil of her home country is both “cruel” and “fruitful”, cruel because of its past, and fertile due to the changes and the richness and variety of the country, its peoples, landscapes, cultures etc.



Isobel Dixon.^{546b}

The woman in Isobel Dixon’s poem who swims towards the South could be a symbol for freedom and democracy which finally have arrived in South Africa and which one should by no means reject: “Make her look up. Tell her she’s home./ Don’t send her on her way again.”⁵⁴⁶

In Malika Ndlovu’s “Take me to the South” the lyrical speaker who is far from the South and, as it turns out in the last line, far from “home”, remembers her home tenderly. The poem is a true celebration of diversity. The lyrical speaker misses the emotional, colourful South, “Where the people do not fear/ The fire of feeling/ Where colours clash/ Like life on canvas”. Just like the lyrical speaker at the end of “She comes swimming” grants that the earth may be “cruel” and “fruitful”, the lyrical speaker in “Take me to the South” confesses that there still remain contrasts “side by side”. Today, however, the people enjoy their “diversity”, dancing, because humanity has returned and they are all gradually coming together in one “complex family”.

The poem praises the better taste of food as well as the attitude of the people in the South who still see big families, “Even in the presence of poverty”, as wealth. The lyrical speaker misses the country where in some places time still is at a standstill and children enjoy a free and happy childhood far away from concrete, and where history is still passed on through the art of telling stories.

⁵⁴⁶ de Kok and Ferguson (2001: 1).

^{546b} Photo: Isobel Dixon <<http://www.Poetryinternationalweb.org/cwolkmigratefiles/southafrica.poetryinternational.org/Dixon.jpg>> (accessed August 8, 2008).

Take me to the South

by Malika Ndlovu

Take me to the South
 Where the people do not fear
 The fire of feeling
 Where colours clash
 Like life on canvas
 And contradictions rest
 Side by side
 Singing a human harmony
 Mirror of a complex family
 Dancing in their diversity

Take me to the South
 Where the food
 Truly talks to your mouth
 Where large families
 Are still considered a wealth
 Even in the presence of poverty

Where the old world still exists
 Not only in myths
 But in regions where children
 Still swim in rivers
 Landscape free of concrete clutter
 Where elders gather to record history
 With their tongues
 Where seekers retreat
 To mountains and hills
 And the Earth is still honoured
 For the generations she has mothered

Take me to the South
 Where nature is sacred
 Where simple is sweet
 And experience is respected
 As the well of wisdom
 Take me home

Additionally, the lyrical speaker sees the South as a place where traditions allow that “the Earth is still honoured/ For the generations she has mothered”, but Malika Ndlovu most probably was not thinking of the townships where nature is trampled on.

In the last stanza it becomes clear and distinct that the South is the home of the lyrical speaker. A home in which, unlike in the Western world, nature is still esteemed as sacred, where even simple things can be pleasing and where, just as in southern European countries or Asia, the experience of older people is regarded as a source of wisdom, and where, therefore, old people are not regarded as a liability, but integrated, admired and revered.

The poem comprises four stanzas of different length. Still, it is noticeable that stanzas one, three and four begin with “Take me to the South”. Moreover there are rhymes between the words “diversity”, “harmony” and “family”, “South” and “mouth”, plus “honoured” and

“mothered”. All this contributes to a very intense and longing atmosphere in the poem. Although Malika Ndlovu wrote the poem only in 2002, that is two years after she had been in the Netherlands, one can assume she wanted to depict the feelings of longing and homesickness which she had experienced in wintry Amsterdam.

I have put these two poems into Chapter V since homesickness is often attributed to the weaker sex. Furthermore, in this chapter one can compare the various arguments with and for the home country put forward by two different female poets, who are of almost the same age and both far from home. In both poems, the beauty and the colourful future of the South, of Cape Town, are celebrated: on the one hand through the arduous journey to the South where the “dark Ophelia” does not give up before she gets to the Cape, on the other hand through revering the views, the way of life and the traditions of the people of the Cape in Malika Ndlovu’s poem. This firmly establishes Malika Ndlovu as an African with African values.

Strikingly different is the use of language. While Isobel Dixon’s poem, written in triplets, is very literary and puts her in one line with other (older) white South African writers like Karen Press and Antjie Krog, Malika Ndlovu writes deliberately in an intelligible and easily accessible style. In our conversation in June 2003 she told me how important it is for her to be easily understood.

It is of great importance especially to those poets who, in addition, write performance poetry that not only educated people, but also the ‘normal’ audiences at public performances can follow and identify themselves with their works: a principle that is fascinating when it is put into practice so artistically and skilfully, colourfully and eloquently, as it is in the work of the poets presented in this study.

There is once again a clear need to discuss ‘home’ when looking at the story of exiles. Allusions can be found in Lebogang Mashile’s poetry to her growing up in the United States of America⁵⁴⁷ (Lebogang Mashile was born there in 1979) and her struggles with adapting there and back in South Africa. In “Inside Outsider”,⁵⁴⁸ she says through her lyrical speaker: “Home is a foreign land/ [...] Strangers believe they know my bruises” and then “I will not live in boxes/ They are not my home/ Home is laughter/ Home is rounded figures/ Home is a sharpened mental weapon/ To be wielded against foreigners of the spirit”. In these lines it becomes clear how she experienced her exile in the United States and how

⁵⁴⁷ Gasebalwe Seretse. 2007. “Mashile writes a winner”. *MMegi Online*. <<http://www.mmegi.bw/index.php?sid=7&aid=16&dir=2007/July/Friday6>> (accessed Aug.08, 2008). And: “A tangled web of rainbows”. Mashile (2005: 16-22).

⁵⁴⁸ Mashile (2005: 7).

the “foreigners of the spirit” needed to be fought against from there (with “mental weapon[s]”). And yet she mentions: “I am tired of being different”, and how important it is to her to search her “tribe” and help (re-)build her country “With my own hands”.⁵⁴⁹ In “A tangled web of rainbows”, Lebogang Mashile even says:

Home, for my parents, was a place far away from where we were living as a family.

The thought of leaving, America, Providence, Rhode Island for this place was a heart-shattering nightmare.⁵⁵⁰

And about the exiles themselves she reports from first hand:

We bear the scars of exile: of forced silences and dislocation.

Our childhoods were spent, in part, marinating in the frustrations of isolation, immigration and the struggle against Apartheid. We are foreigners in the countries of our births and in the lands that we now call home, including South Africa.

We are an anomaly that is an intrinsic thread in the fabric of South Africa’s history, one of many contradictions in a complicated national identity still in its infancy.⁵⁵¹

Still, Lebogang Mashile describes the homecoming, the embracing of her South African roots as one of the most moving experiences in her life.

Two summers later, we would travel to South Africa and be reunited with an enormous tree of extended family for the first time. No words could ever accurately describe these events or their meaning for life.⁵⁵²

Her attachment to her background and to the home of her ancestors further comes out clearly in lines like “Life is a gift from our ancestors that we borrow from our children”,⁵⁵³ one of the many such pieces of wisdom to be found in her poetry.

⁵⁴⁹ All from “Inside Outsider”. Mashile (2005: 7).

⁵⁵⁰ Gasebalwe Seretse. 2007. “Mashile writes a winner”. MMEgi Online. <<http://www.mmegi.bw/index.php?sid=7&aid=16&dir=2007/July/Friday6>> (accessed August 08, 2008). And:

“A tangled web of rainbows”. Mashile (2005: 17).

⁵⁵¹ Gasebalwe Seretse. 2007. “Mashile writes a winner”. MMEgi Online. <<http://www.mmegi.bw/index.php?sid=7&aid=16&dir=2007/July/Friday6>> (accessed August 08, 2008). And:

“A tangled web of rainbows”. Mashile (2005: 19).

⁵⁵² Gasebalwe Seretse. 2007. “Mashile writes a winner”. MMEgi Online. <<http://www.mmegi.bw/index.php?sid=7&aid=16&dir=2007/July/Friday6>> (accessed August 08, 2008). And: “A tangled web of rainbows”. Mashile (2005: 22).

⁵⁵³ From “Every child, my child”. Mashile (2005: 11-14). Title also included on the CD as track nr. 18.

Hanging

by Malika Ndlovu

Waiting
dreaming
hoping
hanging

You have found a way
to leave me
to be the one who left
You found a way
to teach me
the price
of what we shared
You found a way
to hold onto me
so that I had to
let you go

Silently
you brought love to me and
Silently
you decided
when being together
was enough
You chose our last day
You found a way
to haunt me
so I would remember you
not in my way
but through the fire
your way

And in the torture of waiting
the futility of hoping
the loneliness of dreaming
I heard that precious
first feeling
break

You found a way
to leave me
Now I must find a way
to heal me

The inclusion of the poem “Hanging”,⁵⁵⁴ written by Malika Ndlovu in 2000, in the present work, is explained by the evident sincerity of the strong emotions it conveys. The poem begins with a list of emotions with which either an abandoned woman or man, which is unspecified but who may well be a woman, is occupied: “Waiting/ dreaming/ hoping/ hanging”. The pain and despair of being abandoned call to us from the lines of the poem. The lyrical speaker addresses the former friend and depicts the different ways and ploys which he, the male lover, possibly also the female beloved, has used to be able to leave the lyrical speaker. It also speaks of having to pay the price for the time they had lived together, and it refers to the manner which the ex-lover resorted to “to hold onto me” which then caused her to let him go. The lyrical speaker describes the power which the lover has over her and which one only becomes aware of when the other misuses his power. After the ex-lover has found so many ways to humiliate her, the poem ends with the lyrical speaker’s realization that she, too, has to find her own way now: a way without the other, a way of healing.

Especially effective in this poem is the touching description of the process of separation, through the change from “we” and “you” to “I”. Malika Ndlovu plays with the contrasts between “you” and “me”. Stylistic means, such as the repetition of the cry of despair “You found a way”

in the second stanza, emphasize this process.

⁵⁵⁴ Barry, Ndlovu and Khan (2002: 178).

It is even possible that the title ‘Hanging’ indicates that the lyrical I was ‘left’ by the suicide of the partner.

In the third stanza the word “Silently” is repeated. It underlines the well known negative aspects of rejection, secretly and silently creeping into the inner self probably well-known to everybody. A rhyme is introduced between “You chose our last day” and the recurring “You found a way”.

Besides, this stanza portrays the deserted lyrical speaker as helpless and unprotected, at the mercy of the partner. The partner has “had enough” and has, thereby, found a way to haunt her thoughts, a way which makes it impossible for her to forget him. The stanza complains that she can no longer remember him and their relationship in her way, but only in his way, and that her memory of their time together will be spoilt “through the fire [of] your way”. Here, Malika Ndlovu chooses fire, to symbolize a destructive force which leaves behind scars.

The last stanza, visually divided into two parts through the word “break”, begins by bringing back the verbs expressing feelings in the first stanza, even if not in the same order. The lyrical speaker combines waiting with torture, hope with futility and dreams with loneliness. Then the love she had felt to be precious disintegrates “before her eyes” too, since the former lover has found a way to leave her, thus breaking the lyrical speaker’s heart.

In spite of all this, a certain hope shines through in the last sentence of the poem, like in many of Malika Ndlovu’s poem. As the lyrical speaker ends her reflections upon the separation with the realization that she has to find a way to heal herself, hope speaks out of these last lines, and the reader is left with the feeling that, ‘hope springs eternal’.

This poem has multiple applications. Not only can it be transferred from the point of view of a woman to that of a man. It is also transferable to any relationship which ends in disappointment. This can be an inter-human relationship, but also any disillusionment or the dashed hopes placed in a particular path of life, a profession or, and especially, governments.

During Apartheid Coloureds and especially Blacks were assumed to be more animal than man. The conservative racists still are of this opinion today. It did not matter what Blacks thought or felt. As if to make up for lost time, since then writers have been making liberal use of their new freedom to express themselves and their feelings freely and to be able to communicate with others.

In the poem “Ex”,⁵⁵⁵ as in the previous poem “Hanging”, Malika Ndlovu manages to capture well understood, universal feelings and sensations and to reproduce

<p>Ex by Malika Ndlovu</p> <p>I re-enter that room Marked by you Relishing at least A mental reunion With you</p> <p>I swim in your eyes I romanticize I fantasize I realise I am clinging To you</p> <p>Digging up your bones Bringing back my tears Raising dusty questions To flood the space I have opened up For you Inside my head</p> <p>Alone</p> <p>The truth remains With you</p> <p>Alone</p> <p>This resurrection is over I return to living Letting you rest</p>	<p>them in words: reflections of events in the past, the force of one’s inner strength and reunification by active recollection. The poem was written in 2001.</p> <p>The seven segments of the poem portray a day dream, in which old memories come flooding back. By entering a room, the memory of a failed relationship is released. Here, too, the gender is left open. The lyrical speaker enjoys this, if only “mental, reunion”: “I re-enter that room/ Marked by you”, “I swim in your eyes”. At first it remains unclear if the lyrical speaker still suffers from being ‘lovesick’ or if only from a memory. “I romanticize/ I fantasize/ I realise/ I am clinging/ to you”.</p> <p>The male or female ex-lover still possesses the power to cause tears to flow and old questions to be resurrected;⁵⁵⁶ the lines “Digging up your bones/ Bringing back my tears/ Raising dusty questions” refer to this, for in her memories the lyrical speaker again makes room “For you”. The lyrical speaker, at last, however, makes it clear that the events of the first three stanzas, which all end in “With you”/“To you”/“For you”, have only taken place in the mind.</p>
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⁵⁵⁵ Malika Lueen Ndlovu. *poetry-in-progress from period 1986-2002* (unpublished).

⁵⁵⁶ This linking of a lost love/an ending relationship to death (“resurrected” and “bones”) is also found in a beautiful love poem by Makhosazana Xaba, “HANDLE WITH CARE”, where she talks of a “graveyard of relationships”. Xaba (2005: 52-53).

Since she has awoken from her daydream the lyrical speaker has to accept that she is still alone and that the questions and the relationship belong to the past: “The truth remains/ With you”. Malika Ndlovu emphasizes this being alone by the separated position of the word “Alone” and by its repetition.

The last lines indicate that the lyrical speaker, in spite of the brief moment of joy afforded by her memories of it, has come to terms with the relationship and she sees the ex only as an ex. She returns back to real life with renewed strength. She has found her inner peace and is in harmony with herself: “This resurrection is over/ I return to living/ Letting you rest”. The picture of the short “resurrection” through thoughts forms a contrast to “living” in the next to last stanza. This contrast prevents a real “reunion”. With this we see that in the whole poem there is no single “we”. The second stanza is particularly noticeable since the “I” at the beginning is repeated five times before it leads to a “you” in the sixth line. This could indicate that the positive memories are one-sided, that it is the lyrical speaker that is abandoned, or that the lyrical speaker does not believe that the other also sometimes remembers the time they shared. Apart from this, the use of “you”/“your” as opposed to “I”/“me”/“my” is well-balanced.

Even if the title intimates that the poem is about the former lover, it is also applicable to persons in other roles and relationships. The feelings are depicted in such a way that someone who has lost a beloved person through death or broken ties can also identify with this poem.

In particular the poems “Hanging” and “Ex” testify to the new self-confidence of black female poets, who for the first time after Apartheid get a hearing. Finally they can write about whatever they like, and can publish their work in their own country, even if the topics are about politics, feminism, art or ‘only just’ love. During Apartheid, poets could not write about some subjects openly if they did not want to put their personal safety or freedom at risk. Only today are they free to select their topics themselves. So when women nowadays write about love this has a decisively different relative importance than during Apartheid; today they can choose their subjects freely and are not just pushed into one subject because the other subjects are too sensitive or because they are not expected to write about anything else.

Yet, as the following poems show, home is not always the safe haven one would want it to be. With the topic of abuse, the poem “Next door”⁵⁵⁷ describes the situation of many women next door or in countries in which a patriarchal society is still alive and well. Although many women live in conditions of oppression, they often accept and endure their fates.

From the formal point of view the simple and plain structure of the poem

<p><u>Next door</u> by Malika Ndlovu</p> <p>He enters She falls</p> <p>He circles She murmurs He invades She whimpers He flexes She aches He threatens She resists He abuses She obeys</p> <p>He triumphs She burns He sighs She cries He whispers She knows He exits She unfolds He tries She forgives</p> <p>She dies He lives</p>	<p>is striking. Including the title, each of the 24 lines is made up of only two words: a subject, “He” or “She”, and a verb. The stark simplicity of this form underlines and emphasizes the emptiness of the life portrayed. The poem has four stanzas the first and last of which consist of only two lines each and which ‘frame’ the whole. They resemble a portal and a final thesis. The second and third stanzas comprise ten lines each. There the sufferings of a woman at the hands of her partner or husband are depicted: he acts and lives vigorously, she only reacts and lives passively and even seems to let herself be abused.</p> <p>There is a constant alternation between “He” and “She”, most suitably it begins and ends with “he”. This alternation is only interrupted in the final two lines. The poem ends as it has begun, with “He”. This framing enforces the reader’s impression of a “man’s world” predominating, as it does in this relationship, and the injustice is thus emphasized. The irony of this fate, and how often it is encountered, is reflected in “Next door” in the way that the poem ends: after the man has terrorized his partner or wife for years <i>HE</i> unjustly survives his woman. Malika Ndlovu does not necessarily, in the last two lines, refer to the physical death of the woman. The body may survive its total suppression, subjection and resignation, yet the spirit of the woman dies, even if only temporarily.</p>
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⁵⁵⁷ Ndlovu (2000: 42).

Finally, the title of this poem should make us think, too. It points out that the tragedy of the case at hand is that it is not an isolated incident, but that everywhere “Next door” there may be a woman living who is suppressed and abused. “Next door” wants to make us sensitive to what goes on around us and wants to be a memorial for the suppressed.

The Day Before

by Malika Ndlovu

The day before she killed herself
we had another stupid argument
something about a missing tie
I came up with some easy to tell lie
and walked away
knowing she could not follow

The day before she killed herself
I forgot the milk she asked for
some excuse like not having time
she breathed her deep angry sigh
and I put the TV on
knowing she could not shout

Now tears from the corners
of eyes that seldom cry
are burning their way through
are here to tell the truth
to say what I did not say
now that she cannot hear
now that I cannot follow or shout.

We meet a similar topic as in “Next door” in “The Day Before”.⁵⁵⁸ This poem also talks about abuse, more precisely about unfaithfulness, betrayed trust, inattentive-ness to explanations and waking up to the reality when it is too late. “The Day Before” is the only poem in this work which Malika Ndlovu plainly writes from a man’s/husband’s perspective, although one should not be limited to this interpretation. Here, too, the roles remain to a certain extent interchangeable.

The poem comprises three stanzas. The first two have six lines and the last seven lines. The two first stanzas begin with the same verse: “The day before she killed herself”. All the three stanzas end

with verses related to each other: “knowing she could not follow”, “knowing she could not shout”, “now that I cannot follow or shout”. There are only few rhymes “tie”/“lie”, “time”/“sigh” and “cry”/“say”, these create a bond within the stanzas.

The title “The Day Before” refers to the irony of the fact that a chance was present but missed, and so came the inevitable result; that “she killed herself”. The woman in the poem could not endure oppression, abuse and humiliation any longer. The last stanza says that now, as it is too late, the “eyes that seldom cry” weep for her, those eyes which had made others cry and despair. The tears express what the lyrical speaker never could put into words. They tell the truth, but it is too late. Now that the one who preferred suicide to life definitely cannot hear any

⁵⁵⁸Ndlovu (2000: 21).

more, it is he, who can no longer “follow or shout”. Thus, “The Day Before” is also in memory of the many unknowns, ‘mutes’,⁵⁵⁹ who suffer and who either cannot or could not cope with life.

A so far fairly unknown and yet very impressive collection of poetry on poverty, violence, abuse and HIV/Aids is *Breaking the Silence – Positive Survivors: POWA Women’s Writing Competition 2006*⁵⁶⁰ published by POWA in 2007. The anthology features women survivors of violence, who are as yet unknown as poets, but whose very personal poems have won prizes in the POWA Women’s Writing Competition 2006. The poetry was written in a skills development programme run by the Curriculum Development Project. Their objectives read like those of many a contemporary South African women poet and especially Malika Ndlovu’s motto:

The objectives of the POWA Women’s Writing Competition are to promote women’s writing as a means of healing, increase discussion and debate about women’s issues and struggles, and encourage women to write creatively.

In the collection, poems like the elaborate “Bedtime Prayer”⁵⁶¹ by Brigitte Liebenberg reveal very intimate and painful experiences of the author. Almost innocently woven into the lines of a children’s prayer, her poem witnesses the abuse of a helpless little girl and her horror, mirrored in the persistent anaphora of “Please don’t”. Brigitte Liebenberg mentions that she has written the poem while working with her psychologist on her then unvoiced childhood memories of abuse. Like the other poets who do so deliberately, she describes the process of writing as healing: “The act of putting pain, shame, guilt etc down on paper is extremely cathartic for the poet and, also, I hope, for the reader”.⁵⁶²

Last but not least, another powerful statement of a woman fighting the consequences of abuse, domination, addiction and destruction is Prudence Mathebula’s “You Must be Crazy”.⁵⁶³ After listing the crimes which were committed against her, she declares: “You had the best of my body/ But won’t get the last of my soul/ You must be crazy/ Because I was crazy enough to love you”.

⁵⁵⁹ Cf. “The Silence of a Lifetime” on rape by Makhosazana Xaba. Xaba (2005: 18-19).

⁵⁶⁰ POWA (2007).

⁵⁶¹ POWA (2007: 15).

⁵⁶² POWA (2007: 102).

⁵⁶³ POWA (2007: 12-13).

VIII. Being an artist

Unfortunately artists, and especially black women artists, often lack the support and financial means as well as the self-confidence they need. First, this chapter will introduce the women's collective WEAVE which wants to make good these shortcomings.

Then, the following chapter presents poems which all have in common the topic of considering, discussing and praising art, writing and not writing,⁵⁶⁴ and being an artist. What Dorothea Steiner says in the introduction to *Imagination in a Troubled Space* is also true for the poets in this chapter: "Commitment is what unites all poets, commitment to a craft",⁵⁶⁵ to their craft.

VIII.1 WEAVE: Women's Education & Artistic Voice Expression



*The members of WEAVE.*⁵⁶⁶

"We are not harping on WOMAN issues – We are talking HUMAN issues, telling South African stories recording our histories!"⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁶⁴ Cf. "Poems about writing and not writing". Dowling (2005: 74).

⁵⁶⁵ Borzaga (2004: 24).

⁵⁶⁶ Photo: WEAVE. No date. "Affiliates-WEAVE (Women's Education & Artistic Voice Expression)". *Women's World*. <<http://wworld.org/about/affiliates/weave.htm>> (accessed August 8, 2004).

⁵⁶⁷ No author. 2000. "New Moon Ventures". <<http://www.cmc.gov.za/cs/gender/press%20New%20Moon.htm>> (accessed March 20, 2004).

The founding members of WEAVE (Women's Education & Artistic Voice Expression, the acronym being a pun for the act of 'weaving a text') are a group of coloured and black women authors whose common bond is the passion for writing. Members are the short story-writer Joan Baker (who died in 2000), Shelley Barry, Pat Fahrenfort, Diana Ferrus,⁵⁶⁸ Gertrude Fester, Beverly Jansen, Deela Khan, Malika Ndlovu, Carmen Myles Raizenberg, Meganthrie Pillay, Warona Seane, Mavis Smallberg, Halejoetse Tsehlana and Weaam Williams. In our interview in June 2003, Malika Ndlovu said about WEAVE:

We learn from each other and help each other. Those of us who have studied might offer valuable skills, feedback and affirmation to others. We offer each other encouragement because most of the members have full time jobs and writing is a site of struggle; economically, politically and emotionally.

WEAVE was founded in 1997 after some of the members had already worked with each other before. During Apartheid some members of WEAVE had belonged to the Congress of South African Writers (COSAW), a programme which had tried to promote black⁵⁶⁹ authors internationally with the aid of foreign sponsors. However, after COSAW dissolved for various reasons, the women authors teamed up to form new groups.

The first aim of WEAVE is to support and promote the literary works of up-to-now invisible black and coloured South African women from the Western Cape, by fostering their mutually beneficial creative exchanges and reciprocal support. The seat of the collective is in Cape Town. A further aim is to make it possible for black South African women to speak about their own creativity and their own lives, at last, and to get a public hearing. WEAVE tries to make the public aware of the existence and presence of black women authors in South Africa. WEAVE seeks to achieve these goals by actively participating in authors' readings, public performances and cultural festivals, by means of publications and workshops, which are even backed by the National Arts Council (NAC).

⁵⁶⁸ Diana Ferrus, who writes particularly on identity, is known beyond South Africa's borders for her poem on Sara(h) Baartman "I Have Come To Take You Home – A tribute to Sara Baartman". The poem is said to have been influential in bringing home, to the country of her birth and of her ancestors, the remains of the Hottentot Venus, as Sara(h) Baartman was called, from the *Musée de l'homme* in Paris. In: Barry, Ndlovu and Khan (2002: 70).

⁵⁶⁹ In this context, black stands for 'not white'.

The idea to found their own collective emerged from frustration at the way that so few black women were able to have their work published, and from the comments of publishers who were of the opinion that it was high time, too, for Blacks to write about new topics instead of writing only about Apartheid and struggling with the search for identity. Moreover the founding members were concerned about the way in which white authors portrayed black characters, and so this women's collective decided to find a way through WEAVE to tell their own story and history from their own point of view and no longer to accept only what others wrote about and for them. Malika Ndlovu called this approach "the rethinking, repositioning and restoration of women in terms of the past, present and future".

With *ink@boiling point* in 2000, WEAVE published their first self-edited collection of works written by black women in South Africa, and at the moment WEAVE is working on a book of *A 20th Century Selection of Women's Writing from the Tip of Africa*. Meanwhile, works of these women authors have also been published in other national and international anthologies and have been performed on stage and on the radio.

As Malika Ndlovu's poems and a quote in Fiona Tobin's study *Negotiating the ambivalent construction of 'coloured' identity* confirm, the state of artistic creativity in Africa looks better now than it ever has:

Despite of overwhelming reality of economic decline; despite unimaginable poverty, despite wars, malnutrition, disease and political instability – African cultural productivity grows apace: popular literature, oral narrative and poetry, dance, drama, music, and visual art all thrive.⁵⁷⁰

⁵⁷⁰ Appiah, as quoted in Tobin (2001: 14).

VIII.2 Being an artist in South African poetry**Women Weaving**

by Malika Ndlovu

In the company of these women
 I am humbled
 I am inspired
 I am healed
 Where living words bounce between us
 The blood of our experience exchanged

In the company of these women
 Anonymous spaces turn sacred site
 Willingly
 Courageously
 We reveal our vulnerability

In the company of these women
 I need not
 and yet I can
 cry for the sister I never had
 for my mother's wounding recalled
 mourn as my grandmother's face
 emerges in another
 Honouring each one in me

In the company of these women
 I laugh
 I play
 Like my pre-teen self
 I can lay my masks on the ground
 For us all to dance around
 Synchronising
 Recognizing our flowing roles
 In this tribe of She

The poem, "Women Weaving",⁵⁷¹ written in 1998 or 1999, is the frontispiece of the anthology, *ink@boiling point*. Malika Ndlovu writes in an email that she wrote it "inspired by the women of WEAVE writers' collective, but for all women, too". Indeed, the poem celebrates the company of women and sisterhood in general terms.

In "Women Weaving" Malika Ndlovu describes her feelings towards the other woman poets of WEAVE and the inspiration and healing which emerge from this artistic association. Malika Ndlovu calls the community of WEAVE a place "Where living words bounce between us/ The blood of our experience exchanges". In her colleague-girlfriends she sees the sisters she never had. WEAVE is a place for Malika Ndlovu where women poets can drop their masks. That is why

Malika Ndlovu calls WEAVE a "tribe of She" which sticks together through thick and thin.

The poem consists of four stanzas, all of which begin with the sentence, "In the company of these women". The first stanza is the calmest, it tells in three parallel sentence structures of the emotions, such as humility, which these women arouse in the inner depths of the lyrical speaker. Her cooperation with them gives her inspiration and helps in the process of healing.

⁵⁷¹ Ndlovu (2000: 27) and title poem of Barry, Ndlovu and Khan (2002).

The second stanza is more dynamic. Here the lyrical speaker informs us that all the women in this circle willingly and bravely “reveal our vulnerability” and that the things which are thereby revealed are taken seriously, almost sacredly.

The third stanza presents the relationships amongst the women as almost familiar. The women “In this tribe of She” replace the sisters the members may never have had, and they feel free to weep in each other’s company over the injuries and violations to family members, while their memories are brought to life again. In the face of one of the other women, one may even recognize the face of one’s own “grandmother”, symbolising wisdom and the feeling of security, or notice a resemblance to a person whom one misses. Among Africans the family plays an important role and is given the greatest respect. The lyrical speaker thus honours all women and their unity.

The deep trust which prevails among the members of the group is reflected in the contents of the last stanza: an adult woman beginning to smile and to play, “Like my pre-teen self/ I can lay my masks on the ground”. Malika Ndlovu says that after they drop their masks, they render them harmless by dancing around them. “In this tribe of She” the members synchronize with each other, acknowledging their “flowing roles”.

In four stanzas the poem undergoes a development from humility to confidence. From stanza to stanza the description of what is possible “In the company of these women” expands. Through the poem, Malika Ndlovu opens the reader’s eyes to emotions which every person knows from his or her own life and brings them to the surface.

“Women Weaving” also contains the entire process of their getting to know each other. It does not matter if some are older or have achieved or experienced much more in their lives, which could only prolong the time it takes for the feeling of respect finally to change into friendship.

Yet, Malika Ndlovu emphasizes in “Women Weaving” that she did not only write for the women of WEAVE but for all women. Each woman has people around her who give her a feeling of well-being and whom she trusts and in whose company she can let her masks fall. As everywhere, in Africa, it is quite common for women to meet in groups in order to chat, to while away their time, to console and comfort each other or merely to exchange news and tell stories.

Mending

by Ingrid de Kok

In and out, behind, across.
The formal gesture binds the cloth.
The stitchery's a surgeon's rhyme,
a Chinese stamp, a pantomime

of print. Then spoor. Then trail of red.
Scabs rise, stigmata from the thread.
A cotton chronicle congealed.
A histogram of welts and weals.

The woman plies her ancient art.
Her needle sutures as it darts,
scoring, scripting, scarring, stitching,
the invisible mending of the heart.

Although not a member of WEAVE, Ingrid de Kok may be mentioned at this point. In her poem “Mending”,⁵⁷² she uses an image similar to that employed by Malika Ndlovu in “Women Weaving”. In the traditional women’s task of mending, Ingrid de Kok depicts the art and strength of women to stitch back together what was broken or to make something new of what is left: “Her needle sutures as it darts,/ scoring, scripting, scarring, stitching”. The poem likens this “ancient art” to “the invisible

mending of the heart”, which never gives up but puts pieces together again and grows a scar after disappointments, defeats and deep sorrows. Through the process of mending, for Ingrid de Kok, one obtains “A histogram of welts and weals”, which can be seen as a metaphor for the heart’s healing process.

Along with other interpretations, Ingrid de Kok herself suggests that her poem “Mending” could also be on the act of writing a poem.⁵⁷³

It [“Mending”] took a long time to write – maybe a year, and its first form was very different, originating as a response to someone’s broken marriage, only later developing the stitching metaphor. The language itself, the working of the poem, is what generated the poem, not something as definable as a prior ‘idea’. But it is intended to carry a sense of the wounding of, and healing by women, and perhaps their ambiguous role in the healing of nations, or this particular nation. Having to stitch itself together. Wounds and ruptures. Mending is one of our most domestic metaphors. And it’s a complex act. It is done alone but it references women’s work over the ages, as well as torn things, repaired things. And needlework suggests precision, obsession, cross-overs, coverings up and undersurfaces. Not to mention fine motor control! Perhaps the poem is also about the act of writing a poem.⁵⁷⁴

For all these points “Mending” is included in this chapter on women writing about their art and the process of writing poetry itself, as well as their art’s capability to help mend wounds. The initiation to a healing process this particular poem alludes to is one mentioned by many poets considering the positive effects of their work.

⁵⁷² de Kok (1997, 35).

⁵⁷³ Cf. Seamus Heaney’s poems on digging. Possibly mending is the female equivalent?

⁵⁷⁴ Berold (2003: 114).

Storytime

by Shelley Barry

We will write
Gather stories unto ourselves
And breathe them out
We will write
For our ancestors
For unborn children
For I and I

We will write
When all we have
Are words

Words will hold us
Words will sing to our tears
Words will spell out our laughter

We are writing the sounds
Of our lives
The smell of our Africa
We are slaves mothers sisters queens
Friends comrades lovers

We pound unbeaten drums
We carve our words on the cave walls of time
We write ourselves into history

Our mouths are open
Our hands seek the labour
Of our thought

Listen

Hold your ears to the sky

For here begins
Our once upon a time

WEAVE promotes this tradition of storytelling in verse and prose. Thus, in *ink@boiling point*, one finds narratives besides poems. Shelley Barry's (b.1971) poem "Storytime"⁵⁷⁵ deals with this important African tradition of passing on history by storytelling, which WEAVE wants to keep alive through their work.

Like WEAVE, the Nigerian novelist, poet and literary critic Chinua Achebe is of the opinion "that the story we had to tell could not be told for us by anybody else no matter how gifted or well intentioned",⁵⁷⁶ and he also states that the "writer cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and re-generation that must be done".⁵⁷⁷

"Storytime" is a typical poem suitable for performance. It is easy to understand and stylistically, it is constructed

strikingly beautifully, using various effects. There are many parallelisms, "Words will", and anaphoras, "We", "Our", as well as alliterations as in "We will write" and invitations directed at the audience, like "Listen".

⁵⁷⁵ Barry, Ndlovu and Khan (2002: 35).

⁵⁷⁶ Chinua Achebe as quoted in: Ngugi Wa Thiong'o. "Europhonism, Universities, and the Magic Fountain: The Future of African Literature and Scholarship". *Research in African Literatures* - Volume 31, Number 1, Spring 2000. 1-11. 5.

⁵⁷⁷ Chinua Achebe. "The Novelist as Teacher". *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays*. New York, London et al: Anchor Books – Doubleday, 1989 (first published in the *New Statesman*, London, January 29, 1965). 40-46. 45.

Shelley Barry starts the poem with the almost threatening statement “We will write”. This phrase predicts that there will be multiple histories of the times written by many women. At the same time, it alludes to the tradition of oral historiography which is deeply rooted on the African continent. The next sentence, “Gather stories unto ourselves/ and breathe them out”, indicates the ease with which this is going to happen amongst the African people. The lyrical speaker says they will write “For our ancestors/ For unborn children”, the past and future generations. And they write “For I and I”, which for Rastafarians stands for ‘I’, “you”, ‘we’ and ‘us’. Rastafarians are deeply rooted in Christian, mostly Old Testament beliefs. Maybe at this place in the poem, this allusion to a slight Rastafarian influence hints at a peaceful, particularly South African, or maybe even pan-African view of the world, and at the fight for the long unvoiced truth, no matter who speaks it: “When all we have/ Are words”. These lines allude to the new freedom, the personal wealth, or the lack of it. The so long unheard truth is also mirrored in the line “We pound unbeaten drums”, which brings in another traditional African element, the drum. Then, in allusion to the famous South African cave paintings in which an artistic depiction of the realities of the time survived for thousands of years, the lyrical speaker announces, to “carve our words on the cave walls of time”, to make history seen and last.

Shelley Barry, too, apparently sees writing as a means for personal healing. “We write ourselves into history” sums it up: the members of WEAVE write their own view of history, in memory of their suppressed ancestors, for the still unborn and for themselves to heal and grow. Thus, Shelley Barry’s “Storytime” acknowledges the power of writing which gives strength to the writers and supports them, by giving them the chance to express themselves and to get everything off their chests. The overall atmosphere amongst the women writers since the end of Apartheid is optimistic, and so “Storytime” ends with a paradox as ‘punch line’: “For here begins/ Our once upon a time”. This line underlines and emphasizes the title, “Storytime”, rounding off the poem and pulling it together, as both refer to the tradition of story telling and fairy tales. Finally, as explained in Chapter III above, South Africans do not have to wait for a voice to be given to the voiceless;⁵⁷⁸ the formerly voiceless can talk for themselves.

⁵⁷⁸ Garman (2006: 11).

Tell your story

by Lebogang Mashile

After they've fed off of your memories
Erased dreams from your eyes
Broken the seams of sanity
And glued what's left together with lies,
After the choices and voices have left you alone
And silence grows solid
Adhering like flesh to your bones

They've always known your spirit's home
Lay in your gentle sway
To light and substance
But jaded mirrors and false prophets have a way
Of removing you from yourself
You who lives with seven faces
None can eliminate your pain

Tell your story
Let it nourish you,
Sustain you
And claim you
Tell your story
Let it feed you,
Heal you
And release you
Tell your story
Let it twist and remix your shattered heart
Tell your story
Until your past stops tearing your present apart.

“Tell your story”⁵⁷⁹ by Lebogang Mashile calls also for an active dealing with one’s gloomy past, in which “they” have “fed off of your memories” and “Erased dreams from your eyes/ Broken the seams of sanity/ And glued what is left together with lies”.

The second verse paragraph speaks of temptations and of pain. This verse paragraph is used to underline what has been said and to lead into the main, the culminating paragraph, the ‘refrain’ on Lebogang Mashile’s Performance Poetry CD, on which the poems are performed with a variety of repetitions and refrains, as well as call and response situations and music. So there, in the performed version of the poem, the line “Tell your

story” is repeated like the refrain in a song.

The third verse paragraph directly addresses the reader, or the audience, to “Tell your story” so that the story could help “nourish”, “sustain”, “claim”, as well as “feed”, “heal” and “release” one’s self. As in the poems above, dealing with one’s story supposedly helps to avoid an inner crisis and again the last line forms the ‘punch line’: “Tell your story/ Until your past stops tearing your present apart”. In this regard, it is worth noting that the last lines of her collection of poetry also strengthen the message of the poem, “Tell your story”: now, all stories are possible, for “we are left/ with the triumph of courage...”.⁵⁸⁰

⁵⁷⁹ Mashile (2005: 46). Title also included on the CD as track nr. 2.

⁵⁸⁰ From “The triumph of courage”. Mashile (2005: 64).

Also, in her poem “You and I”,⁵⁸¹ Lebogang Mashile mentions the task of a poet as being to keep history alive: “You and I/ We are the keepers of dreams/ We mould them into light beams/ And weave them into life seams”. It is interesting, that she, too, uses the image of ‘weaving’ as Malika Ndlovu and Ingrid de Kok do. In her poem “My imagined community”, Lebogang Mashile explicitly mentions that through speaking out “We are fighting the silence”. No matter where in South Africa they have their origins, for Lebogang Mashile, all South Africans should stand together, as, even if they do not seem to have anything in common, which sounds like an antithesis, they are united by the country’s problems: “In our separate corners/ Bound together by/ Slavery/ Colonisation/ Poverty/ AIDS/ Drugs/ Abuse”.⁵⁸²

Like many of the poets featured in this study, in “Tell your story”, Lebogang Mashile expresses her need to heal through voicing the untold and to tell history from an as yet unheard perspective. Significantly, this often happens when she is referring to blood, skin or skin colour. Lebogang Mashile’s poem “Style” invites the audience to “wear your colours with pride/ Sing your spirits unplugged/ We’ll use the hands that built our art/ To build ourselves with love/ Always remember that you carry your style in your blood/ Because style is in the survival of my people”.⁵⁸³ And one also recalls lines of another of her poems: “The past does not cleanse itself/ It eats inside your skull and sheds itself of your skin”.⁵⁸⁴

In “A tangled web of rainbows”, Lebogang Mashile relates an experience which influenced her writing. At the Science Fair of her school, a friend of hers explained an experiment to her with the words “There are rainbows hidden where you wouldn’t expect, someone just has to show you where to look”. This remark made such impression on her that she goes on to say: “I am a poet, one who chases rainbows, and I often find them in places where my blinded eyes only saw the ordinariness of things until a teacher showed me where to look”.⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁸¹ Mashile (2005: 32-33). Title also included on the CD as track nr. 15.

⁵⁸² Mashile (2005: 2). Title also included on the CD as track nr. 9.

⁵⁸³ From “Style”. Mashile (2005: 3-4). Title also included on the CD as track nr. 4.

⁵⁸⁴ “I like it deep sometimes” by Lebogang Mashile (2005: 34-35). Title also included on the CD as track nr. 17.

⁵⁸⁵ Both from “A tangled web of rainbows”. Mashile (2005: 22).

Altogether, Lebogang Mashile, as “midwife to poetry”,⁵⁸⁶ experiences being a poet as a blessing: “Blessed are those guided by word woven with a ribbon of rhythm”.⁵⁸⁷ And she sees a promising future for the art of writing, too, as writing is healing and can help find peaceful solutions: “My child will know deception and rage can be converted to pages/ Where reality can heal in the realm of fantasy/ [...] My child will know that boxes like race, class, gender/ Are fated to be transcended in the face of a limitless self that is free”.⁵⁸⁸

In her poem “Ancient ones”,⁵⁸⁹ it becomes clear, that the pen, for Lebogang Mashile, holds a might experienced by many poets. The lyrical speaker repeatedly starts her sentences with “I hold a pen for ...”. The poem ends: “Because there’s a pen for every sister/ And every mother in every home/ There’s a healer in these hands/ That writes the lines of every poem// For every ancient who prayed/ For another heavenly power to save them/ There’s a meditation of peace for you/ In the lines written by this pen”.

⁵⁸⁶ From “The green of words”. Mashile (2005: 31).

⁵⁸⁷ From “Every child, my child”. Mashile (2005: 11-14). CD track nr. 18.

⁵⁸⁸ From “Every child, my child”. Mashile (2005: 11-14). CD track nr. 18.

⁵⁸⁹ Mashile (2005: 53-55).

Weaam Williams (b.1977) sees politicians and poets, especially in the last stanza of her poem “Derailed”,⁵⁹⁰ in such a critical way, that she even uses profanities:

Holey Words

by Weaam Williams

They say the pen is mightier
Than the sword
In this day and age
The keyboard is mightier than the AK47
So paint me a picture with words
Words of wisdom
Words to change the world

But War
Is not controlled by the illiterate
Nor is it initiated by the deaf and mute
The leaders first fight with their tongues
Later, like children
Bring out the ammunition
'I'm gonna tell my army'
So bombs get thrown
Like stones in a catfight
Words become lies
And promises are broken
Together with hearts, homes, and families

What has happened
To the power of words
If war has seized the mentality?
What do you give to the Bosnian child
Who cries in an abandoned filthy alley
While the ashes of her home
Surround her with smoggy clouds
And her mother's corpse
Lies whistling in the wind?

Words?
Words of comfort?
Words of hope?

She's five years old
Scared, skinny and rotten inside
Her mind warped
With memories of violence
Familiar bloody heads
Flying like splattered melons
Before her eyes

“Politicians/ The world's best wankers/ Poets/ The world's best moaners/ If only our words/ Could bring real change”. Here, she doubts that words can change the world. Equally sceptical is the beginning of the poem “Holey (not holy!) Words”,⁵⁹¹ a war poem in which she simultaneously broods on the power of writing.

In the first stanza the lyrical speaker requests and urges her reader to paint a picture of the world with wise words, words that are capable of changing the world, if it actually were the case that “the pen is mightier/ Than the sword”.

Already in the next stanza, however, Weaam Williams sets a different, less passionate tone when she discovers that wars seem to emerge in spite of all the good words, in spite of all the tracts written to preserve peace. The lyrical speaker points out how short the duration of the value of a word can be if, for example, promises are not kept. Wars destroy whole ‘holy’ families, and if these

⁵⁹⁰ Barry, Ndlovu and Khan (2002: 296).

⁵⁹¹ Barry, Ndlovu and Khan (2002: 298).

All because of a misunderstanding
Words became war
So the big boys brought out their latest toys
And of course
Never bother to clean up the mess

Paint me a picture with words
Words of wisdom
Words to change the world

families are broken up the individual members are weakened.

The third stanza asks what has ever come of the “power of words” considering the wars and conflicts which threaten the world and which never seem to end.

While the third stanza, made up of an anaphora of the word, “Words”, asks if words can compensate at least somewhat, and if they can really offer comfort, consolation and hope, the fourth stanza comes back to the hopelessness of a world of endless wars which deprive whole generations of their thoughts and memories. Here, Weam Williams uses the image of a child who cannot suppress the memories of the cruelty of its war experiences.

The last stanza but one has a very ironic undertone. With an internal rhyme, it tells of the “big boys” who use their “latest toys” whenever they do not get on with words, but they do not worry about the consequences for the innocent: “Never bother to clean up the mess”. After this, the last three lines sound very sad and disillusioning. The attempt and the belief in the ability to change the world with words shall certainly not be given up, but for the lyrical speaker all realistic hope seems to have vanished.

Nevertheless, to the members of WEAVE, ‘artistry’ unmistakably belongs to their self-image. They write in order to raise awareness of certain concerns which substantiate the theory that words can at least contribute to changes.

A further fact, when comparing the WEAVE women poets to others, is the abandonment of traditional Western rhyme schemes in their free-verse poems. All of the poets only use rhyme where it serves their purposes and seems appropriate to them. They do not press their thoughts into a given shape any longer, but let them take their course, flow as they will. Stylistic devices like anaphora, alliteration, parallelism, chiasm etc. continue to appear frequently. They underline what is being said and contribute to textual cohesion in the place of other conventional forms of presentation. To achieve this cohesion, Modernist forms of experimentation are combined with conventions of performance poetry.

My book

by Makhosazana Xaba

My book has never been too tired to go to bed with me.
It never has a headache or needs downtime to discuss the day.
It never says: please not now, I'm not in the mood.
In fact my book seduces me with its spine
that beckons from the shelf, yearning for my touch.
When I reach out to hold it between my fingers
it eases into them, slides into my palm, yields to my gaze.
With tenderness it lays its pages bare for me
and speaks words that carry me through waves of emotions.
When my eyes won't open and I am spent,
it rests right next to me, ready for the next round.

Another poem which, in an original way, praises literature, specifically in this instance, books, is Makhosazana Xaba's poem "My book",⁵⁹² published in *Isis X* in 2005. With a teasing, joking, even ironic undertone, Makhosa-

zana's lyrical speaker takes on a male perspective and likens her book to the ideal female partner in life. By comparing, she decides that the book wins in all aspects over women: A book is "never [...] too tired", "never has a headache", never is not in the mood. On the other hand, a book "seduces", lays its pages bare" for the reader and "speaks words that carry me through waves of emotions". And last but not least, it "rests right next to me", always "ready for the next round", taking on the role of a male partner... Then again from a female perspective,

One notices that Makhosazana Xaba's poetry, turning around the rules, draws from her life experiences with men. The reader can readily believe what she says about her work: "It is inspired by life, propelled by my passion for words and grounded by my constant search for meaning".⁵⁹³

⁵⁹² Horwitz (2005: 175).

⁵⁹³ Poetry Africa Festival. 2006. "Makhosazana Xaba (South Africa)". University of KwaZulu-Natal. <<http://www.ukzn.ac.za/cca/images/pa/pa2006/pg/Xaba.htm>> (accessed August 8, 2008).

New Dawn

by Beverly Jansen

Let us
Place lighted candles
In sparkling crystal jars
And clay calabashes
To celebrate the beginning
Of a new dawn in our existence

Let us
Send a celestial light
From our majestic mountains
And blood-spattered sands
Where spears once pierced
Freedom-craving hearts
To envelop the horror of yesterday

Let us
Write words of hope
For those with dreams stillborn
Paint pictures of love
For those shackled
By the sorrow of dark nights gone
Dance duets with arms outstretched
In flowing white robes
And sing praises in virginal voices
While celebrating the beginning
Of a new dawn

The poem “New Dawn”⁵⁹⁴ by Beverly Jansen is included in this chapter because it alludes to art’s improvement of the quality of life. This poem witnesses “a new dawn in our existence”.

It gains its textual cohesion formally through the beginning of each of the three stanzas with “Let us”, which gives them an encouraging and challenging character. The poem conveys the sense of a new era with new challenges about to dawn. It encourages the reader to be active, to celebrate a new beginning, to forget “the horror of yesterday”.

The first stanza depicts the ceremonial preparations for a big joyful celebration by lighting candles, and contains the request: “Let us” celebrate in common.

In the second stanza Beverly Jansen relies on very expressive language: “celestial light”, “majestic mountains”, “blood-spattered sands”, “Freedom-craving hearts”, and thus lends colour to the contrast between today and past times, immediately and quite closely associated with South African history, which one has to harmonize and “interface with” in order to build on it for the future.

The third stanza introduces art as the best way to come to terms with what has happened. Even if art is only the voice “For those with dreams stillborn”, or if it merely digests history, giving us pictures via metaphors, “For those shackled/ By the sorrow of dark nights gone”, art which embodies hope, love, songs and dancing is a fitting celebration of release. For the lyrical speaker it is absolutely clear that the time for celebrating and praising has come.

⁵⁹⁴ Barry, Ndlovu and Khan (2002: 115).

Out of Now-here

by Malika Ndlovu

She is a fire borne of the same flame
 She bears the same name
 As any other
 Burning her way
 Through the baggage and bars
 Of convention
 Of domination
 Of expectation

She is a river borne of the same source
 Running the same human course
 As any other
 Claiming her right
 To turn the other way
 Dancing to the sacred melody
 Of healing
 Of self-discovery
 Finding her own groove
 She moves through her curves
 Her shapes
 Her circles

She spirals in and out of the darkness
 Her own poison of self-doubt
 Even more corrosive in this environment
 This seemingly endless season of drought

Black
 Woman
 Artist

Artist
 Woman
 Black

Which part of this pyramid
 Puzzles
 Silences
 Intimidates you most
 Sets her on a distant or opposite pole
 Predetermines her potential
 Her outcome
 Her role
 Blinding your vision
 Depriving her of recognition

I was personally present at the first performance of Malika Ndlovu's poem "Out of Now-here"⁵⁹⁵ in the former District Six in Cape Town on 19 May 2003. The motive for writing and performing this poem, which in a way resembles praise poems, was the opening of the 'Voicing the Abstract' exhibition. This was an exhibition by three black South African women artists – Trish Lovemore, Thembeqa Qangule and Ernestine White – which was organised by the Swedish Ph.D. student Stina Kordblom. This performance, or rather this opening ceremony, was the occasion of my first meeting with Malika Ndlovu. Through the heading of the poem she sought and seeks to point out that women artists, who have always been there and who by no means have come from 'no-where', are definitely "now-here".



Malika Ndlovu performing.^{595b}

⁵⁹⁵ By Malika Lueen Ndlovu. Borzaga and Steiner (2004: 138-139).

^{595b} Photo: <<http://www.ukzn.ac.za/cca/images/pa/PA2005/IMG/Ndlovu/Malika2005%20.jpg>> (accessed August 8, 2008).

Who knows how ancient her calling may be
Driving her to express that spirit
Shed her skin
Directing the force and flow
Of her artistry
That spirit she fights to liberate
She refuses to deny
The one she reincarnates
On canvas
On paper
Makes vivid
With metal and wood
How is it that she is so seldom seen
Even in her home
So rarely accepted or understood

Written for the opening of the “Voicing the Abstract” exhibition, featuring three young Black South African women artists, Trish Lovemore, Thembeqa Qangule and Ernestine White and curated by the Swedish PHD student Stina Kordblom - 19 May 2003

The performance of the poem was moving and very successful. Malika Ndlovu clearly knows how to fascinate her audience. At first only the singing of a woman was heard, it was Malika Ndlovu herself. A mixture of traditional, ritual singing and despair resonated in her voice. Slowly, reciting the poem, she came down a flight of winding stairs. Again and again the stanzas were interrupted by her melancholic singing. The poem’s story, on the life of an artist and on womanhood, was impressive.

To begin with, in the first stanza, Malika Ndlovu describes the young women artists as “of the same flame” as many others, as young women who “bear [...] the same name” and do not differ from the others. And still, as artists, they are strong women who, like a fire fighting confinement, fight their way through obstacles and difficulties such as conventions, dominations and expectations, obstacles which are placed in their path.

The first and second stanza each set in with a rhyming couplet. Here the young woman artists are described as humans who claim and want to walk an artistic path on which they can discover themselves. Particularly for them, however, this path is especially hard as they are tormented by self-doubt in a still male and predominantly white world of successful artists. “This seemingly endless season of drought” symbolizes the long period of Apartheid which must have been like an arid desert for black women artists, as they had many fewer chances in their home country than they would have had abroad or if they had been white and/or male.

Malika Ndlovu’s poem resembles a monologue about the difficulties of being a coloured or black artist. The monologue refers to the experiences with obstacles Malika Ndlovu faced herself and which certainly many artists and many individual histories tell us of. Among others, this problem is discussed in the

poem “Black Woman Poet: The Eternal Outsider”⁵⁹⁶ by Deela Khan (cf. Chapter IV). The present poem talks about the family’s and society’s expectations of women. These expectations are even more demanding in the case of a “Black/ Woman/ Artist”. Malika Ndlovu plays with these three words, they are the centre, the core of the poem. By playing a three piece ‘shell game’ with “Black/ Woman/ Artist”⁵⁹⁷ and changing their order to “Artist/ Woman/ Black” it looks as if the lyrical speaker wants to find out if this changes something in the situation of the artist. I remember her changing the intonation at this sequence into an astonished question as if after “Artist” each word would be still more incredible.

The entire fifth stanza asks if these three words seduce us into determining in advance the potential of the black artist, as well as the result of her artistic work and her role and chances as an artist. The stanza complains that these three determinants – black, woman, artist – distort our view and could possibly make us withhold our approval of artists. “Which part of this pyramid/ Puzzles/ Silences/ Intimidates you most/ Sets her on a distant or opposite pole/ Predetermines her potential/ Her outcome/ Her role”? Many critics forget, in view of their preoccupation with art, that the wish to become an artist is not only a matter of craving for recognition, but also a desire for true artists to express themselves, in no matter what way: “Who knows how ancient her calling may be”? Many artists fight with themselves and their surroundings for a long time before they can give substance to and realise their creativity and revive their fantasies.

The poem ends by criticizing society and describing how difficult it is for artists, especially for black woman artists, to truly live their artistry and lives as artists: “How is it that she is so seldom seen/ Even in her home/ So rarely accepted or understood”. In South Africa today, there are still proportionally fewer works published and exhibited by black artists than white. This is not because the Blacks are less gifted or skilled, but mostly because of financial problems or a want of contacts.

⁵⁹⁶ Barry, Ndlovu and Khan (2002: 138-140).

⁵⁹⁷ Also the title of a book on postcolonial theory.

The following poem is a good 30 years older than “Out of Now-here”. Like Malika Ndlovu, Jennifer Davids shows in “Poem for my Mother”⁵⁹⁸ that poets often have difficulties when it comes to justifying their art to the greater community as a valid and viable art form and profession. Poetry, as well as other artistic professions, is, by many, not as valued in the modern world as it once was.

Poem for my Mother

by Jennifer Davids

That isn't everything, you said
on the afternoon I brought a poem
to you hunched over the washtub
with your hands
the shrivelled
burnt granadilla
skin of your hands
covered by foam.

And my words
slid like a ball
of hard blue soap
into the tub
to be grabbed and used by you
to rub the clothes.

A poem isn't all
there is to life, you said
with your blue-ringed gaze
scanning the page
once looking over my shoulder
and back at the immediate
dirty water

and my words
being clenched
smaller and
smaller.

Jennifer Davids (b.1945) lived most of her life under Apartheid, which classified her as a Coloured. Her “Poem for my Mother” was published in 1974, but written much earlier, during her teenage years.

Nowadays, her parents are supportive and proud of their daughter's success with her art, but the poem introduces the reader to her dismissive mother, who, at the time, told her young daughter: “That isn't everything/ ...on the afternoon I brought a poem”. Annoyance and impatience speak from the voice of the hard-working mother, who, with her “shrivelled/ burnt granadilla/ skin” and “blue-ringed gaze”, cannot imagine one could make a living from poetry.

Two worlds collide, the one full of “foam” and “dirty water” and the other one which finds merit in pages and “words”.

As for her perspective, the mother would not wish for such a future for any of her children. So, “scanning the page/ once looking over my shoulder”, she warns her daughter “A poem isn't all/ there is to life” and thereby destroys all hopes and aspirations of the young poet. Like “a ball/ of hard blue soap” her “words/ slid.../ into the tub” to be used for a practical purpose.

⁵⁹⁸ Daymond, Driver et al. (2003: 343).

The shrinking of the hopes and the resignation of the young girl are mirrored in the clenching of the page and at the same time made visible by the way Jennifer Davids sets the very last stanza: It consists of four lines, which contain first three words, then two, then two shorter ones before it ends with the single word, “smaller”: poem, and hope, visibly run out.

Bit by bit it might become obvious that in South African poetry one finds many comments on and hints of what it is like to be a poet. Meta-poetry has a long tradition with even famous poets such as Shakespeare or Keats treating the subject of poetry and the power of poetry in their poems (example: Shakespeare’s Sonnet XVIII or Keat’s Sonnet “If by dull rhymes”). Contemporary examples of this may be found in poems of Finuala Dowling, such as in lines like “I have to go home too/ and immortalise her” from “Servant and daughter” or “On the roof with Rory, 1976”.⁵⁹⁹ Both of these poems are from the chapter “God knows I’m a writer” in *Doo-wop girls of the universe*, and like Shakespearian poetry, they talk about the great ‘gift’ of writers, and in this case poets, to immortalize events and people by writing about them.

As many of the poems show, however, writing professionally and the art of writing altogether can also be seen as or even become a ‘burden’ to the writers themselves: In “Out of Now-here”⁶⁰⁰ Malika Ndlovu writes on how a woman is questioned or even criticised by her family and environment if she is an artist or a poet. In “Black Woman Poet – An eternal outsider”,⁶⁰¹ Deela Khan discusses the situation of many women of colour in South African literature. Amongst Finuala Dowling’s poetry, one finds many references to practical problems for writers such as the fact that they never have enough time. “Fear” by Makhosazana Xaba describes her fear of being published. Even Antjie Krog, who is so familiar with the publishing business and could therefore be very self-confident, speaks in her novel *The Country of my Skull* of incidental ambiguous feelings towards writing as well as the dilemma and need for choices which the ‘heavy responsibility to write’ can cause in a writer:

⁵⁹⁹ Dowling (2006: 64-67).

⁶⁰⁰ Borzaga and Steiner (2004: 138-139).

⁶⁰¹ Barry, Ndlovu and Khan (2002: 138-140).

How do I thank a publisher who refused to take no for an answer when I said, 'No, I don't want to write a book about the Truth Commission'; stuck with me when I said, 'No, I can't write a book,' and also, 'I dare not write a book'; and was still there when I came around to saying, 'I have to write a book, otherwise I'll go crazy.'⁶⁰²

One of the most powerful expressions of her feelings towards her situation as an artist is disclosed by Makhosazana Xaba in her poem "Fear".⁶⁰³ It is obvious that publishing creative work always needs a lot of self-confidence, to which family,

Fear

by Makhosazana Xaba

The fear of being published
is not just the fear of having
every inch of your skin
laid out for everyone to touch at will.

It's more than the fear
of having your gut
unravelling on a display table
for the public to scrutinise at leisure.

It's more like the fear
of having your faecal tube
turned inside out into the light
of the midday sun,
having its pleats undone
for the world to discover what lies
within and beneath the folds,
to meet the odour of hidden truths,
having to inhale it.

It's having the world iron
the now-opened pleats,
beholding their truth.

The fear of being published
tightens my sphincter,
the rest of me.
I fold into a ball
Hard as a stone.

friends, fans and publishers contribute. Talking of self-confidence, it is interesting that, as Makhosazana Xaba told me at the Poetry Africa Festival in Durban in 2006, "Fear" is not included in her first collection of poetry, as according to the publisher, it is better to start off with poetry which is more easily 'digestable'.

In the narrative poem "Fear", Makhosazana Xaba writes honestly and plainly on how she experiences the fear of publishing her work. All the fears which are linked to stripping the soul bare when one publishes one's own work, become clear in the vivid descriptions.

In the five very different stanzas, Makhosazana Xaba's lyrical speaker builds up step by step the picture of how her inner self is laid open every time she is published. At first, she develops her pictures from rather harmless ones,

⁶⁰² Garman (2006: 18).

⁶⁰³ Jason le Grange and Kim Donnelly, eds. *South Africa Writing: Spud, John van der Ruit and the rise of popular fiction in SA. Become a better writer. Books, book clubs and so much more.* Volume 2. Rondebosch, Cape Town: South Africa Writing, April 2006. 41.

“every inch of your skin/ laid out for everyone to touch at will”, to more and more brutal ones: “having your gut/ unravelled on a display table/ for the public to scrutinise at leisure”.

To adequately describe her feeling, the third stanza culminates in the lyrical speaker describing an ugly scene, an anatomic, forensic dissection of the bowels: “having your faecal tube/ turned inside out into the light/ [...] / to meet the odour of hidden truths, having to inhale it”. The fourth and fifth stanzas then talk about how the “truth” comes out when “the world iron[s]/ the now-open pleats” and describe the helplessness and being at the mercy of the critics.

Makhosazana Xaba uses very disturbing and at the same time powerful images to depict her physical suffering upon publishing, pictures which, in their detailed anatomic descriptions, remind one of (German) Expressionist Poetry and can be compared to poems like the expressionist poem “Kleine Aster” by Gottfried Benn published in 1912. From stanza to stanza, the description of the tightened body due to “The fear of being published”, a phrase which, taken from the first and repeated in the last stanza, forms a frame, almost becomes a tangible reality for the reader as the lyrical speaker folds “into a ball/ Hard as a stone”.

Similarly to Makhosazana Xaba's "Fear", "Found Poem"⁶⁰⁴ by Finuala Dowling deals with problems that every writer knows. She mentions the stress of writing which can get so bad that she only wants "to scream & scream" when people ask her if she has "submitted/ any creative writing lately, you know, rhymes". The pressure under which the lyrical speaker has to write and to turn out pages, kills

all creativity.

Found Poem

by Finuala Dowling

When asked by concerned parties
whether I've submitted
any creative writing lately, you know, rhymes
I want to scream & scream,
Where Do You Think I Would Find the Time?
Every moment I have is mortgaged
off another moment.
If I go for a walk I fall behind,
I fall behind and I mind falling behind
with the marking. Or at two in the afternoon,
poised on the brink
poised on the brink of a thought
a child interrupts

a lesson a lecture a sonnet a thread
shreds itself in my cheese-grater head
to be collected and recollected later,
in a time slot allotted for something unrelated.

I'm saving time as it is by not speaking,
by living in this intertidal zone
where communication washes over me,
friends twinkle distantly on rocky, dangerous
promontories I no longer approach.

Or crash into them
in supermarkets, me picking
up the groceries between domestic duties
& study guides & yes! – ha! I catch laughing couples
opening litres of cooldrink in the juice aisle,
droëbek from last night's party – up late & dancing,
& another one coming, & I speaking to them,
it feels like, through sheets of one way glass
& they ask, have you written anything lately,
you know, creatively, & I just shake my head
& think: You hedonists! layabouts! slugabeds!
Where Do You Think I Would Find The Time?

The greatest problem she mentions is lack of time, which a mother and working woman has to deal with. She wants to ask "the concerned parties", several times throughout the poem, "Where Do You Think I Would Find the Time?" The lyrical speaker who has to do "the marking" most likely represents Finuala Dowling. Like her, the lyrical speaker is in the teaching profession and "Every moment I have is mortgaged/ off another moment". She describes how her life consists of constant decision making. Every decision to do something has to be weighed against something else. "If I go for a walk I

⁶⁰⁴ Dowling (2002: 20).

But I stop & I think:
I should live
I should sing the blues
should party all night & then swig unpaid-for juice
in the aisles of Pick 'n Pay
in the new Long Beach Mall
till the deadlines whiz by, & say
to my employers, fuck, you all
& write poems in lipstick
& stick them in bottles
for my *babbalas* friends
to get stuck in their throttles
& I will do just this,
when I find the time.

fall behind./ I fall behind
and I mind falling behind/
with the marking.”

The last stanza shows the lyrical speaker close to a nervous breakdown. She wants to admit she is defeated by the stress and to stop living up to the enormous expectations she has to

fulfil. Exhausted, she thinks of throwing in the towel and waiting “till the deadlines whiz by”. She wants to give in to crazy ideas, such as to “write poems in lipstick/ & stick them in bottles/ for my *babbalas*⁶⁰⁵ friends”, and she ends the poem “& I will do just this,/ when I find the time”, which again underlines how busy the lyrical speaker is: she really has no time, not even or, especially not for nonsense.

The poem is applicable to many a woman’s life and shows what women have to cope with: the challenges of juggling family, friends, private life, career and “domestic duties”, and all at the same time.

⁶⁰⁵ Hungover.

Freelance writer's lament

by Finuala Dowling

The man in the van with glass panes trussed to the sides
 knows what he has to do
 The bricklayer donning his hard hat
 knows what he has to do
 The clerk in a headscarf waiting for the Post Office to open
 knows what she has to do
 The labourer cycling along the country road
 knows what he has to do
 The blue-checked chef with fresh ingredients
 knows what he has to do
 The woman unlocking the iron grille of her shop
 knows what she has to do.

But I might do anything today.

I could write twenty wonderful pages
 or nothing at all
 I could finish four commissions
 or stare at the wall
 I could answer every single mail
 or wait for the call
 I could parcel up manuscripts with brown paper and string
 or crumple here, like a damn frayed knot, 'fraid not.

I might be a writer
 or might be a paper ball.

“Freelance writer’s lament”⁶⁰⁶ from the chapter “God knows I’m a writer” in *Doo-wop girls of the universe* by Finuala Dowling makes the difficulties of the writers’ job its topic. So the poem starts off stating that “The man in the van” (internal rhyme), “The bricklayer”, “The clerk”, “The labourer”, “The blue-checked chef”, and “The woman unlocking the iron grille of her shop” all have something in common: They all know what they have to do and what is expected of them at work.

The problem for the freelance lyrical speaker is that she “might do anything today”, a line, which is visually framed by the long stanza before and the shorter stanza afterwards and gains thereby a certain weight and importance.

The following stanza describes the lyrical speaker’s daily work as a writer. She laments that she “could write twenty wonderful pages/ or nothing at all”. This is something that constantly haunts freelancers: They are always dependent on creativity and on their own time-management skills. The last two stanzas achieve cohesion and rhythm from internal and terminal rhymes, “all”, “wall”, “call”, parallelisms and anaphoras: “I could [...]”/ “or [...]”. These underline the many possible ways writers may be distracted from their work. The ‘problem’ for freelancers is that, what they make of the day is in their hands. All this brings into sharp relief the possible range of output of a writer’s day.

⁶⁰⁶ Dowling (2006: 60).

Talk, share and listen

by Finuala Dowling

I was meant to be writing a poem
but because I'm human I made a lasagne instead
while simultaneously composing a poem in my head
and thinking about an article I'd read, which said
poets on average live for only 62.2 years.
(It is Ferlinghetti's fault, I think, that we look so long-lived.
Born 1919 and still going – he may make a hundred.)
You can tell if a poet's depressed, say researchers,
because we write more "I's" and more "me's" and choose
fewer words of rapport such as "talk", "share" and "listen".

Ho, hmm, talk, share and listen.

In fact I made two lasagnes, since some people like meat
whereas others won't eat things which once had feet.
I was cooking to escape my screen. On it were two lines:
Poets end their own lives
But politicians have to be shot.
How dreadful. I said that. I wish I had not.

Ho, hmm, talk, share and listen.

There is an art to making lasagne while simultaneously
composing a poem. Lasagnes are quite complicated
and deep. They come in layers with blank sheets
in between. Lasagnes are best assembled alone,
in a serious and contemplative atmosphere, and should,
wherever possible, be allowed to stand quite long
before being read aloud to create a *frisson*
at occasions where one gathers to talk, share and listen.

Those parts of the next poem, which attract one's attention, particularly in the third stanza, comment on poetry. Just as Maganthur Pillay gives an artistic treatment to the burden of a body with stretch marks in "Warrior Marks", Finuala Dowling finds a similarly innovative way of describing how to write a poem in "Talk, share and listen".⁶⁰⁷ Here, the lyrical speaker likens cooking to the creative process of writing poetry: "There is an art to making lasagne while simultaneously/ composing a poem". She says that just as "Lasagnes are quite complicated/ and deep",

poems also consist of several layers.

In the third stanza, the lyrical speaker further mentions that "Lasagnes are best assembled alone,/ in a serious and contemplative atmosphere, and should,/ wherever possible, be allowed to stand quite long/ before being read aloud". This is a fascinating way of describing one's attitude towards the process of writing and publishing poetry, one, that is definitely feasible for poets who write and publish their works in print. Performance poets, on the other hand, would surely frequently disagree with this approach, as they do not always have the time to let the poem mature when they are commissioned to compose a poem for a specific occasion. Yet, their poem still has to be effective.

⁶⁰⁷ Dowling (2006: 76).

At this point I want to gather and bring together a few lines from the works of contemporary women poets, which cannot be treated in detail but shall not be left out, answering the question posed (and partly answered) in “Shards”⁶⁰⁸ by Gabeba Baderoon:⁶⁰⁹ “When you write a poem/ do your words scroll precisely/ down a pristine screen?” The examples given below answer by describing what experiences the featured poets have had with their art. It can be said that their experiences with writing vary widely.

In one poem, Michelle McGrane compares writing to addictive behaviour. She explains that once the heart starts writing, writing becomes an addiction, “always hungry, insatiable”,⁶¹⁰ which needs to be fed.

Ingrid Andersen sees the writing process as one in which “Words coalesce/ out of confusion and despair/ escape onto paper” before they rearrange themselves into a “cleaner [not clearer] meaning”.⁶¹¹ This sounds as if the process were unplanned and happened spontaneously and surprisingly. As if words always just ‘came over her’.

Different, very expressive experiences are described by Antjie Krog in “poet becoming”.⁶¹² Here, Antjie Krog writes: “The poet writes poetry with her tongue/ yes, she breathes deeply with her ear”. The writing process is being linked to the instrument of speech, the tongue, and to the vital act of breathing.

In another poem by Crystal Warren, poetry promises a form of freedom, a fulfilment, which the lyrical speaker, and maybe the author herself will never know: “In your absence/ I’m free to write/ what I may not think/ in your presence// The poems you will not see/ somehow draw you near to me”.⁶¹³ Here, poetry offers a way out and an escape into a dream world.

For Jaqui Dichabe, too, “Poetry is my way of escape from this painful reality”. These lines stem from her poem “Remembering Baby Tshepane”, track

⁶⁰⁸ Baderoon (2005: 53).

⁶⁰⁹ On her homepage <<http://www.gabeba.com>>, one can listen to some of her poetry read by herself.

⁶¹⁰ “Writing is an addiction” by Michelle McGrane (2003). No pagination.

⁶¹¹ Ingrid Andersen. *Excision*. Grahamstown: Ingrid Andersen, 2004. 12.

⁶¹² Krog (2000: 59).

⁶¹³ “These lines” by Crystal Warren (2004: 10).

17 on the 2005 *Off the Wall* CD,⁶¹⁴ a poem which was dedicated to the many raped and abused babies and children in South Africa. Through the poem, the lyrical speaker pleads to all criminals, molesters, abusers, violators, to respect humanity and for a peaceful South Africa without crime. Here, poetry is used as a means to reach people, with a clear message.

Last but not least, I want to mention the poem “Tell me” by Siphumelele Shabalala, track 18 on the *Off the Wall* CD.⁶¹⁵ In the poem, the lyrical speaker asks the audience to tell her about her leaders, “through the eyes of their own people”, to tell her “the truth” about the times “before the colonizer came, took and attempted to destroy our cultures”. Here, poetry is a means to inspire and stimulate the audience to search for the truth in history.

⁶¹⁴ Jaqui Dichabe. *Off the Wall CD: Off the Wall: Open Mike Sessions: Poetry 2005: A Touch of Madness, Cape Town*. Recording: Simon Malherbe. Production: Graham Ellis. 1 compact disc (55.46min). Cape Town: Digital Forest Studios, 2005.

⁶¹⁵ Khadija Heeger. *Off the Wall CD: Off the Wall: Open Mike Sessions: Poetry 2005: A Touch of Madness, Cape Town*. Recording: Simon Malherbe. Production: Graham Ellis. 1 compact disc (55.46min). Cape Town: Digital Forest Studios, 2005.

Mantra of Fear

by Malika Ndlovu

this is a journey whose terror and bliss
 only the true seeker can know
 you cannot go back
 you cannot forget
 what has begun
 since you made that choice
 to walk this path
 to be here
 since you turned to confront that shadow
 chose to face that mountain of fear

fear of not doing what you said you would do
 fear of contradicting yourself
 fear of the expectations of others
 fear of being a liar
 fear of judgement
 fear of not being liked
 fear of being left alone
 by those who form your comfort zone

fear of rejection
 fear of losing those you love
 fear of experiencing pain
 fear of coming to terms change
 fear that you are not ready
 fear that you are heading
 for another dead end
 fear of imprisonment
 fear of suffocation, of open spaces
 fear of crowds, of criticism
 of water, of heights
 fear of falling
 fear of holding on too tight
 fear of flight

fear of exposing myself
 fear of setting myself up
 fear of failure
 fear of attention
 fear of success

fear of commitment
 fear speaking your truth
 fear that you'll be misunderstood
 fear of knowing you should do something
 say something and doing nothing at all
 fear of not doing enough
 fear of saying too much

It is difficult to find just the right place in this study for the poem “Mantra of Fear”⁶¹⁶, written in 2002, as on the one hand, it is socio-critical, but on the other hand it describes the typical fears of a woman and a female artist. Due to its listing of fears it is placed among the poems which deal with a being an artist.

Many women in search of their true destiny and fulfilment reach a point at which they can no longer turn back because they have already learned too much and “cannot forget”. With this observation “Mantra of Fear” sets the mood for challenges one has to meet and to deal with in life if one decides “to confront that shadow/cho[o]se to face that mountain of fear”.

In the second stanza, Malika Ndlovu describes her fears of the high expectations others had of her: ‘Will I manage or not? Am I as good as the others? What if I

⁶¹⁶ Malika Lueen Ndlovu. *poetry-in-progress from period 1986-2002* (unpublished).

fear of dying
fear of living your life
in a constant in a state of fear
fear of never understanding your purpose
why you are here

fear only is defeated
when faith is restored

when you have nothing else to lean on
when everything that matters to you is at stake
when a crisis arises
and you are forced to make a choice
to heed the inner warnings
that your heart and mind have heard
more than once before

fear only is defeated
when faith is restored

cannot measure up to the expectations of others? Will I become unpopular, will I lose friends?’

The third stanza speaks of the fears of a mother and wife, “fear of losing those who love/ fear of experiencing pain”. It also becomes clear just how contradictory some fears often are, “fear of not doing enough/ fear of saying too much”. Malika Ndlovu here takes into

consideration her own fears as a suppressed person when she was longing for freedom and equality, and when she constantly feared getting into conflict with the authorities, the “fear of imprisonment” whenever she said the wrong thing. She also mentions existential fears, “fear of dying/ fear of living your life”.

Striking is the permanent anaphora of “fear of/that...”. The anaphora and the parallel sentence structures reinforce the character of enumeration which in turn underlines the enormous extent of these fears. In the second to last stanza Malika Ndlovu plays with the anaphora of the word “when”.

The whole ending of “Mantra of Fear” refers to Apartheid, the last two lines are the repeated words of someone facing defeat: “fear only is defeated/ when faith is restored”. This sentence contains a wise little saying and may be transferred to many fields in life, to relationships which are not possible without trust and confidence, to the family which is strengthened and supported by unity and bonds, or to the healing processes of a society. “fear only is defeated/ when faith is restored” may be applied, without limits, to any situation or time.

The sentence “fear is only defeated/ when faith is restored” is also full of meaning for the people of South Africa, for the faith in the former oppressors and in government can only develop gradually. The current process needs time. It is certain that fears can only be overcome by the growth of trust and confidence.

Prison Poems: Comment on “fear of imprisonment” (line 26)

Many if not most South African ‘prison poems’ date and go back to Apartheid. Especially impressive are the poems by Dennis Brutus in *Letters to Martha*⁶¹⁷ and James Matthews in *Poems from a prison cell*.⁶¹⁸ Some ten years after Brutus, Matthews collected his impressions during his solitary confinement in the top-security prison Victor Vester in Paarl from September to December 1976. Alongside torture, solitary confinement was a popular means of disorientating prisoners, to deprive them of their sense of self, and to draw information out of them. The only oft-mentioned ‘weapons’ with which the prisoners could protect themselves and keep from going mad were books and the skill of writing. When the sale of Matthews’ poems was prohibited, two weeks after their publication, he did nothing to fight the prohibition because he did not want to give the government the satisfaction of seeing him struggle. To him, symbols for freedom are the bird and the blue sky. His poems give evidence of the inhuman loneliness of solitary confinement, and they arise from experiences which are plainly real. James Matthews writes from the perspective of one in a cell and describes with great honesty his feelings and longings during his solitary confinement.

In *ink@boiling point* there are also poems referring to confinement. Examples are the poems written by Gertrude Fester (among others “The Spirit Shall Not Be Caged”), who was sentenced for treason and terrorism and her cooperation with the ANC. Her poems convey a different feeling from those by James Matthews. They give evidence of an enormous *joie de vivre* and power which Gertrude Fester did not allow to be taken away from her in prison. While Gertrude Fester continues to write “I” with a capital letter, the “i” written in a small letter in Matthews’ poems makes us imagine him as a, at the time, almost broken man. In addition to that, Gertrude Fester’s poems express a strong belief in South Africa’s speedy and inevitable release from the grasp of Apartheid.

⁶¹⁷ Dennis Brutus. *Letters to Martha* London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1968.

⁶¹⁸ James Matthews. *Poems from a prison cell*. Athlone: Realities, 2001.

A Plea to Poetry

by Gertrude Fester
Pollsmoor Prison, 3 April 1989

hold
hold onto your mind
do not let dumb fascists taunt you
psychologically terrorize you
pulverize you
do not let them break you
crumble you
bit
by bit
into a seething mass
of unbridled emotions
random pieces of yourself
your soul
flung furiously
scattered sporadically
like bits
of shit
on to cell walls
hold onto your anger
contain it
do not let it
like a malignant cell
spread insidiously
throughout your body
your soul
eating it up
devouring your very self
your very soul
consuming all
consuming the residue

of your humanity
your dignity
do not let them dehumanize you further
in this hell hole of hostility
this cell
claustrophobically covering you
closing in on you
overwhelming you
the powerful over the powerless

your soul
your spirit

“A Plea to Poetry”⁶¹⁹ by Gertrude Fester (b.1952) reflects her personal cry for help directed at poetry, which enabled her during her imprisonment to express herself and not to go mad. Being active in the struggle and part of the anti-Apartheid movement, she was arrested and accused of treason and terrorism and of being in contact with the ANC. Writing was a survival strategy during her time in prison.

As it was not permitted in solitary confinement to possess writing materials she later wrote down poems, which had already been completed in her head. One of these poems is “This Is The Reality”,⁶²⁰ in which she first describes her solitary confinement and the humiliation which went along with it.

Gertrude Fester’s incredible optimism is astonishing, in spite of her inhumane treatment, which, as she tells it, left her untouched: “This is the South African reality/ But not for long!” Maybe Gertrude Fester got this strength from her outlook on life, which is shown not only in this poem but also in the title of another poem: “The Spirit Shall Not Be Caged”,⁶²¹ an attitude which finds its

⁶¹⁹ Barry, Ndlovu and Khan (2002: 82).

⁶²⁰ Barry, Ndlovu and Khan (2002: 84).

⁶²¹ Barry, Ndlovu and Khan (2002: 81).

slouches inside yourself
your pent up frustrations
cloud your brain
imprison your soul
like they imprison your body
your hands shiver
vibrating with impotence

though your mind cannot
form clear thoughts
systematize them
though your hands cannot
produce polished letters
go on
write on
contain your mind
hold
hold onto your thoughts
write them down

you
paralysed
powerless in prison

hold onto life
to sanity
soothe your tormented soul
push
prod to pusillanimity pusillanimous
to poetic purgation
let Kalliope inspire your spirit
to soar the skies
let your tears not dissipate your spirit
but rather
feed new strength into you
infuse you with faith
that the spirit shall not be caged
that the powerless shall free themselves
from indignity and oppression

let your pen however slowly
empower you through poetry
as your pen pours out
your troubled thoughts
jettisoned
like flotsam
onto paper
so too
shall strength be sieved into your soul
slowly
but surely

correspondence in the German song “Die Gedanken sind frei”. This outlook on life helped Gertrude Fester and her lyrical speaker in “A Plea to Poetry” to remain free in her thoughts and to overcome the physical restraints placed on her.

It was Gertrude Fester’s inner freedom which helped her preserve her humanity and dignity and to withstand dehumanization. Her inner freedom also helped her to cope with her outer and inner anxieties and to hold out, when “your pent up frustrations/ cloud your brain/ imprison your soul”. It is these personal experiences which give so much conviction and credibility to the lyrical speaker of the poem.

Gertrude Fester’s language is rich in imagery: “your hands shiver/ vibrating with impotence” or “you/ paralysed/ powerless in prison”. Besides, there are more alliterations in these lines suggesting that Gertrude Fester thought over her poem well and had in these lines a definite purpose in mind. Gertrude Fester frequently uses the alliteration of the letter f, a ‘sighing consonant’, probably in order to underline her physical and mental state of exhaustion.

The anaphoras “hold”, “let” and the parallelisms “your soul”, “your spirit” intensify the impression that the imprisoned has to concentrate hard in order not to lose her nerve and not to let

herself be broken. The monologues, too, contribute to encouraging her to: “go on/ write on”. Poetry becomes a means of purification, “poetic purgation”, to the lyrical speaker, to overcome her desperation.

The reference to the muse Kalliope⁶²² reinforces the belief that during the time of being isolated and cut off, stories which are fixed firmly in the head, in the memories, can give hope and distraction. It is the art which keeps the imprisoned alive, which is a catalyst and an anchor to give strength and stability: “shall strength be sieved into your soul/ slowly/ but surely”.

Also when comparing their poems, it becomes clear that most WEAVE members use writing in order to digest their personal experiences. Another poem which cannot be quoted in its entirety, but which I nevertheless want to mention briefly, is Shelley Barry’s poem, “Wheels”,⁶²³ in which the principle of “Healing through creativity”⁶²⁴ is expressed clearly. In “Wheels”, Shelley Barry treats her personal fate of being wheelchair-bound after she had been shot, an example for violence in South Africa. She overcomes these physical fetters with the help of her love of life and with the knowledge that she does not have to abandon art: “Yes, it was in this chair/ .../ That I understood/ Who I was, what I valued/ And that living/ Is indeed beautiful”.

⁶²² Kalliope, Greek for ‘beautiful-voiced’ was the eldest and wisest of the nine muses and the muse of epic poetry, always portrayed with a writing tablet in her hand.

⁶²³ Barry, Ndlovu and Khan (2002: 298).

⁶²⁴ Lit Net ~ Poetry Net. Michelle McGrane. No date. “Malika Ndlovu”. LitNet. <http://www.oulitnet.co.za/relax/m_ndlovu_in.asp> (accessed August 8, 2008).

Conclusion

UNTYING THE KNOTS

by Halejoetse Tshelana

I write to untie the knots
that lump in my throat
turning into splitting headaches
when I could simply say fuck off but I can't
because I am an African woman
and my mouth must not be foul.

I write to wipe the tears
as pages of pain
scroll from my thumbs
smudging my mascara.

I write myself into time.
I write that they may know
I became even stronger,
when my heart was broken
by culture, church
and civilization

I write to share with you the quiet
revolution raging inside my brain.
I write to celebrate my triumph
over poverty, murderers and rapists.
I write to celebrate myself.
I write because it is time to celebrate lessons
learned from the mire of womanhood.

As a final poem, “Untying the knots”⁶²⁵ by the relatively young poet Halejoetse Tshelana shall be mentioned. Born in Lesotho, Halejoetse Tshelana now lives in Cape Town. Her poem once more summarizes all aspects this study has looked into: the struggle with one’s own identity and the expectations one has of a woman, womanhood, re-writing history, art as a means to speak out and tell one’s story,⁶²⁶ art to help healing and also as a means to celebrate one’s freedom and life itself. Cohesion is given by the fact that all verse paragraphs start with “I write” and give reasons why the lyrical speaker uses the art of writing to express herself.

The fourth paragraph is interesting, too, because it gives evidence of the lyrical speaker’s alienation from the basic elements and institutions of Western society; culture, church and civilization. The culture, language, religion and general civilization offered by colonial institutions did/does not agree with many writers of colour.⁶²⁷ They now want to reveal the atrocities committed by those

⁶²⁵ Halejoetse Tshelana. *Poems and Songs from the Mire*. Cape Town: New Voices Publishing, 2006.

⁶²⁶ “Poetry as Witness” to reality in the article by John Higgins. “The Sole Measure of Poetic Value: A Response to Kelwyn Sole”. *Protexts: Literary and Cultural Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2003. 97.

⁶²⁷ Cf. Malika Ndlovu’s poetry or Gcina Mhlophe in “We Are at War”, where she touches on this subject too, when she says, “Customs are set against us/ Religions are set against us”. Mhlophe (2002: 73-75).

institutions by pointing out the danger that lies in unquestioning and submissive acceptance of solutions by people who think themselves superior. To reach this goal, their hopes are set on the improvement of education.

This issue of one national identity for the many coexisting different cultures in South Africa is touched on by many writers, including J.M. Coetzee in *Disgrace* and Zakes Mda in *Madonna of Excelsior*. The poems continually touch on the problem of estrangement and the difficulties of unification in the face of old prejudices. This, in effect, constitutes a campaign to raise a national banner of a cohesive culture and identity acceptable to all that the country can meet under – united, not divided into different groups. It is clear that unless all South Africans work hard to be able to march forward together enthusiastically, the country's progress will be slow.

With the poems presented and alluded to in this study, the poets give proof of an attitude that it is the role of poets to witness and to give testimony concerning their times and if possible to encourage their fellow human beings to live their lives, not to let them slip by, and to wake up to all they can achieve, to the possibilities open to them in the 'new' South Africa.

The goal of this study was to present and discuss a representative selection of the poetry of post-Apartheid South African women poets: This included socio-critical poems, as in Chapter IV, besides poems dealing with women's issues, as in Chapter V, and others which describe the fears and prejudices which face and concern the poets and their art, as in Chapter VI. With the help of these poems, I was able to demonstrate that South African history and society are not only mirrored per se in the poetry presented, but also documented from the (black) African women's point of view, accurately recorded through the hand of South Africa's women poets, making the experience of their group accessible to a wider audience.

Furthermore, I wish my study to contribute to the spread of knowledge of the richness of contemporary South African Women's Poetry. I hope that through this study the reader to share my enthusiasm for South African women poets, their directness and the precision with which they capture pictures and situations. My goal has been to present their poems in such a way that the reader can read his or her own feelings and experiences into them. Through the poetic craft of the poets

presented, specific South African situations are not restricted to South African contexts. I believe I have been able to show that careful reading provides a new and fresh perspective on the topics involved and makes the poetry transferable and applicable to other societies and situations.

By the end of this study the reader should have noticed that a change can be seen in many aspects of the lives of South African poets after the end of Apartheid. Several publishers have attempted to achieve the acceptance of previously marginalised poets of colour by gradually including them in their publications, and thereby encouraging their incorporation into South African school and university curricula. My study will hopefully contribute, too, to an increase in the presence of women's poetry in these areas.

While during Apartheid, poetry was used as a political weapon in the liberation struggle, contemporary poetry deals rather with the consequences of Apartheid for the identities of all South Africans, and there is now an additional emphasis on women's subjects. Another interesting topic in South African poetry, covered in this study, is poetry itself, even though this is not a new topic.

In the socio-critical poems the poets in Chapter IV draw attention to social injustice. By showing the difficulties involved in forming their personal identity and by reporting cases of marginalisation and oppression, the poets contribute to setting the historical record straight and to correcting historical misconceptions and prejudices. They set people thinking and give even outsiders an insight into the state of affairs in the country. Besides the attention these poets give to the beauty of their poetry, they give well deserved importance to the truth, the truth of humiliation, degradation and subjection in the past. Now, finally, the release from inner chains and the recovery of inner values, self-respect and a proper identity, allow a person just to be a human being, and the human being one chooses to be.

The poems on women's issues in Chapter V acknowledge and pay tribute to the existence and the tasks of women. These poems are often deeply private and autobiographical. It becomes clear that most of the black and coloured poets, but also some white poets, follow the principles, views and beliefs of "African Feminism", "Womanism" or "Motherism". The poets' attitude towards the fact that women can also be happy in their 'naturally assigned' role, is reflected in many of the poems presented, but so also are the challenges which women have to

meet in every day life and in their relationships. It is plain to see that women in the past have often been, and are even now kept oppressed, but that they are seldom defeated. In fact, many of the poems make the case that women are the stronger sex. Furthermore, it is the women who hold together their families, which in South Africa are the starting and focal point for social life.

The poetry about the life of an artist in Chapter VI points out the difficulties which come with one's colour and gender. The poems express all the anxieties and prejudices which are connected with an artistic profession, but they also refer to the possibilities, capabilities and freedom that come from expressing oneself, and the healing that results. Besides this, the last chapter shows that for many poets it is also important to convey to those of their readers, who are attracted by their work, the idea that everyone has the same chance to work artistically. By their example they intend to show that there are ways and methods open to everybody to communicate, and they want to encourage people generally to give expression to their problems and all sorts of experiences and to heal themselves through the art form of their own choice, just as many poets do, in accordance with Malika Ndlovu's motto "healing through creativity".

The women poets want to generally disseminate their art far and wide and to rectify the errors in their falsely portrayed history. Many of the poets, however, do not write their poetry primarily with an educational or pedagogical intention, but in order to 'process' their own experiences. These poems do leave a big impression on the reader. In them, we are confronted with images which are worth being reflected and depicted and which can bring about a change in one's thinking. The brevity of the poems brings to them the clarity and ease of understanding that make them interesting for people of all ages and social groups.

South African poetry manages to get deep under the skin because it reveals so much of South Africa's regrettable past. It is incredible that, even in the middle of the 20th Century, Apartheid in South Africa still managed to exclude people because of their birth, with calamitous results. Until recently Blacks and Coloureds were deprived of their 'God given rights', discriminated against, threatened, arrested and sometimes tortured to death for any offence against any law. At issue is the way this nation and its artists, especially the women poets present, deal and work with their guilt and experiences to get a new start. The post-Apartheid poets of South Africa play, through their work, an indispensable

role in the digestion and 'processing' of the South African trauma, while not allowing the history of Apartheid to be forgotten. Yet it is also encouraging to see that they have come far enough to make topics like women and art the subject matter of their contemplations. In fact if one looks closely at the poetry presented, the overall impression given is that these women poets have not only overcome the country's gloomy past but that they are leading the way to South Africa's bright future, which can be seen from the many uplifting and encouraging poems written since 1994.

I hope the cross section of samples given in this dissertation will make many a reader's heart warm to the post-Apartheid women's poetry of South Africa. Still, it has to be said that the poems presented in this study are nothing but a fraction of what is available in the literature of South African women's poetry. Unfortunately, this study has to stay within certain limits and therefore only the most appropriate and suitable poems are included, others are only referred to by name, and many others, which would have also deserved a place or at least a mention, had to be left out.

Most likely, the appeal and unique quality of this post-Apartheid women's poetry comes from the same old familiar difference between men and women. That is, that men are often more interested in the abstract and women in personal relationships and human, you might say, subjects. This allows women to represent topics in a very personal way. It is against the background of their attachment to reality that we find women poets so involved in rectifying the misrepresentation of South African history.

Both men and women write novels about personal relationships, but women's issues in poetry have long not found their way to publishing houses. This makes it even more necessary to assure that these poems are widely circulated and read. The reason for the unmistakable depth of women's poetry could be a newly gained self-confidence reached through emancipation, various feminist theories and the motivation coming from other women. Now, in the gradually emancipating times of post-Apartheid, women poets are neither obliged to write about love 'as a woman's topic' nor politics 'to contribute to liberation', and still they continue writing about all of these subjects anyway.

There can, in fact, be no better window through which to look at South Africa and her future than that opened to us by that country's women poets, who give us an exemplary and even inspirational image of aspired racial harmony and cultural integration; a window which was opened first by the writing of a 17 year old white Afrikaner school girl in her poem, "my beautiful land", in 1969.⁶²⁸

With the collapse of Apartheid in 1994 and after civil rights were acquired by all South Africans, women poets arrived at a fork in the roads at which they could write about many subjects, not just freedom. Perhaps having tired of playing 'second fiddle' in the male dominated struggle for freedom and equality, women of all colours and cultures found unity, inspiration and a voice in writing about all aspects of their lives, both public and private, and not just about the fight for their rights.

Here, the South African womanist movement came into its own. The womanist view provides Western feminism with a shining example, and one without feminism's anti-masculinism. The South African womanism is not against anything or anybody, but it is merely for women.

A last question that came up while working with South African Literature is, if there are Theatre and Fiction for Development, why should there not be Poetry for Development? The idea of "Poemdras"⁶²⁹ in Horst Zander's *Fact, Fiction, 'Faction'* gives an initial indication of what poetry for development might look like. It would be interesting to investigate whether or not South African Poetry has, in fact, during the last 100 years, been a kind of poetry for development. After all, in South Africa, poetry has often been written for political and educational reasons and is nowadays often written to help personal and national healing.⁶³⁰ As one can see, there is a definite need for the formation of a new, 'healthy' generation of South Africans, and the country's poets can help fill that need.

⁶²⁸ Krog (2000: 11). The Afrikaans original was first published in 1970 in *Dogter van Jeftha* (Daughter of Jephtha).

⁶²⁹ Zander (1999).

⁶³⁰ As mentioned before Malika Ndlovu has even made "Healing through Creativity" her personal motto.

Finally, this study has only compared poems on certain subjects. There remains a lot to be done, therefore, regarding the study of contemporary South African poetry. Just one last quote by Goethe from the epigraph to Coetzee's *Youth* as a tip on the way:

Wer den Dichter will verstehen
Muß in Dichters Lande gehen.⁶³¹

And for those who cannot travel but want to understand life in post-Apartheid South Africa, one can but recommend having a close look at the work of the women poets presented. All studies must come to an end. There could be no better comment on South African poetry with which to sum up this survey, or note on which to end it, than the following:

The reawakening of South Africa will be remembered through the words of her poets, writers and in the images of her painters and sculptors more than by the adjurements of her politicians or the words or phrases of her lawmakers. Of all our writers, it is the poet who holds us most in thrall, for it is the poet who gives voice to our deepest thoughts and emotions.⁶³²

⁶³¹ J.M. Coetzee. *Youth*. London: Vintage, 2003 (first published by Secker & Warburg in 2002). "To understand the poet/ Go to where he wrote it", my translation.

⁶³² James Olivier from Educall Publishers. Ndlovu (2000: 2).

Alphabetical list of South African women writers

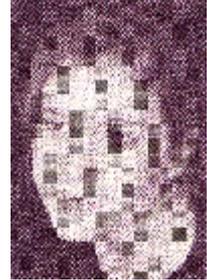
<p>Baderoon, Gabeba *1969 p. 7, 51f, 63f, 67f, 70,105f, 257 Photo: Isabelle Vogt. SPIER Poetry Festival. 2007.</p>	
<p>Baker, Joan. *1934-2000 p. 232 Photo: Barry, Ndlovu and Khan (2002: 2).</p>	
<p>Barry, Shelley *1971 p. 7, 39, 232, 237f, 264 Photo: Isabelle Vogt. World Poetry Day, Cape Town 2007.</p>	
<p>Botha, Nadine *19?? p.65 Photo: <http://www.african-writing.com/gallery/albums/userpics/thumb_Poet_Nadine_Botha.jpg>.</p>	
<p>Combrinck, Lisa *1967 p. 7, 70, 90, 92, 143, 189 Photo: Andrew Mohamed.</p>	
<p>Davids, Jennifer *1945 p.124, 249f</p>	<p>No picture found</p>
<p>de Kok, Ingrid *1951 p. 7f, 24f, 58, 63f, 67f, 70, 80f, 125-135, 140, 179f, 236, 240 Photo: Isabelle Vogt. SPIER Poetry Festival. 2007.</p>	

<p>de Villiers, Phillipa Yaa *19?? p. 190 Photo: Isabelle Vogt. Cape Town Book Fair. 2007.</p>	
<p>Dike, Fatima *19?? Photo: Perkins (1999: 23).</p>	
<p>Dixon, Isobel *1969 p. 66, 218-222 Photo: <http://www.Poetryinternationalweb.org/cwolkmigratefiles/south africa.poetryinternational.org/Dixon.jpg>.</p>	
<p>Dowling, Finuala *1962 p 7, 63-66, 70, 172, 179, 189f, 203-206, 231, 250, 253, 255f Photo: IsabelleVogt 2006. Poetry Africa Festival 2006.</p>	
<p>Erfort, Chantel *19?? p. 195 Photo: http://www.oulitnet.co.za/toast/images/poetry8.jpg</p>	
<p>Fahrenfort, Pat *1944 p. 232 Photo: Barry, Ndlovu and Khan (2002: 54).</p>	

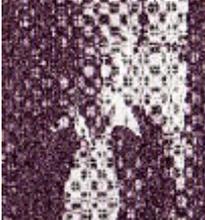
Alphabetical list of South African women writers

<p>Ferrus, Diana *1953</p> <p>p. 232</p> <p>Photo: <http://www.sois.uwm.edu/afrikaans/culture/images/diana_ferrus.png>. 2003.</p>	
<p>Fester, Gertrude *1952</p> <p>p. 7, 232, 261-263</p> <p>Photo: <http://ipsnews.net/africa/focus/countdown/gertrudefester_sm.jpg>.</p>	
<p>Gordimer, Nadine *1923</p> <p>p. 3, 44, 107-109, 179</p> <p>Photo: George Hallett. <i>Portraits of African Writers</i>. No pagination.</p>	
<p>Greeff, Lucille *1976</p> <p>p. 71</p> <p>Photo: Nic Percival.</p>	
<p>Head, Bessie *1937-1986</p> <p>p. 99, 107, 109, 150, 197</p> <p>Photo: Berlin 1979. George Hallett. <i>Portraits of African Writers</i>. No pag.</p>	
<p>Heeger, Khadija *1966</p> <p>p. 7, 172, 258</p> <p>Photo: Isabelle Vogt. World Poetry Day, Cape Town 2007.</p>	
<p>Higgs, Colleen *1962</p> <p>p. 7, 64f, 70, 183</p> <p>Photo: <http://farm4.static.flickr.com/3279/2580730673_4fef371a2f.jpg?v=0></p>	

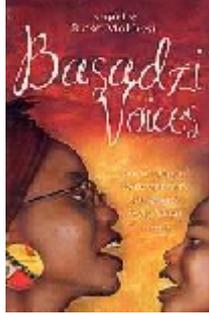
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<p>Jansen, Beverly *19?? p. 169, 232, 245 Photo: Barry, Ndlovu and Khan (2002: 114).</p>	
<p>Jenkins, Myesha *1984 in California, USA Photo: 2005 on the blurb of her anthology of poetry <i>Breaking the surface</i>.</p>	
<p>Johnson, Sarah *1980 p. 30 Photo: 2004 on the blurb of her collection of poetry <i>personae</i>.</p>	
<p>Jonker, Ingrid *1933-1965 p. 6, 66, 105, 107, 109f Photo: <http://www.unitalfilms.com/nss-folder/siteimages/INGRID.jpg></p>	
<p>Khan, Deela *1952 p. 7, 153f, 232, 248, 250 Photo: Barry, Ndlovu and Khan (2002: 135).</p>	
<p>Khunyeli, Neiloe *19?? p. 157 Photo: Mokhosi (2006: 83).</p>	
<p>Krog, Antjie *1952 p. 7, 14, 24, 26, 30, 60, 63-70, 85, 107, 110, 119, 179, 181, 184, 187, 189, 195, 222, 250, 257, 270 Photo: Isabelle Vogt. Cape Town Book Fair. 2007.</p>	

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<p>Malange, Nise *1960 p. 73, 137 Photo: IsabelleVogt 2006. Poetry Africa Festival 2006.</p>	
<p>Mashile, Lebogang *1979 p. 7, 14, 55, 65-70, 78, 155-158, 189, 214f, 222f, 239-241 Photo : Isabelle Vogt. Franschoek Literary Festival 2007.</p>	
<p>McGrane, Michelle *1974 p. 7, 11, 60, 62, 67, 70, 80, 121, 211-215, 257, 264 Photo: <http://www.oulitnet.co.za/youngwriters/images/michelle_mcgrane.jpg></p>	
<p>Metelerkamp, Joan *1956 p. 62-65, 188, 203f Photo: Peter Metelerkamp 2000.</p>	
<p>Mhlophe, Gcina *1959 p. 7, 70, 190, 265 Photo: 2006 Poetry Africa Durban Flyer.</p>	
<p>Miller, Ruth *1919-1969 p. 6, 96, 107-111, 192</p>	<p align="center">No picture found</p>
<p>Müller, Petra, Afrikaans Poet Photo: 2006 on the blurb of her anthology of poetry <i>night crossing</i>.</p>	

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<p>Murray, Sally-Ann *1961 p. 7, 62, 65f, 70, 94, 189, 201-203 Photo: IsabelleVogt 2006. Poetry Africa Festival 2006.</p>	
<p>Millin, Sarah Gertrude *1889-1968 p. 27, 37, 94, 107f, 144 Photo: On the blurb of <i>The Coming of the Lord</i>.</p>	
<p>Mokhosi, Rose *1979 p. 7, 157f Photo: 2006 on the blurb of her anthology of poetry <i>Basadzi Voices</i>.</p>	
<p>Ndlovu, Malika *1971 p. 5-7, 30-33, 48, 51-55, 60, 65, 67, 70, 105, 112-122, 125, 134-136, 142-152, 159-172, 174, 176, 178, 195f, 198-200, 206-211, 217-236, 240, 246-250, 259f, 268 Photo: IsabelleVogt 2004. Cape Town.</p>	
<p>Pillay, Maganthrie *1971 p. 7, 211-215, 232, 256 Photo: Barry, Ndlovu and Khan (2002: 205).</p>	
<p>Press, Karen *1956 p. 14, 58, 63f, 82, 85f, 180, 184-187, 222 Photo: George Hallett. <i>Portraits of African Writers</i>. No pagination.</p>	
<p>Raizenberg, Carmen Myles *1961 p. 232 Photo: Barry, Ndlovu and Khan (2002: 195).</p>	

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<p>Robertson, Heather *1964</p> <p>Photo: 1991 on the blurb of her collection of poetry <i>Under the Sun</i>.</p>	
<p>Schreiner, Olive *1855-1920</p> <p>p. 68, 197f</p> <p>Photo: <http://farm4.static.flickr.com/3281/2417566515_10898d35ca.jpg?v=0>.</p>	
<p>Seane, Warona *1974</p> <p>p. 232</p> <p>Photo: Barry, Ndlovu and Khan (2002: 228).</p>	
<p>Smallberg, Mavis *19??</p> <p>p. 232</p> <p>Photo: Barry, Ndlovu and Khan (2002: 239).</p>	
<p>Thomas, Gladys *1944</p> <p>p. 12, 18, 44, 99, 101, 107, 110, 117, 123-125, 138, 150</p> <p>Photo: <http://farm3.static.flickr.com/2247/2097365861_0310408056.jpg>.</p>	
<p>Tlali, Miriam *1933</p> <p>p. 191</p> <p>Photo: <http://farm1.static.flickr.com/171/440613750_e699903a5e.jpg?v=0></p>	
<p>Tsehlana, Halejoetse *1969</p> <p>p. 33, 232, 265</p> <p>Photo: 2006 on the blurb of her collection of poetry <i>Poems and Songs from the Mire</i>.</p>	

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<p>Tyoda, Pumeza *19?? p. 157f Photo: Mokhosi (2006: 85).</p>	
<p>van Niekerk, Marlene *1954 p. 68 Photo: <http://www.dieburger.com/Photos/DieBurgerMultimedia/Web/RichContents/Photos/2007-04-13/Marlene_Van_Niekerk_nuus_wk--297x250.jpg>.</p>	
<p>Warren, Crystal *1969 p. 7, 70, 216, 257 Photo: <http://schoolfest.foundation.org.za/nsf/2004/images/warren.jpg>.</p>	
<p>WEAVE p. 6, 119-121, 153, 211, 231- 238, 240, 243, 264 Photo: <http://wworld.org/about/affiliates/weave.htm>.</p>	
<p>Wicomb, Zoë *1948 p. 53, 55f Photo: <http://farm1.static.flickr.com/185/397515513_a137ccddf0_s.jpg>.</p>	
<p>Williams, Weeam *1977 p. 7, 232, 242f Photo: Barry, Ndlovu and Khan (2002: 284).</p>	
<p>Xaba, Makhosazana (Xhosi) *1957 p. 7, 44, 65, 88f, 91f, 143, 244, 250-253 Photo: Isabelle Vogt. Poetry Africa Festival, Durban 2006.</p>	

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The collections of poetry in this bibliography are divided into those written by women and those written by men. This also makes research easier.

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Schulbildung

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Studium

WS 00/01	Aufnahme des Studiums für das Lehramt an Realschulen mit den Fächern Musik (Schwerpunktfach Gesang) an der Hochschule für Musik und Theater und Englisch an der Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in München, Ergänzungsfach Französisch Paralleles Magisterstudium mit den Fächern Englische Literaturwissenschaft, Fachdidaktik und Musikpädagogik
2001-2002	Studienbegleitende Ausbildung zur Kulturmanagerin in München, am 7. Juli 2002 erfolgreich abgeschlossen
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Dez. 2004	Staatsexamen in Englisch und Musik (LMU und HfMuT München)
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Referendariat

2008- 2009	Referendariat an der Mädchenschule St. Klara in Rottenburg am Neckar, danach, ab Schuljahr 2009/2010, Wechsel an die Geschwister-Scholl-Schule in Tübingen
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Zusätzliches Engagement.

2000-2005 Semestersprecherin; 2005-2007 KHG Think-Tank (LMU)
2008-2009 Päd-Gruppensprecherin am Lehrer-Seminar Reutlingen

Postgraduiertenstudium

- SS 2005 Studium der Humanmedizin und Theologie in Tübingen
- WS 05/06 Aufnahme eines Promotionsstudiums an der LMU München über südafrikanische Literatur der Post-Apartheid
2006 Wechsel von Prof. Dr. Horst Zander zu Prof. Dr. Helge Nowak
- SS 2007 Forschungsaufenthalt in Kapstadt, Südafrika
Praktikum am Goethe-Zentrum in Kapstadt, Südafrika
- WS 2007 Erhalt des Zertifikats „Fernstudienprogramm Deutsch unterrichten“ als Abschluss des Fernstudiums „Deutsch als Fremdsprache“, einer Kooperation des Goethe-Instituts und der LMU München.
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Stipendien

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- 2006-2008 Stipendiatin der Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung, Sitz in Potsdam
- 2007-2009 „LMU excellence“ – Mentoring für Nachwuchswissenschaftlerinnen

Praktika und Auslandsaufenthalte

- 2000 / 2002 / 2004 Moderatorin und ViP-Hostess während der 1. Chorolympiade 2000 in Linz, Österreich, der 2. Chorolympiade 2002 in Busan, Südkorea, sowie der 3. Chorolympiade 2004 in Bremen: Betreuung der Politiker, Ehrengäste, Jury, Chorleiter, Chöre... Mitarbeit im Protokollbüro
- März 2001 / 2002 Zwei dreiwöchige Blockpraktika an Münchner Realschulen
- April 2001 Praktikum an einer katholischen Mädchenschule in London
- Sommer 2001 Praktikum bei Meridian Records in London: Übersetzertätigkeiten, Verwaltung, Promotion, etc.
- August 2002 Teilnahme an den Intern. Schulmusikwochen in Salzburg
- Juli 2002 / 2003 Gruppenleiterin an einer Sprachschule in Torquay, England
- WS 02/03 Studienbegl. Praktikum an einer Realschule in München
- SS 2003 Freiwillige Mitarbeit in einem Kinderheim in Kapstadt (www.SHAWCO.org)
- WS 04/05 Werksstudentin bei Gemino in München: u.a. Übersetzung
- Februar-April 2005 Sechswöchiges Krankenpflegedienstpraktikum im Red Cross Children's Hospital in Kapstadt, Südafrika
- Aug-Oktober 2005 Freiwillige Betreuung HIV/AIDS- und krebskranker Kinder im RCC Hospital in Kapstadt (www.friendsofthechildrens hospital.co.za), sowie Recherche für die Doktorarbeit
- März-April 2006 Recherche am NELM (National English Literary Museum) in Grahamstown und Gast bei Professor Michael Chapman an der University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban, Südafrika
- September 2006 Praktikum bei Missio München im Monat der Weltmission
- Oktober 2006 Teilnahme am Poetry Africa Festival in Durban, Südafrika
- Jan-Juni 2007 Praktikum am Goethe-Zentrum in Kapstadt, u.a. Betreuung des Self-Study-Zentrums und einer Foto-Ausstellung

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