

The copyright of this thesis vests in the author. No quotation from it or information derived from it is to be published without full acknowledgement of the source. The thesis is to be used for private study or non-commercial research purposes only.

Published by the University of Cape Town (UCT) in terms of the non-exclusive license granted to UCT by the author.

**Thinking out of the Box: A Critical Interrogation of Selected Essays in
Njabulo Ndebele's *Fine Lines from the Box*. (2007)**

Mxolisi Malimela

MLMMXO002

A minor dissertation submitted in *partial fulfillment* of the requirements for the award
of the degree of Masters of Philosophy in African Studies

Faculty of the Humanities

University of Cape Town

2012

COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	2
Dedication	3
Abstract	4
Chapter 1	6
<i>Introduction</i>	
Chapter 2	18
<i>Literature Review</i>	
Chapter 3	38
<i>“Liberation and the Crisis of Culture”: Ndebele on the Inclusive Post-apartheid National Culture</i>	
Chapter 4	53
<i>Njabulo Ndebele on the Role of Universities in Effecting a new Inclusive National Culture</i>	
Conclusion	62
Bibliography	64

Acknowledgements

I would like to convey my deepest gratitude to my supervisor Associate Professor Harry Garuba. Many thanks for your support and patience. I am also grateful for your support in securing funding for my post-graduate studies.

Thank you to the Centre for African Studies (CAS) for giving me the time and space to explore the study of Africa in a different way. Thank you to Associate Professor Nick Shepherd for presenting me with an opportunity to study overseas. Thank you to Ms Lillian Jacobs for her dedication and kind assistance.

Words alone are not enough to express my heartfelt appreciation for the invaluable support, patience and resilience of my entire family. To my uncle Perfect Malimela and aunt Azoline Malimela: your unconditional support remains constant and provides me with strength. To Lethukuthula, Langelihle and Khanyisile Malimela, thank you for being you: I love you guys!

Thank you also to all my friends, especially Sphiwe Ndlovu for his words of encouragement.

Lastly, this study was made possible by the generous funds from the National Research Foundation (NRF).

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my mother Gugulethu Malimela, and to the memory of my late grandparents: Smangele Audrey Malimela and Zwelabelungu Charles Malimela.

University of Cape Town

ABSTRACT

This research paper aims to critically interrogate Njabulo Ndebele's reflections in the collection of essays, entitled, *Fine Lines from the Box* (2007). The paper engages with Ndebele's argument that the post-apartheid South African transformation agenda would be futile if it failed to achieve a new and inclusive South African national culture. Thus, through an examination of selected essays from the collection, this mini-dissertation explores the manner in which he formulates the argument that post-apartheid national culture ought to be rooted on shared values and reflect the ideals of South Africa's negotiated democratic dispensation. This argument is important not only within the context of South Africa's negotiated settlement and Nelson Mandela's promotion of reconciliation but also against the background of the binarisms that characterised the anti-apartheid struggle and the discourses that underpinned it.

The methodical approach adopted in the paper involves taking selected essays in Ndebele's *Fine Lines from the Box* (2007) and using them to open up a critical inquiry into the post-apartheid South African social reality. The evidence used to support my arguments and those of Ndebele have been collected via an exploratory interdisciplinary approach. Therefore, whilst I critically engage Ndebele's reflections concerning post-apartheid South Africa's social reality, I also look at African scholars and thinkers whose work critically engages both Ndebele's ideas as well as his representation of the post-apartheid social environment. My aim is to seek an Africa formulated solution to a post-colonial/apartheid African social experience.

Chapter 2 is a literature review of critical analysis of Ndebele's critical work during the last three to four decades. This chapter grapples with scholars of Njabulo Ndebele's critical work and aims to highlight a gap with regards to Ndebele's reflections in post-apartheid South Africa. Chapter 3 is a close critical inquiry into Ndebele's reflections about a need for an inclusive national culture in post-apartheid South Africa. This chapter will critically examine Ndebele's assertion that to move South Africa forward would require that the citizens discover shared cultural values and a common national identity. Selected essays for critical examination in this chapter include "Liberation and the Crisis of Culture", as well as the "Ties that Bind". Key to this critical inquiry is the issue concerning the voice of the 'ordinary' in processing a new post-apartheid national culture. In this case, Ndebele suggests that the new culture must be influenced from below and be rooted on shared values of the ordinary people, rather than a plethora of elitist and hegemonic Euro-American cultural values and preferences, filtering down from the top. Chapter 4 serves as a critical interrogation of Ndebele's

view on the role of universities in a post-apartheid South African social landscape. Primary essays selected for critical analysis include “The ‘Black’ Agenda and South Africa’s Universities”, “Good morning, South Africa”, “Reaching out to the World” and “Higher Education and a New World Order”. This chapter seeks to explore Njabulo Ndebele’s suggestion in the essay, “The ‘Black’ Agenda and South Africa’s Universities”, that South African universities must be transformed into institutions that help to consolidate and deepen the ‘black interest in the national life of South Africa. This will be followed by a conclusion.

University of Cape Town

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This research paper aims to critically interrogate selected essays in Njabulo Ndebele's reflections collected in, *Fine Lines from the Box* (2007). The paper engages with Ndebele's argument that the post-apartheid South African transformation agenda would be futile if it failed to achieve a new and inclusive South African national culture. Thus, through an examination of selected essays from the collection, this mini-dissertation explores the manner in which he formulates the argument that post-apartheid national culture ought to be rooted on shared values and reflect the ideals of South Africa's negotiated democratic dispensation. This argument is important not only within the context of South Africa's negotiated settlement and Nelson Mandela's promotion of reconciliation but also against the background of the binarisms that characterised the anti-apartheid struggle and the discourses that underpinned it.

Since 1972, Professor Njabulo Ndebele has been actively involved in the production of socio-cultural knowledge in Africa through his literary and cultural works.¹ For many centuries, the African continent, and its people have been marginalised; they have been portrayed as incapable of producing social knowledge that not only describes their social reality but also shows immense understanding of the cultural, economic, political challenges within their social environment at a given time and space. Not many would dispute the fact that Africa's social reality has for many decades been represented through a European-American perspective. This is a result of the impact of the hegemonic systems of imperialism and colonialism on the African continent.

It is against this background that this paper seeks an alternative critical understanding of the social challenges in one of Africa's youngest democratic nation-states, namely South Africa:- an understanding that is informed by an African intellectual whose work is primarily influenced by indigenous intellectual and thought traditions that advocate for African solutions to African social challenges. Such solutions, I argue, should aim to benefit Africans, first and foremost, the formerly marginalised as result of the continent's colonial history, as well as apartheid in South Africa. In addition, the solutions ought to be sensitive and relevant to our contemporary, globalising social environment. Thus, this paper is an attempt to open silences and close gaps left by the legacy of apartheid and colonialism in post-apartheid South Africa. Ndebele is certainly an important voice in our attempts to better understand the emerging trends in post-apartheid social-cultural and literary discourses. In this respect, reading Ndebele reflections in *Fine Lines from the box* (2007) exposed

¹ Professor Njabulo Ndebele's ground-breaking essays, titled, "Black Development" was first published in 1972.

me to his relentless intellectual commitment – well beyond apartheid in South Africa - to the ongoing struggle for an inclusive national culture in post-apartheid South Africa. An inclusive national culture that is rooted on shared cultural values and a common national identity, and biased towards the social demands of the formerly oppressed.

Ndebele's reflections in *Fine Lines from the Box* (2007) can be read as a timely response to recent calls by acclaimed African thinkers that it is Africans themselves that can move the continent forward. In this respect, for instance, Mahmood Mamdani (1999) has suggested that Africa needs an "Africa-focused intelligentsia"² in order to carry forward the agenda for change needed for Africa's renaissance generally, and for South Africa's reconciliation and nation-building efforts to succeed. Equally pertinent, is Ayi Kwei Armah's (2010) assertion that the journey to Africa's 'true' liberation will be taken by "persons and groups able, from the start, to see themselves as Africans, to think, to plan, to work steadily toward their goal as Africans, and in general, to live, not just to talk, as Africans."³

Ndebele's reflections serve as a testament that the continent possesses a rich history of social knowledge and understanding, and accordingly, such knowledge should be fully endorsed by institutions of knowledge and cultural production in post-apartheid South Africa and the continent generally. He has been actively involved in African intellectual and thought traditions for more than four decades. He fully belongs in the list of internationally acclaimed African intellectuals whose devotion to the pursuit of cultural and social development in Africa is incontestable. In South Africa these African intellectuals include Es'kia Mphahlele, Nardine Gordimer, Peter Abrahams, Mazisi Kunene, and H.I.E. Dhlomo among others. For instance, Dhlomo is today recognised for his contribution to the "New African Movement"⁴ of the 20th century that gave rise to African modernity and the subsequent struggle against colonialism and apartheid. Ndebele's critical essays are a further contribution to the modernisation of the 'New African' that was central to the project

² Mahmood Mamdani. "There Can Be No African Renaissance without an Africa-focused Intelligentsia." *African Renaissance: The New Struggle*, (ed) William Magalepuru Makgoba. Sandton: Mafube, (1999).

³ Ayi Kwei Armah. "Remembering the Dismembered Continent (2)." *New African Online Magazine* (March, 2010) <http://www.africasia.com/newafrican/na.php?ID=2719> (accessed on 21 January 2011).

⁴ According to Ntongela Masilela, the 'New African Movement' was Black South Africa's response to white hegemony and a repressive regime towards Black people (Africans in particular) in South Africa during the late 19th and early 20th Centuries. This movement was envisioned by Pixley ka Isaka Seme in 1904 and led to the formation of the South African Natives National Congress (later ANC) in 1912. Under Seme's aegis, it is argued that these two historical movements were mutually inseparable, in that the former was the cultural expression of the latter and the latter was the driving political force of the former. Ntongela suggests that there was great synergy between the two movements in the development of South Africa's struggle for liberation which was ultimately achieved in April 1994. Following the banning of all political movements in SA in 1960, the New African Movement also disbanded with some of its major role players exiting into exile. In Ntongela Masilela. "The Historical and Literary Moment of Njabulo Ndebele." *English in Africa*. 1(36) (May 2009): pp17.

of the New African Movement.⁵ Upon the disintegration of the New African Movement, following the tightening of repressive laws by the South African government early in the 1960s - as well as the intellectual and leadership vacuum that engrossed the struggle for liberation - it was writer-intellectuals such as Njabulo Ndebele, Oswald Mtshali, Mongane Serote and others who ensured that African social issues remained part of the black South African literary and cultural tradition. Thus, they kept black social issues alive in South African cultural and political discourses during apartheid.

The methodical approach adopted in the paper involves taking the work of Ndebele in *Fine Lines from the Box* (2007) and using it to open up a critical inquiry into a post-apartheid South African social reality. The evidence used to support my arguments and those of Ndebele have been collected via an exploratory interdisciplinary approach. According to Jeffrey Wasserstrom (2006) this interdisciplinary approach is commonly used by scholars whose research often demands that they borrow material “from other fields on occasion to support their claims.”⁶ The reason for doing so in this paper is based on the fact that African scholars and other thinkers, whose research interests and focus is centred on African knowledge production, more often than not, “borrow” from varying academic and disciplinary backgrounds. In addition, the study of Africa demands that one breaks disciplinary barriers in order to gain a broader understanding of socio-cultural, political and economic challenges in the continent within a given time and space.⁷

Therefore, whilst I critically engage Ndebele on his reflections regarding post-apartheid South Africa’s social reality, I also look at African scholars and thinkers whose work critically engages both Ndebele’s ideas as well as his representation of the post-apartheid social environment. I do this with the intention to seek an Africa formulated solution to a post-colonial/apartheid African social experience. The paper, further appropriates what Professor Jimi Adesina (2008) has referred to as an “on-going twinned project of relentless combating of alterity and extroversion and affirmation of endogeny,”⁸ in the study of post-colonial Africa and its societies. Therefore, the paper is not a literary investigation of Ndebele’s work; instead, I use his work to critically examine post-apartheid South African social reality.

⁵ Ntongela, Masilela. “The Historical and Literary Moment of Njabulo Ndebele.” *English in Africa*, 1(36) (May 2009): pp17.

⁶ Wasserstrom, Jeffrey. “Expanding on the I-Word.” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 52 (20) B5, (2006), p3.

⁷ Paul Zeleza. “Introduction.” *The Study of Africa Volume 1: Disciplinary and Interdisciplinary Encounter*. Dakar: Codesria Book Series, (2006/7).

⁸ Jimi Asedina. “Archie Mafeje and the Pursuit of Endogeny: Against Alterity and Extroversion.” *Africa Development*, Vol. XXXIII. No. 4, (2008), p134.

In addition, all essays collected in *Fine Lines from the Box* (2007), have been closely studied, however, not all of them will be closely interrogated in this paper. Whilst the essays I have not focused upon do influence certain aspects of the thesis; all cited essays cohere around the themes I dwell upon in this critical inquiry. In addition, the paper will make references to Ndebele's first collection of essays, titled, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (1991) during the literature review of his work in chapter two. This will be further supported by a body of critical analysis of Ndebele's work in the last three to four decades. It is important to emphasize that particular focus will be on critical analysis of his post-apartheid reflections. Any citation of essays from the collection *Rediscovery of the Ordinary* (1991) will be within the context of the recurring themes in *Fine Lines from the Box* (2007) and how they continuously feature in contemporary and post-apartheid social life.

It should by now be common sense that African intellectuals and scholars – some of them educated at Western academic institutions – are not entirely taken in by Euro-American schools of thought. This refers to their understanding of the world in general and Africa in particular, as they think and reflect on the social reality within their own communities, social classes and cultural groups. The research done for this paper strongly reveals the extent to which Ndebele's work has been influenced by the 'Sopiatown intellectual' tradition he discovered in his father's garage, for example. However, the research has exposed me to Ndebele's own social experiences during his upbringing in apartheid South Africa. The literature he discovered in his father's home garage had an immense influence to his understanding of how African literature could be a useful tool for critical debates and intellectual discussions that seek solutions to South Africa's repressive social environment.

Ndebele's reflections in the collection, is firmly embedded in what is now commonly referred to as the radical anti-colonial/apartheid intellectual traditions. Furthermore, it positions Ndebele within the context of the rise of the 'New African Movement' that gave birth to the 'New African' Intellectual in South Africa during apartheid. Lately, this movement has taken on a new notion of the "public intellectual that came into being along with the democratic majority rule"⁹ in post-apartheid South Africa.

In *Fine Lines from the Box* (2007), Njabulo Ndebele reflects on issues central to a changing political and cultural environment as well as a society undergoing transformation and seeking reconciliation. Ntongela Masilela's (2009) suggests that the essays are a "remarkable appraisal of

⁹ Ntongela Masilela. "The Historical and Literary Moment of Njabulo Ndebele." *English in Africa*, 1(36) (2009), p18.

the political consequences of a democratic culture still in its formative stages.”¹⁰ Njabulo Ndebele is now a recognised public intellectual, and it is in that capacity that this research paper interrogates his essays as he reflects on post-apartheid South African social reality.

The rest of this chapter seeks to locate the intellectual tradition in which Njabulo Ndebele’s thought is positioned. The remaining chapters will proceed as follows: Chapter 2 is a literature review of critical analysis of Ndebele’s critical work during the last three to four decades. Chapter 3 is a close critical inquiry into Ndebele’s reflections about a need for an inclusive national culture in post-apartheid South Africa. This chapter will critically examine Ndebele’s assertion that to move South Africa forward would require that the citizens discover shared cultural values and a common national identity. Key to this critical inquiry is the issue concerning the voice of the ‘ordinary’ in processing a new post-apartheid national culture. In this case, Ndebele suggests that the new culture must be influenced from below and be rooted on shared values of the ordinary people, rather than a plethora of elitist and hegemonic Euro-American cultural values and preferences, filtering down from the top.

Chapter 4 serves as a critical interrogation of Ndebele’s view on the role of universities in a post-apartheid South African social landscape. As a former Vice-Chancellor at a Historically Black University (HBU) and again at a Historically White University (HWU), Njabulo Ndebele is well positioned to reflect on the role South African universities. Ndebele argues that universities can play a role in effecting ideals of the nation’s transformation agenda, in deepening democratic values, and building a non-racial, multi-cultural society rooted on a shared new national culture and common values. This chapter seeks to explore Ndebele’s view that universities in South Africa must be sensitive to their local social needs, just as well as they strive for relevance to contemporary global challenges. Chapter five is the conclusion.

Locating Ndebele’s Intellectual Tradition

Born into a black middle-class family in the South African township of Charterston, Nigel, in 1948, Professor Njabulo Ndebele attended a high school in Swaziland, so that he could escape the inferior education reserved only for African natives during apartheid. In an interview on his work, recorded in Roma, in 1986, Ndebele reveals that, “many of [us] had been taken there so that we could escape

¹⁰Ibid, p18.

from the hideous system of Bantu Education in South Africa.”¹¹ He recalls that the parents of many of the students at the school “easily made up an impressive list of who’s who in the black political and cultural leadership in South Africa in the fifties and sixties.”¹² It was during his years there as a pupil that Ndebele began writing; and after completing high school, he returned to South Africa for two years before going to study at the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland (UBLS). During the two years he spent in South Africa before going to university after finishing his Matric, he “began to understand with greater clarity the problems of South Africa: the mass resettlements, the intricacies of the pass laws, township life with its culture of shebeens, poverty, skin-lightening creams, the patronage politics of Township Advisory Boards (TAB), etc.”¹³ This cultural experience influenced Ndebele’s renewed worldview and bolstered his interest in the study of the Humanities (he later went on to major in Philosophy and English Literature).

Whilst at UBLS, Ndebele was introduced to Africa’s acclaimed literary and cultural writers and scholars. The English Department, according to Ndebele, was keenly interested in the literary and cultural debates that took place at the time in Eastern and Western universities concerning the role of African Literatures and Cultures in Africa. This development exposed Ndebele to scholarly debates, ideas and pan-Africanist thought, centred mainly on decolonisation in Africa. As he puts it, “[we] studied a fair share of the major African writers on the syllabus ... Soyinka, Achebe, Ngugi, Armah, Camara Laye, Elechi Amadi, J. P. Clark – all those who were major figures. They were required readings ... They were not just an exotic optional sideline.”¹⁴ This intensive study of African literature at university certainly had an influence on his intellectual growth. Later on as a postgraduate and academic, he managed to establish relations with South African writers such as Mongane Wally Serote, Mbulelo Mzamane, Nadine Gordimer, Mafika Gwala, Stephen Gray and Oswald Mtshali, among others. These figures went on to pose as a new group of African public intellectuals in the years preceding South Africa’s democratic era. Ndebele has highlighted meeting Es’kia Mphahlele as a very important period in his intellectual development as he had long admired¹⁵ Mphahlele’s literary and scholarly work.

In the preface to *Fine Lines from the Box* (2007), Ndebele recalls a fascinating moment in his father’s garage where he discovered “the intellectual tradition of banned Sophiatown Renaissance

¹¹ Interview with Njabulo Ndebele (Recorded in Roma on 19 August 1986) published in *Bayreuth: African Studies Series*. Ed. Bernth Lindfors. p42.

¹² Ibid, p42.

¹³ Ibid, p44.

¹⁴ Ibid, p45.

¹⁵ Ibid, p48.

writers.”¹⁶ Stashed in a box banned books written by Ezekiel Mphahlele, Peter Abrahams, Todd Matshikiza¹⁷ and others. He recalls that “after putting the books back, dangerously placing the banned books at the top for easy access, I went back into the house and began to read *Down Second Avenue*. Two days later, I read *Blame Me on History*. I still remember clearly the thrill of reading these two books and beginning to discuss them with myself. How different they were from each other, conveying different aspects of the same overriding political and social reality!”¹⁸ This was a turning point in Ndebele’s intellectual development. These books influenced his thinking and understanding of the socio-cultural, political and economic environment of the oppressed in South Africa at the time. Ndebele writes that:

It struck [me] then that no matter how much black people suffered under apartheid, they did not experience oppression in the same way. They did not evoke the pain of oppression in the same way. It struck [me] then that oppressed people were far more complex than the collective suffering that sought to reduce them to a single state of pain. This has been a consistent interest of mine: thinking about South Africa ... these books spoke to [me] with a directness I had not encountered in many school books about South Africa. For the first time I began to read books that spoke directly to me about the forbidden subject of white people’s oppression of blacks and the latter’s resistance to it.¹⁹

The major influence in Ndebele’s literary, historical, and cultural “versatile imagination”²⁰, of course goes far beyond the literature he discovered in his father’s garage. Such a discovery not only propelled him to restore “his imagination and historical consciousness with the cultural heritage that stretched from Sol Plaatje to Mphahlele”; it also ensured that Ndebele was inserted into the historical memory of the ‘New African’ Movement. He continues to contribute vast amounts of socio-cultural and political insight in his role as a public intellectual and uses this platform carefully to promote national reconciliation and social cohesion in post-apartheid South Africa.

Accordingly, Sam Thlalo Radithlalo’s (2007) afterword in *Fine Lines from the Box* (2007) moves to curtail any misconceptions about Ndebele’s intellectual influences. Radithlalo challenges the notion

¹⁶ Ntongela Masilela. “The Historical and Literary Moment of Njabulo Ndebele.” *English in Africa*. 1(36) (May 2009), p19.

¹⁷ Njabulo Ndebele. “Preface.” *Fine Lines from the Box*. Houghton: Umuzi. (2007), p9.

¹⁸ Ibid, p9.

¹⁹ Ibid, p10.

²⁰ Ntongela Masilela. “The Historical and Literary Moment of Njabulo Ndebele.” *English in Africa*. 1(36) (2009), p25.

of the “hegemonic Eurocentric school of criticism of African literature”²¹ that seems determined to convince everyone that the “shaping of the African intellect almost always emanates from Europe.”²² This fallacy acts as a deliberate attempt to undermine and repress all historical and critical thinking that originated in Africa pre-colonialism, during and after colonialism. Radithlalo does well in debunking this fallacy on the part of Ndebele’s influences. Ndebele’s education did introduce him to many acclaimed African scholars and thinkers, and subsequently to African intellectual traditions of thought at the time. This was at the time when African intellectuals were at the receiving end of “an era in which the deflated self-concept of black people was being seriously challenged all over Africa A time when Chinua Achebe, Mphahlele and other writers gave meaning to what it means to be African.”²³ Radithlalo goes on to explain that:

A cursory look at any academic text of the time concerning identity politics, attests to the considerable and efflorescent engagement of black people in self-definition. Ndebele was bound to be affected by this ferment in an era renowned for the ebullience of Kwame Ture, the fiery energy of Malcolm X, the intellectual clarity of Patrice Lumumba, the launching and stained progression of the Second Chimurenga, the liberation of Kenya as result of the spectre of the Mau-Mau revolutionary activity, the wider dissemination of the lessons of Aime Cesaire, Kwame Nkrumah, and Amilcar Cabral, the violent self-assertion of the Black Panther movement which gave direct impetus to the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM).²⁴

It is clear therefore that, in his early years as an aspiring African intellectual, Ndebele was poised to emulate the African literary and cultural foundations laid down by the proponents of the tradition of black radical intellectualism that “began in the 1880s in the then Cape Colony.”²⁵ Radithlalo suggests that Ndebele should be seen as “following this long line of intellectual descendants of this radical black intellectual tradition, precisely because he profoundly appreciates the critical interventions of the intellect in the remaking of the body politic.”²⁶ He goes on to argue that “to blithely ignore the decades of the 1960s in black politics, is to do Ndebele’s intellectual development an enormous disservice in favour of ‘repackaging’ his intellect. It comes across almost as an imperative to control.”²⁷

²¹ Njabulo Ndebele. “Redefining Relevance.” *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: South African Literature and Culture*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. (1994). p46.

²² Sam Radithlalo. “Assembling the Broken Gourds: an appreciation.” *Fine Lines from the Box*. Houghton: Umuzi. (2007), p260.

²³ Ibid, p261.

²⁴ Ibid, p261.

²⁵ Ibid, p262.

²⁶ Ibid, p262.

²⁷ Ibid, p262.

Since the dawn of democracy in South Africa in 1994, many public commentators in the country have lamented what they regard as a shortage of intellectual debate aimed at providing clarity and curbing anxiety among the former oppressed and the nation in general. As a public intellectual, Ndebele has actively participated in the struggle to emancipate his people from an oppressive social environment. Ndebele has wittingly fulfilled the role that is demanded of intellectuals and thinkers for the good of their social group, class and/or community, at a given time and space. Antonio Gramsci's (1997) most prominent collections of writings offer a distinct definition of an intellectual. Gramsci suggests that there are two types of intellectuals, namely, an 'organic' and a 'traditional' intellectual:

The 'traditional' professional intellectuals, literary, scientific and so on, whose position in the interstices of society has a certain inter-class aura about it but derives ultimately from past and present class formations. The 'organic' intellectuals are the thinking and organising element of a particular fundamental social class. These organic intellectuals are distinguished less by their profession, which may be any job characteristic of their class, than by their function in directing ideas and aspirations of the class to which they organically belong.²⁸

For Gramsci, the view that intellectuals exist in a unique social level which is independent of class is not accurate. Gramsci situates intellectuals within the network of social relations that define the structure of society. According to Gramsci, an organic intellectual plays a key role in the development of his/her social class. This he or she does by actively marshalling for social change, aimed at providing answers and insight for the benefit of his/her social class/group and/or community. Ndebele's literary public interventions in South African debates locate him as an organic intellectual, as defined by Gramsci.

Radithlalo makes a compelling remark as he locates Ndebele within the organic intellectual fold:

When [I] place Ndebele in this schema, it is less for where he is situated than for his *identification*²⁹ with the class origins of those with a history of three hundred and fifty years of colonialism and apartheid and what the evolution of South African society holds for them and the emerging privileged class within them. This does not exclude those communities who came here as

²⁸ Antonio Gramsci. "Problems of History and Culture: The Intellectuals." *Selections from Prison Notebooks*. Lawrence & Wishart: London. (1971), p3.

²⁹ Sam Radithlalo's emphasis. p263.

settler minorities – rather, this vision places an onus on those communities to the development of the majority as a priority that will enable every to flourish in a constitutional democracy.³⁰

Furthermore, Ndebele, through his use of language in his reflective essays, places himself within and among the ordinary people of South Africa. he writes that it is out of “[our] hunger for knowledge; [our] hunger for constructive social discussion; [our] hunger for the ultimate right: the right to determine the future with our own minds and with our hands;”³¹ as well as to “encourage the broad masses to participate in the process of becoming active in the making of their own history, to (re)discover themselves in order to understand their historic mission in their exalted emancipation, thereby proving that ‘the mainspring of cultural identity comes from below’³²

In a series of lectures given by Edward Said (1994) under the title *Representations of the Intellectual*, he focuses on the role of the intellectual in the post-colonial and modern era. Said argues that intellectuals are engaged in the process of attempting to influence others within society or professional grouping, with a set of ideas or viewpoints based on the intellectual's own understanding and sense of the world. Said writes that:

My argument is that intellectuals are individuals with a vocation for the art of representing, whether that is talking, writing, teaching, and/or appearing on television. And that vocation is important to the extent that it is publicly recognizable and involves commitment and risk, boldness and vulnerability; when I read Jean-Paul Sartre or Bertrand Russell it is their individual voice and presence that makes an impression on me over and above their arguments because they are speaking out for their beliefs. They cannot be mistaken for an anonymous functionary or careful bureaucrat.³³

Said suggests that intellectuals are therefore advocates for social change and cultural-political criticism. An organic intellectual is always aware of his/her power to influence the minds of others in the public domain. Hence, Ndebele’s ambition - through his public interventions – has been to ensure that black South Africa’s socio-cultural knowledge production and reproduction in post-apartheid South Africa, encapsulates the essence of the daily life experiences of ordinary citizens.

³⁰ Sam T. Radithlalo. “Assembling the Broken Gourds: an appreciation.” *Fine Lines from the Box*. Houghton: Umuzi. (2007), p263.

³¹ Njabulo Ndebele. “Towards Progressive Cultural Planning.” *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: South African Literature and Culture*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. (1994), p122.

³² Sam Radithlalo has paraphrased Ndebele’s argument in “Assembling the Broken Gourds: an appreciation.” *Fine Lines from the Box*. Houghton: Umuzi (2007), p263.

³³ Edward Said. *Representations of the Intellectual*. United Kingdom: Vintage Books. (1994), p13.

Since the dawn of democracy in South Africa, Ndebele has repeatedly argued in his essays that the pursuit of social justice for the formerly oppressed should be pursued within the realms of the negotiated settlement which gave birth to the agenda of national reconciliation, nation-building, as well as political and cultural transformation.

Ntongela Masilela (2009) suggests that “the critical practice of an intellectual should always be in the interrogative mode.”³⁴ Ndebele has been actively involved in asking thought provoking questions and suggesting difficult solutions for more than thirty years. As such, the principle of interrogation resonates powerfully in his collected essays as it investigates the complex post-apartheid societal phenomenon, namely, the political, social, cultural and historical legacies of colonialism and apartheid.³⁵ The complexity that Ndebele deconstructs is commensurate with the complexity of his own imagination.³⁶ In this case that of a radical post-apartheid South African intellectual.

Njabulo Ndebele’s reflective essays open up new ways of thinking about and understanding the emerging trends in post-apartheid South African life. It is difficult to imagine the propensity that drives Ndebele to openly share his thoughts at the risk of being ridiculed by his colleagues who form the hegemonic Eurocentric schools of criticism³⁷ that insists on evaluating African literature from a European point of view. However, it is easy to understand why he continues to do so despite this reality; he understands that in pursuit of black social advancement, the “social space is the effective struggle zone for democratic ideas and ethical politics”³⁸ to mushroom in any society undergoing democratic transition. As Mcebisi Ndletyana (2008) points out, it is expected of intellectuals to “explain new experiences and ideas in the most accessible and understandable ways to the rest of society.”³⁹ This fact, Ndletyana goes on to say, is most fundamental in a society that is undergoing a transition, where people are grappling with and seeking to make sense of their new and unknown world. Therefore, there remains a space for more intellectual dialogues among South Africans themselves as many of them seek answers to what continues to be a confusing post-apartheid social environment. As Gumede & Dikeni (2009) put it, “the need for fresh ideas, debate

³⁴ Ntongela Masilela. “The Historical and Literary Moment of Njabulo Ndebele.” *English in Africa*, 1(36), (2009), p25.

³⁵ Ibid, p25.

³⁶ Ibid, p25.

³⁷ Njabulo Ndebele. “Rediscovery of the Ordinary.” *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: South African Literature and Culture*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. (1994), p47.

³⁸ Ibid, p29.

³⁹ Mcebisi Ndletyana. “Introduction.” *African Intellectuals in 19th and Early 20th Century South Africa*. Cape Town: HSRC Press. (2008), p1.

and engagement with pressing issues has never been great⁴⁰ in post-apartheid South Africa. This no doubt poses a challenge for public intellectuals and scholars to come out and engage in order to find answers to challenges troubling the post-apartheid social experience. Ndebele is already involved in this dialogue.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the structure of this research paper and located Njabulo Ndebele's intellectual thought. The following chapters aim to critically interrogate his reflections in *Fine Lines from the Box* (2007) in the manner that has been pointed out in the above paragraphs. This critical study is carried out within the context of seeking an alternative understanding of the emerging trends in the post-apartheid social cultural environment. The approach is based on an on-going effort to affirm endogeny by acknowledging indigenous knowledge systems of thought as appropriate forms knowledge for understanding local and social realities in Africa generally, and in post-apartheid South Africa in particular. By locating Ndebele's intellectual thought within Africa, particularly South African traditional modes of thought, developed in response to apartheid and colonialism, this paper is strongly grounded in Africa and depends on African thinking. These intellectual traditions have been identified above as: the New African Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, Sophiatown-writer Intellectual tradition, Black Consciousness movement, and lately the modern thought tradition associated with African modernity and South Africa's democratic era, known as the public intellectual. This paper shares Ndebele's overall view that an inclusive system of knowledge production would enable South Africans of all races, ethnicity, gender, and cultural groups to find cultural ties that bind them together as citizens of a single nation. I shall further argue in support of Ndebele that all institutions of knowledge and cultural production in Post-apartheid South Africa ought to be transformed in order to serve the common interests and help to discover shared values of the entire South African population.

⁴⁰ William Gumede & Leslie Dikeni. "Introduction." *The Poverty of Ideas: South African Democracy and the Retreat of Intellectuals.* Jacana: Auckland Park. (2009), p2.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Introduction

Njabulo Ndebele enjoys international acclaim for both his work of fiction and non-fiction. As this research paper focuses mainly on his reflective essays, this chapter will be devoted to a literature review of critical commentaries on this specific body of work. Ndebele's essays were first published individually in various journals, newspapers and magazines around the world between the late 1980s and 2006. Some of the essays were first presented as lectures at various universities and conferences around the world during the same period. His work has over the last three to four decades drawn criticism and acclaim from various scholars, thinkers and intellectuals within and outside the academic world, as well as different scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds. The common denominator to engaging Ndebele's thought among these scholars and thinkers is a shared interest in the literature and culture of South Africa generally, and social reality in the country during and after apartheid.

Critical work on Ndebele's reflections over the years has focused on critically analysing his ideas in relation to issues such as cultural production, literature, the role of universities, political and/or popular culture, reconciliation and transformation, and the media in South Africa. This chapter seeks to review the literature on Ndebele's work with a view identifying gaps and silences by those that have engaged with and /or critiqued his work in recent years. This review will focus primarily on the critics that engage Ndebele's reflections on South Africa's social reality, its challenges, as well as proposed solutions for the realisation of a new and inclusive national culture. As pointed out in the introduction of this paper, this research study is concerned with highlighting an alternative reading of the post-apartheid social reality in South Africa. Thus, his reflections offer such an alternative during this on-going struggle to affirm endogeny in post-apartheid social experience. Again, my approach in this literature review will be selective and strategic, aimed at engaging with this literature in furtherance of the objectives of my research.

Reading Fine Lines from the Box: The Reviews

Over the last four decades, Njabulo Ndebele has been "deeply involved in the intellectual, social and political development of South Africans, first and foremost the previously oppressed and the

previously advantaged, in the process of nation-building and cultural *toenadering*⁴¹,⁴² Throughout this time, he has not been one to shy away from expressing his thought on issues related to literary and cultural discourse in South Africa. In *Fine Lines from the Box* (2007), he reflects on what needs to happen in the present in order to influence the future: a post-apartheid future shaped by a new and inclusive national culture. For Ndebele, this culture must be rooted on common values as well as a shared national identity. Reading his book, it is easy to establish that he is committed to the post-apartheid ideals of nation-building, reconciliation, transformation and deepening of democratic values in South Africa. Ndebele's essays in *Fine Lines from the Box* (2007) are an attempt to affirm endogeneity by proposing locally determined solutions to local challenges.

In an interview with him at the Cape Town Book Fair (2008) before a packed crowd, Victor Dlamini was poetic in his description of the book, saying that it “teases, provokes and gives one a sense of nuance. Where many social commentators use their commentary as a blunt instrument, he uses it like a brush, utilising so many colours of the palette.”⁴³ During the conversation, Ndebele admitted to Dlamini that his essays are deliberately speculative due to a calculated move to disregard historic and sociological data, thereby enabling “a depth of contemplation, using your experience as well as your engagement with the outside world to fashion something.” He pointed out that the genre of speculative essay opens up a space for writing something that seldom gets talked about; as such, more room is needed to expand the boundaries of communication.⁴⁴ He further re-affirmed the view that rebuilding the nation should begin at the local level, and he went on to suggest that to build a successful nation South Africa must first confront its ordinariness. According to Ndebele: “The question to answer is: ‘Who are we living for? We’re not living to prove to the world that we can be like it.’”⁴⁵ This is the tone that Ndebele maintains in all the essays in the book; and that is, South Africa must look within itself for solutions to its own social challenges.

Accordingly, Ntongela Masilela (2009) has written a concise critical review that explores Ndebele's themes in the book. In the paper, titled, “The Historical and Literary Moment of Njabulo Ndebele”, Masilela begins by first acknowledging and contextualising Ndebele's intellectual and traditional

⁴¹ This term refers to the effort of bringing different parties or groups together with an ambition to finding common ground, especially in political circumstances.

⁴² Sam Radithlalo. (2007), “Assembling the Broken Gourds: An Appreciation”. *Fine Lines from the Box*. Houghton: Umuzi, p257.

⁴³ Liesl. “on Being Viewed in a Game Lodge and Other Thoughts: Njabulo Ndebele in Conversation with Victor Dlamini.” <http://umuzi.bookslive.co.za/blog/2008/06/16/on-being-viewed-in-a-game-lodge-and-other-thoughts-njabulo-ndebele-in-conversation-with-victor-dlamini/> accessed on 11th October 2011.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

influences. He suggests that Ndebele's book is an attempt at "completing the modernity of the New African"⁴⁶; a journey begun by the radical black intellectuals of the late 19th and early 20th century, mentioned in the previous chapter. Interestingly, Michael Vaughan (1990) has also noted Ndebele's tendency to omit "any consideration of the part played by the Western, realist narrative tradition, in the fiction-writing of African writers."⁴⁷ Vaughan goes further to suggest that Ndebele is an advocate for "a 'storytelling' practice of writing, which maintains a close, even an 'organic' relationship with oral culture and oral narrative traditions."⁴⁸ Masilela frames Ndebele's intellectuality within the legacy of the New African Movement, which played a key role in the initial stages of the struggle for liberation in South Africa, following the formation of the South African Natives National Congress (later ANC) in 1912. Masilela characterizes Ndebele as instrumental in the knowledge production on black social experiences during and beyond apartheid South Africa. He suggests that Ndebele's reflections in *Fine Lines from the Box* (2007) serve as a microscope through which the political consequences of South Africa's democratic culture and its emerging trends can be traced. According to Masilela, the social issues that Ndebele raises are first and foremost raised within the arena in which they affect the development of formerly oppressed groups, and reconciliation efforts in post-apartheid South Africa.

Through Ndebele's far-sighted reflections, Masilela suggests that one is able to trace the "trajectory and metamorphosis of the cultural category of the 'New African Intellectual' within the New African Movement under white hegemony, to the notion of the Public Intellectual that came into being during democratic majority rule."⁴⁹ Masilela argues that it is through this notion of the public intellectual that Ndebele suggests reconciliation as necessary towards national-building and social cohesion. Finding binding cultural ties would require that all cultural groups open up to each other's cultural epistemologies. Ndebele points out that this is could help in realising shared cultural values and a common national identity. As a public intellectual, he uses this space to stimulate debate and discussion in a manner that puts social issues of the formerly oppressed groups on the national agenda. Not many would dispute the fact that the unequal dissemination and consumption of cultural and knowledge systems in popular social discourse is the legacy of apartheid in South Africa. Masilela sees *Fine Lines from the Box* (2007) as offering a missing link in the manner in which many people think about and understand social challenges in post-apartheid South Africa.

⁴⁶ Ntongela Masilela. "The Historical and Literary Moment of Njabulo S. Ndebele." *English in Africa* 36 (1), (2009), p18.

⁴⁷ Michael Vaughan. "Writer and Community: Theory and Practice in the Work of Njabulo Ndebele" prepared for presentation at the History Department Workshop, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. (6-10 February 1990), p6. Accessed via the University of Cape Town's African Studies Library: C04 0057 3269. BA968 90 (VAUG).

⁴⁸ Ibid, p6.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p18.

The collection *Fine Lines from the Box* (2007) proposes possible avenues for widening and deepening democracy within the post-apartheid South African society. Masilela has identified five themes that frame the content of the essays in the collection. These include the “necessity to constantly reinvent the self and the nation in order to make available new options and new opportunities.”⁵⁰ In this regard, Masilela suggests that there are four essays that address this issue. These four essays address the importance of leadership in societies undergoing cultural and political transitions. For example, Masilela points out that in essays such as: “Act of Transgression”, “Leadership Challenges”, “Learning to Give up Certitudes” and the “Ties that Bind”, Ndebele challenges post-apartheid leaders to remain open to new possibilities and alternatives so that democracy deepens as South Africa undergoes transition. Masilela argues that leaders have a role to play in entrenching democratic values such as credibility, dialogue, tolerance and equity among other things in society.⁵¹

The second theme, according to Masilela focuses on the idea of “re-inventing values that would hold the idea of the nation in a cohesive manner during the democratic developmental process.”⁵² Here, Masilela suggests that Ndebele is calling for a restorative process in pursuit of shared values and a “creation of new thoughts and new worlds.”⁵³ According to Masilela, this theme is significant in the sense that it highlights what Ndebele understands as the role of the public intellectual. Masilela agrees with Ndebele that the idea of “making possible an alternative vision of national governance to the dominant one”⁵⁴ is pertinent in a young democracy like South Africa.

The third theme speaks to the “transformative role of education in creating a new system of values that enables the democratic national experiment.”⁵⁵ Masilela suggests that education ought to be central in enabling society to understand and overcome its challenges. In other words, education must be designed in ways that empower ordinary South Africans to confront their socio-cultural, political and economic challenges in ways that benefit their social reality. In essence, Ndebele’s view, within this theme - as South Africa aspires to normalisation - is that full transformation of the social institutions of knowledge production is paramount and must be biased towards the agenda of the formerly oppressed groups in the country. Such transformation will enable these groups to

⁵⁰ Ibid, p32.

⁵¹ Ibid, p32.

⁵² Ibid, p32.

⁵³ Ibid, p32.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p32.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p32.

“participate fully in the upliftment of the quality of life for all citizens.”⁵⁶ Sam Radithlalo’s (2007) agrees and suggests that transforming all institutions of knowledge production and dissemination will:

Encourage the broad masses to participate in the process of becoming active agents in the making of their own history, to (re)discover themselves in order to understand their historic mission in their exalted emancipation, thereby proving that the mainspring of cultural identity comes from below.⁵⁷

In Chapters three and four I will explore this theme in detail.

The last theme of the book according to Masilela is the “necessity for reconciliation in order to forge a democratic future.”⁵⁸ Masilela suggests that for Ndebele, “the matter of reconciliation seems to have signalled the end of an era of the interregnum and the beginning of the era of reconstruction.”⁵⁹ Masilela reaffirms Ndebele’s suggestion that it is through education that reconciliation can be achieved. As such, Masilela notes that Ndebele’s essays outline the recurring issues and emerging trends in the post-apartheid social reality and these require critical attention because it is these very issues that undermine the democratic gains of 27th April 1994. Masilela writes that:

Reconciliation and reconstruction are coupled together in many of the essays, which touch on the AIDS crisis, the idea of the ‘African Renaissance,’ the abysmal quality of political leadership after the Mandela era, the emergence of a black bourgeoisie that unapologetically feels a sense of entitlement, the relationship between English and the newly empowered African languages in the construction of new cultural and national identities, and the ethical responsibility of the press in the transitional period of political uncertainty.”⁶⁰

These issues continue to dominate post-apartheid social discourse. Most importantly though, Masilela’s critical paper on Ndebele’s collection is an attempt to prove once and for all that indigenous intellectual and thought traditions are equally relevant and deserving of institutional recognition in modern contemporary South Africa.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p33.

⁵⁷ Sam Radithlalo. “Assembling the Broken Gourds: an appreciation”. *Fine Lines from the Box*. Houghton: Umuzi. (2007), p263.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p33.

⁵⁹ Ntongela Masilela. “The Historical and Literary Moment of Njabulo S. Ndebele.” *English in Africa* 36 (1), (2009), p33.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p33.

According to Sam Radithlalo (2007), the essays in *Fine Lines from the Box* (2007) are an attempt by Njabulo Ndebele to urge South Africans to utilise their new democratic space by asking uncomfortable questions and seeking difficult answers. Radithlalo points out that, “Ndebele’s insistence is that South Africans need to critically engage with such questions in order to remake the country, and hence to read more, reflect more, write more on the issues of the time.”⁶¹ It is in the public spaces such as the institutions of knowledge production and dissemination that all cultural groups can meet and exchange ideas. Such a process would begin to bear an inclusive understanding of social challenges in post-apartheid South Africa. In addition, more socio-cultural deliberations among these cultural groups may result in a realisation of shared values and a common national identity. The public domain is the appropriate platform for citizens to “mutually discover each other on the basis of shared values and together, construct new ones.”⁶² It is after all the legacy of apartheid that continues to inhibit major gains towards nation-building and social cohesion among South Africa’s race and cultural groups. Masilela points out that:

Ndebele strongly believes that only in civil society can attitudinal change towards new democratic forms be effected and not through politics: it is in this realm that the values of democracy, equality, non-racialism and academic freedom can be strengthened or forged. In this extraordinary address he shows how the reconstruction of new values through mutual interdependency makes reconciliation possible.⁶³

Accordingly, Ndebele’s view is that all sites of knowledge production must be transformed so that their attitude towards the ideals of the new South Africa can find root. As far as the attitudinal change needed at civil society level is concerned, Ndebele argues that:

This complicated integration would bring forth new values of mutual respect and understanding across previous historical divisions and would enable new configurations, at personal and institutional levels. The creative reordering of old forms facilitates the shaping of new experiences.⁶⁴

Masilela is equally assertive that the deepening of the democratic culture in South Africa would be achieved through an attitudinal change within civil society.

⁶¹ Sam Radithlalo. “Assembling the Broken Gourds: an appreciation.” *Fine Lines from the Box*. Houghton: Umuzi. (2007), p264.

⁶² Ntongela Masilela. “The Historical and Literary Moment of Njabulo S. Ndebele.” *English in Africa* 36 (1), (2009), p34.

⁶³ Ibid. p34.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p43.

Beyond their complexity, the essays in *Fine Lines from the Box* (2007), writes Masilela, serve as confirmation that Ndebele is the “the premier public intellectual in South Africa today.”⁶⁵ According to William Gumede and Leslie Dikeni (2009) there has been a lamentable retreat of public intellectuals in post-apartheid South Africa’s public discourse.⁶⁶ Mcebisi Ndletyana (2008) agrees and suggests that post-apartheid South Africa is in need of more public intellectuals in the calibre of “African intellectuals of the 19th and early 20th century South Africa.”⁶⁷ Given this background, it is fair therefore, to suggest that Ndebele’s collection is a timely intervention aimed at unlocking post-apartheid South Africa’s social crises.

Gumede and Dikeni (2009) have noted a need for fresh ideas, debate and discussion in post-apartheid South Africa’s pressing issues. They suggest that ‘intellectual leadership’⁶⁸ (Ndletyana, 2008) will help to curtail the “generalised and undefined anxiety in the body politic [which] breeds conspiracy and fear.”⁶⁹ They highlight Ndebele’s public intervention where he noted that “South Africans across the class, racial and cultural spectrum, confess to feeling uncertain and vulnerable as never before since 1994.”⁷⁰ It is again fair to suggest that despite the noticeable retreat of African public intellectuals in post-apartheid’s social discourse, Ndebele is seen by many as continuously active in the on-going struggles for black emancipation and recognition during this democratic dispensation.

Pumla Dineo Gqola (2009) gives a feminist reading of Ndebele’s reflections in *Fine Lines from the Box* (2007). Gqola, along with Antjie Krog⁷¹ (2009) use Ndebele’s reflections in the collection to open up a range of critical issues that continue to affect women and their social struggles in post-apartheid South African life. Gqola’s critical reading of the book highlights Ndebele’s pointed criticism towards patriarchal attitudes in post-apartheid South Africa’s cultural environment. Gqola’s paper focuses on masculinities in the body politic of the ANC-led regime, more especially the events surrounding Jacob Zuma’s rape trial between 2005 and 2007. Gqola points out that Ndebele’s critique of the literary representation of the spectacle is “theoretically applicable to

⁶⁵ Ibid, p35.

⁶⁶ William Gumede & Leslie Dikeni. “Introduction” *The Poverty of Ideas: South African Democracy and the Retreat of Intellectuals*. Auckland Park: Jacana. (2009), p1.

⁶⁷ Mcebisi Ndletyana. *African Intellectuals in the 19th and early 20th Century South Africa*. Cape Town: HSRC Press. (2008), p1-6.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p1.

⁶⁹ William Gumede & Leslie Dikeni. “Introduction” *The Poverty of Ideas: South African Democracy and the Retreat of Intellectuals*. Auckland Park: Jacana. (2009), p2.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p2.

⁷¹ Antjie Krog. “What the Hell is Penelope Doing in Winnie’s story?” *English in Africa* 36 (1), (2009), p58.

spaces beyond the literary impulse.”⁷² She argues that this has been Ndebele’s primary concern going back to his first collection of essays, titled, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (1991). Accordingly, Gqola notes that “Ndebele’s theorisation of the spectacular remains a powerful commentary on specifically the ways in which violent masculinities have taken centre stage since the Jacob Zuma rape trial.”⁷³ Gqola suggests that the notion of the representation of the spectacle remains in place in the social imagination of South Africans; a phenomenon that has caught Ndebele by surprise. Gqola writes that:

Interestingly, the space of the spectacular has moved away from the literary to the explicitly political sphere. Unlike apartheid writing, contemporary South African prose and poetry have turned inward to amplify the details of the everyday. In other words, the focus on the common textures of people’s lives and interiority is the common ground of post-apartheid literature.⁷⁴

The above passage, highlights the metamorphosis and trajectory of South Africa’s socio-cultural and political development from the viewpoint of the Africans during their journey to modernity, as articulated by Ndebele, and noted by Ntongela Masilela (2009). In the essay, “Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Some New Writings in South Africa”, published in the book, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (1991), Ndebele argued that:

The spectacular documents; indicts implicitly; it is demonstrative, preferring exteriority to interiority; it keeps the larger issues of society in our minds, obliterating the details; it provokes identification through observation and analytical thought; it calls for emotion rather than conviction; it establishes a vast sense of presence without offering intimate knowledge; it confirms without necessarily offering a challenge. It is the literature of the powerless identifying the key factor for their powerlessness. Nothing beyond this can be expected of it.⁷⁵

Gqola has identified similar trends continuing even in the post-apartheid era. She notes that there has been an increasing trend in the form of masculinist spectacle. This masculinist spectacle has enjoyed a lot of attention within the political and public debates. By ‘masculinist spectacle,’ Gqola is referring to “the hypervisible, and self-authorising performance of patriarchal masculinist in public spaces, where such performance hints at masculine violence or a contest between forms of

⁷² Pumla Gqola. ““The difficult task of normalising freedom”: Spectacular Masculinities, Ndebele’s Literary/Cultural Commentary and Post-Apartheid Life.” *English in Africa* 36 (1), (2009), p61.

⁷³ Ibid, p61.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p62.

⁷⁵ Ibid, p64.

manhood.”⁷⁶ The activities in the form of support for Jacob Zuma during his rape trial signify Gqola’s argument. Ndebele took exception to such public performances, and has raised his concerns about the consequences of such spectacular performances in a society going through a transition, and searching for a non-sexist and an inclusive national culture.

Ndebele condemned patriarchal public performances in the aftermath of the Jacob Zuma rape trial. In the essay, titled “Jacob Zuma and the Family”, Ndebele reflects about how he “was intrigued, pained and revolted by Zuma’s self-representation.”⁷⁷ This was in reaction to Jacob Zuma’s voluntary ‘toyi-toying’⁷⁸ outside court along with his supporters. Such a performance, Gqola argues, suggested strongly that the struggle is not yet over. The memory it evoked was a reminder to those black South Africans who remain unemployed that the struggle continues. For Gqola, the performance was an attempt to portray the rape case itself as part of the imperialists and anti-revolutionary forces within the ANC itself, attempt to send their leader to prison. The song was “an obvious echo of a time when the spectacular reigned supreme and, according to Ndebele, it helped to keep the larger issues of our society in our minds.”⁷⁹ Thus, Gqola draws our attention to Ndebele’s two fold response to Zuma’s spectacle. The first is a request to Zuma that he thinks “about the damage of his chosen performances of masculine bravado against the claimed internal ANC conspiracy.”⁸⁰ In this regard, Ndebele suggested:

Zuma must now call off his supporters. His ability to do so will expose him to yet another test. What are the limits of his capacity to self-mastery? This latter attribute is vital for whoever aspires to high office. It will enable him to spare me, and others among the public, the pain and revulsion I felt when I saw him on my television screen, calling for umshini wami. Was he knowingly and defiantly inviting me to make horrible connections between the AK-47 and the invasive penis? The public morality issues at stake are as graphic as this. [...] That is why, as he sang and danced with his supporters, images of South Africa’s raped mothers, sisters, daughters (some, infants), nieces, aunts, and grandmothers, raced through my mind, torturing me. Are their pain and the broad sense of public morality of little consequence in the settling of ‘family’ scores?⁸¹

⁷⁶ Ibid, p64.

⁷⁷ Gqola has paraphrased Ndebele’s comments in the Sunday Times article, later published in *Fine Lines from the Box* ... under the title “Jacob Zuma and the Family” (2007), p67.

⁷⁸ A popular dance in South Africa during mass public protests of various types. It is easily associated with the mass struggle for liberation in apartheid South Africa.

⁷⁹ Pumla Gqola. ““The difficult task of normalising freedom”: Spectacular Masculinities, Ndebele’s Literary/Cultural Commentary and Post-Apartheid Life.” *English in Africa* 36 (1), (2009), p67.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p67.

⁸¹ Njabulo Ndebele. “Jacob Zuma and the Family.” *Fine Lines from the Box*. Houghton: Umuzi. (2007), p232.

Here, Ndebele comes across as the voice of reason in a political spectacle that pits the power of a male political figure against the powerlessness of the ‘ordinary’ female figure in post-apartheid South Africa. It points to the way “in which spectacular masculinist posturing distinguishes between “larger issues” and issues that are deemed less relevant.”⁸²

Furthermore, Gqola reminds us that “performances of masculinity have materiality. The laying of rape charges against Zuma, and/or criticising him, is met with further spectacular masculinist hostility on and off newspaper pages.”⁸³ In this instance yet again, Ndebele’s intellectuality is able to provide sobering insight and clarity on gender related issues, even in instances where powerful political forces are pitted against each other. In the essay, “Jacob Zuma and the family”, Ndebele exposes Jacob Zuma’s attempt to impugn epistemic violence for political gain. When addressing his supporters and singing to them, he willingly portrayed himself as equal to the ordinary citizens, when in fact he is more powerful and a long-time member of the political elite that he claimed was conspiring to end his political career.

Gqola is at pains to acknowledge Ndebele’s contribution to social challenges that fall outside his own intellectual interest. In this regard, Ndebele is certainly fulfilling his role as a public intellectual by imparting his insights on issues that have an impact in post-apartheid social life. Gqola suggests that Ndebele’s contribution to the perpetuation of masculinist violence:

Has not only been to offer the theoretical and intellectual tools to understand phenomena beyond his immediate preoccupation. Further examination of his essays yields alternatives to the spectacular and, indeed, the spectacular masculinist, even though he has not written specifically about the latter.⁸⁴

Gqola argues that Ndebele’s essays are a welcome contribution to the “collective imagination of different kinds of public spaces, conversations and memories. Where there has been a failure by many powerful leaders to recognise that there have been significant shifts in these sites, Ndebele’s essays stand as testimony to such changes.”⁸⁵ Gqola’s views on Ndebele’s critical work further justifies this research paper’s argument that Njabulo Ndebele’s is significantly a major producer of socio-cultural knowledge in a post-apartheid South Africa. Therefore, it is important for institutions

⁸² Gqola, Pumla. ““The difficult task of normalising freedom’: Spectacular Masculinities, Ndebele’s Literary/Cultural Commentary and Post-Apartheid Life.” *English in Africa* 36 (1), (2009), p68.

⁸³ Ibid, p68.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p72.

⁸⁵ Ibid, p72.

of knowledge production in South Africa to acknowledge the various indigenous knowledge systems that have influenced his intellectual maturity over the years. In addition, Gqola agrees with Ndebele's view that post-apartheid South Africa ought to find binding cultural roots through voluntary recognition of shared values, a common national identity and social justice. She suggests further that South Africa move away from being a society of posturing and sloganeering, and begin to emphasize the subtlety of thought and feeling, permit the sobering power of contemplation, of close analysis, and the mature acceptance of failure, weakness and limitations.⁸⁶ Such attitudinal changes would steer the country towards a mutually discovered national culture. She concludes her critical reading of *Fine Lines from the Box* (2007) thus:

Ndebele's commentary on the spectacular in South African literature assists us in making sense of recent developments in the gendered post-apartheid political sphere. Such a reading does not detract from Ndebele's primacy in literary theory, but demonstrates the depth of his contribution to making sense of areas of social life other than the creative. A close appreciation of Ndebele's notable intellectual contribution enables a deeper engagement with the textures of South African culture.⁸⁷

Ndebele's creative imagination and social understanding is able to capture eloquently the unfolding of the post-apartheid social reality in ways that educate, open up debates and provide leadership where it's most needed. As Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1981) pointed out:

There is a sense in which no writer of imaginative literature from the very best to the moderately significant can really avoid the big issues of the day, for literature, to the extent that it is a mirror unto man's nature, must reflect social reality or certain aspects of social reality.⁸⁸

Chinua Achebe (1975) has expressed similar sentiments with regards to the contribution that can and should be made by writers in their immediate socio-cultural, political and economic environment. Achebe noted that:

It is clear to me that an African creative writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of the contemporary Africa will end up being

⁸⁶ As cited by Gqola from Njabulo Ndebele's essay in *Rediscovery of the Ordinary* (1991), p50.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p74.

⁸⁸ Ngugi wa Thiong'o. "Writers in Politics: The power of Words & the Words of Power." *Writers of Politics: A Re-engagement with Issues of Literature & Society*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers. (1981), p70.

completely irrelevant like that absurd man in the proverb who leaves his house burning to pursue a rat fleeing from the flames.⁸⁹

It is an undisputable fact that the post-apartheid social environment needs as many intellectuals (especially of African origin) to reflect on the post-apartheid life experience. As Ngugi suggested:

What is important is not only the writer's honesty and faithfulness in capturing and reflecting the struggles around him/her, but also his/her attitude to those big social and political issues. It is not simply a matter of a writer's heroic stand as a social individual – though this is crucial and significant – but the attitudes and the world-view embodied in his/her work and with which he/she is persuading us to identify vis-a-vis the historical drama his/her community is undergoing. [...] The extent to which the writer can and will help in not only explaining the world but in changing it will depend on his/her appreciation of the classes and values that are struggling for a new order, a new society, a more human future, and which classes and values are hindering the birth of the new and the hopeful. And of course it depends which side he/she is, in these class struggles of his times.⁹⁰

Since the end of apartheid, Ndebele has openly embraced the transitional and reconciliation efforts aimed at nation-building and deepening democratic values in South Africa. Ndebele's reflections through his speculative approach, is able to challenge aspects of social behaviour that he sees as a hindrance to nation-building and provokes a response from those he identifies as responsible. Ndebele does this conscious of the "historical drama that his community (first and foremost the previously oppressed) is undergoing"⁹¹; however, the tone is almost always within the spirit of reconciliation and nation-building.

Re-discovering the Ordinary in Post-apartheid Social Life

This chapter has so far focused on the three critical responses to Ndebele's book, *Fine Lines from the Box* (2007). Pumla Gqola's (2009) feminist reading of Ndebele's reflections highlight the relevance of Ndebele's first collection of critical essays - *Rediscovery of the Ordinary* - many years after it was first published in 1991. Notions of the 'representation of the spectacle', 'the ordinary', and 'protest literature' have retained a great deal of significance in post-apartheid South Africa's

⁸⁹ Chinua Achebe. "The African Writer and the Biafran Cause." *Morning Yet on Creation Day*. London: Heinemann. (1975), p78.

⁹⁰ Ngugi wa Thiong'o. "Writers in Politics: The power of Words & the Words of Power." *Writers of Politics: A Re-engagement with Issues of Literature & Society*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers. (1981), p70.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, p70.

literary and cultural discourse. As such, Michael Chapman (2006) hails Ndebele's achievement in the preface of the third publication of *Rediscovery of the Ordinary*. According to Chapman, the republication of the book, "with no alterations fifteen years after its first publication, is a tribute to Ndebele's prescience."⁹² Chapman goes on to say that, "the issues that Ndebele raises, and the questions that he poses remain key to a people who, after apartheid, are seeking to rediscover the complex ordinariness of living in a civil society."⁹³

Ndebele's critics at the time disagreed on the notion of the representation of spectacle and 'protest literature' in South African literary and cultural discourses. According to Chapman, "the error was to interpret Ndebele's concern with the spectacular as an implicit endorsement of its apparent opposite: the psychological mind-set of Western-style individualism."⁹⁴ As such, Ndebele's critics have attempted to position his ideas in "dichotomous relationships: art versus politics; and the personal versus the public. But these were not Ndebele's dichotomies. His strenuous formulations still await the full justice of their possibilities."⁹⁵ Within this context, Johan Geertsema (2004) offers an interesting reading of the theme of irony in *Rediscovery of the Ordinary* (1991).

Johan Geertsema's (2004) critical reading of Ndebele's work begins with his acknowledgment of the influence of Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) and Frantz Fanon (1961) in Ndebele's work. Many of Ndebele's critics rarely acknowledge this important intellectual background. Accordingly, Geertsema points out that Ndebele's use of irony in his essays must be understood in the context of BCM and Fanonian schools of thought. Geertsema suggests that these two epistememes of thought were significant in highlighting the "complicity of the oppressed in their own oppression."⁹⁶ Geertsema suggests that the use of irony in Ndebele's work attempted to move 'black' South African literature beyond "the colonialism of apartheid by insisting on identities – especially those of blackness and victimhood – but only in order to transcend them."⁹⁷ Rob Gaylard's (2009) is equally convinced that Ndebele's critical work is a continuation of the inward-looking process that [Steve] Biko saw as central to Black Consciousness."⁹⁸

Ndebele has argued that African writers (as knowledge producers) ought to focus on the interiority of the black social experience in order to capture the social practices that kept society progressing

⁹² Michael Chapman. "Preface" *South African Literature and Culture: Rediscovery of the Ordinary*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. (2006), vii.

⁹³ Ibid, vii.

⁹⁴ Ibid, viii.

⁹⁵ Ibid, viii.

⁹⁶ Johan Geertsema. "Ndebele, Fanon, Agency and Irony." *Journal of Southern African Studies*. 30 (4), (2004): p749.

⁹⁷ Ibid, p749.

⁹⁸ Rob Gaylard. "Rediscovery Revisited." *English in Africa*. 36 (1), (2009), p50.

culturally during apartheid. Accordingly, Graham Pechey's (1998) critical reading of *Rediscovery of the Ordinary* (1991) prompted him to suggest that these essays were an appropriate invitation for:

A post-heroic culture of irony, the local, ordinary: that is to say, a culture, or a literature, preoccupied not with the polar conflicts of 'the people' versus 'the state' but with the textures of life which have eluded that epic battle and have grown insouciantly in the cracks of the structures that South Africa's fraught modernity has historically thrown up.⁹⁹

Rob Gaylard (2009) noted that essays in *Rediscovery of the Ordinary* (1991) were a product of a specific social condition in South Africa's political history. Thus, the book challenged:

Received views of black South African culture and writing, and [it] asked new and provocative questions. Ndebele was, in a sense, breaking ranks. [...] by introducing a new category – that of the 'ordinary' – he subverted the view that black writers should simply reflect or promote the political struggle.¹⁰⁰

In addition, Yianna Liatsos (2006) has articulated Ndebele's stance against 'protest literature' as well as the 'representation of spectacle' in black South African literature during apartheid much more coherently. Liatsos pointed out that:

According to Ndebele the political agenda of liberation that obliged black writers during the latter part of the apartheid era – mainly in the 1980s – to follow, by and large, the wider international trend of protest literature, signalled not so much the political rebellion as the imaginative impoverishment of black South African consciousness. [...] Ndebele's contention was that by 'testifying everyday repression under apartheid, a writer is not necessarily being polemical: if truth-telling entails mere observation, it risks being little more than a dull response to an action initiated by those who possess socio-political agency. Worse still, protest literature tends to generate static images 'of passive people whose only reason for existing seemed to be to receive the sympathy of the world.'¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Pechey Graham. "The post-apartheid sublime: Rediscovering the ordinary." *Writing South Africa*, (eds) Rosemary Jolly & Derek Attridge. United Kingdom: Cambridge University. (1998), p57.

¹⁰⁰ Rob Gaylard. "Rediscovery Revisited", *English in Africa*. Vol36 (1). (2009), p42.

¹⁰¹ Yianna Liatsos. "Truth, Confession and the Post-apartheid Black Consciousness in Njabulo Ndebele's *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*." *Modern Confessional Writing: New Critical Essays*. (ed) Jo Gill. New York: Routledge (2006), p115/6.

As such Liatsos points out that Ndebele has categorically stated that “literary writing committed to socio-political transformation needed to abandon the ‘spectacular rendering of familiar oppressive reality’ and concentrate on the ‘essential drama in the lives of ordinary people’”.¹⁰²

According to Anthony O’Brien (2001), Ndebele’s work represents a radical perspective of society and culture in apartheid South Africa and beyond. O’Brien argues that Ndebele critical work (especially in *Rediscovery of the Ordinary*, 1991) breathes an extra-ordinary excitement and confidence; and at the same time deploys to good effect the critical scepticism, sense of history, and commitment to theory. O’Brien points out that BCM influence is present in Ndebele critical works. He further notes that Ndebele’s theory has matured along South Africa’s cultural-politics for more than thirty years.¹⁰³ In the book *Against Normalisation* (2001), O’Brien gives a balanced trajectory of Ndebele’s intellectual development and goes on to interrogate the authenticity of the various indigenous knowledge systems and intellectual traditions that have greatly influenced Ndebele’s intellectual imagination and social understanding. O’Brien’s reading of Ndebele is self-admittedly from an ‘Africanist’ perspective, modelled on Edward Said’s *Orientalism*¹⁰⁴ (1978). However, O’Brien’s approach in reading Ndebele is coupled with an understanding of the global cultural economy popularised by Arjun Appadurai’s (2006) theory on the development of global cultural economy.¹⁰⁵

According to Anthony O’Brien’s (2001), Ndebele’s critical work in *Rediscovery of the Ordinary* (1991) was an attempt to open up a space for alternative “ways of thinking, ways of perception that will help to break down the closed epistemological structures of South African oppression,”¹⁰⁶ As such, through his intellectual imagination, Ndebele sought to provide leadership and provoke a debate about the importance of freeing the entire social imagination of the oppressed majority from the shackles of apartheid and bondage. Ndebele understood literature as a powerful instrument through which the oppressed could be conscientized and enlightened about their social reality and challenges. O’Brien argues that Ndebele has always expressed himself from “his disciplinary niche as writer/critic, but extending progressively further into cultural studies.” O’Brien adds that:

¹⁰² Ibid, p117.

¹⁰³ Anthony O’Brien. *Against Normalisation*, Durham & London: Duke University Press. (2001), p57.

¹⁰⁴ Edward Said. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage (1978).

¹⁰⁵ Arjun Appadurai. “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy.” *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*. eds. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner. Blackwell Publishing (2006).

¹⁰⁶ Njabulo Ndebele, in “Beyond Protest”, as cited by O’Brien in *Against Normalization* Durham & London: Duke University Press. (2001), p39.

Ndebele has moved from the formulations of Black Consciousness poetics, through three major articles on the political aesthetic of black fiction (“Turkish Tales”, “Rediscovery of the Ordinary” and “Redefining Relevance”), to a series of influential inquiries into the conditions of cultural production in South Africa.¹⁰⁷

Anthony O’Brien’s book is an important critical reading of Njabulo Ndebele’s contribution to South Africa’s cultural and knowledge production. The book is an outsider’s inside critical analysis of Ndebele’s work. O’Brien regards Ndebele as pivotal in the struggle for alternative ways of understanding and thinking about social reality in South Africa. Ndebele seems determined to carry out Frantz Fanon’s (1961) suggestion that beyond colonialism and oppression, African intellectuals ought to join their people in that “fluctuating movement which they are just giving a shape to, and which, as soon as it has started, will be the signal for everything to be called into question.”¹⁰⁸ Fanon suggested further that, “it is to this zone of masked instability where the people dwell that we must come.”¹⁰⁹ In other words, Fanon was cautioning African intellectuals to continue to provide leadership for the peoples of the continent even when colonialism has been defeated. I suggest that Ndebele’s work provides this intellectual leadership in post-apartheid South Africa.

Further Critical Thoughts on Ndebele’s Reflective Writings

Themba Sono’s (1994) theoretical assessment of the challenges facing African intellectuals beyond apartheid frames the cultural and political context of South Africa’s social reality. The plurality of intellectual voices that had condemned apartheid and colonialism, it would seem, according to Sono - in *Dilemmas of African Intellectuals in South Africa* (1994) - were now constrained by an ideological dilemma; many of the African intellectuals spoke in a single voice against apartheid and social injustice. During the apartheid era, intellectualism in South African literature and culture was steeped deeply in the political struggle against the regime, thus, prompting thinkers such as Ndebele to suggest (as cited by Sono, (1994)) that:

The history of black South African literature has largely been the history of the representation of spectacle. The visible symbols of the overwhelmingly oppressive South African social formation appear to have prompted over the

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p41.

¹⁰⁸ Frantz Fanon. “On National Culture” *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Weidenfeld (1961).

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

years the development of a highly dramatic, highly demonstrative form of literary representation.¹¹⁰

Sono accuses black South African intellectuals, including Njabulo Ndebele of suffering from a “singular lack of philosophical imagination and scientific curiosity”¹¹¹ due to the country’s political, cultural and social history. Sono tears into Ndebele and others for lacking the capacity to create new dimensions for an intellectual output and activity that can liberate parochial, pseudo-scholarship and narrowly focused populist intellectualism from its dungeons; to free the human spirit to soaring whatever direction it so desires in the dialectic of celebrating the essentiality, the imaginativeness, creativity and experimentation that inhere in human nature.¹¹²

Sono accuses Ndebele of actively “constricting the future by his insistence on mortgaging the present to a past essentially not worth retrieving.”¹¹³ Sono attempts to demolish Ndebele’s suggestion that writer’s in South Africa during apartheid ought to have focused on the interiority of the social life of the oppressed during apartheid. As such, the writers would have contributed to closing down the epistemological structures of apartheid; thereby, moving away from a culture and/or literature that preoccupied itself not “with the polar conflicts of ‘the people’ versus ‘the state’ but with the textures of life which have eluded that epic battle.”¹¹⁴ What Ndebele suggested, therefore, was that writers in South Africa needed to bring out the details of the social conditions in their narratives. Ndebele’s suggestion, rather, was designed to get African writers to pay more attention to the practices that enabled oppressed black communities to survive their oppressive social conditions. To have done so at the time, would have ensured the post-apartheid social environment does not fall short of ordinary people’s social experiences at the time as the nation attempts to find shared cultural values and a common nation identity. The reason African intellectuals experience constraints is precisely due to the fact that African knowledge systems lacked agency. It is bordering on ridiculous therefore, that Sono would accuse Ndebele of lacking far-sight in his reflective essays. Kelwyn Sole (1994) has noted the Ndebele’s (including Albie Sachs, 1989) bold attempt to curb the influence of politics in South African art. Sole pointed out that:

Sachs criticised “the manner in which radical South African art had become caught in ‘support art’; an art which, to quote Ndebele in turn, remained

¹¹⁰ Themba Sono. “Intellectuals in the New South Africa”, *Dilemmas of African Intellectuals*, Pretoria: University of South Africa Press. (1994), xii

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, p71.

¹¹² *Ibid*, p71.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, p72.

¹¹⁴ Njabulo Ndebele, “Rediscovery of the Ordinary,” in *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: South African Literature and Culture*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. (2006), p59.

content with allowing mere recognition of the horrors of apartheid without encouraging deeper analysis or insight.¹¹⁵

Sole goes on to note Ndebele's strong contribution to South African literature, particularly with in essays published after 1983. Sole writes that Ndebele has been "enormously influential among literati otherwise paying allegiance to a number of different political and formal positions."¹¹⁶

Moving Towards a New National Culture

South Africa's political history has left the country with a legacy of racialised cultural identities, values and inequalities due to apartheid and colonialism. Accordingly, Ndebele has noted that this legacy serves as a reminder to many South Africans of the loss of a permanent home, a lost space that resulted in many notable social constraints to cultural development and emancipation for a section of the population in the country. This section of the population was Black and mostly African, whose origins go back to the rural villages of the South African landscape. According to Ndebele, for these millions of black South Africans, the legacy of the apartheid landscape represents a lost space. A space that:

In some undetermined future has to be reclaimed. The space they were permitted to occupy without the exercise of choice was often the space of deprivation, and violence. It presented them with a future of uncertainty and impermanence with limited possibilities for planning the future.¹¹⁷

The other space noted by Ndebele is that of the oppressor whose memory of the South African landscape was invaded by them; a "space possessed through determined dispossession. Once invaded, the space has to be fiercely defended and protected from the encroachments of the dispossessed." These two social "experiences of South African space present themselves to us as dominant features of our post-apartheid reality" today. Meg Samuelson (2009) has noted Ndebele's concerns regarding this particular post-apartheid reality. Samuelson uses Ndebele's concerns to begin to think about "what it might mean to move beyond the liminal threshold moment of transition: to walk through that door and inhabit the house of a new national culture."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Kelwyn Sole. "Democratising Culture and Literature in a 'New South Africa': Organisation and Theory." *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa*, 6 (2), (1994), p13.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p13.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p13.

¹¹⁸ Meg Samuelson. "Walking Through the Door and Inhabiting the House: South African Literary Culture and Criticism after the Transition." *English Studies in Africa*, 51 (1). (2009), p130.

Samuelson's suggests that the post-apartheid reality, understood in the context of post-apartheid literatures, gives one a "discomfiture or sense of stasis entailed in inhabiting the transitional margin [which] is met by a desire to move on – to enter into a post-transitional state in which to create new structures of intimacy."¹¹⁹ Samuelson's critical essay takes Ndebele's post-apartheid reflections and uses them to put forward thought-provoking questions that force her readers to think deeply about the present reality in search for answers and/or solution. She asks:

Yet with the gloss of reconciliation now fading, transitional structures – and those that preceded them – may summon cultural workers and critics back to explore what they might yet contain and what unfinished business they have left us: what faded, cracked plaster can we still chip away at; what ghosts continue to lurk in the passages; what walls could we smash through to create windows looking out on unexplored vistas, what new rooms might these structures still throw up; what space of sociality may they come to enable; what textures of communication and contact could they still house; and what doors might they yet open? And more troublingly, how do they imprint themselves upon our intimate worlds, shaping the ways of being that those attempting to make home in South Africa are able to inhabit?¹²⁰

These questions are pertinent to the current socio-cultural experience in post-apartheid South Africa. Ndebele has repeatedly argued that institutions of cultural production, included in there are the transitional structures that Samuelson refers to, need not be destroyed as they can play a major contribution to the rebuilding of a national and permanent home in post-apartheid South Africa. Samuelson agrees with the view that such structures must all be transformed to serve the post-apartheid national agenda, and suggests that:

Rather than wistfully imagining the tearing down of structures, then, it may be more pertinent to think in terms of the renovation and re-habitation of what has been inherited as a means to engage and unsettle the on-going imbrications of past and present.¹²¹

Ndebele has argued strongly in many of his reflective essays against any dismantling of existing cultural structures and institutions. He has stressed that such structures possess both positive strengths and negative weaknesses. The challenge facing these institutions is identifying the

¹¹⁹ Ibid, p134.

¹²⁰ Ibid, p134-5.

¹²¹ Ibid, p135.

appropriate strengths that can contribute to the nation-building and affirming of social justice initiatives taking shape in post-apartheid social environment.

Conclusion

Njabulo Ndebele's reflections in *Fine Lines from the Box* (2007), suggest that the attainment of democracy in South Africa is, so far, failing to create conditions that develop the political, cultural, economic and social situation of the formerly oppressed majority. His public interventions are aimed at assisting South Africa develop a new cultural identity. The succeeding chapters focus on the subject of cultural production in post-apartheid South Africa and the need to transform the post-apartheid university into an African university that seeks sustainable solutions as propelled by the social conditions and demands of its geographical location first and foremost and within the context of the local community's positional worldview in relation to the world and globalization trends. The study is an attempt to locate his ideas within South Africa's transformative cultural landscape, within a globalising world.

CHAPTER 3

“Liberation and the Crisis of Culture”: Njabulo Ndebele on the New Inclusive National Culture.

*The South African stage is full of actors with many competing scripts. Before there had been only one legitimate script: all other possible actors had been forcibly prevented from entering the stage.*¹²²

Njabulo Ndebele (1994).

Introduction

Njabulo Ndebele writes in the essay “Liberation and the Crisis of Culture”, first published in 1994, that the biggest challenge facing South Africa at the time was the crisis of culture. The above epigraph is the opening line of the essay. Ndebele uses a theatrical analogy to paint a clear of the social reality at the beginning of the country’s democratic dispensation. The stage and actors represent South Africa and its citizens respectively. In addition, the competing scripts refer to the different cultural patterns and values that characterise social life in South Africa. Accordingly, the animating question that this chapter seeks to explore is how can such competing scripts be brought in conversation in post-apartheid South Africa? As such, I explore Ndebele’s suggested answers with regards to this and other similar issues which he has identified as constraints to the realisation of a new inclusive national culture. A national culture that is rooted on shared cultural values and a common national identity.

The above-mentioned essay serves as anchor for the critical inquiry into Ndebele’s reflections in post-apartheid social life, as argued in his book, *Fine Lines from the Box* (2007). I argue that the notion of competing scripts is pivotal in addressing constraints that hinder South Africa from realising a shared national culture. This will be done through a critical interrogation of one of Ndebele’s principal theme in the book. Ntongela Masilela (2009) has identified this theme as “the re-invention of values that would hold the idea of the nation in a cohesive manner during the democratic development process.”¹²³ This theme emerges in several of Ndebele’s essays (including his first collection of essays, entitled, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (1991). I go on to explore how Ndebele has brought the idea of competing scripts into conversation through notions of imaging the nation (Benedict Anderson) “in order to make available new options and new opportunities”¹²⁴, home and intimacy, as well as cultural calendars.

¹²²Njabulo Ndebele. “Liberation and the Crisis of Culture.” *Fine Lines from the Box*. Houghton: Umuzi. (2007): p59.

¹²³ Ntongela Masilela. “The Historical and Literary Moment of Njabulo S. Ndebele.” *English in Africa* 36 (1), (2009), p32.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, p32.

Competing Scripts as a Conversation for a Shared Culture

Njabulo Ndebele writes in “Liberation and the Crisis of Culture”, that:

The challenge of culture in South Africa is one that results from the interaction of many languages yielding discordant meanings. In this situation we need to look for a creative point of convergence such as would inspire a universal confidence that our strivings towards a viable national culture are based on as inclusive an understanding as possible.¹²⁵

He argues that the democratic dispensation offers all South Africans an opportunity to learn about each other’s cultures in order to discover a common identity and shared cultural values. He believes that all citizens have an important role to play, regardless of their cultural and language background. He goes on to explain that this crisis of culture is also a crisis for the transition that was underway in the early to mid-1990s in South Africa. According to him, it is expected that this reality “should culminate in the emergence of something new.”¹²⁶ He goes on to say that:

But seldom does the new in human history emerge so clearly as the sun at dawn. Rather, the new is experienced as a process of becoming. Recognition of this fact should underscore the heavy responsibilities of leaders in politics, labour, education, business, art and every other field of endeavour, to assist in bringing into being the self-actualisation of the oppressed in a way that will be in tune with their aspirations.¹²⁷

The ‘new’ for Ndebele, was characterised by a hope that the transition would bring about social emancipation for those once oppressed. For Ndebele, the starting point in rebuilding the nation ought to begin with identifying shared cultural values and a common national identity among various cultural groups. This process could have begun by deliberating in a social content that consisted “of patterns of past behaviour that each of the contending parties bring to the collective search for new alternative.”¹²⁸ He writes further that:

As many of those cultural patterns as possible will need to be exposed to a scrutiny of the most comprehensive kind, for any emerging understanding has the potential of being a strong basis for a future political culture.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ Njabulo Ndebele. “Liberation and the Crisis of Culture.” *Fine Lines from the Box*. Houghton: Umuzi. (2007): p60.

¹²⁶ Ibid, p65.

¹²⁷ Ibid, p65.

¹²⁸ Ibid, p60.

¹²⁹ Ibid, p60.

The above suggestion follows recognition of the grossly racialised cultural inequalities in South Africa that could have reduced the democratic gains to a crisis of culture with dire consequences. Not many intellectuals within the 'New African Movement', Sophiatown Renaissance, and Black Consciousness Movement, among others, would have disagreed with the view that transformation in South Africa ought to be skewed towards the socio-cultural, political and economic aspirations of those once oppressed. These movements were identified in the previous chapters as influential in shaping Ndebele's intellectual thought. In fact, the liberation struggle followed the vision of the 'New African Movement'; the struggle was aimed, among other major political issues, at protecting African cultural values, indigenous knowledge systems (I use this strictly as a descriptive term for Africa-focused and/or Africa generated knowledge) marginalised during colonialism and apartheid on the continent.

The struggle for liberation in Africa is well documented and need not be repeated in these pages. It will suffice to highlight the founding social injustice suffered by the peoples of the continent. Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1981), reminds us of this historical social injustice on the continent, and its ramifications on African cultural values and knowledge systems. Ngugi has pointed out that:

The most important collective experience for Africa and the world over the last four hundred years was the economic, political, and cultural dislocation of Africa under two connected historical phases: slavery, and colonialism. The two are connected in the sense that the victims and the perpetrators, the benefactors and the beneficiaries of the crimes were Africa and Europe respectively. [...] And the two phases were really two stages of the same process: the demotion of the human resources of Africa and their use in the building Europe and the West, as C.L.R. James, Eric Williams, W.E.B. Dubois, Walter Rodney and many others have now recorded.¹³⁰

During the last 400 years, Africa has undergone systematic repression, colonial bastardisation, under-development and other social injustices that contributed to the current state of cultural disparities in many post-colonial African societies. In South Africa, for instance, colonial and apartheid regimes ensured - through systematic state repressive policies - that indigenous cultural values and knowledge systems were undermined, underdeveloped and further marginalised from the national agenda. In addition, colonial and apartheid regimes supported knowledge systems and cultural patterns that denied African history, culture, intellectuality and progressive philosophic thought among others. As such, to rebuild the nation, Ndebele has pointed out that this process must

¹³⁰ Ngugi wa Thiong'o. "Learning from our Ancestors." *Writers in Politics*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers. (1981): p139-40.

begin by acknowledging the different languages in the country that have yielded “discordant meanings”¹³¹ about what it means to be South African. As South Africans search for inclusive culture, it is important that the social content as Ndebele suggested is based on as inclusive an understanding as possible.”¹³²

Therefore, the historic and democratic moment of 27th April 1994 marks an opportunity for South Africans to begin a new era whereby its multi-cultural society could work together to create a new social experience. This new social experience would be rooted on mutually shared cultural values and a common identity. Ndebele has suggested that the post-apartheid social experience be sensitive and biased towards the needs and aspirations of the Black cultural groups in South Africa, at the same time be sensitive to the reconciliation and transformation processes. This is a crucial “process of nation building and cultural *toenadering*”¹³³ necessary in order to re-invent new social values for sustaining the ideals of a new nation in its democratic developmental phase.¹³⁴

At the time of political independence, South Africa was largely divided into three types of socially significant groups. In his ground-breaking essay, titled, “Black Development” (1972), Ndebele spelled out the social problem in apartheid South Africa as emanating from these socio-cultural divisions. He identified the national group as a combination of the racial and the ethnic:

The national group, which for purposes of international identification, can also be known as the people of South Africa, or simply as South Africans. The racial group is a combination of ethnic groups. Thus, the black racial group is made up of Zulus, Basotho, Pedis, etc. and the white racial group is made up of Afrikaners, English people, Portuguese, etc. The national group, we shall note, is fragmented by the institutionalised racial conflicts, that is to say in fact the national group is formed when the racial groups begin to interact. This means implicitly that the most important agent for social dynamism is the interaction of the racial groups. In other words, it is not the nation, in South Africa, which matters, it is the racial groups. Indeed, there is no nation in South Africa; a nation presupposes a voluntary and unified political co-operation of all the social groups within a State.¹³⁵

¹³¹ Njabulo Ndebele. “Liberation and the Crisis of Culture.” *Fine Lines from the Box*. Houghton: Umuzi. (2007): p60.

¹³² Ibid, p60.

¹³³ Sam Radithlalo. “Assembling the broken Gourds: An Appreciation.” in *Fine Lines from the Box*. Houghton: Umuzi. (2007): p257.

¹³⁴ I have paraphrased what Ntongela Masilela identified as the main themes of Njabulo Ndebele’s *Fine Lines from the Box* (2007).

¹³⁵ Njabulo Ndebele. “Black Development.” *Black Viewpoint*. (ed) Steve Biko. (1972): p2.

Accessed@<http://v1.sahistory.org.za/pages/library-resources/onlinebooks/black-viewpoint/black-viewpoint.htm> on 08/10/2010.

In Ndebele's view, apartheid South Africa further exacerbated these cultural/ethnic divisions through racialised social interactions at cultural, political and economic levels. This extended to a biased process of cultural and knowledge production towards the interests of the regime and those it privileged. Thus, cultural knowledge in post-apartheid South Africa is continuously biased towards the values of the former privileged groups. In this regard, Ndebele writes that:

There is a hierarchy of conflict in South Africa. The greatest conflict is that between the races. The race which is in power is the white race; that which seeks the power it does not now have is the black race. The white race is able to control the black race, by force if necessary, in order to maintain its position of power. The white race precludes the black race from participating creatively in the quest for industrial development and, consequently, political power. [...] The white race seeks to prevent the black race from making any constructive and creative contribution to the black race's own cultural development, by creating social conditions un conducive to meaningful cultural expression, thus excluding the blacks from the quest for cultural power in a distinct cultural identity.¹³⁶

Ndebele is adamant that April 1994; offered an opportunity to transform the superior-inferior relationship between white and black, and to completely and permanently discontinue white domination and cultural superiority at the expense of black advancement.

In his words, apartheid and Western cultural imperialism deprived not only black communities from cultural development; they also prevented the settler white communities from developing "social skills necessary to deal with the complex issues of multi-cultural contact in South Africa."¹³⁷ As a result, white communities were in turn exposed for their lack of intercultural contact with fellow citizens. White cultural groups soon had to grapple with a social reality they had been prevented from and protected against by apartheid. Whites found it challenging to dispel stereotypes - forged over many decades - of a black world that's synonymous with the worst "social nightmare imaginable: overcrowded taxis, buses and trains; overcrowded schools, overcrowded stadiums. People everywhere, living in monotonously similar houses, killing without motive, screaming and hollering and laughing uncontrollably in the streets"¹³⁸ Whites cultural groups soon discovered that apartheid had denied them an opportunity to learn indigenous languages which would have exposed

¹³⁶ Ibid, p3.

¹³⁷ Njabulo Ndebele. "Liberation and the Crisis of Culture." *Fine Lines from the Box*. Houghton: Umuzi. (2007): p62.

¹³⁸ Ibid, p61.

them to the diverse forms of indigenous cultures expressed through “dance, painting, architecture, human movement, music, clothing, food, crafts, and forms of leadership.”¹³⁹

At the beginning of South Africa’s democratic era, many within the white community and as a result of the racialised institutions of cultural and knowledge production, were and remain largely ignorant towards the cultural patterns of their black counterparts. Even though the white political culture and social experience were produced and developed through extreme violence, as well as through force-fed claims that Western civilisation itself had made such privileges possible; the black social experience on the other hand, has not been one long formless night¹⁴⁰. Black communities have over the decades been formulating their own agency in order to overcome their social challenges. Under extreme social conditions black people, too, have been fighting for relevance and identity in the modern global world. As Ndebele writes:

In spite of oppression, if not also in response to it, blacks have engaged in the search for such social order as would make life predictable. They have developed forms of cultural experience that may have an impact on the reorganisation of national life in South Africa. For example, the phenomenal success of the black taxi business is not unrelated to the long-established traditions of small money-making societies: burial societies, church groups, football clubs, the ballroom dancing club, the network of market women, home-boy and home-girl groups of various kinds and sizes, and the intricate network of extended family support groups. A predominant energising factor behind all these groupings is the sense that blacks are involved, no matter how informally, in a life of resistance. The ideology of resistance, the call for the uplifting of the black person, even if these are not immediately related to the material interests of a group being formed, are the ultimate justification for social effort.¹⁴¹

Ndebele’s view is that any talks of political transition and negotiations gravitating towards an inclusive and equal social experience in a new South Africa should be “determined by the extent to which the black interest is taken into consideration, for it defines perceptions of legitimacy and loyalty.”¹⁴² He makes it clear that any cultural experimentation for the future should be sensitive towards the social interests of the once oppressed majority in South Africa. Even though black people could produce an unofficial culture under apartheid, their efforts go a long way in dispelling prejudiced notions of an uncivilised and uncultured society. Ndebele argues that all “the scenarios

¹³⁹ Ibid, p60.

¹⁴⁰ This term is borrowed from Chinua Achebe

¹⁴¹ Njabulo Ndebele. “Liberation and the Crisis of Culture.” *Fine Lines from the Box*. Houghton: Umuzi. (2007): p62.

¹⁴² Ibid, p63.

of the future, premised on the habitual experience of white hegemony, are likely to be seen as additional efforts at experimenting with black society.”¹⁴³

Amilcar Cabral (1979) has warned against any attempt to sideline the cultural values of the former oppressed community in the rebuilding of an inclusive and free society. Cabral pointed out that:

A people who free themselves from [foreign] domination will not be culturally free unless, without underestimating the importance of positive contributions from the oppressor’s culture and other cultures, they return to the upward paths of their own culture. The latter is nourished by the living reality of the environment and rejects harmful influences as much as any kind of subjection to foreign cultures.¹⁴⁴

At the time of political independence, the historically oppressed majority in South Africa ought to have ensured that aspects of its ‘upward’ cultural outputs – regardless of whether they date back to pre-colonial, colonial and/or post-colonial/apartheid era – form part of the new national culture. I share Ndebele’s view therefore, that competing scripts are necessary in the course of finding shared cultures in post-apartheid social life. The once dominant actor, as Ndebele put it, must accept that his/her script, during apartheid, was never subjected to a fair and comprehensive scrutiny. It is no wonder “that the emerging actors have no inherent confidence in the quality of the original script”¹⁴⁵.

The Nation: Home, Intimacy and Shared Cultural Calendars

According to Benedict Anderson (1983) a nation can be defined as an “imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”¹⁴⁶ He suggests that the nation is imagined because even “members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”¹⁴⁷ He goes on to point out that a nation is imagined “as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.”¹⁴⁸ Post-apartheid South Africa is imagined by many

¹⁴³ Ibid, p63.

¹⁴⁴ Amilcar Cabral. *United in Struggle*. New York: Amilcar Cabral Foundation. (1979): p173/4.

¹⁴⁵ Njabulo Ndebele. “Liberation and the Crisis of Culture.” *Fine Lines from the Box*. Houghton: Umuzi. (2007), p59.

¹⁴⁶ Benedict Anderson. “Introduction” *Imagined Community*. London: Verso. (1983): p15.

¹⁴⁷ Benedict Anderson. “Introduction” *Imagined Community*. Verso: London (1983), p15.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, p16.

of its citizens – including Ndebele - as a nation aspiring to be a multi-cultural society, united in its common national identity and shared cultural values.

However, hardly is the question posed: what common national identity and shared cultural values unite post-apartheid South Africans? Former president Thabo Mbeki (1997) has asked the question more explicitly: “whereas daily we proclaim ourselves a nation, are we a nation which can share in national interest, or are we merely a collection of communities which happen to inhabit one geopolitical space?”¹⁴⁹ As the democratic dispensation matures, South Africa seems to be struggling to point out tangible aspects of shared cultural values. More than seventeen years into democracy, “the people of South Africa do not [yet] constitute or participate in ‘one culture’”¹⁵⁰ This is because South Africa remains a heterogeneous¹⁵¹ society, culturally naïve and prejudiced against each other’s cultural values and identities.

According to Ndebele South Africans struggle to find shared cultural values and a common national identity because they do not know each other. This is due to lack of open inter-cultural social interactions. He wonders, for instance, what would happen if fifty thousand South Africans of all races, classes, gender, ethnic groups and religious groups were taken to a different city overseas, all at the same time. And once they have settled, what is it that would make them gravitate towards each other? What would separate them as a group from other nationalities to an extent that their “distinctiveness become a basis on which they might become economically or culturally useful in that city?” These thought-provoking questions may find an answer in Thabo Mbeki’s (1997) assertion that:

The new nation cannot come into being on the basis of the perpetuation of the extraordinary imbalances we have inherited from the past. It cannot be founded on the entrenchment of the apartheid legacy.¹⁵²

Accordingly, Ndebele suggests in “Liberation and the Crisis of Culture” that all the scenarios of the future ought not to be premised on the habitual experience of white hegemony.¹⁵³ He argues that failure to prevent this is “likely to be seen as additional efforts at experimenting with black society.

¹⁴⁹ Thabo Mbeki. Speech of Deputy President Thabo Mbeki, at the National Assembly, During the Debate on Budget Vote No. 2. 10 June 1997. <http://www.dfa.gov.za/docs/speeches/1997/mbek0610.htm> accessed 13 September 2011.

¹⁵⁰ Neville Alexander. “Nation Building and the Politics of Identity.” *An Ordinary Country*. University of Natal Press: Pietermaritzburg. (2002), p81.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, p99.

¹⁵² Thabo Mbeki. Speech of Deputy President Thabo Mbeki, at the National Assembly, During the Debate on Budget Vote No. 2. 10 June 1997. <http://www.dfa.gov.za/docs/speeches/1997/mbek0610.htm> accessed 13 September 2011.

Ndebele has rightly pointed out in the book *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (1991) that the challenge in preparing for freedom was freeing the “entire social imagination of the oppressed from the laws of perception that had characterised the apartheid society.”¹⁵⁴ As he suggested, the future at the time was “perceived as being possible only with the contribution of the oppressed themselves as decision-makers.”¹⁵⁵ After-all, one of the fundamental objectives of the struggle for liberation in Africa generally and South Africa particularly, was the attainment of socio-cultural, political and economic freedom from hegemonic Euro-American imperialism, colonialism and apartheid.

In the aftermath of Frantz Fanon’s compelling book, titled, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), the transition to democracy in South Africa should not be allowed to suffer similar pitfalls that have characterized many post-colonial regimes on the continent. Thus, as Ndebele witnessed the dawn of the democratic era in South Africa, he also began to reflect on the emerging socio-cultural, political and economic trends that seemed to dominate the national social content. As such, he has lamented the failure to discover shared and binding cultural ties. Constraints towards this discovery include, among others, the deep-seated cultural differences that are a legacy of apartheid. Evidence of this is the increasing new literature of separate development that has begun to emerge “in which communities once submerged in their common resistance to apartheid now finally exercise the liberty to explore their own histories and assert their own agendas.”¹⁵⁶ As Kelwyn Sole (1994) noted, historically, culture in South Africa has been one of inequality:

The South African government kept the different racial groups from mutual knowledge or common identity and purpose; at the same, ethnic identities were delimited and transfixed into a stagnant and synthetic tribalism. That there has been any cross-cultural interaction in the past, resulting in the emergence of specifically South African cultural forms, has been little short of a miracle. [...] From at least the 1920s, culture functioned as a way of winning hearts and minds, through the controlling of leisure time and the inroads of commercial interests into the lives of disadvantaged and dispossessed people.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ Njabulo Ndebele. “Liberation and the Crisis of Culture.” *Fine Lines from the Box*. Houghton: Umuzi. (2007), p63.

¹⁵⁴ Njabulo Ndebele. “Redefining Relevance” *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: South African Literature and Culture*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. (1994): p67.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, p68.

¹⁵⁶ Shaun Irlam. “Unravelling the Rainbow: The remission of Nation in Post-apartheid Literature.” *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Duke University Press. Vol. 103:4. (2004): p698.

¹⁵⁷ Kelwyn Sole. “Democratizing Culture and Literature in a ‘New South Africa’: Organization Theory”, *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa*. Vol. 6:2, (1994): p1.

Almost two decades since the advent of democracy in South Africa, the racialised cultural gaps are evident. Worst still, is the assimilation of the Euro-American cultural values - espoused by the white cultural groups - by an increasing number of black communities through the institutions of cultural and knowledge production. Historically, argues Sole, “South Africa has been marked in all aspects of life by enormous disparities in power and accessibility to skills and education.”¹⁵⁸ Accordingly, Ndebele suggests that during the apartheid era, the “white race [tried] to make it difficult for the black race to reach certain academic standards, thus excluding the black race from the quest for intellectual and ideological.”¹⁵⁹ Thus, making it extremely difficult for the dispossessed black groups to invest in their own institutions of cultural and knowledge production that could serve as an agency for social and cultural development.

According to Sole, reconciliation structures and institutions of cultural production ought to have recognised the need to democratise culture, by firstly, working towards:

Closing the gap between the notions of ‘high’ as opposed to ‘popular’ forms of culture. For the latter are the wellspring from which all South African art and indeed literature emerge; and a reappraisal of, and change of attitude towards, the culture of those people who have had less power, less leisure time and less facilities available to create self-confident art and literature is long overdue.¹⁶⁰

Kelwyn Sole (1994) had anticipated that the process of reconciliation in South Africa would open up a space through which “many different political groupings, cultural organisations and interest groups, ideological and indeed aesthetic viewpoints battle for positions of visibility and influence.”¹⁶¹ He further suggested that South Africans should not expect a future of “harmony or stasis.”¹⁶² Since Ndebele has openly embraced the democratic and reconciliation processes, he has equally followed this up with thought-provoking reflections, and has argued vociferously that (the relevant form of) education, among others, is one aspect in which reconciliation and transformation can be achieved in post-apartheid social life. He has argued that education is crucial in uplifting the consciousness of the people towards the process of reconciliation and the establishment of a new

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, p2.

¹⁵⁹ Njabulo Ndebele. “Black Development”, *Black Viewpoint* (ed) Steve Biko. (1972): p2.

Accessed at <http://v1.sahistory.org.za/pages/library-resources/onlinebooks/black-viewpoint/black-viewpoint.htm> p3. Accessed on 08 October 2010.

¹⁶⁰ Kelwyn Sole. “Democratizing Culture and Literature in a ‘New South Africa’: Organization Theory.” *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa*. Vol. 6:2, (1994): p4.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, p3.

¹⁶² Ibid, p3.

nation. Ntongela Masilela (2009) agrees and adds that there is a “necessity for reconciliation in order to forge a democratic future.”¹⁶³

It appears that as South Africa moves away from the ‘miraculous’ transition of 27 April 1994, its much celebrated achievement has begun to feel increasingly normal and more ordinary among its people. Evidently, on the one hand, the historically privileged groups realise that the negotiated settlement guaranteed them possession of their ill-gotten wealth and material possession; on the other hand, the once oppressed groups are beginning to realize that 1994 meant that, they too, can pursue such wealth but only from their disadvantaged position. Ultimately, the historically privileged could go on as normal whereas the former oppressed ought to adjust to the new social conditions opened up by the negotiated democratic dispensation. This development has unfortunately, not adequately addressed the expectations and promises of the transitional process for the historically disadvantaged cultural groups. Thus, the pursuit of reconciliation has been thrown into a permanent state of disrepair, as those who continue to enjoy the economic benefits of apartheid, are increasingly “contemptuous of the democratic breakthrough”¹⁶⁴ and the transformation agenda.

In this regard, Ndebele has noted the fact that not enough attention is given to the restoration of the national domiciles, in the wake of the loss of homes [and the] demise of intimacy,”¹⁶⁵ that seems to cripple African families in the wake of democracy and massive urban migration that unfolded since the democratic era. When negotiations were concluded, under-privileged communities in post-apartheid South Africa soon discovered that the ‘intimacies’ of home, lost during apartheid were never to return. The journey for freedom demanded that the dispossessed groups rejoice in the collective experience of homelessness. For the oppressed majority in South Africa, promises of freedom meant that they had to now understand a homely social environment as one that guarantees national safety and security. This safety and security comes with:

The experience of the reality of national boundaries, the setting up of new institutions of governance, and yes, the building of private homes. It is this meaning of 27th April 1994 that would stretch far into the years ahead.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Ntongela Masilela. “The Historical and Literary Moment of Njabulo Ndebele.” *English in Africa*. No. 1(36), (2009): p33.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, p33

¹⁶⁵ Meg Samuelson. “Walking Through the Door and Inhabiting the House: South African Literary Culture and Criticism After the Transition” *English in Africa*, Vol. 51:1, (2009): p130.

¹⁶⁶ Njabulo Ndebele. “A Home for Intimacy” *Mail & Guardian*, 26 April 1996. <http://mg.co.za/article/1996-04-26-a-home-for-intimacy> Accessed on 7th May 2010.

It is also within this context that Meg Samuelson (2009) has pondered such questions in her reading of Ndebele's article in the *Mail & Guardian* (1996) titled, "A Home for Intimacy". Samuelson's insight offers an interesting perspective into Ndebele's reflections about the crisis of culture in post-apartheid social life. Samuelson asks:

What, then, is 'new' about the space entered into across the threshold of the transition? What kind of home is this? With what idioms and insights do writers and other cultural practitioners respond to and explore home as the theatre of intimate lives, home as the site of intimate violations, home under siege, home as space of stultifying domesticity, home as the source of sociality, home as refuge and retreat and home as marker of both belonging and exclusion?¹⁶⁷

More than seventeen years into democracy, these difficult questions remain un-answered. Ndebele, returned home from exile with his family in 1991, only to discover that his family home in the Western township, outside Johannesburg, was no longer there. Ndebele learnt that Africans were removed from the township during apartheid, to "make way for the "coloureds"¹⁶⁸. The township was redesigned so that it could be made more spacious, more comfortable, and more liveable."¹⁶⁹ Like many of his black counterparts, Ndebele had to set aside his own personal pain of losing a home and embrace the promises of a new 'Home', built out of the collective struggle for social emancipation and liberation. As he embraced the transition, Ndebele concluded that "home for [us] can only be some concept of belonging to some historic process; some sense of justice assuming on the day of liberation the physical space of a country."¹⁷⁰ As Samuelson has suggested; "the discomfiture or sense of stasis entailed in inhabiting the transitional margin is met by a desire to move on – to enter into a post-transitional state in which to create new structures of intimacy."¹⁷¹

Antjie Krog (2009) after reading essays in *Fine Lines from the Box* (2007), as well as Ndebele's post-apartheid fictional novel, entitled, *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* (2003), has pointed out that the overwhelming support towards South Africa's transition to democracy was based on the realisation that "[we] are all interconnected; none of us can be 'without' ourselves. And to be our fullest selves, and have our giftedness released, [we] have to accept one another as part of ourselves"¹⁷² in shaping

¹⁶⁷ Meg Samuelson. "Walking Through the Door and Inhabiting the House: South African Literary Culture and Criticism After the Transition" *English in Africa*, Vol. 51:1, (2009): p130.

¹⁶⁸ The term is commonly used to refer to mixed race groups in South Africa.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Meg Samuelson. "Walking through the Door and Inhabiting the House: South African Literary Culture and Criticism After the Transition" *English in Africa*, Vol. 51:1, (2009): p134.

¹⁷² Antjie Krog. "What the Hell is Penelope Doing in Winnie's Story" *English in Africa*. Vol. 36:1, (2009): p59.

a new cultural and social experience free of cultural marginalisation. As such, to achieve full cultural transformation, black and white communities in post-apartheid South Africa can begin to “kindly, remove one another from the banishment of aberration – instead of judging and rejecting one another – a term and a place [we] construct when [we] refuse to care.”¹⁷³ What Samuelson and Krog are pointing out speak to Ndebele’s argument in “Liberation and the Crisis of Culture” that unless all actors and their scripts are fairly and fully tested, South Africa will struggle to find an inclusive national culture.

Opening up the stage for all emerging actors to participate, Ndebele suggests that:

We will develop new political meanings and values. It is here that we will find new homes. It is here that we come to terms with the disturbing truth that both the friends and enemies of yesterday can no longer be taken for granted. The heroes of the revolution may reveal distressing flaws, while the devils of repression may become disturbingly lovable.¹⁷⁴

By agreeing to negotiate the transition to freedom, South Africa opted for feelings and the intellect to determine the future cause of the country’s social environment. South Africa committed itself to posing questions and researching them for solutions. The country opted for “complexity, ambiguity, and nuance in pursuit of its imagined democratic society”.¹⁷⁵ Thus, as time moves along, and the “attainment of full transformation vanishing, literature and cultural artists may be invited to share insights into what went wrong in the process of nation-building”¹⁷⁶. As Samuelson puts it:

Yet with the gloss of transformation now fading, transitional structures – and those that preceded them – may summon cultural workers and critics back to explore what they might yet contain and what unfinished business they have left us: what faded, cracked plaster can [we] still chip away at; what ghosts continue to lurk in the passages; what walls could we smash through to create windows looking out on unexplored vistas; what new rooms might these structures still throw up; what spaces of sociality may they come to enable; what textures of communication and contact could they still house; and what doors might they yet open? And, more troublingly, how do they imprint

¹⁷³ Ibid, p59.

¹⁷⁴ Njabulo Ndebele. “A Home for Intimacy” Mail & Guardian, 26 April 1996. <http://mg.co.za/article/1996-04-26-a-home-for-intimacy> Accessed on 7th May 2010.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Meg Samuelson. “Walking Through the Door and Inhabiting the House: South African Literary Culture and Criticism After the Transition.” *English in Africa*, Vol. 51:1, (2009): p135.

themselves upon [our] intimate worlds, shaping the ways of being that those attempting to make home in South Africa are able to inhabit?¹⁷⁷

It should be clear now that the process of transformation and the transitional structures put in place after negotiations were concluded left more questions than answers. As Sole points out, “the point of cultural democratisation is to spread knowledge beyond an elite few to enable others to participate on their own terms.”¹⁷⁸

Therefore, the need to reconcile remains crucial if South Africa is to forge a ‘democratic future’ that unites them as citizens who share in democratic values that promote tolerance and respect for others’ cultural beliefs, values and identities. In the essay, “The Ties that Bind”, Ndebele argues that cultural calendars are an important form of keeping a nation tied together. He mentions that even townships, during the apartheid era, had their own ‘short’ calendars that kept black communities together. He points out that:

Cultural calendars arise when social activity over time evolves common values, common adherence to an evolved discipline of rule and regulation, and socially programmed anticipation that results in planning as a social activity, not something that bureaucrats do to or for people. Cultural calendars produce communal competences. They provide social cohesion and security. From the perspective of the cultural calendar, days, weeks, and months become a series of signposts in the passage of social time, not the purposeless measure of life without value.¹⁷⁹

The post-apartheid cultural calendar remains with many unfilled entries, due to the fact that the current calendar is designed by top government bureaucrats. What should happen, according to Ndebele is that ordinary citizens ought to be the ones filling those empty spaces in the calendar with “self-generated social initiatives such as would transform social effort into a series of responsible, predictable activities that are then transmitted to future generations.”¹⁸⁰ This is crucial among many other initiatives that can help usher in a new and inclusive national culture in post-apartheid social life and in the nurturing of a well- functioning national community.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p135.

¹⁷⁸ Kelwyn Sole. “Democratizing Culture and Literature in a ‘New South Africa’: Organization Theory.” *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa*. Vol. 6:2, (1994): p9.

¹⁷⁹ Njabulo Ndebele. “The Ties that Bind.” *Fine Lines from the Box*. Umuzi: Cape Town. (2007), p156.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p156.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, p159.

Accordingly, Ndebele has identified public schools and other institutions of learning as important sites for the deepening of shared cultural values. According to him, it is at these sites that the deepening of values of “tolerance, equity, multilingualism, openness and dialogue”¹⁸² could be instilled to the “future generations.”¹⁸³ Ultimately, such developments may bring South Africans closer together as they become more conscious of their social reality, and bringing in a broad sense of cultural effort will have replayed politics as the single most important and definitive catalyst in value making,” as he has suggested. However, the arrival of that moment demands that South Africa “fundamentally transforms itself”¹⁸⁴ first.

Conclusion

This chapter has critically examined Ndebele’s reflections in the essay “Liberation and the Crisis of Culture”. I have explored his suggestion that the post-apartheid South African social experience would be better served if it was founded on an inclusive national culture. A culture that is rooted on shared values and a common national identity. I have examined the notion of competing scripts as pivotal during the process of searching for new alternatives. This chapter concludes by restating Ndebele’s view that unless attempts to find a viable national culture as based on an inclusive social interaction among cultural groups in post-apartheid life, South Africa will struggle to discover a new inclusive national culture.

¹⁸² Ibid, p159.

¹⁸³ Ibid, p158.

¹⁸⁴ Thabo Mbeki. Speech of Deputy President Thabo Mbeki, at the National Assembly, During the Debate on Budget Vote No. 2. 10 June 1997. <http://www.dfa.gov.za/docs/speeches/1997/mbek0610.htm> accessed 13 September 2011.

CHAPTER 4

Njabulo Ndebele on the Role of Universities in Effecting a new Inclusive National Culture

*Is it possible to speak of university autonomy and academic freedom without considering the demand that intellectuals be accountable? Or underline the quest for quality and excellence without which university life loses much of its significance, without heeding the call that university activity be relevant to the needs of the society whose resources nourish it?*¹⁸⁵

Mahmood Mamdani (1993).

*Universities play a pivotal role in shaping the future of any nation.*¹⁸⁶ Malegapuru Makgoba,

Jennifer Molwantwa & Ihron Rensburg (2011)

Introduction

This chapter seeks to explore Njabulo Ndebele's suggestion in the essay, "The 'Black' Agenda and South Africa's Universities", that South African universities must be transformed into institutions that help to consolidate and deepen the 'black interest in the national life of South Africa. In this essay, Ndebele argues that the transformation agenda at these universities must devise strategies that respond to the post-apartheid social realities and challenges. This chapter will appropriate a theme in the book, *Fine Lines form the Box* (2007) identified by Ntongela Masilela (2009) as: "the transformative role of education in creating a new system of values that enables the democratic national experiment."¹⁸⁷ I, in turn, use this theme to open up a critical inquiry into the role of post-apartheid universities in enabling South Africa to realize its shared cultural values and a common national identity. The above-mentioned essay will be explored intermittently with similar essays in the collection, that fall under the same theme. These essays are: "Good morning, South Africa", "The University of the North in the New Era", "Reaching out to the World" and "Higher Education and a New World Order". I conclude the chapter by sharing Ndebele's view that the agenda for change at South African universities must be consolidation and deepening of the 'black' interest in the national life of South Africa."¹⁸⁸

Njabulo Ndebele on the History of Inequalities at South African Universities

It is important to remind ourselves of the racialised quality of education offered at South African universities during apartheid and the legacy thereof beyond April 1994. There exist two types of universities in post-apartheid South Africa as a result of its repressive past. Firstly, there are

¹⁸⁵ Mahmood Mamdani. "University Crisis and Reform: A Reflection on the African Experience" *Review of African Political Economy*. No.58, Setting an Agenda for Change in Africa. (1993), p8.

¹⁸⁶ Cited from the trios newspaper opinion piece, published in the Sunday Independent on the 13th November 2011.

¹⁸⁷ Ntongela Masilela. "The Historical and Literary Moment of Njabulo S. Ndebele." *English in Africa*. 36 (1), (2009), p32.

¹⁸⁸ Njabulo Ndebele. "The 'Black' Agenda and South Africa's Universities." *Fine Lines from the Box*. Houghton: Umuzi. (2007), p166.

Historically Disadvantaged Institutions (HDI), that were established by the apartheid regime to act as an agency through which practices and paradigms that essentialized ethnicity and tribalism could be deepened and entrenched within the South African population. It is also at these HDI's that Bantu Education¹⁸⁹ was used to produce and reproduce mass ignorance on the part of the oppressed groups.¹⁹⁰ These institutions were further characterised by lack of resources and inadequate infrastructure facilities, under-qualified and under-paid academic and supporting staff. The HDI's are a classic example of what Leo Zeilig (2008) has described as “a neglected institution, a crumbling edifice housing impoverished students and lecturers.”¹⁹¹ Ndebele points out in the essay, “The ‘Black’ Agenda and South Africa’s Universities”, that:

All universities in apartheid South Africa were white institutions. This speaks not to the colour-coded categories of human bodies that were required by law to go to and congregate at their designated institutions. It speaks more fundamentally; to the dreadful political that brought those institutions into being in our country. They were all part of the long and complex history of colonialism and white supremacy in South Africa.¹⁹²

Secondly, South Africa has Historically White Universities (HWU) that were established primarily to ensure further development, enhancement and protection of cultural values of the European settler communities, strengthening of imperialism and apartheid objectives and policies. These privileged universities during apartheid possessed enough support and resources to develop and deepen preferred knowledge systems and intellectual traditions of thought for the benefit of white communities. It is also this position of privilege that enhanced these universities international recognition and relevance within the contemporary global order. Writing in the essay, “The University of the North in the New Era”, Njabulo Ndebele argues that the gap between the HDI's and HWU's¹⁹³ needs to be closed and that this requires developing a strategy that ensures that donors do not have an ultimate say on the content of the curriculum. Thus, imposing transformation strategies at South African universities requires careful consideration of their singular problems that are due to their historic origins. As Mahmood Mamdani (2009) noted, there are no universal

¹⁸⁹ An inferior type of education forced onto African communities by the apartheid regime. Its intended aim was to ensure that Africans intellectual development did not equal that of other race groups in South Africa and the rest of the world.

¹⁹⁰ Njabulo Ndebele. “Good morning, South Africa.” *Fine Lines from the Box*. Houghton: Umuzi. (2007), p15.

¹⁹¹ Leo Zeilig. “Student Activism, Structural Adjustment and the Democratic Transition in Sub-Saharan Africa.” In SAIH: International Student Conference. September 2008.

¹⁹² Njabulo Ndebele. “The ‘Black’ Agenda and South Africa’s Universities.” *Fine Lines from the Box*. Houghton: Umuzi. (2007), p165.

¹⁹³ My use of the terms HDI's and HWU's is only for purposes of identifying the two historical types of universities in apartheid South Africa and does not extend to Ndebele's critic of the terminology in his address to the University of the North.

answers to these dilemmas, and so, they must be resolved contextually.¹⁹⁴ Accordingly, Malegapuru W. Makgoba (1997) shares this view, and suggests that whilst “transformation is vital,”¹⁹⁵ this must be tackled within the context of each university’s historic origin.

Emancipating ‘Black’ Interests vs. Academic Freedom at South African Universities

In the above-mentioned essay, Ndebele argues that:

The negotiated nature of our transition to democracy ensured that there was no violent overthrow of the old order by a new one. As a result, many political, social, economic, and educational institutions were inherited intact by the new order. The goal of changing them to reflect new and urgent national realities called for a resort to various strategies that depended on prevailing conditions at respective institutions. Many factors determined the pace and qualities of change.¹⁹⁶

Thus, it is vital that beyond apartheid, these universities begin to function as instruments through which the national democratic experience can be consolidated. For Ndebele, the challenge in transforming universities goes far beyond bridging racial disparities at both student and staff levels (Martin Hall, 2006a; Leo Zeilig, 2008a; Thabo Mbeki, 2010a). He acknowledges the overwhelming challenges faced by agents of change at some of the institutions, such as “the continuing momentum of institutional culture that was set in place long before they came onto the scene.”¹⁹⁷ He suggests that agents of change have to consider which elements of that culture can be retained and which to cast away; such a process often is met by resistance and therefore it becomes slow.

Njabulo Ndebele emphasises that universities’ academic freedom must be exercised within the ideals of the new nation, and open up spaces for the development of academic and intellectual traditions aimed at deepening shared national values, reflect multicultural experiences, and ensure their survival through archives, museums, etc. He argues that:

Every major historic era builds its kind of university. The different phases of white supremacy in South Africa produced their kinds of institutions. Some institutions have been so successful in carrying out their political mandate

¹⁹⁴ Mahmood Mamdani. “University Crisis and Reform: A Reflection on the African Experience” *Review of African Political Economy*. No.58, Setting an Agenda for Change in Africa. (1993), p7.

¹⁹⁵ William M. Makgoba. “Reality Skulks in ... Again” *Mokoko: The Makgoba Affair. A Reflection on Transformation*. Florida Hills: Vivlia Publishers & Booksellers (Pty) Ltd. (1997), p76.

¹⁹⁶ Njabulo Ndebele. “The ‘Black’ Agenda and South Africa’s Universities.” *Fine Lines from the Box*. Houghton: Umuzi. (2007), p165/6.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p166.

that few traditions of serious teaching and research of special significance have survived in them. This is so despite any heroic political role they may have played in the struggle for liberation.¹⁹⁸

Accordingly, Paul T. Zeleza (2004) has pointed out that the university has hardly ever been apolitical:

An apolitical free-market of ideas, where objective facts or truth are traded by impartial scholars, for knowledge is socially constructed and the university is inscribed with, and reproduces, all the unequal power relations of the wider society structures around class, gender, race, ethnicity and other social markers.¹⁹⁹

Zeleza goes on to argue that “academic freedom is more than a set of institutional practices, it is also an ideology used by academics to stake claims for and against friends and foes within and outside the academy.”²⁰⁰ As result, interpretations of academic freedom have been known to “privilege some individuals and silence others.”²⁰¹ Accordingly, Ndebele should know, after all: he has been “intimately involved in the failures and successes of the higher education sector”²⁰² in South Africa.

According to Ndebele, all post-apartheid South African universities must reflect the ‘black’ interest in carrying out their function. By ‘black’, he is not referring to “human colour coding, but to the historic centring of the majority interest in national life.”²⁰³ He suggests that the need to mainstream and project nationally, and beyond individual institutions far outweighs concerns about academic freedom. In all five essays wherein Ndebele reflects about higher education in South Africa, he makes it clear that transformation has to take place if reconciliation and nation-building is to be achieved. In the essay, titled, “Good morning, South Africa”, first delivered as a lecture at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in 1987, he launched a scathing attack on the university’s reliance on academic freedom to perpetuate narrow European cultural interests. Former white liberal universities during apartheid had become notorious for assimilating and acting as “torch-

¹⁹⁸ Njabulo Ndebele. “The ‘Black’ Agenda and South Africa’s Universities.” *Fine Lines from the Box*. Houghton: Umuzi. (2007), p168/9.

¹⁹⁹ Paul T. Zeleza. “Neo-liberalism and Academic Freedom” *African Universities in the Twenty-First Century: Liberalisation and Internationalisation*. (eds) Paul Tiyambe Zeleza & Adebayo Olukoshi. Volume 1. Dakar: CODESRIA. (2004), p43.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, p43.

²⁰¹ Ibid, p43.

²⁰² Sam Radithlalo. “Assembling the broken Gourds: An Appreciation.” *Fine Lines from the Box*. Houghton: Umuzi. (2007): p257.

²⁰³ Njabulo Ndebele. “The ‘Black’ Agenda and South Africa’s Universities.” *Fine Lines from the Box*. Houghton: Umuzi. (2007), p166.

bearers of Western civilisation in the southern corner of South Africa.”²⁰⁴ Anthony O’Brien (2001) has highlighted this essay as “one of Ndebele’s angriest pieces.”²⁰⁵ To this extent, O’Brien suggested that Ndebele had:

Staked out the university as a terrain of bitter political struggle over transformation and drawn the line between what “absorption and accommodation” would mean in a university dedicated under the guise of “high academic standards” to “maintain[ing] the illusion of metropolitan purity” and an “already sterile, derivative cultural environment”.²⁰⁶

Ndebele’s attack on the university was directed towards the white liberal universities that pledged support for the liberation struggle, whilst, actively working towards maintaining the ‘purity’ of Western civilisation in Africa generally. Ndebele’s frustrations at Wits led to his eventual departure as he took up a post as Vice-Chancellor at the University of the North in 1993.²⁰⁷ This highlights the nature of the institutional culture and how it marginalised the cultural interests of the black majority in South Africa during apartheid.

Former white liberal universities are known to have actively opposed any tempering of the ‘purity’ of Western civilisation with local cultural trends and indigenous knowledge traditions. These universities have argued in the most spectacular fashion that such a move would immensely compromise ‘high academic standards’ that these institutions were founded upon and for which they were internationally recognised. As he points out, the white community in apartheid South Africa “insisted on being the human point of reference for all the people of this country”²⁰⁸ Thus, the development of academic traditions and institutional culture at South African universities, were entirely prescribed by this community. He further writes that “the need for the maintenance of European culture in South Africa [was] not negotiable.”²⁰⁹ The liberal university’s support for liberation went only as far as fighting for change that would draw the “oppressed into this culture and making its benefits available to all – to some extent. While apartheid insisted that the oppressed would develop better alone, white liberals insisted they would develop better within the prescriptions of European standards.”²¹⁰

²⁰⁴ Njabulo Ndebele. “Good morning, South Africa.” *Fine Lines from the Box*. Houghton: Umuzi. (2007), p14.

²⁰⁵ Anthony O’Brien. *Against Normalization: Writing Radical Democracy in South Africa*. Durham & London: Duke University Press. (2001), p88.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p88/9.

²⁰⁷ William M. Makgoba. “Reality Skulks in ... Again” *Mokoko: The Makgoba Affair. A Reflection on Transformation*. Florida Hills: Vivlia Publishers & Booksellers (Pty) Ltd. (1997), p82.

²⁰⁸ Njabulo Ndebele. “Good morning, South Africa.” *Fine Lines from the Box*. Houghton: Umuzi. (2007), p15.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p15.

²¹⁰ *Ibid*, p15.

According to Ndebele, South Africa's 'peaceful' liberation will have amounted to nothing if it does not ensure that cultural aspirations of those once oppressed are given serious consideration. An inclusive form of higher education at post-apartheid universities ought to assist in processes aimed at discovering shared values and a common identity. As Ndebele has suggested, it should by now be common sense that all major historical events soon establishes its own university.²¹¹ Thus, it makes logical sense that beyond 1994, existing universities be transformed into institutions that are relevant and sensitive to the social reality in post-apartheid South Africa. After all, Howard Phillips's history of the University of Cape Town (UCT) informs us that:

The 'new' South African Union government of 1910 'with its emphasis on English-Afrikaner reconciliation, was keen to implement an idea first mooted by Cecil John Rhodes in 1891, to establish a national, teaching university on his estate at Groote Schuur, where English and Dutch-speakers could mingle during their student years, thus laying a foundation for future cooperation.'²¹²

Understood in this context, the UCT for instance, despite its 'limited' academic freedom, was nonetheless committed to the aspirations of a minority regime; it contributed to the socio-cultural, political and economic development of the white-settler communities in the country at the time. As South Africa settled for its historic negotiated democracy, it follows, therefore, that the time has come for the dismantling of that repressive alliance forged on the basis of racial oppression and marginalisation of one race group by another. In this instance, Martin Hall (2006) is therefore correct, in suggesting that:

A key stage in the path of transformation is a broadly-founded reconsideration of the core purpose of the university – the generation of new knowledge through scholarship and research, and the transmission of such knowledge through teaching and learning, and through the network of relationships that connect the university with wider society.²¹³

²¹¹ Njabulo Ndebele. "The 'Black' Agenda and South Africa's Universities." *Fine Lines from the Box*. Houghton: Umuzi. (2007), p168

²¹² Njabulo Ndebele. "Higher Education and a New World Order" *Fine Lines from the Box*. Houghton: Umuzi. (2007), p190.

²¹³ Martin Hall. "Overview" *The University in Africa*, p3.

http://www.uct.ac.za/download/uct.ac.za/about/introducing/transformation/reports/univ_in_africa.pdf (accessed 1 June 2011).

By claiming victory over the repressive apartheid regime, the people of South Africa were also pronouncing their readiness to become active participants in the 'new global order' that is emerging. The wider society that Hall suggests the university must connect with is both the black masses in particular and the international community in general. In the essay "Reaching Out to the World" - delivered during his installation as vice-chancellor of the UCT in 2000 – Ndebele points out that "South Africa had been "pushed towards diversity no longer by a political imperative but by felt social necessity"²¹⁴; this inference, points us to the hunger for a 'network of relationships' outside of those essentialized by colonial interests, and exacerbated during apartheid. He goes on to say that South Africans should forge ahead with the process of finding each other in search of an inclusive national culture:

We cannot but come to realise that each one of us brings a high store of value, up until now unknown in the public domain, because we have come from a past that did not allow us to share our value. Now, after some hesitance, flickers of recognition are occurring. That is why those moments and places where we can meet, in our schools, in our universities, in our churches, are so important as sites of mutual discovery.²¹⁵

This is a positive comment, and its intention is quite clear: the post-apartheid social environment is expected to bring together diverse cultural groups to institutions of cultural and knowledge production such as the university; and the time has come for all South African cultural groups to engage in the journey of mutual discovery. It is through some form of mutual discovery that will lead South Africans to discover their shared cultural values and deepen the democratic gains of 1994 through a common national identity. Ndebele ponders on this suggestion in the essay "Higher Education and a New World Order", and suggests rhetorically whether:

Is it not remarkable that Rhodes' dream of inter-ethnic cooperation should, at this time in world history, combine with Mandela's dream of reconciliation, the latter encompassing a much more complex human environment?²¹⁶

²¹⁴ Njabulo Ndebele. "Reaching Out to the World: New Identities on the Horizon." *Fine Lines from the Box*. Houghton: Umuzi. (2005), p141.

²¹⁵ Ibid, p140.

²¹⁶ Njabulo Ndebele. "Higher Education and a New World Order" *Fine Lines from the Box*. Houghton: Umuzi. (2007), p190.

Ndebele suggests that this development will present new possibilities not only to South Africa but to the entire world. I suggest that, read within the context of nation-building and reconciliatory efforts, he is correct, and therefore the university remains a key player in influencing and deepening national democratic values.

The statement issued by the Council for Higher Education (cited by Ndebele, 2007) recognised a need for “a fundamental attitudinal change in the manner in which South Africans looked at the higher education sector”²¹⁷; it stated categorically that, “the 36 public higher education institutions inherited from the past [were] all South African institutions. They must be embraced as such, must be transformed where necessary and must be put to work for and on behalf of all South Africans.”²¹⁸ Accordingly, the statement further noted, that “a new South African identity expresses itself through an inclusive possessiveness of the human and physical landscapes we have inherited.”²¹⁹ In addition, the higher education sector, according to him, was “crying out to be freed from the psychic prison of inherited divisions, vigorously defended, among other things, through the discourse of redress and institutional autonomy.”²²⁰

The major challenge, however, has been to dispel the feeling of entitlement on the part of the former privileged groups to certain universities and their curricula. It cannot be accepted that black South Africans:

Limit their options through a reflex resort to an outmoded system of colour coding, by turning their backs on any of the thirty-six institutions of higher learning they have inherited. To do so would amount to no less than a surrender of historic rights achieved through great sacrifice.²²¹

Neo Lekgotla laga Ramoupi (2011) a researcher at the Africa Institute of South Africa, is adamant that the future of South Africa and Africa generally depends, amongst other things, on the university’s ability to overcome past, present and future social, economic and environmental challenges. With regards to this challenge, Ramoupi has argued that:

An open relationship of trust and mutuality is required between the university, government, the world of work and the broader community. It is

²¹⁷ Ibid, p141.

²¹⁸ Njabulo Ndebele. “Reaching Out to the World: New Identities on the Horizon.” *Fine Lines from the Box*. Houghton: Umuzi. (2007), p141.

²¹⁹ Ibid, p141.

²²⁰ Ibid, p141.

²²¹ Ibid, p142.

only through robust, critical, far-sighted and ongoing engagement that options will emerge that will come to shape the outlines of what a university of the future might look like. In practice, this focus must be on: reviewing the nature of the curriculum; and reviewing the relationship of the university with broader society.²²²

It is time that all universities in South Africa recognise that change is necessary. This change extends to the curriculum as the university comes to terms with the reality that it is now educating all South Africans in Africa as already pointed out by Magalepuru Makgoba (1997). Makgoba has gone on to say that - Africans in particular – “do not come to university to escape or erase the[ir] Africanness, but to confirm and articulate their roots.”²²³ This suggestion has been repeated, at different platforms and academic spaces; and by different thinkers, intellectuals and academics from various academic backgrounds and disciplines.

Conclusion

Intellectuals and scholars cited for this chapter share a common view that the university in post-apartheid South Africa has a fundamental role to play during the enculturation process of post-apartheid society. I have further shown that, Ndebele’s suggestion that a post-apartheid university ought to be biased towards an ‘African agenda’ is justified. Ndebele’s reflections in *Fine Lines from the Box* (2007) serve to confirm his continuous commitment to the struggle for intellectual, social and political emancipation of the historically disadvantaged cultural groups, first and foremost and the realisation of a reconciled, non-racial, multicultural post-apartheid social experience. The curriculum at African universities ought to begin with the community in which the university is located. The university character and/or institutional culture must reflect the shared cultural values and a common national identity of geographical location.

²²² Neo Lekgotla laga Ramoupi. “African-Centred Education and African Languages: Content and Curriculum in Post-Apartheid Education and Training in South Africa” *Africa Institute of South Africa Policy Brief*. no. 56. (August, 2011), p9.

²²³ William M. Makgoba. “Reality Skulks in ... Again” *Mokoko: The Makgoba Affair. A Reflection on Transformation*. Florida Hills: Vivlia Publishers & Booksellers (Pty) Ltd. (1997), p77.

CONCLUSION

This research paper has explored Njabulo Ndebele's reflections in the collection of essays, entitled, *Fine Lines from the Box* (2007). It has critically examined Ndebele's argument that the post-apartheid South African transformation agenda would be futile if it failed to achieve a new and inclusive South African national culture. Through a critical examination of selected essays from the collection, this mini-dissertation has explored the manner in which he formulates the argument that post-apartheid national culture ought to be rooted on shared values and reflect the ideals of South Africa's negotiated democratic dispensation. Through such critical engagement, this paper succeeded in exposing constraints to the realisation of a new inclusive national culture.

In chapter two of this research paper, I reviewed all critical literature on Ndebele's work with the intention of identifying gaps and silences by those that have engaged with and/or analyzed his work in recent years. This review focused primarily on critics that engaged Ndebele's reflections on South Africa's social reality, its challenges, as well as proposed solutions for the realisation of a new inclusive national culture. As pointed out in the introduction of this paper, this research study was concerned with highlighting an alternative reading of the post-apartheid South African social reality. In his reflections, Ndebele suggested that the attainment of democracy in South Africa is, so far, failing to create conditions that develop the political, cultural, economic and social situation of the formerly oppressed majority. A closing analysis of this claim has shown that Ndebele's observation is not far from the truth.

In Chapter three, I sought to open up a critical inquiry into Ndebele's suggestion in the essay "Liberation and the Crisis of Culture", first published in 1994, that the biggest challenge facing South Africa at the time was the crisis of culture. Accordingly, the animating question that this chapter explored was how to bring competing scripts that Ndebele refers, in conversation with the post-apartheid South African social reality? As such, I explored Ndebele's suggested answers with regard to this and other similar issues, which he has identified as constraints to the realisation of a new inclusive national culture. The central theme explored in this chapter and identified as a principal theme in the book by Ntongela Masilela (2009) as "the re-invention of values that would hold the idea of the nation in a cohesive manner during the democratic development process."²²⁴ This theme emerges in several of Ndebele's essays (including his first collection of essays, entitled, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (1991).

²²⁴ Ntongela Masilela. "The Historical and Literary Moment of Njabulo S. Ndebele." *English in Africa* 36 (1), (2009), p32.

Chapter four has explored Ndebele's suggestion in the essay, "The 'Black' Agenda and South Africa's Universities", that South African universities ought to play a vital role in effecting the ideals of the national democratic experiment. I have critically examined his suggestion that transformation at these universities ought to be biased towards the interests of the black majority, and further consolidate and deepen the 'black interest in the national life of South Africa. The chapter appropriated a second theme in the book, identified by Ntongela Masilela (2009) as, "the transformative role of education in creating a new system of values that enables the democratic national experiment."²²⁵ I have used this theme to open up a critical inquiry into the role of post-apartheid universities in enabling South Africa to realize its shared cultural values and a common national identity.

University of Cape Town

²²⁵ Ntongela Masilela. "The Historical and Literary Moment of Njabulo S. Ndebele." *English in Africa*. 36 (1), (2009), p32.

Bibliography

- Achebe, Chinua. "The African Writer and the Biafran Cause." *Morning Yet on Creation Day*. London: Heinemann, 1975.
- Appadurai, Arjun. "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy." *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*. Eds. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner. Blackwell Publishing (2006).
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Community*. London: Verso, (1983).
- Armah, Ayi Kwei. "Remembering the Dismembered Continent (2)". *New African Online Magazine* (March, 2010) <http://www.africasia.com/newafrican/na.php?ID=2719> (accessed on 21 January 2011).
- Adesina, Jimi. "Archie Mafeje and the Pursuit of Endogeny: Against Alterity and Extroversion" *Africa Development*, Vol. XXXIII. No. 4, (2008).
- Cabral, Amilcar. *United in Struggle*. New York: Amilcar Cabral Foundation, 1979.
- Chapman, Michael. "Preface" *South African Literature and Culture: Rediscovery of the Ordinary*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006.
- Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1961.
- Gaylard, Rob. "Rediscovery Revisited." *English in Africa*. 36 (1), 2009:41-54.
- Geertsema, Johan. "Ndebele, Fanon, Agency and Irony." *Journal of Southern African Studies*. 30 (4), 2004:749-763
- Gqola, Pumla. "'The difficult task of normalising freedom': Spectacular Masculinities, Ndebele's Literary/Cultural Commentary and Post-Apartheid Life." *English in Africa* 36 (1), 2009:61-76.
- Graham Pechey. "The post-apartheid sublime: Rediscovering the ordinary." *Writing South Africa*. (eds) Rosemary Jolly & Derek Attridge. United Kingdom: Cambridge University, 1998.
- Gramsci, Antonio. "Problems of History and Culture: The Intellectuals." *Selections from Prison Notebooks*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971.
- Gumede, William & Dikeni, Leslie. *The Poverty of Ideas: South African Democracy and the Retreat of Intellectuals*. Auckland Park: Jacana, 2009.
- Hall, Martin. "Overview" *The University in Africa*, http://www.uct.ac.za/download/uct.ac.za/about/introducing/transformation/reports/univ_in_africa.pdf (accessed 1 June 2011).

Interview with Njabulo Ndebele (Recorded in Roma on 19 August 1986) published in Kulankula: Interviews with Writers from Malawi and Lesotho. *Bayreuth: African Studies Series*. Ed. Bernth Lindfors. 42-64.

Irlam, Shaun. "Unravelling the Rainbow: The remission of Nation in Post-apartheid Literature", *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Duke University Press. Vol. 103:4. 2004:671-698.

Krog, Antjie. "What the Hell is Penelope Doing in Winnie's story?" *English in Africa* 36 (1), 2009:55-60.

Iraga Ramoupi, Neo Lekgotla. "African-Centred Education and African Languages: Content and Curriculum in Post-Apartheid Education and Training in South Africa" *Africa Institute of South Africa Policy Brief*. no. 56. (August, 2011)

Liatsos, Yianna. "Truth, Confession and the Post-apartheid Black Consciousness in Njabulo Ndebele's The Cry of Winnie Mandela." *Modern Confessional Writing: New Critical Essays*. (ed) Jo Gill. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Liesl. "On Being Viewed in a Game Lodge and Other Thoughts: Njabulo Ndebele in Conversation with Victor Dlamini." <http://umuzi.bookslive.co.za/blog/2008/06/16/on-being-viewed-in-a-game-lodge-and-other-thoughts-njabulo-ndebele-in-conversation-with-victor-dlamini/> accessed on 11th October 2011.

Makgoba, M. William. "Reality Skulks in ... Again" *Mokoko: The Makgoba Affair. A Reflection on Transformation*. Florida Hills: Vivlia Publishers & Booksellers (Pty) Ltd. 1997.

Mamdani, Mahmood. "The Importance of Research in a University" Keynote Address at the Makerere Institute of Social Research (MISR), Makerere University, delivered on the 21st April 2011. <http://pambazuka.org/en/category/features/72782>. (accessed on 23 June 2011).

Mamdani, Mahmood. "University Crisis and Reform: A Reflection on the African Experience" *Review of African Political Economy*. No.58, Setting an Agenda for Change in Africa. 1993:7-20.

Masilela, Ntongela. "The Historical and Literary Moment of Njabulo Ndebele." *English in Africa*. No. 1(36) (May 2009):17-39.

Mbeki, Thabo. Speech of Deputy President Thabo Mbeki, at the National Assembly, During the Debate on Budget Vote No. 2. 10 June 1997.

<http://www.dfa.gov.za/docs/speeches/1997/mbek0610.htm> accessed 13 September 2011.

Mbeki, Thabo. Addressing a conference of the Association of African Universities. Cape Town, 22 February, 2005. <http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/pebble.asp?relid=3120> (accessed on 26 June 2011).

Ndebele, Njabulo. "A Home for Intimacy" Mail & Guardian, 26 April 1996. <http://mg.co.za/article/1996-04-26-a-home-for-intimacy> Accessed on 7th May 2010.

Ndebele, Njabulo. "Black Development", *Black Viewpoint* (ed) Steve Biko. (1972), 2. Accessed@<http://v1.sahistory.org.za/pages/library-resources/onlinebooks/black-viewpoint/black-viewpoint.htm> p3. Accessed on 08 October 2010.

Ndebele, Njabulo. *Fine Lines from the Box*. Houghton: Umuzi, 2007.

Ndebele, *South African Literature and Culture: Rediscovery of the Ordinary*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006.

Njabulo Ndebele in an interview conducted by Richard Fehnel in the course of research for the book: *Transformation in Higher Education: Global Pressures and Local Realities in South Africa*. (May 2001).

Ndletyana, Mcebisi. "Introduction", *African Intellectuals in 19th and Early 20th Century South Africa*. HSRC Press: Cape Town, 2008.

Neo Lekgotla Iaga Ramoupi. "I do not speak and learn what I like" Mail & Guardian. 16th September 2011. <http://mg.co.za/article/2011-09-16-i-dont-speak-and-learn-what-like> (Accessed on 2nd October 2011).

O'Brien, Anthony. *Against Normalisation*, Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2001.

Radithlalo, T. Sam. "Assembling the Broken Gourds: an appreciation". *Fine Lines from the Box*. Houghton: Umuzi, 2007.

Radithlalo, Sam. *University in Africa*. (2006).

http://www.uct.ac.za/download/uct.ac.za/about/introducing/transformation/reports/univ_in_africa.pdf (accessed 1 June 2011).

Samuelson, Meg. "Walking Through the Door and Inhabiting the House: South African Literary Culture and Criticism after the Transition." *English Studies in Africa*, 51 (1), 2009:130-137.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage, 1978.

Samuelson, Meg. "Walking Through the Door and Inhabiting the House: South African Literary Culture and Criticism After the Transition." *English in Africa*, Vol. 51:1, 2009: 130-137.

Sole, Kelwyn. "Democratizing Culture and Literature in a 'New South Africa': Organization Theory." *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa*. Vol. 6:2, 1994:1-38.

Sono, Themba. "Intellectuals in the New South Africa", *Dilemmas of African Intellectuals*, Pretoria: University of South Africa Press, 1994.

Vaughan, Michael. "Writer and Community: Theory and Practice in the Work of Njabulo Ndebele" prepared for presentation at the History Department Workshop, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. (6-10 February 1990), p6. Accessed via the University of Cape Town's African Studies Library: C04 0057 3269. BA968 90 (VAUG).

Wasserstrom, Jeffrey. "Expanding on the I-Word" *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Vol. 52 (20) B5. 2006.

wa Thiong'o, Ngugi. *Writers in Politics*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1981.

Zeilig, Leo. "Student Activism, Structural Adjustment and the Democratic Transition in Sub-Saharan Africa." In SAIH: International Student Conference. September 2008.

Zezeza, T. Paul. "Neo-liberalism and Academic Freedom" *African Universities in the Twenty-First Century: Liberalization and Internationalization*. (eds) Paul Tiyambe Zezeza & Adebayo Olukoshi. Volume 1. Dakar: CODESRIA, 2004.