Speaking for the Poor and Oppressed:

Questioning the Role of Intellectuals in South African Social Movements

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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:_____

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Glossary:

AAC	All Africa Convention
AbM	Abahlali baseMjondolo
AEC	Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign
ANC	African National Congress
ANCYL	African National Congress Youth League
APF	Anti-Privatisation Forum
ASSA	Association for Sociologists in South Africa
BC	Black Consciousness
BCM	Black Consciousness Movement
CNETU	Council of Non-European Trade Unions
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CCS	Centre for Civil Society
CYL	Congress Youth League (precursor to ANCYL)
DA	Democratic Alliance
EE	Equal Education
Fosatu	Federation of South African Trade Unions
GEAR	Growth, Employment and Redistribution Programme
ICU	Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union
KRDC	Kennedy Road Development Committee
LPM	Landless People's Movements
LGEP	Lesbian and Gay Equality Project
MPAEC	Mandela Park Anti-Eviction Campaign
MNC	Multi-National Corporation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NUSAS	National Union of South African Students
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
SJC	Social Justice Coalition
SA	South Africa(n)
SASO	South African Students Organisation
SACP	South African Communist Party
SANCO	South African National Civics Organisation
SANNC	South African Native National Congress (precursor to ANC)
SASOV	Suid-Afrikaanse Sosiologie Vereniging
SLSJ	Students for Law and Social Justice
SMI	Social Movements Indaba
TAC	Treatment Action Campaign
Tripartite Alliance	ANC, SACP and COSATU
UPM	Unemployed People's Movement
UKZN	University of KwaZulu- Natal
WSSD	World Summit on Social Development
UN	United Nations
UWC	University of Western Cape
WSF	World Social Forum

Clarification on Language Usage: British spelling is employed throughout the body of this thesis, except when quoting directly from sources produced in American English.

Abstract

This thesis is concerned with debates around the role of intellectuals in South Africa and particularly in the question of intellectuals "speaking on behalf of the oppressed." Although such a question is foremost a response to *recent* debates about intellectuals in post-apartheid social movements and particularly the social movement *Abahlali baseMjondolo*, I anchor the discourse of "speaking on behalf of the oppressed" and its subsequent contestations in a longer historical trajectory going back to missionary ideals around *civilisation*, *progress* and *trusteeship*. Using a range of primary and secondary documents I trace the development of this discourse through the anti-colonial and anti-apartheid era and into post-apartheid discussions highlighting the important points of contestation. This is done by providing an initial problematization of the practice of 'speaking on behalf of others' which is subsequently linked to conceptions of the role of 'the intellectual'. Of particular importance are firstly Zygmunt Bauman's distinction between the intellectual as *legislator* or as *interpreter* related to the different between modern and post-modern conceptions of intellectual life; and secondly, Andrew Jamison and Ron Eyerman's distinction between '*intellectual in social movement'* (which I translate into the idea of the *allied intellectual*) and *movement intellectual*.

This thesis argues that current contestations around the role of *allied intellectuals* speaking for the oppressed in post-apartheid social movements show both continuities and discontinuities to earlier discourses as articulated by a range of social and liberation movements since early colonial times. It also argues that at the heart of the dilemma of intellectuals speaking for the oppressed is a contradiction between their role as *legislator* and as *interpreter*.

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Mdlalose's article raised a number of important and far-reaching challenges including vanguardism and the use of poor people as subjects "who could be used to look like [intellectuals] dreams and assumptions."[4] Responses to this article were many and varied. One that garnered significant further attention was a petition sent to the editors of *Politikon* and signed by a number of prominent intellectuals (lead by Steven Friedman). This letter called on the journal to acknowledge a "lapse in scholarly standards."[5] Furthermore, it argued that Mdlalose's piece "fails to meet the basic requirements of intellectual exchange" which, according to the petitioners, should include the production of empirical evidence, footnoting and the consideration of "the other side's" view.[6] The underlying point of contention was arguably the preservation of traditional academic/intellectual modes. Further debates took place via open letters and raised important questions around the roles that intellectuals play in post-apartheid social movements even calling for a code of conduct for intellectuals working in post-apartheid social movements.[7] In particular they called for an interrogation of how class, race and gender function in the interactions between intellectuals and social movements and in particular begged the question whether intellectuals and outsiders can or should "speak for the oppressed".

Although this represents a climax of these debates, a close reading of the literature on post-apartheid social movements makes it clear that these issues have been bubbling under the surface since the inception of AbM (as well as other contemporary social movements). Indeed, questions around the role of intellectuals in 'speaking on behalf of the oppressed' have been of concern for political theorists as historically and ideologically diverse as Benda, Lenin, Gramsci, Said, Foucault and

[4] Mdlalose, "The Rise and Fall of Abahlali baseMjondolo," p. 345.
[5] Steven Friedman, "Letter for concern by Steven Friedman and signatories," *Politikon* Vol. 42 No. 1 (2015), pp. 129-131. Originally accessed in *Workers World Media Productions* e-newsletter (24 January 2015).
[6] Ibid.
[7] See: Patrick Bond, "The Intellectuals Meets the South African Social Movement: A Code of Conduct is Overdue, When Researching Such a Conflict-Rich Society," *Politikon* Vol. 42 No. 1 (2015), pp. 117-122.

Chapter 1- Introduction

> *This has been a theme in SA politics since the time of Steve Biko who spoke about the tendency of some white comrades, even well meaning ones, to dominate the way issues are raised that affect mainly black people. What we experienced was a vanguardism and control like the Trojan Horse, where an outsider joined in and acted as if passively listening to the people but then began to take over the ideological function.*
>
> -Bandile Mdlalose

In late 2014, the South African political studies journal *Politikon,* published an article entitled "The Rise and Fall of Abahlali baseMjondolo, a South African Social Movement" [1] sparking significant controversy within certain South African intellectual and academic circles. The reasons for the controversy were related both to the author and content of the article. The author was Bandile Mdlalose, a black woman and former leader of *Abahlali baseMjondolo* (AbM or Abahlali), a social movement that comprises people living in an informal settlement outside of Durban. The subject was a serious critique of the role that intellectuals had played in AbM's development and, in her view, its demise. Her claims were particularly controversial given that Abahlali had been hailed by many (often those on "the left"[2]) as one of the most prominent in a group of new social movements seen to represent an alternative opposition force within the ANC-dominated post-apartheid political space.[3] Even more so it was controversial because of the politics of Abahlali which had claimed to be grounded in a much-lauded philosophy of 'speaking for ourselves' thus rejecting any claims by outsiders to speak on their behalf.

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[1] Bandile Mdlalose, "The Rise and Fall of Abahlali baseMjondolo, a South African Social

[2] The term "the left" is in some ways a problematic construction-it is clear that there is no homogenous grouping that this description would fit. However, the term is still widely accepted in South Africa and used extensively as a means of both description and self-identification.

[3] See for example: Nigel Gibson ed., *Challenging Hegemony: Social Movements and the Quest for a New Humanism in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2005); Ashwin Desai, "We are the Poors: Community Struggles in Post-Apartheid South Africa." (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2002).
Africa (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2002).

Biko to name but a few. In contemporary politics the role of intellectuals specifically in *social movements* has also been debated by the likes of Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison. The South African context is no exception. While the *idea* of an 'intellectual' developed within a specific western context related to enlightenment ideals of *truth* and *justice*, the anti-apartheid/anti-colonial struggle in South Africa raised more specific questions about the role of intellectuals. Particularly, the question of "speaking for *the oppressed*" has been debated in many social and liberation movements in the South African context as is evident in disputes in the 1940s between the ANC Youth League and the older ANC generation as well as in the political thought of Steve Biko and other Black Consciousness leaders.

Recently, in the post-apartheid context, there have been various books, newspaper columns and articles that talk about the fact that South African intellectuals are "in retreat." Much of this discussion and criticism is directed towards the African National Congress and their allies within the Tripartite Alliance who are seen to have shut down avenues for intellectual engagement. This idea of "a retreat" actually began surfacing soon into "the new South Africa." The journal *Debate* in 1997, for example, was dedicated to "The Retreat of the Intellectuals" and similar topics were explored in the journal, *Transformation*.[8] These authors lamented the way in which South Africa's transition to democracy had gone hand in hand with a corresponding shift of intellectuals away from the radical, oppositional politics of the anti-apartheid struggle.

Despite these stark predictions and assessments, South Africa's democratic transition also saw the emergence of a more robust and open civil society. In particular the early 2000s gave rise to a number of new social movements often located at the grassroots level. These social movements garnered significant attention from intellectuals who aimed to write about and work with these nascent

[8] See for example: Johan Muller and Nico Cloete, "To Outwit Modernity: Intellectuals and Politics in Transition," *Transformation* 14 (1991), pp. 24-41; Grahame Hayes, "Violence, Research, and Intellectuals," *Transformation* 17 (1992), pp. 74-86; Eddie Webster, "The Impact of Intellectuals on the Labour Movement," *Transformation* 18 (1992), pp. 89-92; Alec Erwin, "The Research Dilemma: To Lead or to Follow," *Transformation* 18 (1992), pp. 4-11.

movements often seeing them as a new radical force in opposition to the power of the post-apartheid state. This renewed involvement raised the importance of the practice of "speaking for others." One of the most common assertions made about the role of intellectuals is that they must "Speak Truth to Power." Many have echoed this call and thus the idea of the 'truth-telling' intellectual is one of the most prominent. However, the notion of 'truth' is in and of itself a complex one. Whose 'truth' can or should intellectuals be speaking? Which intellectuals can legitimately speak this 'truth'?

Nigel Gibson argued that, "The challenge to academics and intellectuals in the university setting is quite clear; their work requires listening to, and taking seriously, the thinking that is done in the communities."[9] However, even a cursory glance at the debates on intellectuals working within disadvantaged or marginalised communities and social movements raises a number of dilemmas and questions that are far from clear.

Intellectuals have to confront power dynamics that arise from their position of privilege based on class, education, gender and race. Importantly, they also have to confront their own ideological biases. In a changed (and changing) post-apartheid political climate intellectuals are often in positions of (relative) power especially when operating within social movements made up of the "poor" and "oppressed." Do intellectuals have a duty to use these positions of privilege and power in order to speak out against oppression or is the act of "speaking on behalf of" always fraught with moral and political considerations? Do these moral and political considerations outweigh the obligation enshrined in an intellectual's position of privilege? Does "taking seriously the thinking done in communities" imply the intellectual has no right to judgment or teaching? What then is the purpose of their involvement in these communities? These questions are not merely abstract or philosophical but have very real impacts on social movement praxis as well as knowledge production. It is clear that the questions raised both by the more traditional and philosophical

[9] Nigel Gibson, Fanonian Practices in South Africa: From Steve Biko to Abahlali baseMjondolo (New York: Palgrave, 2011), p. 161.

literature on intellectuals as well as by the debates of the anti-apartheid struggle have not been adequately dealt with and answered.

1.1 Research Questions:

This thesis thus begins with the question, "What roles do intellectuals play *in speaking for the oppressed* in South Africa and particularly, in post-apartheid social movements?" It then goes on to ask, "What possible dilemmas or conflicts are associated with this practice and how have these been contested both historically and in contemporary politics?"

1.2 Chapter Outline:

Chapter two, which follows, will provide a theoretical and analytical framework. This has essentially two parts. Firstly, I provide a problematisation of the question of "speaking on behalf of others." This is done by drawing on Linda Alcoff's article "*The Problem of Speaking for Others"* and introduces 'positionality' and 'representation' as two analytical concepts important in analysing this problem. Secondly, and in conjunction with this, it outlines a broad framework based on various conceptions of the role of 'the intellectual'. In particular this outlines what Bauman saw as the shift from the *legislative* role of the intellectual to the *interpretive* role corresponding to the shift from modernity to post-modernity as the dominant paradigm for intellectual life.

Chapter three provides an outline of the evolution of political thought on the role of the intellectual in "speaking on behalf of the oppressed" in the South African context. This chapter tracks how such discussions evolved from the anti-colonial and anti-apartheid movements through to post-apartheid discussions. Although necessarily limited, this chapter aims to provide some historical background to these debates using both primary sources (such as speeches or founding documents) as well as secondary material.

Chapter four looks at the question of the role of intellectuals in "speaking for the oppressed" in more depth by focusing specifically on one post-apartheid social movement, Abahlali baseMjondolo. Importantly, it therefore highlights some of the key dilemmas that are alluded to in the debate over Bandile Mdlalose's *Politikon* article. This is done by analysing at least two types of academic writing. The first are studies of social movements by intellectuals. The second are studies of intellectuals in social movements. While I try not to conflate the two, I hope that it will be clear how the knowledge that is produced on social movements by intellectuals is an intrinsic aspect of an intellectual's role. This chapter also uses primary documents (speeches, press releases etc.) produced chiefly by Abahlali and its members.

The final chapter, **chapter five**, provides final analysis and conclusions aimed at outlining the roles of intellectuals and the concomitant dilemmas as they pertain to speaking for the oppressed with reference to the analytical and conceptual framework outlined in chapter two. This chapter anchors post-apartheid discussions in their historical context thus providing a framework in which they can be understood.

1.3 Limitations/Delineation of Study

It should be clear that this thesis does not aim to analyse social movements *per se* but rather uses them as a lens through which to analyse the changing role of the intellectual in post-apartheid South Africa and ascertain how debates on 'speaking for the oppressed' have been framed. In this way it also aims to anchor post-apartheid contestations in a longer historical trajectory. It is thus an attempt to both historicise and understand recent contestations around the practice of "speaking on behalf of the oppressed" in South Africa. I have answered these questions by analysing key texts and writing that deals with these questions. I have not however, engaged in ethnographic research with the social movements in question nor have I conducted interviews with the various *allied* (and *movement*) intellectuals who I refer to. Undoubtedly this would have gained rich insight and information. However,

I feel that the rich primary and secondary texts already available were both insightful and extensive enough to provide an initial characterisation of this question.

Chapter 2- Conceptualisation and Analytical Framework

The word 'intellectual' invokes multiple images. For some an intellectual is in the "ivory tower" of a university, for others they are those who provide political and social commentary and still for others, they may be leaders who provide guidance or even liberation. Conceptually the intellectual has also been conceived of in numerous ways. As Zygmunt Bauman notes it makes little sense to ask 'what is an intellectual?' because,

> *In any place and at any time 'the intellectuals' are constituted as a combined effect of mobilisation and self-recruitment. The intentional meaning of 'being an intellectual' is to rise above the partial preoccupation of one's own profession or artistic genre and engage with the global issues of truth, judgement and taste of the time. The line dividing 'intellectuals' and 'non-intellectuals' is drawn and redrawn by decisions to join in a particular mode of activity.*[10]

Although the origin of the *word* 'intellectual' is credited to the time of the Dreyfus affair, ideas around the role of such a class (devoted to, as Roger Kimball said, "a life of the mind"[11]) go back to the times of the pre-Socratics and were popularised during the enlightenment era. Here the role of the intellectual was conceived of within the context of 'truth-telling' because intellectuals were seen to be those who had access to a higher truth. What the Dreyfus Affair did do however, was link these enlightenment ideas around *truth* and *justice* with the role of the intellectual as someone who 'speaks for the oppressed.' Since then many have argued that it is the role (and duty) of the intellectual to speak for those in society who are marginalised, oppressed or unable to speak for themselves.

[10] Zygmunt Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), p. 1.
[11] Roger Kimball ed., "Introduction to the Transaction edition," in Julien Benda, *The Treason of the Intellectuals* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2007).

'The intellectual' has thus come to be understood as someone who speaks "truth to power" on behalf of the powerless. However, the call for intellectuals to "speak on behalf of the oppressed" has also come under criticism by those who do not see this as a legitimate function. In some ways this is a specific instance of a wider, more general problem about *speaking on behalf of others*. Drawing on work by Linda Alcoff in her article "*The Problem of Speaking for Others",* this chapter introduces *positionality* and *representation* as analytical categories important in analysing the problem of speaking for others.[12] These analytical categories are then linked to conceptions of the intellectual in order to lay out a theoretical and analytical framework for understanding this particular problem as it pertains to 'the intellectual'.

2.1 The Problem of Speaking for Others: Positionality, Representation and Legitimacy

As alluded to above 'intellectuals', at least since the Dreyfus Affair, have been called upon to "speak on behalf of the oppressed". However, the act of speaking for others has come under increasing attacks (for example by proponents of post-colonial or feminist theory[13]) as illegitimate. This has particular relevance for intellectuals involved in social movements because their roles often involve claims to "speak on behalf of the oppressed" through various academic and non-academic mediums. This is problematised by Linda Alcoff in the following way,

> *As philosophers and social theorists we are authorised by virtue of our academic positions to develop theories that express and encompass the ideas, needs, and goals of others. However, we must begin to ask ourselves whether this is a legitimate authority. Is the discursive practice of speaking for others ever a valid practice and, if so, what are the criteria for validity? In particular,*

[12] It is important that this is understood as a broad problem of representation and therefore distinct from the more specific instance of political representation through, for example, electoral politics.

[13] See for example: Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault, "Intellectuals and Power," in Donald Bouchard ed., Donald Bouchard and Sherry Simon Trans., *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 205-217; Joyce Trebilcot, "Dyke Methods," *Hypatia* Vol. 3 No. 2 (1988), p. 1-13.

> *is it ever valid to speak for others who are unlike me or who are less privileged than me?*

Alcoff dealt with this question by introducing a number of important concepts. Firstly she argued that where one speaks from is *epistemically salient* in the sense that one's social position affects the meaning and 'truth' of what one says.[14] This relates to the concept of *positionality,* which comes from a growing awareness of the significance of reflexivity especially for social anthropology.

In anthropology, *positionality* refers to how the researcher's own identities or subjectivity affects both their interaction with those they are studying as well as how such interactions are interpreted and passed on to others. The most obvious of these social identities would be a researcher's race, class and gender but there are of course many others. Thus the act of *acknowledging one's own positionality* is meant to ensure that it is clear how an author's social position relates to the position of those that they are studying and thus how it affects the meaning and truth of the knowledge they produce.[15] The assumption is that this reflexive consciousness will henceforth mitigate the influence of one's subjectivity. Alcoff takes the standpoint that it is impossible to "render positionality, location, or context irrelevant to content."[16]

The second point in Alcoff's problematisation of the practice of 'speaking for others' is to assert that "certain privileged locations are discursively dangerous."[17] By this Alcoff meant that when I speak from a location that is privileged by societal power structures (patriarchy, white supremacy, capitalism, heteronormativity etc.) my speaking for someone (regardless of my intentions) can serve to reinforce their oppression. Both the idea and the problem of "speaking for others" are hence

[14] Linda Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," *Cultural Critique* No. 20 (1991-1992), *pp*. 5-32.
[15] See for example: Frances A. Maher and Mary Kay Tetreault, "Frames of Positionality: Constructing Meaningful Dialogues about Gender and Race," *Anthropological Quarterly* Vol. 66 No. 3 (1993) pp. 118-126.
[16] Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," p. 14.
[17] Ibid. p. 7.

crucially linked to the notion of representation. Importantly, representation, in turn, has two distinct (but related) meanings. The first involves knowledge of something and the subsequent action of conveying this knowledge. This can be understood as *epistemic representation*. Typically such representations by an intellectual or expert would be based on facts or evidence that can be refuted or backed up. The second is better understood from the perspective of *political* representation. The former pertains to the notion of "speaking about" whilst the latter relates to the notion of "speaking for" or "on behalf of".[18]

It is important to be clear that this type of *political* representation is not referring simply (or at all) to representation associated with elected officials. Rather, it concerns *making* representations about groups and thus taking part in the *action* of "speaking for." Alcoff argued that "in both the practice of 'speaking for' as well as the practice of 'speaking about' others, I am engaging in the act of representing the other's needs, goals, situation, and in fact, *who they are*. I am representing them *as* such and such, or in post-structuralist terms, I am participating in the construction of their subject-position."[19] She went on to assert that,

> *such representations are in every case mediated and the product of interpretation (which is connected to the claim that a speaker's location has epistemic salience). And it is precisely because of the mediated character of all representations that some persons have rejected on political as well as epistemic grounds the legitimacy of speaking for others.*[20]

Although distinct, the two forms of representation are often linked. In particular, "speaking for" others may often involve describing their situation or conveying knowledge about their situation and thus "speaking about".[21] In the case of "speaking for the oppressed" this often necessarily involves describing the

[18] Ibid. p. 9.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.

conditions of their oppression. However, the act of 'speaking for' is a more complex and specific problem than that of 'speaking about.'[22] In part the difference relates to the source of legitimacy that the speaker accesses in order to "speak about" or "speak for" others. The source of legitimacy in the case of the former is epistemic in that it relates to the acquisition of knowledge. The latter however comes from some form of societal mandate or expectation which is often contested. In terms of general politics this source is usually dependent on the electoral system and system of government where representatives have a clear authorisation to speak on behalf of their constituents.[23] In terms of the intellectual however, this raises interesting questions as to why intellectuals are expected to engage in the action of political representation on behalf of the oppressed when there has not been specific processes of such authorisation. This takes us back to the underlying assumptions involved in the expectation for intellectuals to "speak truth to power."

2.2 The Dreyfus Affair and the 'Truth-Telling' Role of the Intellectual

> *The Dreyfus Affair consolidated the new social identity around moral as well as political responsibility. The intellectual was not merely the politicized literary personality (with roots in the enlightenment): he or she was also the conscience of the nation, with the duty, as well as the right, to speak out.*[24]

It is often telling to investigate the origins of the words we use in order to understand their true meaning and impact. With respect to "intellectual", it was the intervention by Émile Zola, Marcel Proust and Anatole France in the trial and persecution of Alfred Dreyfus that introduced the contemporary word and meaning.[25] Thus, Kimball argued that it is, "a significant linguistic-historical fact that

[22] Ibid.
[23] See Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," p. 10 for a discussion of this particular instance.
[24] Ron Eyerman, *Between Culture and Politics: Intellectuals in Modern Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), p.60.
[25] Jeremy Jennings and Anthony Kemp-Welch eds., *Intellectuals in Politics: From the Dreyfus Affair to Salman Rushdie* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 7.

the term *intellectual* entered the language in the 1890s in the course of the Dreyfus Affair."[26] The events of this can be summarised as follows,

> *Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish army officer, was accused in 1894 of having composed a letter addressed to the military attaché of the German Embassy in Paris. Dreyfus was convicted of treason and was sentenced to life in prison. But when it was suspected that Dreyfus might have been falsely convicted, as the result of army intelligence's interception of a telegram between the German embassy and a major Eszterhazy, accusations of injustice surfaced. In January 1898 Émile Zola published his famous article "Accuse" in Clemenceau's newspaper L'Aurore, where he proclaimed Dreyfus's innocence and denounced the French army for a miscarriage of justice.*[27]

The "truth-telling" role of intellectuals thus coalesced around enlightenment ideas of reason and a universal moral law to which intellectuals were bound. Kritzman concurred with this noting, "The modern intellectual was invented in France at the time of the Dreyfus affair, as an outgrowth of the Enlightenment quest for *truth* and *justice*."[28] This quest for truth and justice is evident in Zola's original *J'Accuse* article,

> *As they have dared, so shall I dare. Dare to tell the truth, as I have pledged to tell it, in full, since the normal channels of justice have failed to do so. My duty is to speak out, not to become an accomplice in this travesty. My nights would otherwise be haunted by the specter of an innocent man, far away, suffering the most horrible of tortures for a crime he did not commit.*[29]

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[26] Kimball, "Introduction to the transaction edition," in Julien Benda, *The Treason of the Intellectuals,* p. xi.
[27] Lawrence d Kritzman, "Anti-Semitism" In Lawrence D Kritzman, Ed. *The Columbia History of Twentieth Century French Thought* ((New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 151.
[28] Lawrence D. Kritzman, "Inter-chapter: The Intellectual", In Kritzman, *The Columbia History of Twentieth Century French Thought*, p. 363 (emphasis added).
[29] Émile Zola, "J'Accuse," *L'Aurore* (13 January 1898) trans., Shelly Tempchin and Jean-Max Guieu (2001) available at: http://faculty.georgetown.edu/guieuj/others/IAccuse/Jaccuse.htm

From this we can see that Zola saw it as his "duty" as an intellectual to speak out about what had really happened to Dreyfus. Thus his role is crucially linked to the notion of "truth-telling". He asserted that his action was "no more than a radical measure to hasten the explosion of *truth* and *justice*."[30] What was unique about the Dreyfus Affair is indicated by the quote at the beginning of this section; that it included a sense of *political* as well as moral responsibility. As a result "the intellectual" came to be conceived as someone who holds a position as an independent critical voice, using this as a way to speak truth against injustice on behalf of the oppressed (in this case the Jewish officer, Dreyfus). Bauman described the invention of the term as a "rallying call" to those who saw it as their "moral responsibility, and their collective right to interfere directly with the political process through influencing the minds of the nation and moulding the actions of its political leaders."[31] The Dreyfus affair thus "helped to solidify European intellectuals as an intelligentsia, as a distinct group with a moral mission to perform in society, to be the keepers of spirit, of moral standards against the established authority that had abandoned them, and the masses who need instruction in order even to know about them."[32]

2.3 Bauman's Legislator/Interpreter Distinction

The idea of the "truth-telling" role of the intellectual has been elucidated by a number of theorists who have different conceptions of this role. Bauman introduced a critical distinction concerning how the role of "the intellectual" changed with the shift from modernity to post-modernity.[33] Bauman described how the intellectual

[30] Zola, "J'Accuse," (emphasis added).
[31] Bauman, Legislators and Interpreters, p. 1.
[32] Eyerman, *Between Culture and Politics*, p. 38.
[33] Note that Bauman sees the ideas of Modernity/Post-modernity as being distinct concepts here that cannot be limited to an industrial/post-industrial or capitalist/post-capitalist division. He says, "The concepts of modernity and post-modernity stand for two sharply different contexts in which the 'intellectual role' is performed; and two distinct strategies which develop in response to them. The opposition between modernity and post-modernity has been employed here in the service of theorizing the last three centuries of West European history (or West European dominated history) from the perspective of intellectual praxis. It is this practice that can be modern or post-modern; the dominance of one or other

was conceived in the 18th century context as being a *legislator*, a term that implicitly suggested a superior knowledge and access to truth, which afforded the intellectual the legitimacy and ability to *arbitrate*.[34] This was based on a particular world view, held within Western European intellectual circles, that there was one attainable world order where societal practices could be judged inferior/superior by those who had access to this higher truth. Bauman distinguished this from the post-modern role of the intellectual as that of an *interpreter*. It is important to note that Bauman does not see this in terms of a chronological change (the interpreter does not replace the legislator nor does the legislator become the interpreter). Rather, "In referring to intellectual practices, the opposition between modern and post-modern stands for differences in understanding the nature of the world, and the social world in particular, and in understanding the related nature, and purpose, of intellectual work."[35] Thus this change must be understood as a result of a shift to the belief that knowledge and truth are localised (as opposed to universal) and the role of the intellectual became to translate from their own community to others rather than to *order* society in response to an abstract, universal truth.

2.3.1 Modernity and the Intellectual as 'Legislator':

Bauman explained that,

> *The typically modern strategy of intellectual work is one best characterised by the metaphor of the 'legislator' role. It consists of making authoritative statements which arbitrate in controversies of opinions and which select those opinions which, having been selected, become correct and binding. The authority to arbitrate is in this case legitimized by superior (objective) knowledge to which intellectuals have a better access than the non-intellectual part of society.*[36]

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of the two modes distinguishes modernity from post-modernity as periods in intellectual history." See: Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters,* p. 2-3 for a more detailed discussion.

[34] Bauman, Legislators and Interpreters, p. 5

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

Crucially, the intellectual project here was seen to be universalised or, "like the knowledge they produce, intellectuals are not bound by localised, community traditions. They are, together with their knowledge, extra-territorial."[37] It was this universal knowledge that, Bauman argued, gave them the legitimacy to "validate (or invalidate) beliefs which may be held in various sections of society."[38]

This conception is exemplified by others. One particular example is the work of Julien Benda who described the intellectual as being "the guardian and possessor of independent judgement owing loyalty to truth alone."[39] Benda's famous book is a critique of the changing role of intellectuals in the early 20th century. He lamented the involvement of intellectuals in what he termed "political passion" thus betraying their true role, which, he believed, was to remain outside of secular politics (hence the naming of his book *Trahison des Clercs* or *The Treason of the Intellectuals)*[40]. "Political passions" are understood by Benda as, "those passions… termed political, owing to which men rise up against other men, the chief of which are racial passions, class passions and national passions."[41] There was thus "something to be said for intellectual insularity…the 'treason of the clercs' was their abandoning this insularity and involvement in political life."[42] Benda's problem was thus the shift by 'the intellectual' in taking up particularistic causes (i.e. that of a specific race, class or nationality).[43]

Thus, for the *legislative* role of the intellectual there is an intrinsic relationship between independence and truth. The latter necessitates the former or "this responsibility to truth can only be exercised if the intellectual stands apart and is

[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Benda, The Treason of the Intellectuals, p.1.
[40] Ibid. p.3.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Eyerman, *Between Culture and Politics*, p. 85-86.
[43] Some authors have attributed the writing of *La Trahison des Clercs* to Benda's disgust with the actions of Zola and others in speaking out on behalf of Dreyfus. However, Benda laid out specifically that Zola's involvement was not a betrayal of the true intellectual role because of his commitment to the ideals of an abstract truth and justice. See Benda, *The Treason of the Intellectuals*, pp. 50-51.

detached from the society in which he or she operates"[44]. In terms of positionality these conceptions are consequently based on the idea that the intellectual is defined by their ability to *transcend* their own social location. Not only is it possible for an intellectual to do this but it is this very ability that gives the intellectual legitimacy. The notion of "acknowledging ones' positionality" would thus not be relevant to these theorists given that truth is distinct from these kinds of particularities.

2.3.2 Post-Modernity, the Localisation of Truth and the Intellectual as Interpreter:

> *The intellectual does not climb a mountain or pulpit and declaim from the heights. Obviously you want to speak your piece where it can be heard best; and also you want it represented in such a way as to influence with an on-going and actual process, for instance, the cause of peace and justice. Yes, the intellectual's voice is lonely, but it has a resonance only because it associates itself freely with the reality of a movement, the aspirations of a people, the common pursuit of a shared ideal.*
>
> *-Edward Said*[45]

In the opening to the second instalment of his Reith Lectures entitled "*Representations of the Intellectual"*, Edward Said argued that Benda's text "gives the impression that intellectuals exist in a sort of universal space, bound neither by national boundaries nor by ethnic identity."[46] Said, and others, questioned this claim emphasising the idea that the intellectual is very much bound by local traditions and particularities. Bauman's second distinction relating to the typical strategy of the *post-modern* intellectual is relevant here. In describing this Bauman used the metaphor of the *interpreter* rather than that of the *legislator*.[47] This role is said to consist of "translating statements made within one community-based tradition, so

[44] Jennings and Kemp-Welch, *Intellectuals in Politics,* p. 10.
[45] Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (New York: Pantheon, 1994). Also available as a podcast on http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/podcasts/radio4/rla76/rla76_19930623-0900c.mp3
[46] Said, Representations, p.102.
[47] Bauman, Legislators and Interpreters, p.5.

that they can be understood within the system of knowledge based on another tradition."[48] This role is thus not about ascertaining "the best social order" (as with the legislative role) but rather aimed at "preventing the distortion of meaning in the process of communication."[49] Hence, the notion of the intellectual's role as that of *interpretation*.

Said explored some of the key debates on this issue, and asserted that Benda's autonomous intellectual was no longer the standard to which we can, or should, hold intellectuals. Said emphasised the call that the role of the intellectual is to "speak truth to power" but also questioned what this call means by asking,

How does one speak the truth? What truth? For whom and where?[50]

Said's own answer was that the intellectual must be able to *articulate* the suffering of a group and then to be able to *universalise* this suffering so that it can be understood and identified with by other groups. [51] The task of the intellectual is thus "how to reconcile one's identity and the actualities of one's own culture, society, and history to the reality of other identities, cultures, peoples."[52] Said noted that if this is not done it results in the loss of any belief in objective norms and values and allows for intellectuals to defend their own position even if that means falling into hypocrisy.

A crucial distinction for Said was therefore that, in terms of positionality, the intellectuals social position is precisely what they must *use* in order to "speak truth to power" because this action involves making representations about the oppression and suffering of their own people. Consequently he said, "To this terribly important task of representing the collective suffering of *your own* people, testifying to *its* travails, reasserting *its* enduring presence, reinforcing *its* memory, there must be

[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, p. 88.
[51] Ibid. p. 44.
[52] Ibid. p. 94.

added something else, which only an intellectual, I believe, has the obligation to fulfil."[53] This additional obligation is the task of universalising the suffering and thus to "give greater human scope to what a particular race or nation suffered, to associate that experience with the sufferings of others."[54] The legitimacy to 'speak on behalf of' an oppressed group thus comes not only from your own social position (rather than your ability to transcend this) but also from your ability to convey/represent this oppression to those outside of your community. Thus, "the intellectual's representations -- what he or she represents and how those ideas are represented to an audience -- are always tied to and ought to remain an organic part of an on-going experience in society: of the poor, the disadvantaged, the voiceless, the unrepresented, the powerless.[55] Thus Said explicitly related the role of the intellectual to *speaking on behalf of the oppressed* by using their social position in order to represent those in society who are unable to do this for themselves. It is clear from this description that both *epistemic* and *political* representation are at stake here.

2.4 Intellectuals in Social Movements

Traditions of "leftist" thought, revolutionary and liberation movements as well as new social movements have made it clear that the intellectual does not only operate within traditional spheres such as the university or the church. Linking the intellectual with social movements, Eyerman and Jamison distinguished between conceptions of the '*intellectual in social movements*' and the '*social movement intellectual.*'[56] This drew on Gramsci's well-known and oft-used distinction between the *'traditional intellectual'* and the '*organic intellectual.*'[57] The '*intellectual in social*

[53] Ibid. p. 44. (emphasis added)
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid. p.113.
[56] Eyerman, *Between Culture and Politics: Intellectuals in Modern Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994) and Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, *Social Movements: A Cognitive Approach* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).
[57] See: Antonio Gramsci, *The Modern Prince and Other Writings* (New York: International Publishers, 1957), pp. 58-61, 118-25.

movement' conception relates to the established intellectual[58] who is involved in social movements. This type of intellectual is understood to be involved in social movements from their institutional position as an intellectual rather than their position as an equal member of the movement.[59] The '*intellectual in social movement's'* role is based on "his or her 'higher standpoint' to claim insight into the 'laws of history and society' giving to themselves the task of leading 'blind' social forces."[60] 'Eyerman and Jamison go on to assert that these established intellectuals operating in the social movements "often play a crucial role in articulating the concerns of the emergent form of protest, putting them into broader frameworks, giving specific protest actions a deeper meaning or significance."[61] This is interesting to consider in light of Bauman's *legislator/interpreter* distinction. The '*intellectual in social movement'* has elements of the *legislative* role as is evident in the call for them to *lead* as well as the characterisation of the non-intellectual part of society as being "blind." However, the idea that they are also meant to *articulate* the concerns of members within the social movement as well as to put them into a *broader framework* (which can be read as an act of *universalising*) indicates a more *interpretive* function. This implies a merging of *legislative* and *interpretive* roles for the *'intellectual in social movement.'*

Eyerman and Jamison's second distinction is that of the *"movement intellectual."* This draws on Gramsci whose "*organic intellectual"* is engaged with ordinary people and *discovers* truth through such engagement. Gramsci saw '*organic intellectuals'* as those who would be able to bring about social change because it was possible for them to "represent the interests of oppressed groups and encourage them to liberate themselves by developing a critical consciousness."[62] Gramsci was writing in a broadly Marxist framework in terms of which the masses were conceived as an

[58] Eyerman and Jamison assert that this is a translation of Gramsci into "general sociological terms" where established intellectuals are those "formed within the established social institutional contexts." See: Eyerman and Jamison, *Social Movements*, p.95.
[59] Eyerman and Jamison, *Social Movements,* p. 96.
[60] Ibid. p. 113.
[61] Ibid. p. 98.
[62] Richard Bellamy, "The Intellectual as Social Critic: Antonia Gramsci to Michael Walzer" in, Jennings and Kemp-Welch eds., *Intellectuals in Politics,* p35.

implicitly revolutionary agent and his conception of organic intellectuals is bound by a number of ideological constraints that go with this.

Eyerman pointed out that "Gramsci's notion of class, however, is dynamic not static, focusing on historically formed social relations, rather than on fixed social structures. Like Marxian workers, Gramscian intellectuals are formed historically, in specific social relations and thus are not characterised on the basis of generic or empirical criteria alone."[63] Eyerman thus followed Gramsci in that he viewed intellectuals as a product of historically specific social relations. However, he made a key distinction by speaking about social movements rather than the social classes that Gramsci saw as the motivating force for change. He argued that this is because, "in contemporary late modern societies social movements rather than social classes appear to be the new dynamic collective actors and the form of collective identity most likely to bring about fundamental social change."[64]

Eyerman examined Gramsci's claim that political parties were the "organizing and articulating mechanisms" because they brought together the traditional and organic intellectuals.[65] Eyerman pointed out however, that this was historically contingent and subsequent changes brought about by developments within European social democracy have resulted in the political parties associated with the working class being absorbed into formal state structures.[66] Thus, Eyerman argued, the interactions between organic and traditional intellectuals now take place within the context of new social movements rather than in traditional parties. Consequently there was a fundamental shift that took place from Gramsci's *organic intellectual* concerned with class formations and the more modern *movement intellectual* concerned with social movements. Thus,

[63] Eyerman, *Between Culture and Politics*, p.6.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid. p.10.
[66] Ibid.

> *New social movements open spaces which provide opportunities for action for established as well as non-established intellectuals and for the emergence of new roles and tasks for intellectuals. This is why social movements are important to an understanding of intellectuals; they create spaces for 'ordinary people' to become 'intellectuals,' that is, individuals who problematize the routines and beliefs of everyday life and reflect upon them in a meaningful way.*[67]

Following this Eyerman's conception of *movement intellectual* refers to,

> *those individuals who gain the status and the self-perception of being "intellectuals" in the context of their participation in political movements rather than through the established institutions. Through their political activity, rather than through their profession or occupation or on the basis of their legitimated credentials, "illegitimate" persons begin to see themselves and to act as intellectuals, i.e. to take on the identity and aspire to live by those norms and traditions which define what and who is an intellectual.*[68]

The process of participatory democracy that forms these intellectuals is said to "[criticise] the classical role of the intellectual…favoring the movement intellectual as facilitator, interpreter and synthesiser rather than ideological leader."[69] Eyerman and Jamison thus explicitly conceived of the *movement intellectual* as having an *interpretive* function that rejects the "classical role" (what Bauman termed the *legislative* role).

The role of the intellectual according to these theorists is not to remain independent and beholden to a universal truth but rather to articulate the views of a community from which they themselves emerge. Thus, Jennings and Kemp-Welch argued that for some,

[67] Eyerman, *Between Culture and Politics*, p.18.
[68] Ibid. p.15.
[69] Eyerman and Jamison, *Social Movements,* p. 116.

> *Benda's standards, in other words, are not too high but are the wrong standards: the task of the intellectual is to expose the 'easy hypocrisies' and injustices of a society but to do so from within and whilst remaining faithful to the common sense of ordinary people.*[70]

2.5 Conclusion

There are undoubtedly myriad other sources that deal with the role of 'the intellectual' but which have not been mentioned here. However, this chapter has given something of a framework for reference. As a start it highlighted how the "truth-telling" role of the intellectual was conceived and, in particular, how this came to be seen a role that involves "speaking on behalf of the oppressed". Within the "truth-telling" role there is the important distinction between the intellectual as *legislator* and the intellectual as *interpreter*. Although initial ideas around the "truth-telling" role of the intellectual were bound to the legislative role, I would argue that both fall under the "truth-telling" role but are essentially concerned with two competing understandings of what constitutes truth.[71] The former understands truth as being universal and abstract. The intellectual is constituted by their very access to this universal, abstract truth and they are therefore obligated to arbitrate in disputes taking place within the non-intellectual part of society. The latter however, understands there to be multiple truths; each of which is localised and particular. The intellectual in this sense serves to convey meaning from one to the other thus mediating and interpreting between different and disparate groups.

As the Dreyfus Affair illustrated, the "truth-telling" role of the intellectual has come to be conceived of within the context of "speaking on behalf of the oppressed." From the point of the intellectual as *legislator* this can be understood on the grounds that the intellectual has a superior knowledge that they use to arbitrate and order the world in pursuit of "truth" or "justice". In terms of the *interpreter* the intellectual

[70] Jennings and Kemp-Welch, *Intellectuals in Politics,* p.16.

[71] The question of "what is truth?" has been the source of considerable discussion in global political and philosophical thought historically. I am not concerned with addressing this question but rather engaging in a descriptive account of what is the crucial distinction is between these two roles as conceived of by Bauman.

"speaks on behalf of the oppressed" group because they are a part of that group and thus must be able to *represent* its oppression to others.

What however, are the dilemmas associated with these roles? Alcoff's problematisation in "*The Problem of Speaking for Others"* is again useful here even though it does not only deal with this from the point of view of intellectuals (although at times this is implied). As was illustrated in the introduction to this chapter, Alcoff argued that *positionality* plays a key role in the way in which meaning and therefore truth are conveyed. Alcoff's belief was therefore that you cannot separate truth from the positionality of the person who is speaking that "truth" and that the latter always "bears on" meaning.[72] In this way Alcoff agreed with Said and challenged the "autonomous intellectual" conception of Benda and others; consequently taking the opposite stance in terms of positionality. Alcoff argued that neither the act of *political* nor *epistemic* representation "[can] be understood as founded on an act of discovery wherein I discover their true selves and then simply relate my discovery."[73] Her understanding of the problem was in the post-modernist terms that Bauman saw as distinguishing the *interpreter* role of the intellectual but also assumed that the role of *legislator* is illegitimate because of the intellectual's inability to transcend their social position. In addition, to Alcoff there is no one, universal truth that the intellectual can access and therefore their positionality has a significant impact on their representations.

This has been dealt with in a sense by those who say that the role of the intellectual is to articulate the views of the community that they themselves are a part of i.e. to *represent* those views to others. According to Bauman this is the role of the *interpreter*-to be able to translate knowledge from one's own community into others. Alcoff however, contended that we cannot solve problems around representation by claiming to only speak on behalf of communities of which we are a part. Firstly, this was because of the particularly difficult task of delineating complex and intersectional identities. Secondly, Alcoff reasoned, this is because such a

[72] Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," p. 14.
[73] Ibid. p. 9.

position raises equally as important questions around whether one is "abandoning [their] political responsibility to speak out against oppression?" which is brought about precisely because one is in a position of relative privilege.[74] Linking this back to social movements, this dilemma can also result in conflicts between '*intellectuals in social movement'* and '*movement intellectuals'* given that the former are not always a part of the movement or community that they may seek to represent. The '*intellectual in social movements'* is analogous to what I will refer to as an *allied intellectual*. The *allied intellectual* is involved in a social movement despite their formal education/institutional links. They are thus distinct from the established intellectual who has no links to the social movement but are also distinct from the *movement intellectual* formed in the social movement.[75]

To conclude I would like to consider the following quote by Eyerman in relation to *allied intellectuals*,

> *Intellectuals reconceptualise and help to reconstitute these objects and groups. This often ends up tragically or as a farce, as projecting on to movements their own needs and fantasies. At the same time however, intellectuals have helped to uncover deep-seated needs and interests, which otherwise would have gone unknown. This is the thin line between articulation and projection that any theory attempting to grasp the political role of the intellectual must walk.*[76]

It is clear that this assertion goes right to the heart of the dilemma this thesis aims to explore. On the one hand we have the belief that an intellectual has something to bring to those in society who are oppressed, marginalised or downtrodden. Indeed by definition there is the implication that they should provide some form of guidance. And, as Alcoff asserted, is it not a moral obligation to use one's position of

[74] Ibid.
[75] Although conceptually akin to Eyerman's '*intellectual in social movement'* I will refer predominantly to *allied intellectuals* as a less convoluted term which also speaks more clearly to the position and function of such a class.
[76] Eyerman, *Between Culture and Politics*, p.198

privilege to speak out against oppression? However, there is also the counterpoint that intellectuals may fall prey to a kind of elitism or paternalism that disregards the needs, views and capabilities of those they seek to represent. The post-modern role of the intellectual as *interpreter* is in part a recognition of this because it asserts that the intellectual must not legislate but rather convey meaning/truth already generated from those on whose behalf they speak. Alcoff has shown us this is an important consideration for both *political* and *epistemic* representation; *political* representation because of how intellectuals may come to lead movements at the expense of those at the grassroots and therefore risk further reinforcing their oppression; and *epistemic* representation because of the various theories that they might espouse as a result of this involvement which may or may not accurately capture what is at stake in oppressed communities.

Chapter 3- From Colonialism to Apartheid to Democracy: Debates on the Role of Intellectuals in 'Speaking for the Oppressed'

Having problematised the question of "speaking for the oppressed" in general terms and highlighted a framework for the different roles that intellectuals play with respect to this, I now turn to the South African context for further exploration. The social movement *Abahlali baseMjondolo* (AbM) has been a point of both celebration and criticism for its focus on the rejection of outsiders speaking on its behalf as will be explored in the following chapter. However, this discourse did not emerge out of nowhere nor is it entirely unique to AbM.

From the time of early Christian missionaries like Dr John Philip and other "friends of the Natives", the question of the role of intellectuals in "speaking for the oppressed" has been a significant and contested issue at various stages in South Africa's intellectual and political history. This chapter provides some historical perspective for the practice of intellectuals "speaking for the oppressed" by looking at examples of how this question has arisen in South Africa during both the anti-colonial and anti-apartheid struggle as well as post-apartheid struggles for social and economic justice. This chapter is necessarily limited in scope given that it attempts to cover nearly two centuries of political thought and historical developments. The aim is thus not to provide a comprehensive account of all aspects of South African history during this period but rather to give an indication of *some* significant episodes. Moreover these debates are important because, as the quote by Mdlalose at the beginning of chapter one indicated, they are far from resolved. Consequently studying this problem in the context of AbM in isolation would give the inaccurate impression that such debates emerged in a vacuum and are unique to that particular circumstance.

3.1 Who Speaks on Behalf of Black People during Colonialism and Apartheid? Debates on Intellectuals Prior to 1994

3.1.2 Notions of *Trusteeship* and the "Civilising" Discourse of *Progress*

In order to discuss the question of "speaking on behalf of the oppressed" during the anti-apartheid and post-apartheid periods it is important to first look at the way in which this discourse was framed during the colonial period. Of initial significance is the way in which the colonial project, around the end of the 1800s and beginning of the 1900s, came to be defined by a framework of *trusteeship* and *civilisation*. Rooted in earlier missionary ideas of "speaking on behalf of the oppressed", this discourse also functioned as a justification for continued British imperialism.

Trusteeship was a core feature of the early Christian missionaries' philosophy with regards to colonised peoples. This is evident in the case of figures like Dr Philip[77] who aimed to fight for greater justice and equality within the *humanitarian narrative*.[78] Humanitarianism was influential in British metropolitan circles and subsequently spread to various colonies and particularly to the Cape.[79] Humanitarianism went hand in hand with a paternalistic attitude that involved "speaking on behalf of the oppressed" in order to ensure what was, in the minds of the speaker, "best for them". Philip for example is said to have, "vigorously represented the cause and championed the interests of the Khoi and other indigenous peoples, both at home

[77] Philip was the General Supervisor of the London Missionary Society (LMS) and an influential figure in South Africa with regards to "native" rights. For a primary account of his beliefs see: John Philip, *Researches in South Africa; Illustrating the Civil, Moral, and Religious Condition of the Native Tribes, including journals of the author's travels in the interior, together with detailed accounts of the progress of the Christian missions, exhibiting the influence of Christianity in promoting civilization* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969).

[78] Thomas Laqueur describes the humanitarian narrative as being unique in that it "exposes the lineaments of causality and of human agency: ameliorative action is represented as possible, effective, and therefore morally imperative. Someone or something did something that caused pain, suffering, or death and that could, under certain circumstances, have been mitigated…the humanitarian narrative describes particular suffering and offers a model for precise social action." See Thomas W. Laqueur, "Bodies, Details and the Humanitarian Narrative" in, Lynn Hunt ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 176-204.

[79] Andre du Toit, "Experiments with Truth and Justice in South Africa: Stockenström, Gandhi and the TRC," *Journal of South African Studies* Vol. 31 No. 2 (2005), pp. 419-448. For an account of liberalism in the Cape Colony see: Stanley Trapido, " 'Friends of the Natives': Merchants, Peasants and the Political and Ideological Structure of Liberalism in the Cape, 1854-1910," in Shula Marks and Anthony Atmore eds., *Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa* (London: Longman, 1986), p. 247-274.

and abroad."[80] Despite this, his was a humanitarianism described as "an essentially paternalist intervention on behalf of victims of imperialism unable to speak for themselves."[81]

Laqueur argued that these humanitarians thus "implicitly claim a *proprietary* interest in those whom they aid."[82] Significantly, humanitarians "speak more authoritatively for the sufferings of the wronged than those who suffer can speak for themselves."[83] This is indicative of claims to both *epistemic* and *political* representation. Although these missionaries might not have self-identified as 'intellectuals', they too framed their responsibility in the same language as the likes of Zola. "Truth and Justice" were seen to be a crucial part of the critique of colonialism put forward by Dr Phillip.[84]

The paternalistic attitudes associated with the discourse of *civilisation* and *trusteeship* however, went beyond just the missionaries and extended to other colonial figures. While figures like Philip used these arguments to fight for equality, for others, like Genl. Jan Smuts, this served as the philosophical basis of justification for segregation. One such example is a speech by Smuts, entitled "The White Man's Task", where he talks about being in "a position to move forward towards the North and the civilisation of the African continent."[85] Indeed the title of this speech itself gives an indication of the paternalism that would guide much of South African liberalism around the late 1800s, early 1900s and beyond.[86] This went hand in hand with the characterisation of African people as children evident when Smuts said "[the native] has largely remained a child type, with a child psychology and

[80] Andre du Toit, "The 'Dark Sides' of Humanism in South Africa," in John W. de Gruchy ed., *The Humanist Imperative* (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2011), pp. 117-132.
[81] Ibid. p. 121.
[82] Laqueur, "Bodies, Details and the Humanitarian Narrative" p. 180. (emphasis added)
[83] Ibid.
[84] du Toit, "Experiments with Truth and Justice in South Africa," p. 425.
[85] Genl. Jan Smuts, "The White Man's Task," In *Greater South Africa: The Speeches of Genl. J.C. Smuts* (Johannesburg: Truth Legion, 1940), pp. 13-21.
[86] A similar point can be made, of course, for popular literature from the time such as Rudyard Kipling's famous poem "The White Man's Burden" (1899).

outlook."[87] This idea of colonised people being children who need to be guided was integral to the ideologies of *progress* and *trusteeship*. In all of these there was assumed a linear conception of history in which certain groups are "further along" than others (hence "progress") so that they can therefore *help* more "backward" peoples to advance along the same, or only, path to civilisation (hence "trusteeship").[88] There is an underlying universalism to these claims described by du Toit as being "not merely a matter of military dominance, economic power or cultural imperialism; what the British Empire represented was the furthest advance of Civilisation and Progress itself."[89] This links to the previous discussion of the *legislative* conception of the intellectual. Indeed the idea of *civilisation* was itself tied to those same Enlightenment ideals and thus "the core humanitarian assumption [was] of a single and common human nature".[90] Both humanitarians and other colonial figures like Smuts, clearly felt they had the ability and duty to arbitrate by judging societal practices as superior or inferior thus engaging in the *political representation* of colonised peoples.

3.1.3 The early ANC as an 'Elite' Organisation

As one of the first organisations formed to represent black people in South Africa, the ANC is naturally of immense importance in discussing "who speaks for the oppressed" in South Africa. The early ANC (founded in 1912 as the South African Native National Congress or SANNC) was chiefly made up of an educated elite who tended to be more concerned with being integrated into the established colonial order as 'British subjects' than they were with challenging it. In the words of du Toit,

[87] Jan Smuts, "Native Policy in Africa," p. 37.
[88] It should be noted that the idea of trusteeship was also influential at a broader "state" level in the mandate of the League of Nations. See for example article 22 which states, in part,: "To those colonies and territories which as a consequence of the late war have ceased to be under the sovereignty of the States which formerly governed them and which are inhabited by peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world, there should be applied the principle that the well-being and development of such peoples form a sacred trust of civilization and that securities for the performance of this trust should be embodied in this Covenant." See: League of Nations, "Covenant of the League of Nations" (1919) available: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp [accessed 15 December 2015].
[89] du Toit, "Experiments with Truth and Justice in South Africa," p. 431.
[90] du Toit, "The 'Dark Sides' of humanism in South Africa," p. 121.

> *For the new black elites, largely mission educated, who found themselves among the first to be incorporated into the colonial economy and subjected to the colonial state, it was an empowering discovery that resistance could be pursued even after conquest, but now by (non-violent) political means. Paradoxically, such political action had to be premised on claiming the rights due to British subjects, thus taking colonial and imperial incorporation as a departure for protest and opposition.*[91]

Thus many of the early ANC members, at least in their writing or speeches, appeared to buy into the discourses of *civilisation*, *progress* and *trusteeship*. Commitment to this is most evident in the letters written by early ANC leaders confirming their support for the Crown and calling for equal status with whites *within* the Empire.[92] The following extracts are illustrative in this regards,

On British rule:

> *The natives are as fully British subjects as are all the other members of the various races constituting the Union of South Africa, and claim for themselves equal consideration and treatment.*[93]

On the education of other Africans,

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[91] Ibid. In a primary account of this I.B. Tabata writes to Nelson Mandela that "The beginning of this century closed a chapter in our history-the end of resistance of the blacks by military means. It opened a new chapter with new forms of struggle, the political form of struggle." See I.B. Tabata, "Document 67: Letter ["On the Organizations of the African People"], from I.B. Tabata to Nelson Mandela, June 16, 1948" In Thomas Karis and Gwendolen M. Carter, eds., *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1964,* Vol.2: Hope and Challenge, 1935-1952 (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1973), p. 363.

[92] See: Documents 19-21 on the "Establishment of the South African Native National Congress" and Documents 35-38 on "Appeals Abroad" In. Thomas Karis and Gwendolen M. Carter, eds., *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1964,* Vol. 1: Protest and Hope, 1882-1934 (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1972).

[93] SANNC, "Document 35: Petition to Kind George V, from the South African Native National Congress, July 20, 1914," in Karis and Carter, eds., *From Protest to Challenge,"* p. 125.

> *[The African] has refused to camp forever on the borders of the industrial world; having learned that knowledge is power, he is educating his children. You find them in Edinburgh, in Cambridge, and in the great schools of Germany. These return to their country like arrows, to drive darkness from the land.*[94]

On the notion of Progress,

> *There is to-day among all races and men a general desire for progress, and for co-operation, because co-operation will facilitate and secure that progress. This spirit is due no doubt to the great triumph of Christianity…*[95]

On Civilisation,

> *This shall be the dawning of a brighter day for the people of Africa. Christianity will usher in a new civilisation, and the "Dark Continent" will be transformed into a land of commerce and Christian institutions. Then shall Africa take her place as a nation among the nations.*[96]

Christianity was thus particularly influential. Indeed, arguably one of the most "accessible" ways of, at least partial, integration into the colonial order was through conversion to Christianity. These views were however, in many ways out of touch with the majority black population. Consequently, Cell described issues like the franchise and civil rights, which were the most prominent of ANC demands, as being "of direct interest only to the comparatively privileged few."[97]

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[94] Pixley ka Isaka Seme, "Document 20: The Regeneration of Africa," in Karis and Carter, eds., *From Protest to Challenge,"* p. 69.
[95] Pixley ka Isaka Seme, "Document 21: Native Union," in Karis and Carter, eds., *From Protest to Challenge,"* p. 71.
[96] Rev. John Dube, "Document 19: A Talk Upon My Native Land," in Karis and Carter, eds., *From Protest to Challenge,"* p. 68.
[97] John Cell, *The Highest Stage of White Supremacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 267.

Despite this there was an assumption by the organisation that they spoke on behalf of the rest of the black African population. This is clear from many of the ANC founding documents where, despite the elite nature of the organisation, they claimed to *represent* the needs of the oppressed black majority. For example, John Dube wrote in a 1914 petition to the Prime Minister that he writes on behalf of the SANNC "which *represents practically all the native tribes of South Africa*".[98] Furthermore, in a 1916 resolution on the 1913 Land Act it stated, "Therefore this Congress, *representing all the tribes of the Bantu Races within the Union*, earnestly prays that Parliament unhesitantly reject the Report of the Natives Land Commission…."[99]

These texts make it clear how the question of "speaking on behalf of" was framed. Firstly, there was an apparent acceptance of the discourses of *civilisation* and *progress*.[100] Secondly, there was an assertion to "speak on behalf of" the rest of the black African population. Finally, and related to this, there was the implication that there were some black people, like those (foreign-educated) intellectuals in the ANC, who demonstrated that such a "progression" could take place and they could guide and represent the rest of the black population. This indicates that the early ANC self-identified as legislators who would bring enlightenment and guidance to "the masses."

[98] Document 25, "Petition to the Prime Minister, from the Rev. John L. Dube, President, South African Native National Congress, February 14, 1914. (Published in *The Cape Argus*). In Karis and Carter, eds., *From Protest to Challenge,* P. 85. (emphasis added)

[99] SAANC, "Resolution against the Natives Land Act 1913 and the Report of the Natives Land Commission, by the South African Native National Congress," (16 October, 1916) available at: http://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/resolution-against-natives-land-act-1913-and-report-natives-land-commission-south-african--0 (emphasis added)

[100] Some scholars have however, also argued that such displays should not be written off as naiveté or conservatism but rather understood within the context of the period and the potential that such actions had complex meanings and motives. See for example: Peter Limb, "Sol Plaatje Reconsidered," *African Studies* (2003) Vol. 62 No. 1, pp. 33-52. A similar point is made by Raymond Suttner in "The Formation and Character of Intellectuals within the ANC-led South African Liberation Movement," in Thandike Mkandawire, *African Intellectuals* (Dakar: CODESRIA/Zed Books, 2005), pp. 117-154.

The ANC's belief in these liberal values was however dashed in the 1930's with the passing of the Hertzog bills which removed black people in the Cape from the common voters roll and proved a serious blow to ANC leader's belief that they would eventually be *granted* equal status in the Union.[101] Walshe described this process in the following way,

> *Progressive disillusionment in the face of Hertzog's Native policy and the revival of Communist Party influence between 1926 and 1930 also contributed to an environment which produced a robust if eclectic radicalism, split Congress itself and presaged the tensions of later decades when non-collaboration, disassociation from European liberals, Africanist assertion or co-operation within a wider multi-radical liberation front became tactical and ideological issues.*[102]

African politics at this time thus constituted a complex interaction of different forces which disagreed on the best path for bringing about change in an increasingly hostile and white dominated South Africa. They were in many ways competing over the right to *represent* black people in South Africa.

3.1.3 Contesting the Elite Nature of the ANC: The All Africa Congress, the ANCYL and Mass Mobilisation

[101] For a discussion of this see: Tom Karis, "The All Africa Convention, Non-European Unity, and the Left Wing," in Tom Karis and Gwendolyn Carter eds., *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1964, Volume 2: Hope and Challenge, 1935-1952* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1973), pp.3-6.

[102] Peter Walshe, "Moderates and Radicals: Ideological Influences, 1924-1939," in *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa: The African National Congress 1912-1952* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1971), pp. 158-197. It should be noted that the ANC was not the only or even the most successful black opposition force in South Africa during the first three decades of its life. The Industrial and Commercial Union (ICU) for example, largely eclipsed the ANC during the 1920's. See John Cell, "African Responses to Segregation," in *The Highest Stage of White Supremacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 256-275. For more on the ICU (and particularly its ideology in relation to the ANC) see for example: Peter Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa: The African National Congress 1912-1952* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1971), pp. 192-195.

A principled rejection of the politics of assimilation and collaboration came first from leaders of the All-Africa Congress (AAC) set up as a unified African body in response to the Hertzog bills. A Manifesto adopted by the National Executive Committee of the AAC indicates a clear break in the politics of representation from that of the ANC at the time. Firstly, it stated that "nobody can present our case but ourselves."[103] Following this it noted "the rejection, after experience of eight years, of the policy of trusteeship and segregation."[104] I.B. Tabata, an executive member of the AAC, gave an early critique on the role of liberals in the struggle of Africans in South Africa arguing that they had "played a consistent role in furthering the subjugation of the people."[105] Tabata also illustratively added that Africans, mistakenly in his view, saw liberals as their "spokesmen."[106] Tabata attributed this belief, and the ANC's subsequent collaboration with the liberals, as contributing to the passing of the Hertzog bills in 1936. He argued that liberals could never be fully on the side of the African people when their material interests are directly opposed.

Furthermore, Tabata critiqued that liberals in turn sought links with "African intellectuals" however, these "constitute a very small section of the oppressed masses."[107] The role of the intellectual according to Tabata was to "occupy an intermediary position between the working-class and the employing class"[108] This however was compromised by the relative privilege they were afforded. Thus he emphasised,

> *The truth of the matter is that hitherto the intellectuals have been engaged in a systematic miseducation of the masses. That training which they themselves received from the herrenvolk through the liberals they have been*

[103] National Executive Committee of the AAC, "A Call to Unity," Manifesto adopted on August 26, 1943, Document 64 in Karis and Carter,
[104] Ibid.
[105] I.B. Tabata, "Why the Compromise?" In: *The Awakening of the People* (Nottingham: Spokesman Books, 1974), p. 24.
[106] Ibid. p. 25.
[107] Tabata, "Why the Compromise," p. 30.
[108] Ibid. p. 29.

> *passing on to the people without first submitting it to a critical appraisal as to what is good and what is injurious to the cause of the oppressed.*[109]

Internally the ANC's tactics were also challenged in the 1940s by a more radical younger generation of ANC members beginning with Anton Lembede and the formation of the ANC Youth League (ANCYL or CYL). Not only did they challenge the legitimacy of the tactics of the ANC leadership but they also began to raise important questions as to who could speak on behalf of the black majority. This was done by rejecting both the idea of *trusteeship* as well as the idea that the fight against oppression and segregation should be led by a small elite group of black intellectuals. These challenges took place against the background of a changing political context during World War 2 and its aftermath. Externally the late 1940's saw the beginning of the process of decolonisation which would replace the discourse around a "civilising mission" (achieved through colonialism) with that of self-determination and economic development. Internally, the political current within SA was shifting with the introduction of apartheid and the emergence of more radical forces outside of the ANC.[110]

The Youth League manifesto thus stated, "We believe that leadership must be the personification and symbol of *popular* aspirations and ideals" and also that "We believe that practical leadership must be given to capable men, *whatever their status in society*."[111] On *trusteeship* the manifesto stated that, "To mislead the world and make it believe that the Whiteman in South Africa is helping the African on the road to civilised life, the Whiteman has arrogated to himself the title and role of Trustee

[109] Ibid. p.30-31.
[110] See for example discussions on the Non-European Unity Movement and progressive trade unions like CNETU in Robert Fine and Denis Davis, "Labour and Politics: The Left Opposition," in *Beyond Apartheid: Labour and Liberation in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Raven Press, 1990).
[111] Provisional Committee of the Congress Youth League, "Congress Youth League Manifesto," (March 1944) in: Robert R Edgar and Luyanda ka Msumzi eds., *Freedom in Our Lifetime* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1996), pp. 58-69. (emphasis added).

of the African people."[112] The use of the word "arrogated" indicated that the Youth League saw this claim to speak for black South Africans as unjustified and illegitimate. Additionally, the manifesto stated,

> *These conditions [of oppression under trusteeship] have made the Africans lose all faith in all talk of Trusteeship. HE NOW ELECTS TO DETERMINE HIS FUTURE BY HIS OWN EFFORTS…[The African] had made up his mind to sweat for his freedom; determine his destiny himself and, THROUGH HIS AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS, IS BUILDING A STRONG NATIONAL UNITY FRONT WHICH WILL BE HIS SUREST GUARANTEE OF VICTORY OVER OPPRESSION.*[113]

Evidently the ANC was conceived of as the voice of the oppressed black majority in South Africa but this did not preclude a rejection of the ANC leadership's own "elitism". The critique of the ANC as having been an elite organisation without the legitimacy to speak on behalf of the non-elite majority likewise appeared in the following paragraph from the manifesto,

> *Those critics further allege that in that period Congress declined and became an organisation of the privilege few…some Professionals, Small Traders, a sprinkling of Intellectuals and Conservatives of all grades. This, it is said, imparted to the Congress character traits of reactionism and conservatism which made Congress a movement out of actual touch with the needs of the rank and file of our people.*[114]

It is clear that the newly formed CYL rejected the idea that the ANC could continue to speak on behalf of black South Africans so long as they remained an elite or, in the

[112] Provisional Committee of the Congress Youth League, "Congress Youth League Manifesto," (March 1944) in: Robert R Edgar and Luyanda ka Msumzi eds., *Freedom in Our Lifetime* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1996), p. 92. (Capitalization in original).
[113] Ibid. p.96.
[114] Ibid. p. 97.

words of former president of the Youth League A.P Mda, "an organisation of gentlemen with clean hands."[115]

Linked to the rejection of *trusteeship* and the call for the ANC to represent *all* black South Africans, some members of the League still "took the position that 'good' whites existed but had to be excluded from participation in the struggle in order that the African could build up his spirit of self-reliance."[116] Others, including Lembede, took a more radical view arguing that, "liberal whites…had been responsible for stifling the spirit of a self-reliant nationalism among Africans for generations; any concession to, or association with liberals was, therefore, a flirtation with the enemy."[117]

These frictions within the ANC were thus essentially between radical 'Africanists', some of whom later formed the PAC, and those whose philosophy subsequently came to be embodied in the Freedom Charter in the next decade.[118] Although replaced by the ANC's commitment to non-racialism in the 1950s this period in time proved crucial to the development of race consciousness and the beginning of the

[115] In Fine, "Labour and Politics: The Left Opposition," p. 74.
[116] Gerhart, "Lembede and the ANC Youth League," p. 71.
[117] Ibid. Tom Lodge also notes the way in which decreasing levels on trust in white liberals was evident in literature at the time. See Tom Lodge, "Charters from the Past: The African national Congress and Its Historiographical Traditions," in J. Brown et al. eds., *History from South Africa: Alternative Visions and Practices* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), pp. 119-143.
[118] Tom Lodge describes the adoption of the Freedom Charter "representing a deliberate eschewal of racial, linguistic, or culturally-based nationalism." See Tom Lodge, "Charters from the Past: The African National Congress and Its Historiography Traditions," in J. Brown et al. eds., *History from South Africa: Alternative Visions and Practices* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), pp. 119-143. This was a contrast from the politics put forward in the 1940's by the Youth Leaguers. Indeed many in the CYL were closer in their politics to the All-Africa Convention (AAC) and the Unity Movement more broadly and were in fact encouraged to leave the ANC and join them. One illustrative example of this is the letter from I.B. Tabata to Nelson Mandela. See: I.B. Tabata, "Document 67: Letter ["On the Organisations of the African People"], from I.B. Tabata to Nelson Mandela, June 16, 1948" In Karis and Carter, eds., *From Protest to Challenge,"* p. 363. These tensions can also be seen to have led to the breakaway and formation of the Pan-African Congress in 1959. For a discussion of the breakaway of the Africanists from the ANC and the subsequent formation of the PAC see: Tom Lodge, "African Political Organisations, 1953-1960," in *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945* (London: Longman, 1983), pp. 83-86.

rejection of the notion of "speaking on behalf of the oppressed". It is clear that the issue of *political representation* was key to these discussions as was the question of the *positionality* of white liberals. Furthermore, in 1949 the ANC *Programme of Action* committed itself to,

> *the rejection of the conception of segregation, apartheid and trusteeship, or White leadership which are all in one way or another motivated by the idea of White domination or domination of the White over the Blacks. Like all other people the African people claim the right of self-determination.*[119]

3.1.4 Biko, Black Consciousness and White Liberals

> *The role of the white liberal in the black man's history in South Africa is a curious one. Very few black organisations were not under white direction. True to their image, the white liberals always knew what was good for the blacks and told them so. The wonder of it all is that the black people have believed them for so long. It was only at the end of the 50's that the blacks started demanding to be their own guardians.*
>
> –Steve Biko, *Black Souls in White Skins?*[120]

It was arguably with Steve Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) of the 1970s that these ideas around representation and positionality would come to be especially popularised.[121] Biko's Black Consciousness, and in particular his ideas about the role of white liberals, were formative in shaping discussions around the

[119] Document 60, "Programme of Action." Statement of Policy adopted at the ANC Annual Conference, December 17 1949 in Karis and Carter. P. 337. It is interesting to note the shift to the idea of 'self-determination' which itself can be understood as a call to "speak for ourselves" (i.e. *political* representation). This of course developed in the context of the Atlantic Charter. See also the ANC's 'African Claims in Africa' document. Available at: http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=4474

[120] Steve Biko, *I Write What I Like* (Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 1996), p. 21.

[121] In part this could be attributed to the fact that 1) the ANC adopted the Freedom Charter in 1955 thus committing itself to the principle of non-racialism and moving away from the Africanist agenda that Lembede and others had advocated and 2) other Africanist organisations like the AAC and the PAC were not as prominent for at this time.

role of intellectuals and in particular raising questions about positionality and the legitimacy of "speaking on behalf of the oppressed."

Black Consciousness as an ideology was based on a notion of "conscientisation" whereby "liberation was conceived in holistic terms and affected every aspect of black life."[122] Biko argued that integrated spaces and integrated struggles result in "a one-way course, with the whites doing all the talking and the blacks doing this listening."[123] Biko was therefore highly critical of the notion that black people needed whites to speak on their behalf. He believed that this was a way of perpetuating the power structure that elevated "whiteness" above "blackness". Biko argued that white liberals were so immersed "in prejudice that they do not believe that blacks can formulate their thoughts without white guidance and trusteeship. Thus, even those whites who see much wrong with the system make it their business to control the response of the blacks to provocation."[124]

In advocating that black people must organise and liberate themselves, self-reliance was made a crucial aspect of Black Consciousness philosophy particularly when it came to political representation.[125] These principles were a clear rejection of both *trusteeship* and *paternalism*. Speaking about SASO, Lodge argued that

> *before one could consider the difficulties of organisation and strategy the inferiority complexes engendered by oppression and paternalism had to be overcome. Jettisoning any links between black leadership groups and white liberal institutions was essential if all traces of a dependency mentality were to be eradicated…More positively blacks had to create a social identity to*

[122] James Leatt et al., "Black Consciousness," in James Leatt et al., eds., *Contending Ideologies in South Africa* (Cape Town: David Phillip, 1986), pp. 105-119.
[123] Biko, I Write What I Like, p. 21.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Sam Nolutshungu, "Ideology and Meanings," in *Changing South Africa: Political Considerations* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), pp. 151-165. See also: Baruch Hirson, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash: The Soweto Revolt: Roots of a Revolution?* (London: Zed Press, 1979), p. 85.

> *replace the concepts generated by white liberal notions of African integration into a western capitalist society.*[126]

Thus, according to Biko, "Freedom is the ability to define one's possibilities held back not by the power of other people over one."[127] These principles indicate the importance of positionality to Biko's philosophy. It is clear that his rejection of white liberals speaking on behalf of black people, even when attempting to bring about change, comes in part from a belief that one's position is, to use Alcoff's phrase, *epistemically salient*.

Rick Turner elaborated on the critique of white liberals by the BCM by narrowing down what was meant by the term liberal in this context (a term that for Turner, like Biko, was pejorative). A key aspect of his assertion pertained to liberals' belief that they could speak on behalf of black people. Turner argued that liberals in this context were those who "[believed] that "western civilisation" is adequate, and superior to other forms, but also that blacks can, through education, attain the level of western civilisation."[128] This is reminiscent of earlier forms of *trusteeship* (as with the missionaries) as well as indicative of a *legislative* function. This is further elucidated in Turners contention that,

> *This attitude remains arrogant, paternalistic and basically insulting. It involves the acceptance of the idea to behave like whites is the ideal; it is to accept the concept of the 'civilising mission' of the whites, the idea that, although blacks are not biologically inferior, they are culturally inferior. They may be educable, but they need whites to educate them.*[129]

Turner also raised a different instance of paternalism by white liberals when he discussed the question of whether they should always follow black members of the

[126] Tom Lodge, "Children of Soweto," in *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945*, p. 323.
[127] Biko, I Write What I Like. p. 101.
[128] Richard Turner, "Black Consciousness and White Liberals," *Reality* (1972), pp. 20-22.
[129] Turner, "Black Consciousness and White Liberals," p. 20.

anti-apartheid movement or whether they should voice disagreement if and when it arises. Turner argued that choosing the former is "the ultimate white paternalism…because it treats blacks as being incapable of listening to criticism and engaging in rational argument."[130] He went on to assert that,

> *One must not confuse a) the fact that any political strategy in South Africa must have as its unquestionable basis the objective of satisfying the needs of the black masses, irrespective of whether this clashes with white interests, with b) the idea that one must go along with the policy/strategy of any particular black leader just because he/she claims to be aiming at that goal.*[131]

This is illustrative of the tension between the intellectual as *legislator* or as *interpreter*. Despite critiquing the underlying assumptions of *trusteeship* and *civilisation*, Turner was also arguing that intellectuals should not give up their right to arbitrate so long as they are committed to the overarching goal of emancipation from oppression. In this sense there is a merging of the legislator who arbitrates with the interpreter who, in the words of Said, "associates [themselves] freely with the reality of a movement, the aspirations of a people, the common pursuit of a shared ideal."[132]

Glenn Moss noted one example of this in the way such debates, influenced by Biko, occurred within the radical, white student movement at roughly the same time and often in response to the principles of Black Consciousness.[133] He recalled a number

[130] Ibid. p. 21.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, p. 92.
[133] Glenn Moss, *The New Radicals* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2014). For a full discussion of the role that the Black Consciousness movement and the effect of the rejection of NUSAS by SASO on white radical student politics see: Martin Legassick, "NUSAS in the 1970's" in SADET, *The Road to Democracy: Volume 2 (1970-1980)* (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 2007); Richard Turner, "Black Consciousness and White Liberals," *Reality: A Journal of Liberal Opinion* (July 1972), pp. 20-22; Grace Davie, "Agitation through Quantification: White Student Activists in the Era of Black Consciousness," In *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa* (New York: Cambridge, 2015).

of different influences on these conversations. Firstly, there was Amilcar Cabral's notion of class suicide which "argued that intellectuals from the petty bourgeoisie could reject the basis of their class position and privilege. Through doing this they could commit their skills, knowledge and resources to strengthening the revolutionary impetus of the national liberation movements."[134] Secondly, Moss noted the strong Marxist influences from the likes of Gramsci, Lukács and, importantly, Lenin whose analysis of the importance of the vanguard party was especially influential.[135] Consequently important questions were raised around the "optimal relationship between intellectuals and [the] working-class."[136] Moss had in mind young radical white intellectuals who often saw their role as involving education and dissemination of knowledge that used their privileged position to bring about changes to worker issues.[137] This can be seen through the role of structures like the Industrial Wage Commissions set up by NUSAS and various SRC's.[138]

Desai and Bohmke reiterated Moss's points regarding the role that white intellectuals played *within* the anti-apartheid struggle characterising it as being "organic" but also indicating a *legislative* conception of the intellectual's role. They argued that, "Liberal analyses of South Africa's political economy came to be challenged in the early 1970's by intellectuals working from a neo-Marxist perspective."[139] These intellectuals were concerned with building alliances with the newly emergent trade unions (FOSATU and then COSATU) as potential sites for alternative resistance to apartheid. This engagement was extended out of union structures to the nascent civic and student movements.[140] Desai and Bohmke also

[134] Moss, *The New Radicals,* p. 47. See also: Amilcar Cabral, *Revolution in Guinea: Selected Works* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970); Tom Meisenhelder, "Amilcar Cabral's theory of class suicide and revolutionary socialism," *Monthly Review,* 45 (6).
[135]Ibid.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Ibid. p.153.
[138] Hirson, Year of Fire, Year of Ash, p. 126-127.
[139] Ashwin Desai and Heinrich E. Bohmke, "The Death of the Intellectual, The Birth of a Salesman," *Debate* 3 (1997), pp. 10-34.
[140] Desai and Bohmke, "The Death of the Intellectual," p. 12

asserted the following, which gives an indication of the self-conception of this generation of intellectuals,

> *The conditions of struggle served also, in a world becoming bereft of liberatory meta-narratives, to position and bind those intellectuals to a universal identity and universalising analytic framework.*[141]

This "universal identity and universalising analytic framework" meant that these intellectuals had "an almost phobic reaction to bodies of knowledge like cultural studies which tried to take stock of the "Subjective factor in history," critiqued the Enlightenment assumptions underlying their historicism, or mooted micro-political institutional interventions."[142] This characterisation indicated a commitment to the *legislative* conception of the intellectual. It is clear that a rejection of "the subjective factor in history" is a rejection of the kind of post-modern ideals indicated by the *interpretive* role.

3.2 Who 'Speaks for the Oppressed' in Post-apartheid South Africa? Intellectuals in Social Movements

It is clear that the anti-apartheid struggle raised many questions about the role that intellectuals play in "speaking for the oppressed". Given the nature of apartheid as a racially unequal and exclusive system, it is expected that these discussions were framed in terms of race and class differentials. The dominance of ideologies of *paternalism*, *trusteeship* and *civilisation* meant claims to both *legislate* and subsequently "speak on behalf of the oppressed" were prevalent. These were however, contested by the BCM, ANCYL and the AAC emphasising both class and race disparities. These organisations asserted that continued claims to speak on behalf of the black majority by either elite organisations (the early ANC) or by whites (missionaries and liberals) acted more to reinforce modes of oppression. Thus, despite not having academic qualifications or affiliations, some intellectuals in revolutionary and social movements (be it the ANC, the AAC, the BCM or others) had

[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid. p. 14.

leading roles in articulating the views and objectives of these organisations and could be understood as having been *movement intellectuals.* There were of course some academics and university-based intellectuals who supported and influenced liberation movements performing the function of *allied intellectuals*. Indeed the contestations around the legitimacy of "speaking for the oppressed" were particularly challenging to the latter. In some senses though this challenge was superseded by the struggle against apartheid and the calls for intellectuals to 'speak truth to power' were usually a call to oppose the apartheid state.

The transition to democracy however, raised difficult questions for these intellectuals related to both their role and function. The post-apartheid transition also brought about new avenues for intellectual engagement with the rise of social movements. This section gives a brief contextualisation of the shifting roles of intellectuals in the post-apartheid context. Following this it proceeds to a preliminary account of how the question of "speaking on behalf of the oppressed" has been framed in the post-apartheid period with particular reference to *allied intellectuals*.

3.2.1 Intellectuals in Transition: Post-Apartheid Contextualisation

> *It is ironic that the moment of liberation from apartheid should be accompanied by new constraints on independent intellectual work. The advent of democracy has indeed shifted the center stage away from the social movements that led to the democratisation process, toward the new state whose demands are for more technical policy-oriented research.*
>
> -Eddie Webster[143]

Webster's remarks are indicative of a collection of writing from the 1990s which questioned the continuing relevance of intellectuals in a post-apartheid, democratic

[143] Eddie Webster, "Democratic Transition: South African Sociology," *Contemporary Sociology* Vol. 26 No. 3 (1997), pp. 278-282.

South Africa. Authors lamented the way in which South Africa's transition to democracy had gone hand in hand with a corresponding shift of its intellectuals away from the radical, oppositional politics of the anti-apartheid struggle and subsequently becoming disconnected from the social movements in which they had previously participated.[144] Others argued that the transition to democracy would merely see a shift in the role of the intellectual. Muller and Cloete, for example, predicted in 1991 that the transition would result in the "the function of the intellectual [taking] a new direction in this newly prized-open civil society."[145]

The growth of new social movements in the 2000s fulfilled this prediction. According to Dikeni and Gumede,

> *Since 2000, new spaces have opened up for intellectual engagement, on the mainstream ANC left, in civil movements such as the Treatment Action Campaign. Other new intellectual activity has been evident in the mushrooming of civil movements outside the ANC family.*[146]

These social movements have come to occupy a significant position in the post-apartheid political landscape. A number of studies have looked at the rise of new social movements from around the year 2000 and there has been a significant body of literature that examines the possibilities of these alternative forms of resistance in the post-apartheid context.[147] Initially many of these social movements were

[144] See for example Webster's discussion of the role that sociologists had played in the formation ASSA as a breakaway from SASOV as "an important forum for interaction between "organic intellectuals" outside the university and intellectuals inside the university." In: Webster, "Democratic Transition," p. 280.

[145] : Johan Muller and Nico Cloete, "To Outwit Modernity: Intellectuals and Politics in Transition," *Transformation* 14 (1991), p. 26.

[146] Leslie Dikeni and William Gumede, "Introduction," In. William Gumede and Leslie Dikeni eds., *The Poverty of Ideas: South African Democracy and the Retreat of Intellectuals* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2009), pp.8-9.

[147] See for example: Richard Ballard et al., "Globalization, marginalization and contemporary social movements in South Africa," *African Affairs* Vol.104 No. 417 (2005), pp. 615-34. Richard Ballard et al., *Voices of Protest: Social Movements in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006); Tshepo Madlingozi, "Post-Apartheid Social Movements and the Quest for the Elusive New Humanity," *Journal of Law and Society*

celebrated as being potential counter-hegemonic forces and were subsequently ascribed with a variety of possibilities ranging from ending ANC dominance to bringing down capitalism.[148] They were also viewed as new forums for *representation* in a post-apartheid political context believed by many to have moved away from the ideals of "the struggle". Thus in many ways social movements have come to claim representation of the oppressed in the way that revolutionary and liberation movements did pre-democracy.

Much of this era of social movement writing was characterised by a romanticisation of "the poors."[149] This was often a result of the fact that those writing on social movements were involved in them as *allied intellectuals* and were subsequently "also the ones engaged in the framing processes *for* some community organisations"[150] Importantly, this raises the question of *epistemic representation* and particularly Eyerman's assertion that intellectuals can project onto movements "their own fantasies."[151] However, this has also been followed by more critical and self-reflective literature by intellectuals including some auto-critiques. Sinwell and Dawson characterised the literature on social movements in post-apartheid South Africa as following a pattern of 'hope-celebration-critical reflection.'[152]

An early account that dealt specifically with *allied intellectuals* and their role in speaking for the oppressed was Ashwin Desai's 2006 Harold Wolpe Lecture. As one of few pieces to consciously deal with this, it is a seminal source for deconstructing the key issues at stake. In his Wolpe lecture Desai asserted that it was difficult to

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Vol. 34 No. 1 (2007), pp. 77-98; William Beinart and Marcelle C. Dawson eds., *Popular Politics and Resistance Movements in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2010); Marcelle C. Dawson and Luke Sinwell eds., *Contesting Transformation: Popular Resistance in Twenty-First Century South Africa* (London: Pluto Press, 2012).

[148] See for example: Nigel Gibson ed., Challenging Hegemony: Social Movements and the Quest for a New Humanism in Post-apartheid South Africa (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2005).

[149] See for example: Ashwin Desai, *We are the Poors: Community Struggles in Post-apartheid South Africa* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001).

[150] Madlingozi, "Post-apartheid Social Movements," p. 95. (emphasis in original)

[151] Eyerman, *Between Culture and Politics*, p. 198.

[152] Marcelle C. Dawson and Luke Sinwell, "Transforming Scholarship: Soberly Reflecting on the Politics of Resistance," In, *Contesting Transformation,* p. 4.

think of any sustained movement that has not attracted intellectuals to its cause in various roles.[153] He argued that post-apartheid social movements have "attracted 'activists' who seek to come in from the bitter cold of the post-apartheid struggle landscape to the new fires that are burning in communities."[154] Although this is an evocative depiction rather than a rigorous "academic" characterisation, it gives us interesting insight into the self-conception of a new generation of intellectuals.[155] It indicated firstly that post-apartheid intellectuals were looking for "new intellectual spaces". This is related to the perception that the post-apartheid political scene has been marked by the choice to either remain within the ANC as a liberation movement or to continue to play an adversarial role in "speaking truth to power."[156] This trend was also noted by Petras in the case of Latin American transitions. According to him, "As more and more left intellectuals realised that the electoral process was not leading to social change, many turned to "new social movements". [157] The underlying assumption of such characterisations is that these intellectuals saw new social movements as avenues from which they could continue to play the

[153] Ashwin Desai, "Vans, Autos, Kombi's and the Drivers of Social Movements," *Harold Wolpe Memorial Series* (28 July 2006), available at: http://wolpetrust.org.za/dialogue2006/DN072006desai_paper.pdf

[154] Desai, "Vans, Autos, Kombi's and the Drivers of Social Movements," p.2.

[155] It is useful to note at this point that Desai's considers his speech as much a self-reflection as a critique of others. In his opening paragraph he states: "While I urge a complete rethink in the way left academics presently relate to-and sometimes impose themselves on-grass-roots organisations, I write this paper much more in the spirit of self-criticism than as a polemic against them." See: Desai, "Vans, Autos, Kombi's," p.1.

[156] There is a significant body of work that deals with these questions largely pertaining to intellectuals shifting roles in a democratic South Africa (as opposed to operating within the anti-apartheid movement) that have not been included in this chapter due to space limitations. See for example: Edward Webster, "The Intellectual's Dilemma: To Serve or to Criticize," *University of the Witwatersrand Sociology Department Occasional Paper* No. 10 (1996); Eddie Webster, "The Impact of Intellectuals on the Labour Movement," *Transformation* 18 (1992), pp. 89-92; Alec Erwin, "The Research Dilemma: To Lead or to Follow," *Transformation* 18 (1992), pp. 4-11; Dale T. McKinley, "Privatized and Prostituted: Intellectuals in the South African Transition," (March 2004) Available: http://www.dalemckinley.org/Writings/Papers/Paper%20on%20the%20SA%20intellectual%20-%20032004.pdf

[157] James Petras, "The Role of Intellectuals in Social Change," *Rebellion,* (24 March 2005) It is important to note here that in the literature on social movements "new social movements are seen to be those concerned mainly with identity issues rather than class based struggles. However this analysis does not seem to pertain to those in South Africa (nor, according to Petras, in Latin America). For a further discussion of this see: Richard Ballard, "Social Movements in Post-Apartheid South Africa," p. 6-8.

adversarial role of "speaking truth to power." These social movements however, are also predominantly made up of the poor and oppressed. Such a transition thus raised the question of how this shift changed the challenges to and discourse of "speaking on behalf of the oppressed."

3.2.2 Questioning the Role of Intellectual's in Speaking for the Oppressed: Post-Apartheid Social Movements

> *For years, I have been quoting Said, that the craft of the intellectual is critique. To talk truth to power. I am afraid, it is no longer enough to talk truth to power. One must also talk truth within the disempowered.*
>
> -Ashwin Desai[158]

The above quote indicates an important shift in the discourse around the role of the intellectual in "speaking for the oppressed" within the context of post-apartheid social movements. Desai's assertion was that an intellectual has a duty to not only speak out against oppression *on behalf of* the oppressed but to speak truth *within* the oppressed. This illustrates the importance of truth-telling occurring on at least two "levels". Whilst intellectuals may have conceived of their role as "speaking truth to power" on behalf of the oppressed where power is represented by the apartheid state/the ANC/capital etc., Desai notes *internal* 'truth-telling' *within* the movement to be just as important. The reasons behind these characterisations become apparent when one looks at broader post-apartheid debates around speaking for the oppressed.

Firstly, it is apparent that the issue of *epistemic* representation is crucial to *allied intellectuals* in post-apartheid South Africa. Desai reasoned, "It is one thing telling truth to power, colleagues. It is another thing altogether letting out secrets and trespassing on the dignity of those who let you into their space as a fellow traveller, not biographer."[159] Consequently when operating as *allied intellectual* there are dilemmas associated with how you engage in the *epistemic representation* of people

[158] Desai, "Vans, Autos, Kombi's and the Drivers of Social Movements," p.8.
[159] Ibid. p.5

within that movement. The contrast is clear between the "fellow traveller" who walks along the road *with* those in the movement and the "biographer" who merely writes *on* the movement. It is interesting to consider this within the context of the intellectual as *interpreter*. The characterisation of the *biographer* is analogous to the *interpreter* given that it involves the conveying of meaning from within a community to another. The key question however, is whether an intellectual can perform this role if they are not *a part of* that community (i.e. the question of positionality).

Desai further expounded issues of epistemic representation by saying, "We do each other no favours by flattery dressed up as theory…Movements are much more precarious and turning a blind eye to their faults is dangerous and patronising all at once."[160] Furthermore, what is said about social movements often seems to have been "written up especially to serve as substantiation for discombobulated chunks of whichever new theorist it is chic to corroborate."[161] This is a point also made by Rebecca Pointer when questioning the *political* and *epistemic representation* that Desai himself[162] and Richard Pithouse were involved in with respect to the Mandela Park Anti-Eviction Campaign (MPAEC). Pointer made the argument that these intellectuals had not sought to engage in a critical and self-reflective study of these movements but rather had "selected descriptions of the movement by its participants…without any deep and meaningful critique of whether or not that self-description matches action."[163] Pointer argued that this came in part from a desire to present movements as a "new way" and alternate force in post-apartheid politics. The effect of locating these social movements in this way however often serves to "mask the underlying reality of a movement which is, at times, brutal and ugly…"[164]

[160] Ibid.
[161] Ibid.
[162] For clarity it is important to note that Desai's view on this topic has changed significantly over time. The difference between his response to Pointer in 2004 (See: Richard Pithouse and Ashwin Desai, "Sanction All Revolts: A Reply to Rebecca Pointer," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* Vol. 39 No. 4 (2004), pp. 295-314.) and his views as expressed in the 2006 Harold Wolpe Lecture are a clear indication of this.
[163] Rebecca Pointer, "Questioning the Representation of South Africa's Social Movements: A case study of the Mandela park Anti-Eviction campaign," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* Vol. 39 No. 4 (2004), pp. 271-294.
[164] Ibid. p. 272

Ignoring the power dynamics *within* these movements is seen to disempower marginalised voices within the marginalised communities.

Pointer thus argued that these intellectuals have often acted as "publicists for the movements" who focus on what these "'new social movements' look like to 'the world out there'…which often sounds like what we want to hear, but does not unpack what it is like for those many invisible and silent people within."[165] The use of the term publicist is noteworthy given its connotations of covering up (rather than uncovering) negative aspects. She went on to argue that, "without a coherent study of the operations of power in these struggles, we cannot begin to grapple with methods for shifting those power relations; we cannot confront what we refuse to see."[166]

A similar point was made by Prishani Naidoo with respect to the fact that she, and her partner, experienced significant frustrations and discomfort at the World Social Forum (WSF) in 2007 prompting them to begin writing an article describing these issues. However, because of concerns for the social movements involved they decided not to continue with this.[167] Naidoo thus pointed to the conflicts that arise when intellectuals serve to protect the image of social movements they are associated with rather than engage in critical reflection on them. She admitted that her involvement in these social movements meant a reluctance to criticise very real race, gender and class differentials instead producing a subsequent "narration" that was grounded "in the need for new social movements to be shown as potential spaces for change, for the building of other worlds."[168] These critiques are evidently of the intellectual as *interpreter*; they lament the intellectual who refrains from engaging in critique or arbitration and rather conveys meaning produced by these social movements regardless of their legitimacy in reality.

[165] Ibid. p. 273.
[166] Ibid. p. 271.
[167] Prishani Naidoo, "Subaltern Sexiness: From a Politics of Representation to a Politics of Difference," *African Studies* Vol. 69 No. 3 (2010), pp. 439-456.
[168] Naidoo, "Subaltern Sexiness," p. 440.

Indeed in their response to Pointer, Pithouse and Desai argued that they,

> *Stand by [their article on the MPAEC] because the struggle in Mandela Park was a revolt, a desperate action to which, in the historical moment in which we wrote, our first duty was to offer an uncompromising sanction. The situation in and against which we wrote included the fact that the MPAEC was facing severe and increasing repression and that there had been no explanation or legitimation, let alone solidarity, for this struggle in the academic or elite intellectual spheres.*[169]

Thus, they argued that they had explicitly attempted "to provide uncompromising academic legitimation for this struggle in an elite public, from which so much ideological delegitimation of this and other struggles is produced."[170] They therefore stated explicitly that they did not attempt to use their article as a way to speak back to the movement (or legislate) but rather to act as *interpreters* for people who are not able speak for themselves. This however, raised further questions about the legitimacy of such a practice. The following quote is illustrative in this regard,

> *'Voice for the Voiceless', screamed the yellow t-shirt sitting snugly on a stomach belonging to a beaming smile, commitment, charity and self-sacrifice written earnestly across its activist's red face.*[171]

This description, by Naidoo, again pertained to experiences at the WSF. Her article furthers the critique of intellectuals "speaking on behalf of the oppressed" by looking at what happens when intellectuals claim to be doing just the opposite. She argued that there has been a trend whereby intellectuals claim to be "allowing the oppressed to speak for themselves" and yet these "'givers of voice' have become blind to the ways in which their own acts of speaking 'on behalf of the silenced' are

[169] Desai and Pithouse, "Sanction All Revolts," p. 301.
[170] Ashwin Desai and Richard Pithouse, "Sanction All Revolts: A Response to Rebecca Pointer," *Journal of Asian and African Studies,* Vol. 39 no. 4 (2004), p. 300-301.
[171] Naidoo, "Subaltern Sexiness," p. 441

inscribed in the very texts that perform the silencing."[172] She argued that when intellectuals engage in social movements but use these experiences to also take part in traditional intellectual roles (like writing journal articles) they are in fact continuing a process of silencing even if this is done in the name of "giving voice." Thus, having observed the way in which many of the so-called "voiceless" had been represented at the WSF, Naidoo echoed Spivak in asking, "Had the subaltern spoken?"[173] As she explained, Spivak's question and conceptualisation is crucial to deconstructing the tensions that exist between intellectuals and social movements. The key point can be found in the following line,

> *{Spivak] shows how a need to apprehend 'the pure consciousness' or 'voice' of the subaltern results in the dual meaning of representation/re-presentation i.e. both to portray ('darstellen') and to speak on behalf of others ('vertreten'), being run together, and thus removed from view in the practice of 'allowing the subaltern to speak.'*[174]

This is clearly related to the distinction between *political* and *epistemic* representation. Additionally it can be understood using Bauman's distinction in that intellectuals are claiming to be mediating or *interpreting* and yet the implicit act of *legislation* that is occurring has become invisible. Crucially,

> *Spivak also encourages us not to ignore the privileged positionalities of 'intellectuals' and 'interpreters', positionalities also produced by capital, whose own relevance and meaning is derived from and dependent on the creation of specific notions of the subaltern.*[175]

[172] Ibid.
[173] Ibid. This is in reference to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in Carly Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, *Marxism and Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 271-314.
[174] Ibid.
[175] Ibid. p. 442.

Thus Naidoo argued, "It is not the task of the intellectual to 'allow the subaltern to speak' or to 'give voice to the voiceless' or 'to apprehend the voice of the subaltern'".[176] Rather she recommended that intellectuals must acknowledge their positionality and enter into a conversation with social movements that is not based on a desire to homogenise or construct these groups to an end that is separate from their needs [177] This necessarily involves both acts of *interpretation* as well as of *legislation* as is evident from the idea of two levels of "truth-telling". The role of these intellectuals should thus not be conceived of as a process that only engages with outside power structures by narrating the experiences of social movements (*interpretation*) but also with power structures within movements that are made up of marginalised people (*legislation*). In short these authors are asserting that you can't merely interpret when you are in a position of privilege. This brings us back to Alcoff's characterisation that certain privileged positions are "discursively dangerous".

This raised a further issue epitomised by Desai and Pithouse's assertion that "there are different spheres of intellectual engagement in which different situations are confronted." [178] Raising interesting issues about the distinction between *allied intellectuals* and *movement intellectuals*, they conceded that once intellectuals become engaged with social movements, the boundaries become blurred and yet "the movement intellectual never escapes responsibilities with regard to the movement."[179] There is evidently a contradiction here. On the one hand Desai and Pithouse conceive of themselves as *movement intellectuals* and yet, argue that they have different roles and responsibilities outside of the movement. Implicitly they assume that the roles and responsibilities ascribed to them as *movement intellectuals* do not apply when they undertake roles more often associated with the traditional intellectual (i.e. writing in academic journals); and yet, they are also

[176] Ibid. p. 443.
[177] Ibid. It is also interesting that many of the members of social movements at the WSF echoed these concerns when questioned about the role of intellectuals. See for example: Mark Butler, "Re-Connecting the World Social Forum," (2007) available at: http://abahlali.org/node/619/
[178] Desai and Pithouse, "Sanction All Revolts," p. 302.
[179] Ibid.

criticising traditional intellectuals for not legitimising these social movements. In any case the term *allied intellectual* seems a better characterisation of the role that they are playing given their formal academic qualifications and positions within universities.

The underlying issue at stake here is that of the conflict between the *movement intellectual* and *allied intellectual* role.[180] This is clear in the following (later) characterisation by Desai, worth quoting in full,

> *The time has come to very seriously warn about the individual intellectual who claims membership of the movement, but still operates above and beyond its purview in his or her own dealings with other intellectuals or activists. In my own experience of this position these intellectuals are quite vociferous about democratic practice and denounce all those who claim in any way to represent the movements but who are integrally part of them. However, they are quite happy to write academic papers analysing the movements and their leaders in great details, take international speaking engagements that centre around the community movements, and demonstrate their dominance over fellow intellectuals not by means of better arguments but with references to what the poor really want or what is really good for them.*[181]

In addition to the question of *epistemic* representation, there is the related question of *political* representation. This comes in the form of a discussion around vanguardism, which is assumed to be necessarily "wrong" and thus, by implication, not a legitimate role of the intellectual. However, Desai also noted the problematic way in which "vanguardism" is used by various *allied intellectuals* to delegitimise the political or epistemic representation by others. He thus says that,

[180] It is also obviously possible (even probable) that there would be actual conflicts between *allied intellectual* and *movement intellectuals*. However, this point is rather about *allied intellectuals* who sometimes conceive of their own roles as being *movement intellectuals.* There is evidently a contradiction here as illustrated by Desai's speech.
[181] Desai, "Vans, Autos, Kombi's and the Drivers of Social Movements," p.6-7.

> *I certainly agree that it is necessary to decry vanguardism but there comes a point where denouncing outside influence or leadership is worse than vanguardism. It is just gate-keeping: vanguardism without ideology, without strategy. Nietzsche said that "the truth is who gets there first". It seems that the evil vanguardists are, by definition, those who get there second.*[182]

3.3 Conclusion:

It is clear that 'left' politics in South Africa has often been marked by questions around the legitimacy of "speaking on behalf of". Early colonial and missionary discourses around *civilisation* and *progress* framed this question with particular emphasis on paternalistic notions of *trusteeship*. These assumed a right to "speak on behalf of the oppressed" in line with a linear conception of history and a subsequent self-conception of intellectuals as *legislators*. The early ANC, themselves described as elites and intellectuals, often appeared to buy into such a discourse and made similar claims to 'speak on behalf of' the rest of the black African population. This however, was contested by the AAC and the ANCYL. Particularly, these groups contested the right of the ANC to speak on behalf of the majority population particularly because of their positions of privilege. Additionally, they critiqued the role that white liberals played with particular emphasis on the legitimacy of *trusteeship* as a framework for "speaking on behalf of". This raised important questions around positionality especially in terms of race. This was developed more concretely within the Black Consciousness Movement. BC mounted a particular challenge to *allied intellectuals* especially those whose self-conception was still rooted in liberal notions of *trusteeship* as evidenced by Turner's critique. The transition to apartheid meant a shift in the role of 'the intellectual' and a subsequent rise in their involvement in post-apartheid new social movements.

One result of this shift was that rejections of the practice of speaking for the oppressed, in some cases, encouraged intellectuals to act as interpreters, to "take

[182] Ibid. p.6.

seriously the thinking done in communities" and to not assume an elitist or paternalistic position with regards to the problems faced by social movements made up of the poor and oppressed. The *interpreter* role comes from a post-modern understanding of the world in which different subjectivities and different truths are to be recognised and legitimated. In speaking truth to power, the intellectual needed to recognise this. Many rejections of the practice of "speaking on behalf of" come from a similar philosophical underpinning in that they reject that certain people know what is best for others and can therefore speak on their behalf. However, as Alcoff noted, there is also the complication that one might have a duty to engage in both epistemic and political representation *because* of their position as an intellectual which affords them access to greater knowledge. The critiques made by Desai, Naidoo and Walsh all speak to this and are indicative of the continuing relevance of the *legislative* function of the intellectual who is able to arbitrate.

Chapter 4- "Let the Poor Speak for Themselves": Abahlali baseMjondolo

Chapter three provided an account of the questions and contestations that have been raised on the practice of "speaking on behalf of the oppressed" in the South African context historically. The chapter identified various dynamics at play such as the tension between the intellectual as *interpreter* and the intellectual as *legislator*. It also indicated the importance of positionality (especially in terms of race) when dealing with these questions of both *political* and *epistemic* representation. This chapter will explore these in more depth by focusing specifically on one of the most celebrated post-apartheid social movements, Abahlali baseMjondolo (AbM).

AbM has garnered a significant amount of attention from both the media and academics and has come to represent (especially for 'left' intellectuals in South Africa) the possibilities of post-apartheid social movements. There are undoubtedly other social movements with similar significance for post-apartheid politics (TAC or the APF for example) but when it comes to looking at the role of intellectuals and the dilemmas of "speaking for the oppressed" AbM is a particularly apt case to study and it provides some especially rich material given the topic of this thesis. This is due in part to its own insistence on the importance of "speaking for ourselves" which has posed a particular challenge to *allied intellectuals.* This is also reflected in the controversies that have arisen with respect to Bandile Mdlalose's article in *Politikon* (2014) which questioned the role certain intellectuals had played in the movement as well as the various, and often quite visceral, responses by intellectuals both in agreement and opposition to her stance.

Although this episode represented a climax in the debates on these issues, there had been discussion of this almost since AbM's inception. Thus this chapter explores the historical development of the discourse around "speaking for the oppressed" as it pertains to AbM. This is done by firstly looking at how the movement itself framed the discussion. Secondly, it looks at various responses by both *allied intellectuals* and *movement intellectuals* thus tracking the various contestations around this question.

Desai and Pithouse, two intellectuals who feature prominently in this discussion, have written that "knowledge develops dialectically."[183] This is certainly germane to their own cases: Desai and Pithouse are *allied intellectuals* who have done significant work on new social movements including AbM. Their roles in relation to AbM have also been challenged and debated. This has come in the form of auto-critique (as evident in Desai's Harold Wolpe Lecture) as well as in critiques by other intellectuals (both *movement intellectuals* and *allied intellectuals*). Thus it is important to keep in mind the previous chapter's trajectory of post-apartheid social movement literature because of the way the study of social movements by intellectuals has sometimes shifted into debates around the roles of intellectuals in social movements.

In this chapter I will thus be concerned with both the knowledge that is produced on social movements by intellectuals like Desai and Pithouse as well as with the critical debates on the roles of *allied intellectuals* that they exemplify. It should be clear that I am not making an analysis of the movement itself nor am I trying to intervene in the internal (and external) polemics of the various *allied intellectuals/ movement intellectuals*. Not having conducted research on the movement nor having been an active participant in these polemics would make this an illegitimate practice. Rather, I look to the political thought of those involved in order to track the evolution of the discourse on the role of intellectuals in speaking about and for the poor in a similar way to what was done in the previous chapter.

4.1 The Rise of 'the Poors': A (Brief) introduction to Abahlali baseMjondolo:

Abahlali baseMjondolo is a shack dwellers movement that began in the Kennedy Road township just outside of Durban. The movement has its roots in 2005 with protests by the community against their proposed resettlement.[184] According to

[183] Richard Pithouse and Ashwin Desai, "Sanction All Revolts: A Response to Rebecca Pointer," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* Vol. 39 No. 4 (2004), pp. 295-314.
[184] See: Carvin Goldstone and Michael de Vries, "Demonstrators want Shelter and Basic Services," *Independent Online* (15 September 2005) Available: http://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/demonstrators-want-shelter-and-basic-services-1.253488#.VXa3k2DldFI

Tshepo Madlingozi the community organising committee (Kennedy Road Development Committee or KRDC) was promised a section of land by government officials on which formal housing would be built. However, a month later residents woke to find bulldozers on that tract of land preparing to build a brick factory.[185] It was this action that sparked the establishment of AbM with the union of the KRDC and other community groups to form Abahlali baseMjondolo ("those who live in Shacks") in October 2005.[186] In effect, as Madlingozi observed, "Without knowing it, the participants in this revolt were starting a social movement."[187]

Kennedy Road, like many other informal settlements in South Africa, is a product of complex histories of enforced migration resulting from the apartheid government's segregationist policies as well as the post-apartheid government's inability to address this legacy.[188] It is marked by constraints relating to inadequate service delivery, poor living conditions, unemployment and poverty. Jacob Bryant draws on a number of interviews with those living in Kennedy Road in concluding that the community's anger in 2005 came out of years and years of "broken promises."[189] In addition Bryant argued that the "people locate the movement's beginning not only in frustrations or anger, but also in a legitimate leadership that promoted the whole community's involvement in decision making."[190] This leadership has involved both community leaders (such as S'bu Zikode, a long term president of the movement[191])

[185] Tshepo Madlingozi, "Post-Apartheid Social Movements and Legal Mobilization," in Malcolm Langford, Ben Cousins, Jackie Dugard and Tshepo Madlingozi, eds., *Socio-economic Rights in South Africa: Symbols or Substance?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp.
[186] Ibid. p. 115.
[187] Ibid.
[188] For an account of the process of the development of informal settlements during the Apartheid era see for example: Richard Pithouse, "Abahlali baseMjondolo and the Struggle for the City in Durban, South Africa," *Cidades* Vol. 6 No. 9 (2009) pp.241-244;
[189] Jacob Bryant, "Towards Delivery and Dignity: Community Struggle in Kennedy Road," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* (2008) Vol. 43 (1). Pp. 41-61.
[190] Bryant, "Towards Delivery and Dignity," p. 49.
[191] Zikode has become an important *movement intellectual* having written multiple articles on the movement and provided significant leadership. See for example: S'bu Zikode, "The Greatest Threat to Future Stability in Our Country Is the Greatest Strength of the Abahlali baseMjondolo Movement (SA)," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* Vol. 43 no. 1 (2008), pp. 113-117; S'bu Zikode, "The Third Force," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* Vol. 41 no.

as well as middle-class activists and *allied intellectuals.*

The movement has employed a variety of tactics including mass protests, land invasions and a "No Land! No House! No Vote!" campaign calling on members to boycott elections until government is responsive.[192] In addition, they made (mainly defensive) use of the courts including a victory at the Constitutional Court in 2009 against mass evictions.[193] All of these actions have been written about extensively in both popular media and academic literature but it has been their ideology and their questioning of the role of so-called 'outsiders'[194] that garnered special attention.

4.2 2000-2006: the Importance of "letting the poor speak for themselves" and AbM's ideology

> *The grassroots is the nice grass for the political masters to stand on when they speak for the poor.*
>
> *-Mashumi Figlan*[195]

1-2 (2006), pp. 185-189. Also see various other speeches and interviews on www.abahlali.org

[192] See: M'du Hlongwa, "The No Land, No House, No Vote Campaign still on for 2009," (18/01/2007) available at: http://abahlali.org/node/510/ Local government and police have in turn have often been violent in their responses to such action. See for example: Amnesty International, "South Africa: Failure to Conduct Impartial Investigation into Kennedy Road Violence is Leading to further Human Rights Abuses," 16 December 2008. This campaign also became controversial in 2014 when it was announced that AbM would support the Democratic Alliance in the upcoming elections.

[193] See: Abahlali Basemjondolo Movement SA and Another v Premier of the Province of Kwazulu-Natal and Others (CCT12/09) [2009] ZACC 31; 2010 (2) BCLR 99 (CC) (14 October 2009)

[194] The question of who is considered an 'outsider' is both an important and complex question. Taken at face value it is seen to be those who do not experience the same kind of "lived poverty" as members of AbM and thus includes journalists, *allied intellectuals*, NGO workers, middle-class activists etc. However, at times this definition seems to have a certain fluidity to include *allied intellectuals* who work closely with the movement. In part this relates to the contestations around the *allied intellectual/movement intellectual* distinction as evidenced in the previous chapter.

[195] Mashumi Figlan, "Let the Poor Tell You About Themselves," (2007) Available at: http://abahlali.org/node/2856/

As already noted there was an increase in the size and scope of social movements in South Africa from around the year 2000. Although primarily concerned with service delivery, this also involved a revival of the question of "speaking on behalf of the oppressed." This manifested in an analogous call to allow the poor to 'speak for themselves' as is particularly apparent with AbM.

Jessica Harris wrote that "when asked what [AbM's] biggest accomplishment as a movement had been, most members did not hesitate to answer that it was winning the right to speak for themselves."[196] This also led to a focus on the idea of "bottom-up" democracy characterised by the movement (and many who write on it) as both direct and participatory. The following self-description is a useful illustration,

> *[The movement] has developed a sustained voice for shack dwellers in subaltern and elite publics and occupied and marched on the offices of local councilors, police stations, municipal offices, newspaper offices and the City Hall in actions that have put thousands of people on the streets. The movement also organised a highly contentious but very successful boycott of the March 2006 local government elections under the slogan 'No Land, No House, No Vote'. Amongst other victories the Abahlali have democratised the governance of many settlements, stopped evictions in a number of settlements, won access to schools, stopped the industrial development of the land promised to Kennedy Road, forced numerous government officials, offices and projects to 'come down to the people' and mounted vigorous challenges to the uncritical assumption of a right to lead the local struggles of the poor in the name of a privileged access to the 'global' (i.e. Northern donors, academics and NGOs) that remains typical of most of the NGO based left.*[197]

[196] Jessica Harris, "Towards a Poor People's Movement? A Survey of Durban Activists Views on Struggle, Unity and the Future," (2006) Available at: http://abahlali.org/node/848/ [Accessed 7 April 2015].
[197] Abahlali baseMjondolo, "A Short History of Abahlali baseMjondolo, the Durban Shack dwellers Movement," (October 2006) available at: http://abahlali.org/a-short-history-of-abahlali-basemjondolo-the-durban-shack-dwellers-movement/ [Accessed: 4 April 2015].

Use of phrases like "sustained voice", "come down to the people" and "challenges to the uncritical assumption of a right to lead…the poor" indicate the way in which the practice of "speaking for the oppressed" was rejected in the early post-apartheid period. Nigel Gibson described these assertions by Abahlali as going further than mere calls for service delivery provision; they should rather be understood as calls for "the democratisation of development."[198] Put differently, AbM's fight was not only related to material issues but to psychological and/or conceptual ones as well.[199]

The writing of a number of *movement intellectuals* also reflected this AbM discourse. The most well-known of these is S'bu Zikode who has written articles for a number of academic journals despite not having formal academic credentials.[200] The rejection of "speaking on behalf of the oppressed" is evident in Zikode's political writing. In one article he stated, "[Comrades, government officials, politicians and intellectuals] always want to talk for us and about us but they must allow us to talk about our lives and our struggles."[201] In another that "[AbM is] here to make sure that the voices of the poor are heard and paid attention to."[202]

Zikode is not the only *movement intellectual* to articulate this discourse. Mashumi Figlan (a leader of the KRDC) wrote an article entitled "Let the Poor Tell you about themselves."[203] He added, "I say this because there are those who think that there is

[198] Gibson, Fanonian Practices in South Africa, p. xv.
[199] Alison Goebel, "'Our Struggle is for the Full Loaf': Protests, Social Welfare and Gendered Citizenship in South Africa," *Journal of Southern African Studies* Vol. 37 No. 2 (2011), pp. 369-388.
[200] Zikode was actually admitted to the University of KwaZulu-Natal to study law but dropped out due to financial and other pressures. For an account of this and other aspects of his life See: S'bu Zikode, "To Resist all Degradations and Divisions: An Interview with S'bu Zikode by Richard Pithouse" available at: http://abahlali.org/files/A%20Living%20Communism.final_full.pdf (25 January 2009).
[201] S'bu Zikode, "We are the Third Force," (November 2005) Available at: http://abahlali.org/node/17/ [Accessed 10 May 2015].
[202] Zikode, "Sekwanel! Sekwanele! (Enough is Enough!)," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* Vol. 43 No.1 (2008), p. 122.
[203] Figlan, "Let the Poor Tell You About Themselves,"

nothing other people can say for themselves. They think that we, we who are the poor, must let others speak about us."[204] Figlan linked the importance of "speaking for ourselves" with that of bottom-up democracy,

> *It is because the people all believe in a bottom up system! When the people speak they will condemn this top down system! Therefore the people must be kept silent so that this top down system can be made to look like a real democracy which it is not. How long must the people suffer while the political masters talk about protecting the new democracy from the voices of the people?*[205]

These excerpts show a commitment to the idea of "*speaking for ourselves"* but also implicitly refer to the role that other parties have been playing. They allude to a history of exploitation of the poor but also to a longer tradition of *trusteeship* and *paternalism*. The extensive website that the organisation uses was also an attempt at ensuring the movement could 'speak for itself'; it houses a significant body of material on the movement often written by key *movement intellectuals*.[206]

4.2.1 Rejecting both Political and Epistemic Representation: The 2006 Social Movement Indaba

This discourse of "speaking for ourselves" was not without controversy. One of the earliest examples of a contestation around the role of intellectuals in "speaking for the oppressed" was the 2006 Social Movement Indaba (SMI). The SMI was envisaged to be a space that was led by social movements and was born largely as a response to the World Summit on Social Development (WSSD) in 2002.[207] The SMI was

[204] Ibid.
[205] Ibid.
[206] See www.abahlali.org. Also see their Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/abahlalibasemjondolo/?fref=ts. This was however, contested by Mdlalose who claimed that the website was in fact controlled by *allied intellectuals*. See Mdlalose, "The Rise and Fall of Abahlali baseMjondolo," p. 347.
[207] Dale T. McKinley, "The Political-Economy of the Rise of Social Movements in South Africa," *Links* no. 25 (2003).

founded by a number of prominent social movements such as the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF) and the Landless People's Movement (LPM). It conceived of itself as a "civil-society coordinating body", which "performs the role of capacitating its members with leadership skills, women empowerment and also sharing resources and strategies to take the movement forward."[208] The SMI was also run in conjunction with the Centre for Civil Society (CCS) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Walsh argued that the SMI illustrated friction[209] at "multiple, almost mind-boggling, levels."[210] She gave a useful overview of the various levels of contestation as follows,

> *Middle-class activists and NGO's were criticized by the AbM for writing about the movement without having a direct relationship with the AbM itself. They also criticized the CCS for what they saw as a wrongful dismissal of four academics who had been funneling CCS resources into the movement. Sides were taken. Many members of community movements had tirelessly worked to put together the SMI and were deeply offended by the co-opting of their space by what they saw as a chauvinist flaunting of power by AbM. They were also dismayed by issues raised by the AbM regarding internal tiffs with an academic institution which was not directly linked to the SMI meeting. Other activists smelled a rat, and opined that AbM was being 'used' by these same disgruntled academics to wage battles on their behalf.*[211]

[208] Thulani Guliwe, "Civil Society and the State: Civil Society at Crossroads," *Centre for Civil Society Grant Report* (2005), pp. 1-26. Available at: http://ccs.ukzn.ac.za/files/Guliwe%202005%20Civil%20Society%20and%20the%20State%20Civil%20society%20at%20a%20crossroads.pdf

[209] Walsh's understanding of 'friction' is a specific one that she said borrows from Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing (2004) as "a state in which heterogeneous and unequal encounters can lead to new arrangements of culture and power." Walsh goes on to say that "frictions are always present *within* collaborations of struggle involving the presence of the Left, NGO's, academics and others with 'interventionist' goals who form a critical, though often invisible, element of many community movements." See Shannon Walsh, "Uncomfortable Collaborations": Contesting Constructions of the 'Poor' in South Africa, *Review of African Political Economy* No. 115 (2008), pp. 255-279. In particular see p. 256.

[210] Walsh, "Uncomfortable Collaborations," p. 261-262.

[211] Ibid.

This illustrates a complex and seemingly paradoxical situation whereby claims from an organisation to "speak for themselves" are then questioned on the grounds that they are actually a result of manipulation by outside academics. In turn AbM responded that the charge of criticising involvement by so-called "white academics" were intrinsically racist as they undermined the ability of those in AbM to "think and act all on their own."[212]

As a result of these polemical exchanges at the SMI, AbM developed (in 2006) a guide for those who wanted to be involved or conduct research with them. The document was entitled *Brief Guide to the History and Praxis of Abahlali baseMjondolo for NGO's, Academics, Activists and Churches Seeking a Relationship with the Movement.*[213] This document clearly outlined an ideology rejecting the practice of "speaking on behalf of the oppressed". It stressed the importance of AbM's slogan: "'Talk to Us, Not about Us!'" This clearly implies a rejection of outsider intellectuals engaging in *epistemic* representation of the movement. Furthermore there was a clear rejection of *political* representation by outsiders as is evident in the following,

> *No one acting outside of the movement's structures should speak for the movement, decide who should represent the movement or attend meetings or workshops or events on behalf of the movement, raise money for themselves or their organisation in the name of the movement, allocate money to people in the movement, make deals on behalf of the movement, or in any way act for the movement.*[214]

[212] Abahlali baseMjondolo, "What happened at or to the SMI national meeting?" (18 December 2006) Available at: http://abahlali.org/node/462/ [Accessed 20 May 2015].
[213] Abahlali baseMjondolo, Brief Guide to the History and Praxis of Abahlali baseMjondolo for NGO's, Academics, Activists and Churches Seeking a Relationship with the Movement (May 2007) Available at: http://abahlali.org/node/1391/
[214] AbM, "Brief Guide,"

In explicitly framing their politics around a rejection of the practice of outsiders speaking on their behalf, they rejected *political* and *epistemic* representation by those outside the movement. However, this is complicated by paradoxical claims that such calls themselves are a result of the involvement of such outsiders. Evidently, AbM had raised significant challenges to both *allied* and *outsider intellectuals.*

4.3 2008: Calls for Intellectuals to "Speak to rather than for the Poor"

One particular response by *allied intellectuals* to AbM's rejection of the practice of "speaking for the oppressed" was the emergence of the notion of "taking seriously the thinking done in communities." A 2008 edition of the *Journal of Asian and African Studies* for example had as its main focus AbM and claimed to raise the issue of the role of intellectuals[215]. In the introduction to this edition Nigel Gibson wrote,

> *One important ethical question this project in particular seeks to raise is the role of the intellectual. Among the articles gathered here, three focus on the new shack-dwellers movement in South Africa, Abahlali baseMjondolo, and take as their philosophic ground Abahlali's insistence that intellectuals and NGO activists speak to, rather than for, the poor…The three articles on the shackdwellers [sic] have in common the view that the shackdwellers [sic] can think for themselves and articulate this as a challenge to 'outside intellectuals (understood here as those who have been formally educated and graduated from the elite universities), who want to write about the movement.*[216]

Evidently for Gibson, like others, the main challenge to *allied intellectuals* was to

[215] See also: Richard Pithouse, "Struggle is a School: The Rise of a Shack Dwellers Movement in Durban, South Africa," *Monthly Review* Vol. 57 No. 9 (2005); Richard Pithouse, " A Politics of the Poor Shack Dwellers' Struggles in Durban," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* Vol. 43 No. 1 (2008), pp. 63-94.; Richard Pithouse, "The Promised Land and the University of Abahlali baseMjondolo, *"African Sociological Review* Vol. 10 No. 1 (2006), pp. 102-142.
[216] Nigel Gibson, "Introduction: A New Politics of the Poor Emerges from South Africa's Shantytowns," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* Vol. 43 No. 1 (2008), p. 13.

listen to communities and thus "speak to, rather than for" the oppressed. Despite acknowledging this, Gibson nevertheless asserted that, in this case these three intellectuals had a legitimate right to speak and write on behalf of the movement in light of their apparent involvement with it. Gibson made similar assertions elsewhere emphasising the importance of being "directly involved with the movement on a daily basis."[217] Furthermore, he argued that while these *allied intellectuals* were "Committed to the Fanonian belief that a movement of the poors should speak for itself, these activist academics had put themselves in the school of the people… [They] took the thinking done in communities seriously."[218] Indicative of the intellectual as *interpreter*, there is the implicit assumption of the importance of the subjective experiences of those in AbM. Taking seriously the thinking done in communities thus involves the act of *interpretation* in that you are facilitating the universalisation of a particular experience.

4.3.1 "Uncomfortable Collaborations": Contesting the 'allied intellectual as silent 'support worker'

Theory is too often constructed out of the limbs and lives of the most oppressed.
-Shannon Walsh[219]

Shannon Walsh's article *"'Uncomfortable Collaborations': Contesting Constructions of the 'Poor' in South Africa"* however, raised questions about how "taking seriously the thinking done in communities" and thus "speaking *to* rather than *for* the poor" functioned in practice. Along with others her intervention offered a challenge to an uncritical adoption by *allied intellectuals* of AbM's discourse around "speaking for ourselves".

Walsh's article had two substantive points relevant to this discussion. Firstly, it "[deconstructed] the problematic way the 'Poor' are *represented* by the intellectual 'Left' as a fixed, virtuous subject."[220] Secondly, it critiqued the absence of self-reflexive studies by *allied intellectuals* around their positionality and the consequent

[217] Gibson, Fanonian Practices in South Africa, p. 175.
[218] Ibid.
[219] Ibid. p. 259.
[220] Walsh, "Uncomfortable Collaborations," p. 255. (emphasis added).

impact of that on AbM (and, by extension, other social movements). The first concerns the issue of *epistemic* representation whilst the second concerns that of *political* representation.

In terms of epistemic representation, Walsh's argument was essentially that intellectuals often relied on and perpetuated an identity of the 'Poor' characterised as both homogenous and 'pure' or 'true'.[221] The result of this, she argued, was the creation of "a category of people (the oppressed) that are deemed unworthy of honest debate, discussion and engagement through placing them on a pedestal of wretchedness."[222] Furthermore, "even while this fixed identity is actively mobilised by people themselves to gain symbolic and real power…the philosopher's fixation on the singular subjectivity of the oppressed confines the 'Poor' to their very own subjugation."[223]

Walsh contended that representations of the 'Poor' therefore distort the reality of internal power contestations and are consequently not only factually inaccurate and lacking in nuance but can be damaging to movements themselves. This led to Walsh's second critique pertaining to political representation: constructing the 'Poor' in this way leads to a subsequent erasure of the act of political representation by *allied intellectuals* in epistemic representation (i.e. in their journal articles, books etc.). Thus,

> *While the activists I reflect on here-and consider myself a part of-contribute significantly to the maintenance and sustenance of many community movements at various economic, political and social levels, we often escape*

[221] A possible example of this is the following description by Nigel Gibson relating to AbM: "Enough was enough-sekwanele, sekwanele! - truth emanated from their own experiences." In Gibson, *Fanonian Practices in South Africa,* p. 147.
[222] Walsh, "Uncomfortable Collaborations," p. 264. An example of this can be seen in Desai and Pithouse's response to Pointer cited in the previous chapter. When called out on the fact that they ignored very real gender power imbalances in the MPAEC their response was that they did not wish to stigmatise "poor black men." See: Desai and Pithouse, "Sanction All Revolts," p. 307.
[223] Ibid. p. 225. Walsh related this discussion to that by Bertrand Russell, "The Superior Virtue of The Oppressed," In: *Unpopular Essays* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1984).

> *internal or external scrutiny. This may be due to the fact that we are the same people who are narrating community movements to the public. This group tends to write the academic papers, books and news reports that define movements, yet it is rare that they situate themselves within its narratives or work with those movements on a daily basis.*[224]

Walsh termed this "narrating out the messy bits" and noted how other actors such as the police, councillors, city officials etc. are often included in academic writing on AbM but *allied intellectuals* almost never mention their own role or involvement. Thus, "some of the favoured academics position themselves as 'support workers' for AbM rather than visible allies in the struggle. This curious positioning is an attempt, they say, to allow 'grassroots movements' to lead themselves."[225] Although the idea of letting movements lead and speak for themselves is clearly a laudable practice, the problem according to Walsh is that a commitment to this in theory (by *allied intellectuals*) obfuscates the real influence that they undoubtedly have.[226]

It is important to note that Walsh did not criticise the involvement of *allied intellectuals* with regard to either *political* or *epistemic* representation. Rather her point of contention is the erasure of the presence of the former in the production of the latter. Thus she asserted that, "rather than slipping into a sea of post-modern subjectivities, it should cause us to grapple more clearly with power and positioning by revealing more concretely the way our interactions support, collaborate and hinder us." [227] This is based on the contention that the way in which *allied intellectuals* and movement members interact itself creates and transforms knowledge and that this needs to be made transparent in order for us to fully

[224] Ibid. p. 258.
[225] Ibid. p. 262.
[226] One example of this that Walsh believed is illustrative is that of the very ideology of "speaking for ourselves." She argued that initial claims by AbM were centred more around material changes such as housing and provision of other basic services and not around the discourse of "finding voice" or a rejection of others speaking on their behalf. Her contention is that the change occurred precisely when these *allied intellectuals* became involved in AbM. See Walsh, "Uncomfortable Collaborations," p. 262-263.
[227] Ibid. p. 267.

understand its influence; something which "may be critical, enriching, invisible, or exploitative."[228]

Two other *allied intellectuals* were prompted to respond to Walsh. Patrick Bond noted firstly the importance of context particularly that of the transition to democracy and the subsequent evolution of the intellectual's role (largely describing a similar history to that discussed in the previous chapter). Citing the fact that intellectuals need to recognise the ANC's change from liberation movement to ruling party, Bond emphasised that "accountability should be more vigorously demanded from below, particularly against intellect workers' tendencies to self-glorification, careerism, exaggeration, vanguardism and gate-keeping."[229]

Desai's rejoinder was more pointed. Agreeing with Walsh he cited the way in which their positionality had not been adequately recognised by many *allied intellectuals:*

> *So many narrators of social movements, including those who are the staunchest defenders of 'the voices of the poor', have simply ignored the immense class, race, gender and locational privileges they are afforded.*[230]

He reiterated the importance of exposing the power relations that "[lie] at the heart of how the Poor come to be represented."[231] Echoing Walsh's assertion re: *epistemic* representation and the construction of theory, he argued that some intellectuals take the form of 'propagandists' and 'parasites' who live off the movement. The latter, he argued, spend little time with the movements but through their work "we have the mushrooming of some evocative theory" that treats Abahlali as "near perfect examples of the 'wretched of the earth' or grassroots socialism."[232] This was echoed by Luke Sinwell who argued that "[when] paying particular attention to poor

[228] Ibid.
[229] Patrick Bond, 'Rejoinder: Collaborations, Co-optations and Contestations in Praxis-Based Knowledge Production," *Review of African Political Economy* Vol. 35 No. 116 (2008), p. 271.
[230] Ashwin Desai, "Rejoinder: The Propagandists, the Professors and their 'Poors'" *Review of African Political Economy* Vol. 35 No. 116 (2008) p.275.
[231] Ibid. p. 276.
[232] Ibid.

people's struggles and needs…there is a sharp disjuncture between ideologies manufactured by intellectuals and the worldviews that the working class and poor possess."[233] In reference to Abahlali, Sinwell argued that its representation as an opposition force to neoliberalism and the ANC was not always accurate. He pointed to the "No Land! No House! No Vote!" campaign and highlighted how, whilst this might seem militant, it implied that if those things are provided through concessions by the ANC (RDP houses and toilets for example) then it was likely that AbM members would vote for the ANC. Furthermore, "the danger is that the Left may describe these movements as revolutionary or liberatory, as holding realistic possibilities for creating another world, when in fact they buy into the ANC, and to a significant extent, legitimise it."[234] This is what Bond has termed "substitutionalism" defined as "replacing (not augmenting) the local understanding with the researcher's understanding or vision." [235] These act as examples of intellectuals seeking confirmation for *their own* theories or ideological standpoints in their work with social movements.

Finally Desai emphasised that "it is one thing laying bare the intersections of power within the movement but what does this mean for a confrontation *with* power."[236] The importance of truth-telling occurring on at least 2 levels-*within* the movements as well as *from* the movement out-is still apparent.

4.4 Can the Oppressed Speak for Themselves?

4.4.1 Bandile Mdlalose's 2015 Politikon Article

[233] Luke Sinwell, "Is 'another world' really possible? Re-examining counter-hegemonic forces in post-apartheid South Africa," *Review of African Political Economy* Vol 38. No. 127 (2011), pp. 61-67. For an interesting response to this see: Carin Runciman, "Questioning Resistance in Post-Apartheid South Africa: A Response to Luke Sinwell," *Review of African Political Economy* Vol. 38 No. 130 (2011), pp. 607-614. This article does not deal with AbM and thus is not included in the main body of this chapter. However, it does make interesting points in taking Sinwell's arguments further and develops a cogent argument about scholarship on social movements.
[234] Sinwell, "Is 'another world' really possible?" p. 68.
[235] Bond, "The Intellectual Meets the South African Social Movement," pp. 120.
[236] Desai, "Rejoinder: The Propagandists, the Professors and their 'Poors'" p. 276.

> *Marginalised at the grassroots level, the voices of the oppressed and poor use social movements to allow organized communities to sing in one voice.*[237]

Mdlalose clearly saw social movements as an important avenue for amplifying the voices of the poor and oppressed. Her *Politikon* article however, indicated that this was not always the case with AbM chiefly as a result of the involvement of *allied intellectuals.* In this context Mdlalose's commentary was significant for at least two reasons. Firstly, it provided a *primary* contestation of the role *allied intellectuals* play when they attempt to 'speak for the oppressed' and some of the related pitfalls of this practice. Secondly, it did this from the point of view of a *movement intellectual* thus contrasting it to the previous pieces which have taken the form of auto-critique of *allied intellectuals*. Mdlalose's article was also concerned with both *political* and *epistemic* representation. Echoing critiques made by Desai and Pointer she said that,

> *Up until recently, in AbM [academics and left activists] found people who would prove their theories about the revolt of the poor coming any day… AbM was declared to have a philosophy which is the same as all sorts of writers and to have a politics like other sorts of poor peoples' movements.*[238]

Additionally, Mdlalose raised issues which directly contradicted the assertion that AbM was "speaking for itself" by pointing to the involvement of "one white academic"[239] in writing and editing press statements for AbM. Importantly she noted that this academic would send them back to AbM "not only fixing the English but also adding paragraphs of politics and putting slogans, giving what he called background." [240] In one sense this can be understood as an example of

[237] Mdlalose, "The Rise and Fall of Abahlali baseMjondolo," pp. 345-346.
[238] Mdlalose, "The Rise and Fall of Abahlali baseMjondolo," p. 345.
[239] In the published Politikon article this person is not named. However, in subsequent correspondence it is clear that she is referring to Richard Pithouse.
[240] Mdlalose, "The Rise and Fall of Abahlali baseMjondolo," p. 347. Mdlalose gave two examples of this which she saw as illegitimate. Firstly, she noted press statements in support of protests in Turkey. Secondly, she referred to a statement issued in opposition to the closure of the Department of Philosophy at a foreign university. From other texts it is clear that this is with reference to a department at Middlesex University. Nigel Gibson described

'ventriloquism' defined by Bond as "replacing local phrasing with a researcher's own words (in press releases, articles, statements of demands etc."[241] However, it can also be understood as having a broader political function. Mdlalose claimed that AbM's "politics was being shaped and we did not care so much because we were desperate to sound good to the outside world."[242] This description matches Eyerman and Jamison's analysis of the role of *intellectuals in social movement* (or *allied intellectual*) who "often play a crucial role in articulating the concerns of the emergent form of protest, putting them into broader frameworks, giving specific protest actions a deeper meaning or significance."[243] In one sense this corresponds to the role of the intellectual as an *interpreter* given that it involves putting the politics of AbM into a broader framework and thus attempting to universalise it. In another it can relate to acts of *legislation* in that it may involve the removal or replacement of certain aspects of a movements' own voice.

Mdlalose, echoing points made by Desai regarding the intellectual functioning as biographer rather than fellow traveller, also described how various *allied intellectuals* would position themselves as supporters of the movement without revealing that they were also making use of material so gained for their own research.[244] Additionally, she pointed to the fact that neither the actual roles these

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this press statement as an example of a "Fanonian Practice" see: "What happened to the 'Promised Land'? A Fanonian Perspective from South Africa," *Antipode* Vol. 44 No. 1 (2012), pp. 51-73. For an account of the situation of the Middlesex University philosophy department see: Jonathan Wolffe, "Why is the Middlesex University Philosophy Department Closing?" *The Guardian* Monday 17 May 2010 Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/education/2010/may/17/philosophy-closure-middlesex-university; Also note Richard Pithouse calling for support and invoking links to AbM: http://www.pambazuka.net/en/category.php/advocacy/64215/print

[241] Bond, "The Intellectual Meets the South African Social Movement," p. 120. An example of this is perhaps evident in the self-description cited earlier which uses decidedly academic language especially in invoking the "elite/subaltern" distinction that characterises the subaltern studies movement. See: AbM, "A Short History of Abahlali baseMjondolo, the Durban Shack dwellers Movement,"

[242] Ibid.

[243] Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, *Social Movements: A Cognitive Approach* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 98.

[244] See Mdlalose, "The Rise and Fall of Abahlali baseMjondolo," p. 348-349 citing Richard Pithouse's PHD thesis as an example.

allied intellectuals were playing nor the class and race advantages that they enjoyed were evident in their writing thus reinforcing the critique made by Walsh.[245]

4.4.2 Steven Friedman Letter to the Editors of Politikon

Mdlalose's article no doubt raised important issues with respect to "speaking for the oppressed" but the subsequent responses to it were, in some ways, even more illuminating. The first was a letter by Steven Friedman to the editorial board and the editor of *Politikon.* It began by claiming that, in publishing Mdlalose's article, the journal did not uphold normal standards of publication for an academic journal. Friedman argued that the article should not have been published because it failed to cite empirical research or locate itself within the context of broader political science literature.[246] He contended that his letter was *not* however an attempt to silence new voices. This is a point worth citing in full,

> *We welcome any attempt to encourage new voices in South African academic life, particularly those of people who do not enjoy the advantages bestowed by inherited privilege. In principle, we support the view that people who lack academic degrees but who are able to enrich our understanding should contribute to academic debate-some of us have written at length on the fallacy of assuming that only people with formal qualifications can enrich academic life. Nor are we seeking to silence some voices by insisting that only those who convince us that they are thoroughly academic can contribute to journals. Our objection to the article is that it fails to meet the basic requirements of intellectual exchange, most importantly that empirical claims must be backed by evidence if they are to be taken seriously and that opposing positions are to be engaged rather than ignored.*[247]

Ostensibly Friedman's letter raised methodological and procedural concerns (regarding referencing, citation of other political science literature etc.) while

[245] Mdlalose, "The Rise and Fall of Abahlali baseMjondolo," p. 352.
[246] Friedman, "Letter for Concern", p. 129.
[247] Ibid. p.130.

avoiding *substantive* engagement with Mdlalose's article.[248] Such a response, in this context, must unavoidably raise key questions in terms of allowing and encouraging the 'poor' and members of social movements like AbM to "speak for themselves". A key issue around the legitimacy of *epistemic* representation has been shown to be academics use of the experiences of those in social movements in order to write academic papers/books etc. This is done despite continually calling for social movements to not be represented by others. Similarly, Friedman's methodological and procedural concerns arguably functioned to "silence" Mdlalose's attempt to speak in her own voice; something that is seemingly inconsistent with his avowed commitment to the principle that the poor and oppressed should speak for themselves.

In response Mdlalose said,

> *The way I see it, it was really me responding. I was responding to what very learned people like Richard Pithouse have said about Black people's organisations all these years. He does not have a problem getting his articles printed. So I was very excited that someone printed my article. I am an outsider and not academic but I was happy someone gave me a platform. Especially as I am saying something totally different about AbM.*[249]

Calling herself an outsider, Mdlalose turns the insider/outsider distinction on its head showing the way that traditional spheres for intellectual engagement remain cut off to a lot *of movement intellectuals* despite the continual emphasis on "letting the poor speak for themselves."

[248] It is probably worth noting that multiple responses to this statement pointed out that similar articles by S'bu Zikode (cited also in this thesis) were printed in the *Journal for Asian and African Studies* and were similar in style to Mdlalose's and yet were not met with this kind of response. This is despite the fact that the editor and many contributors to that journal are signatories to this letter. See: Lisa Thompson and Pieter Fourie, "Letter of Reply from the Editors of Vol. 41, No. 3," *Politikon* Vol. 42 No. 1 (2015), pp. 133-140.
[249] Bandile Mdlalose, "Open Letter: 'Response of Bandile Mdlalose to Steven Friedman," as published in Workers World Media Productions e-newsletter (24 January 2015).

4.4.3 Is 'Taking Seriously the Thinking done in Communities' enough?

In 2010, Nigel Gibson wrote that,

> *Voices began to be heard that were once silent, and voices of the poor could be heard in spaces where they do not usually speak, such as in newspapers and on the internet, on radio and television, not to mentioned academic journals.*[250]

Despite this assertion, it is apparent from the furor around Mdlalose that contestations around the poor speaking for themselves are unresolved especially as this pertains to spaces normally reserved for privileged intellectuals. It is therefore still "rare that those involved in social movements are able to speak directly to their own experience in academic spaces, especially unmediated by white academic 'experts'."[251]

In a response letter to the *Politikon* editors, a South African academic wrote,

> *In fact part of the thrust of [Mdlalose's] argument is that academics that play 'both sides': representing themselves as a supporter to social movements and then as a [sic] observer writing as an academic, keep both sides largely ignorant about their dual role. Despite the slogan 'Speak to us, not about us', the literature on Abahlali baseMjondolo is dominated by academic voices.*[252]

This was echoed by Mondli Hlatshwayo who emphasised the fact that it is voices like Mdlalose's (black, female and poor) that are systematically marginalised. He argued that "academic conventions are used as a guise to silence what…is an important

[250] Gibson, *Fanonian Practices in South Africa,* p. 179. Gibson, somewhat ironically, was also one of the signatories of Friedman's letter.
[251] Foreign Academic No.1, "extracts from a selection of readers writing in support of vol. 41 No.3 in Thompson and Fourie, Letter of Reply from the Editors of Vol, p. 139.
[252] South African academic no. 2, "extracts from a selection of readers writing in support of vol. 41 No.3" in Thompson and Fourie, Letter of Reply from the Editors of Vol, p. 138.

voice in a debate about the relationship between academics and in particular white academics."[253] Relating this context to earlier discussions around white liberals and ideologies of paternalism, Hlatshwayo said, "I know that race is an uncomfortable question, especially for those who regard themselves as white messiahs of the Black poor."[254]

Walsh thus argued that the reaction by white *allied intellectuals* was less about academic publishing standards and more about the way in which black people are commonly represented by these same individuals:

> *Bandile Mdlalose's eruption from the role of Object of inquiry to that of speaking Subject, with her own perceptions, arguments and departures from the accepted academic narrative, did not fit the fungible example that has been useful for those writing on social movements in South Africa. She disrupts the accepted black voice, used to endorse favoured theorists, from Lefebvre to Fanon.*[255]

It is clear that despite outwardly celebrating and embracing AbM's discourse of "Speaking for Ourselves", many *allied intellectuals* were actually engaging in a contradictory action of speaking for the movement. Thus, when this was threatened by a characterisation like Mdlalose's (which did not rely on an *allied intellectual* to *interpret*) such a role was subsequently threatened. A claim to be giving voice to the poor and oppressed by merely acting as an *interpreter* was thus furthering the process of silencing.

4.5 Conclusion

[253] Hlatshwayo, "Nailing my colours to the mast," (email correspondence) published in Workers World Media Productions e-newsletter (24 January 2015). Hlatshwayo is a senior lecturer at the University of Johannesburg and has been involved in a number of social movements. Importantly, he was also involved in the SMI which, as was discussed elsewhere, has a difficult history with AbM.
[254] Ibid.
[255] Shannon Walsh, "The Philosopher and His Poor: The Poor-Black as Object for Political Desire in South Africa," *Politikon* Vol. 42 No. 1 (2015), p. 124.

This chapter tracked the development of the discourse around “speaking on behalf of the oppressed” as it has evolved in the post-apartheid social movement Abahlali baseMjondolo. It showed the way in which the movement’s discourse articulated a renewed emphasis on this practice and its implications for those who hold privileged positions and particularly for *allied intellectuals*. Although many ‘Left’ *allied intellectuals* celebrated this discourse it remained, in many ways, rooted in early contestations around paternalism and trusteeship. Many intellectuals saw this challenge as meaning that they should “take seriously the thinking done in the communities” and “speak to rather than for the poor.” This resulted in narrations of AbM that were characterised by an apparently contradictory situation. *Allied intellectuals* of the movement produced representations of AbM that at once claimed to respect AbM’s right to speak and right about itself while evidently continuing to speak and write about it. There was thus the creation of an image that these *allied intellectuals* were silent ‘support worker’ who merely narrate the political thought and praxis of AbM so that the rejection of the practice of “speaking for the oppressed” by AbM seemed to cause a subsequent identity of the intellectual as *interpreter*.

This however, came to be challenged on multiple fronts. Firstly, it was pointed out that despite the idea that intellectuals claimed to be merely *narrating* the movement, they actually had a significant impact on it in terms of both political and epistemic representation. Additionally, continuous claims to not be speaking on behalf of the oppressed (whilst still writing for and about them) were said to be masking the very real race, class and gender differentials that existed. These differentials however, were brought out very clearly when Mdlalose did in fact “speak for herself” something which Walsh argued posed a serious challenge to intellectuals who were used to representations of poor black people as subjects despite assertions to the contrary. As one academic remarked,

"The claims that a black woman speaking in her own voice threatens the discipline of social science is quite telling."[256]

[256] Foreign Academic no 1, "extracts from a selection of readers writing in support of vol. 41 No.3" In Thompson and Fourie, Letter of Reply from the Editors of Vol, p. 138.

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> *In Bourdieu as much as Plato, the poor comprise in their very exclusion from the vocation of philosopher the condition of philosophical possibility. Present as objects rather than subjects of knowledge, appearing only in the guise of philosophy's exempla, the poor enable the philosopher to constitute himself- as other than the poor.*
>
> -*Jacques* Rancière [257]

This thesis set out to engage with recent debates on the role of intellectuals in post-apartheid social movements exemplified by Bandile Mdlalose's *Politikon* article and ensuing responses. Significantly, these contestations were framed within the same discourse of "speaking for ourselves" which had been at the heart of the politics of AbM and was itself a specific response to the practice of intellectuals "speaking on behalf of others." More specifically this thesis has been concerned with the role of *intellectuals* 'speaking on behalf of' *the oppressed*. The notion of 'the intellectual' is of particular interest for at least two reasons. Firstly because the role of 'intellectuals' has been tied historically to a responsibility to *speak truth to power on behalf of the powerless*. Additionally because intellectuals have oft been accused of betraying the masses on whose behalf they claim to speak.

These questions were explored using an analytical framework which

> 1) problematised the question of "speaking on behalf of others" with reference to the issues of *positionality* as well as that of *epistemic* and political representation and
>
> 2) introduced important conceptual distinctions between the intellectual as *interpreter* or *legislator* and as *allied intellectual* or *movement intellectual*.

It is clear that historically the discourse of "speaking on behalf of the oppressed" has been an important but also contested one in South Africa. This began with the

[257] Jacques Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor* Trans. Andrew Parker (Durham: Duke University Press, 1983) as quoted in Walsh, "The Philosopher and His Poor," p. 123-127.

discourse of *civilisation* and *progress* that informed early missionary and colonial beliefs issuing in paternalistic notions of (liberal) *trusteeship* with regard to the native population of South Africa*.* At the very heart of the idea of *trusteeship* was an assumed right to "speak on behalf of the oppressed."

It is evident that the early ANC leadership relied on a similar philosophical grounding in the early 20th century. Primary Congress documents emphasised ideas of *civilisation* and *progress* along with claims to represent the rest of the black (African) population. This was done in spite of (or perhaps because of) the elite nature of the ANC leadership at the time. Missionaries like John Philip as well as early ANC leaders can thus be seen to have identified as *legislators* (in Bauman's sense). This was evident in the fact that they assumed a *right* to lead "the masses out of darkness". Arguably the very idea of one ultimate form of *civilisation* is analogous to an ultimate "truth" as described by Bauman in his characterisation of the intellectual as *legislator*. When missionaries and early ANC leaders believed they could guide others on this path they were essentially engaging in the act of arbitration around which ideas or practices were "progressive" or "backward."

Beginning in the 1940s however, there were robust contestations of these elitist and paternalist beliefs by the Unity Movement, the ANC Youth League and, later, the Black Consciousness Movement. In different ways these groupings critiqued both the ANC leadership as well as (white) liberals raising questions of race and class privileges while rejecting the ideologies of *trusteeship* and *civilisation*. More specifically they rejected *political* representation by groups or individuals who did not fully share the situation of the oppressed on whose behalf they claimed to speak. Tabata's assertion, that intellectuals had been engaged "in a systematic miseducation of the masses" because of an unwillingness to critically assess the actual needs of the oppressed, is a clear example of such a contestation.[258] This era raised a pointed and particular critique of elitism and paternalism which, in terms of our analytical framework, implied a shift away from assumptions of the *legislative* role of intellectuals. In practice the rejection of the very notion of *trusteeship* applied especially to (white) liberals and other *allied intellectuals.*

[258] Tabata, "Why the Compromise?" p. 24.

The post-apartheid transition to democracy brought about further shifts in the discourse around the role of intellectuals. The main point of consideration in the 1990s was what the role of the intellectual would be in a now democratic South Africa. During the anti-colonial and anti-apartheid era "speaking for the oppressed" was understood within the larger framework of the anti-apartheid struggle; "speaking truth to power" meant, at least for those on the 'left', opposition to the (Apartheid) state. Thus, when the ANC and its allies came to power, this raised profound questions for left intellectuals: what did "speaking truth to power" mean when the former liberation movement, the ANC, assumed control of the state? Who could and would legitimately "speak for the poor and oppressed" in post-apartheid democracy?

One result of the post-apartheid transition was a resurgence of civil society and an increase in scope and importance of social movements especially in the 2000s. Significantly both *movement intellectuals* and *allied intellectuals* played a part in these movements. Their involvement led to the re-emergence of "speaking on behalf of the oppressed' as a distinctive post-apartheid discourse. Additionally, it saw the recurrence of contestations around this practice. This is particularly evident in the writing of various *movement intellectuals,* like S'bu Zikode of Abahlali, who called for intellectuals to "speak to us not for us." *Allied intellectuals* such as Desai, Walsh and Naidoo began to question the way in which they and other *allied intellectuals* functioned in these new social movements in terms of both political and epistemic representation. Many *allied intellectuals* appeared to have taken ambivalent, inconsistent or even incoherent positions with regards to this practice. On the one hand they affirmed the AbM discourse of "speaking for ourselves"; on the other hand they persisted in speaking *on behalf of* the poor and oppressed while also denying that they were doing that.

This led to the need for what I have termed two levels of "truth-telling". On the one level there were continuing attempts of "speaking truth to power" in the sense of speaking out against societal structures that delegitimise social movements, positing them against the state in a democracy that is not always working for them. This approach emphasised that it was precisely the role of 'the intellectual' to stand in

solidarity with those who are oppressed in order to try and break the cycles of marginalisation. And then on the other level there was the need to speak out against the ways in which these same kinds of power dynamics may be playing themselves out *within* the movement including the role of these intellectuals themselves. On this view intellectuals had a responsibility to critically reflect on the internal dynamics and power structures of their own positionality within movements to avoid the reproduction of the very marginalisation that they aimed to be speaking out against. "Speaking truth to power" was thus about uncovering the significance of positionality and privilege and not just about finding an alternative to state power/capitalism etc.

These contestations were most evident in the social movement *Abahlali baseMjondolo*. AbM's ideology was anchored in the importance of "speaking for ourselves", itself a principled rejection of the right of others to speak on behalf of the oppressed. This led to many *allied intellectuals* emphasising the importance of "taking seriously the thinking done in communities" and hence "speaking to, rather than for the poor". These *allied intellectuals* seemingly self-identified as *interpreters* who were in the business of *communicating meaning* that was developed within these communities in principle rejecting *political* representation. However, this was later contended by others for multiple reasons.

A first point of contention was the fact that such a self-conception (of the intellectual as interpreter) logically includes the action of "speaking on behalf of others" even if such "speaking" is only in the name of "giving voice". This was the critique made by Prishani Naidoo amongst others. Secondly, this critique still ignored the positions of privilege that *allied intellectuals* have *vis-à-vis* movements as well as the modes of oppression *within* movements. These critiques were made by Walsh, Desai, Bond and others. Their analyses were essentially directed at the intellectual functioning as *interpreter*. Such a criticism was also part of Alcoff's problematisation in the first chapter which emphasised the effect of privileged positionalities on the practice of speaking on behalf of others. Part of her critique relates to the following assertion,

> *A plethora of sources have argued in this century that the neutrality of the theorizer can no longer, can never again, be sustained, even for a moment…Who is speaking to whom turns out to be as important for meaning and truth as what is said; In fact what is said turns out to change according to who is speaking and who is listening.*[259]

As Walsh argued this was about more than calling for "intellectuals to get their hands dirty".[260] It was about becoming engaged but also about being honest about your own ideologies, positionality and involvement in social movements. Because of the importance of positionality (and its bearing on representation) "we can no longer determine the validity of a given instance of speaking for others simply by asking whether or not the speaker has done sufficient research to justify his or her claim."[261] Thus we cannot argue that merely becoming a part of the movement and doing research along with it, itself justifies either *epistemic* or *political* representation of that movement. In terms of Abahlali there is sometimes an inability to distinguish the politics of AbM from the politics of these *allied intellectuals*. Thus while we talk about AbM's ideology, it is unclear to what extent that derives purely from the grassroots or to what extent it has been influenced by *allied intellectuals*. The reason for this lack of clarity is the fact that those *allied intellectuals* who were actively involved in the movement were not always open and honest about that in their writing; indeed they sometimes deflected critical questions on the grounds that these somehow posed a threat to the voice of the poor (rather than a threat to their own voice.) Gibson makes the following description about Pithouse's work with AbM,

> *Having worked with and written about movements in post-apartheid South Africa, Pithouse has brought to Abahlali a practical knowledge of the kinds of movements that have been successful and those that have not. Turning the anthropological gaze on itself, he became an informant, sharing knowledge about how to engage with the state, how to express opposition and how to*

[259] Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," p. 12.
[260] Walsh, "Uncomfortable Collaborations," p. 278.
[261] Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," p. 15.

> *navigate the donor/NGO terrain, including the problematic of accountability.*[262]

This may very well be true. However, that is not clear from Pithouse's writing on these social movements themselves because he does not position himself within the writing. Knowledge is not neutral and it should therefore be clear that the kind of knowledge that would be shared comes from a particular positionality. As Walsh, Sinwell, Naidoo and Dawson have argued this is not necessarily problematic when it is done in an open and honest way that interrogates what the effect would be on the movement. Leaving out "the messy bits" is what obfuscates the power relations as they pertain to intellectuals. It means it is difficult to interrogate claims of gatekeeping or racism/classism and relegates these discussions to slander and hearsay.

Anchoring the discussion in a longer historical perspective, it is clear that there are continuities and discontinuities. Firstly, questions of paternalism as well as race and class privileges are still paramount in discussing the legitimacy of intellectuals speaking on behalf of the oppressed. Many of the critiques made by Tabata, Biko and Lembede still hold for the way in which new forms of *trusteeship* and *paternalism* function in social movements. Intellectuals still risk projecting their own beliefs and values on to these social movements. *Political* representation was undoubtedly a key focus in the anti-apartheid and anti-colonial struggles. At the same time in post-apartheid social movements epistemic representation has become equally important – and crucially linked to *political* representation. Additionally there has been a growing recognition that, whether they admit it or not, (allied) intellectuals still play an important role in *legislating* within social movements. As Desai argued, "We need to take seriously the issue of establishing evidence and justifying interpretations, constantly interrogating the relationship between activism and producing academic knowledge." [263] Importantly, by not

[262] Gibson, Fanonian Practices, p. 177.
[263]Ashwin Desai in Christopher Lee, Christopher J. Lee, "Sovereignty, Neoliberalism and the Post-Diasporic Politics of Globalisation: A conversation about South Africa with Patrick Bond, Ashwin Desai and Molefi Mafereka ka Ndlovu," *Radical History Review* No. 103 (2009), p. 148.

making these relations and interactions clear, allied intellectuals ignore the two-way direction in which knowledge can be produced. In other words, the fact that intellectuals may have influenced social movements does not mean that social movements have not also influenced intellectuals. This begins to become clear from Sinwell and Dawson's notion of "critical sympathy"[264] where there is the recognition that those in the academy can bring as much to the movements as the movement can bring to them -- but all of this needs to be done in such a way that the interactions are transparent and interrogated at all points.

At the core of the debate around intellectuals articulating the aspirations of the oppressed is a contradiction between 1) their *legislative* role, i.e. intellectuals' assumed duty to arbitrate (judge societal practices as inferior/superior) and 2) their *interpretive* role, i.e. a call to listen and take seriously the ideas, beliefs and experiences of oppressed communities and thus merely convey meanings *for* them. The first has often resulted in paternalism or elitism and thus the projection of an intellectual's own goals and desires onto movements regardless of whether these match reality or are beneficial to them. The second can result in the silencing of internal modes of oppression, i.e. the marginalised voices within marginalised communities. This was the critique made by both Pointer and Walsh in arguing that it creates a category of people who are not worthy of real debate. It also relates to Turner's critique of the ultimate form of white paternalism which meant that you suspended any critical interaction on the grounds that those who you were working with were poor and black. Additionally, claims to be "giving voice" to movements often in actuality continue the process of "speaking for" them. There is thus a clear tension between the *legislative* and *interpretive* role of the intellectual.

Naidoo presents a potential answer to this dilemma in her own self-conception of the role of an *allied intellectual*,

> *I have never presumed to 'speak on behalf' of those who know the material conditions being fought better than I do, but I have not surrendered my own voice either (a voice that is itself a product of personal and collective*

[264] Dawson and Sinwell, "Transforming Scholarship," p. 4.

> *struggle). While I have certainly listened and been directed in struggle by those directly affected, I have also shared with them my own ideas and experiences, and often disagreed with them about strategies and tactics. This I have done as an equal in a community of people in struggle, but recognising that I do not participate in this particular struggle from the same position."*[265]

This indicates the importance of balancing key aspects crucial to the intellectual as *interpreter* as well as the intellectual as *legislator*. The interpreter needs to be engaged, functioning from a position within the particular community whose voices they aim to amplify by universalising their struggles. The legislator on the other hand has to critically reflect on the consequences of intervening to arbitrate in disputes and give guidance.

[265] Prishani Naidoo as quoted in Walsh, "Uncomfortable Collaborations", p. 262.

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