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Abstract

Writers and artists know better than anyone else what it is like to live and talk and shout and scream, knowing that there is no-one there listening. That makes a killing silence. What validates the experience of an artist is knowing that somewhere out there someone will acknowledge and share your deepest thoughts, your joys, your pains and your joys. Yet in South Africa we have lived for a very long time in the stifling isolation of our separate worlds both as individuals and groups. Only now do we as South African writers and artists self-consciously group and reach out to find fellow South African kindred spirits. (Lauretta Ngcobo 1994, 1)

GINA WISKER

Redefining an African Sky: South African Women's Writing Post-Apartheid

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The destructive silencing of apartheid denied expression, development, clarification and sharing of ideas and arguments about identity, location and values. Newly licensed to speak following the collapse of apartheid, many South African women work and write together, participating, for example, in the *Like a House on Fire* collection (1994), or individually, exploring and newly expressing their own versions of their lives, and their new sense of identity. Identity and location are issues that much of their work has in common, some, returning (either bodily or in their imaginations) to the locations they left. Where once these women were stifled by apartheid's censorship of thought, behaviour and expression, they now feel free to re-imagine and re-possess the locations of their past, reinscribing them with their own interpretations and values (see Farida Karodia, *Against an African Sky*, 1995). They re-member the shared past and re-vision a new future through a variety of forms, favourite among which are life writing and semi-fictional autobiography (*Basali*, 1995; *Like a House on Fire*, 1994). Lauretta Ngcobo talks of sisterhood and writing influenced by the 'shining beacon' of Olive Schreiner's comments on women's roles and challenges. Like Ngcobo, many South African women are now establishing a sense of a writing history which is vital in the creative pursuit of expressing a new South Africa that will encourage all its members to speak.

Unity across barriers of race and class is a feature of Farida Karodia's short stories, stories in *Basali !* and the variety of writing in the COSAW collection, *Like a House on Fire* (1994). Many of the women writers published in the COSAW

collection address troubled histories and endeavour to locate themselves in the new South Africa. Under apartheid, Black women writers, among them Lauretta Ngcobo, Zoë Wicomb and Bessie Head (who wrote from Botswana), were silenced unless they published outside the country, while white Afrikaaner and British-descended women writers also found it nearly impossible to express their solidarity. Recalling exile and deceit, Baleka Kgositsile comments on the loss of her countryman in 'The hill on 8.7.81'. Those 'Guilty Others', those with power, carry on or leave the country, untarnished, unpunished:

We know though
of those whose fangs
Dripping with the blood
Of our children
stick out behind
European passports
We know their stench (ll. 15–21)

Yet leaving does not clean the slate, although it can protect the innocent and guilty alike. Kgositsile uses vampire imagery to indict the murderous escapees whose European status removes all traces of their crimes on the land and peoples they left behind.

Some of the work we can now read was unpublished during apartheid, while other works discussed in this essay have been written since it ended. In some respects, the publication and discussion of the words of African women themselves about their own lives avoids potential feminist cultural imperialism, seen most often in the appropriation of Black women's words by white feminist critics. Suggesting that Black women's theory has often been a call to action, Awa Thiam comments: 'What is the use of writing about Black women, if in doing so we do not learn what they are in reality? It is up to these women themselves to set the record straight' (14).

Additional to the popular genres of life-writing, semi-fictional autobiography and testimony, a move into modes of fantasy is seen by many women as a useful way to shape and articulate both the imaginative and the everyday factual appreciation of life. With this in mind, it is important to look at the range of writing from women published post-apartheid, and it is equally important when dealing with South Africa to recognise that this is a multi-racial country with Xhosa, Zulu, Bushmen, Afrikaaner, British-descended, Asian-descended people. South African women write and speak from many cultural backgrounds, both from their own homes in South Africa and from the diaspora. This essay will concern itself with the spectrum of South African women's writing published post-apartheid, and will take location and identity as its main focus.

SELF AND NAMING NEW: LIFE WRITING AND SEMI-FICTIONAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

The choice of semi-fictional autobiography or life writing is a political one. For those who have suffered dislocation and disintegration of self under the

particular history of apartheid it offers an opportunity to value and articulate personal histories and express the self as subject. However, this is a critically contested choice.

While bell hooks (1982) insists that personal narrative is the only form available to Black woman, Sara Suleri argues that when you allow the 'native' to speak and use his/her subjectivity as a basis for information, you are left with the problem of how and whether subjectivity can provide truth. Representation of lived experience relies upon realism, but does not have to be written in the first person. Rather, it can show experience in action, delineating for example, laws governing rape or women's values. Limiting critical appreciation of women's writing to testimony and realism would be an arrogant culturally imperialist act, but so too would be insisting that the use of symbolism and the poetic are indications of (preferable, advanced) sophisticated writing. Additionally, our reading expectations and strategies are complicated by the post-structuralist problematisation of claims to unique selfhood, and subject identity. This critical debate developed at the same moment as many postcolonial women writers started to speak out, claiming identity and difference.

Hierarchical gender relations between (White) men and (Black) women are reproduced in the patriarchal discourse of master texts which conspire to exclude female 'minor' forms from the (scribal, written) literary canon of South Africa. For subordinated women, making any kind of creative or critical statement is to make a stand for the recognition and value of their subject position whether individually or collectively. Tradition might have hierarchised creative forms, but women 'are now writing back', revaluing what has been marginalised, as for example in the writing of semi-fictional autobiographies. Women also script oral poetry and storytelling using dialogic forms to negotiate the kind of debates found in communities and families. As Cooper argues, 'Feminised literary forms such as letters, diaries, and the literature of romance have had the same relationship to the "Great Tradition" as marginalised oral texts: [that is, they are seen to be] beyond the pale' (Cooper 7).

Mae Gwendolen Henderson draws on Barbara Smith's (1982) work on Black feminist criticism to discuss language, and argues that perspectives of race and gender intermix in Black women's writing, overcoming problems of homogeneity — foremost of which is the repression of individual differences (of heterogeneity). Instead she proposes a model 'that seeks to account for racial difference within gender identity and gender difference within racial identity' (258). She too identifies a dialogic mode as characteristic of Black women's writing, that commonly takes the form not only of a dialogue with the Other outside the self, but also an internal dialogue with several selves:

What is at once characteristic and suggestive about black women's writing is its interlocutory, or dialogic, character reflecting not only a relationship with the 'others', but an internal dialogue with the plural aspects of self that constitute the matrix of

black female subjectivity. The interlocutory character of black women's writings is, thus, not only a consequence of a dialogic relationship with an imaginary or 'generalised Other', but a dialogue with the aspects of 'otherness' within the self.

(Henderson 258–59)

Using semi-fictional autobiography alongside the dramatic qualities of performance poetry and other mixed forms of fiction and polemic enables a dialogic expression of the subjects' negotiated relationship with a changing South Africa. Polyphony and dialogue exist in many postcolonial texts through which formerly-marginalised peoples speak (Boehmer 206).

Suleri maintains that Black women's writing is significant for two reasons, firstly in its use of polyphony, multivocality and plurality of voices, and secondly in its prevalent choice of intimate, private, or inspired voice. She further claims that Black women writers 'have encoded oppression as a discursive dilemma, that is, their works have consistently raised the problem of the black woman's relationship to power and discourse.' (Suleri 263)

Through their familiarity with the discourses of others, in particular those who have colonised and controlled and whose languages (English, Afrikaans in this case) are those of education and the law, Black women writers weave into their work complementary discourses that seek both to adjudicate competing claims and witness common concerns. They negotiate many positions in writing of women's relationship to oppression and to speaking out.

Westernised feminism has been indicted for its racist bias and exclusion, (see Amos and Parmar, 1997). In this context, Susheila Nasta comments on the development of Black and Asian women's 'feminism' in relation to more general struggles for racial equality:

In countries with a history of colonialism, women's quest for emancipation, self-identity and fulfilment can be seen to represent a traitorous act, a betrayal not simply of traditional codes of practice and belief but of the wider struggle for liberation and nationalism. Does to be 'feminist' therefore involve a further displacement or reflect an implicit adherence to another form of cultural imperialism? (Nasta xv)

The negotiation of forms of Black and South African feminism which avoid the homogenising limitations of Western feminism, and springs from definitions of Black feminism as developed in the work of Barbara Smith, Mae Gwendolyn Henderson and others is crucial; but South Africa also includes White women, and a range of commonalities are shared by South African women who are united against apartheid and its tainted legacy. Finding voices for this range of subjects and expressions is a task these women must undertake in the coming years.

SEMI-FICTIONAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Why is it that just at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name ourselves to act as subjects rather than objects of history, that just then the concept of subjecthood becomes problematical? ... Our

nonbeing was the condition and being of the One, the centre, the taken-for-granted ability of one small segment of the population to speak for all ... we need ... to develop an account of the world which treats our perspective not as subjugated or disrupted knowledge, but as primitive and constitutive of a different world. (Harstock 163, 171)

Semi-fictional autobiography — the form favoured by many South African women writers — is often treated by post-modernist critics as aesthetically dubious because of its assertion of a subject position. In a time when self and reality need to be recognised and expressed because the right to identity was removed during the apartheid years, the post-modern project is clearly out of place. As Andre Brink puts it, it is too artificial, too controlled and finally too conservative (18). However, semi-fictional autobiography has a long history and a role to play in re-empowering hitherto silenced peoples — working classes, women, Black and Asian and other minorities or politically disenfranchised people — to speak about their lives so that others might hear, and by speaking about their lives, clarify the structure, establish the shape, value and worth of these lives for themselves. The combination of testimony and creativity enable the writer to reflect upon and structure autobiographical material. Virginia Woolf, in publishing the life writing of the Women's Co-operative Guild, carried out the same kind of enabling function — empowering the women to value their lives through their writing — as did Bessie Head with the publication of *A Question of Power* in 1974.

Autobiography is a form of creative testimony and in the hands of South African women writers it enables not only the articulation of individual identity, but the expression of the identity and experiences of a people or a community for whom the individual speaks. As such, then, it is aligned with the strategies and aims of oral literature — a form with which women for whom literary skills or even literacy were inaccessible (or even inappropriate), were not only familiar, but often skilled. South African women recuperate versions of their past lives through the explorations and expressions of autobiography:

Telling our stories, using the 'self as subject', shows the intersection between the individual and the larger forces of our history. In telling our stories we attempt to understand both intellectually and emotionally. We each have a story to tell, in its uniqueness and commonalty, but also in its constructedness. In remembering in the present, we begin to realise that parts of our past are waiting to be reclaimed, re-visited and told as we view the past through the lens of the present, weaving an inter-textual narrative. (Govinden 171)

Women writers in post-apartheid South Africa testify to a history of suffering and silencing, forming versions of a lived, shared history that can be communicated effectively to others. The autobiographical project for both groups of women writers, Black and White, enables recognition and expression of self and community in history — a reinscribing of women's lives into the location from which they spring. Hitherto this silence imposed largely by apartheid, historically

erased them, at least in terms of recognition by a wider audience. Autobiography reclaims voice and empowers the writer because it offers a viable 'truth telling' alternative to the possibility of misrepresentation by the discourses of colonial power.

For the COSAW and Lesotho writing groups (*Like a House on Fire*, 1994; *Basali*, 1995) forms of autobiography provide particularly authentic first-person testimony of history and experiences otherwise rendered second-hand through different written versions, including journalism. Similar to early African American slave narratives, testifying to one's experience has always had strength and authenticity for Black communities. For both Black and White South African women writers, an authentic voice emerges that is allied with the need to frame, control and make sense of experience rather than merely to record it. The use of various autobiographical forms also allows the construction of an 'I' figure — a fictionalised version of the self. Bessie Head, Zoë Wicomb, Ellen Kuzwayo, Gillian Slovo and other COSAW and Lesotho women writers produce semi-fictional autobiographies that are both authentic *and* constructed because they interpret 'the self'. They represent the self within its community. Cultural contexts affect, condition, prevent and encourage forms of reading and writing. Post-apartheid South Africa is in the exciting, challenging, often contradictory process of re-inventing itself. In this changing context, women's semi-fictional autobiographies act as dialogues between an oppressive and silencing present and a resisting, culturally generated, self-creating individual voice.

South African women writers express the wish to reconstruct, and represent the self in the face of silencing social, political and textual colonial master narratives. Lauretta Ngcobo comments:

It is not the raw truth, the raw events of our embittered days of violence. Essentially writing is about the truth contemplated through the crucible of the imagination, and therefore truth becomes art. (Ngcobo 1994, 2)

Women in the COSAW collection build on the work of novelists such as Ellen Kuzwayo (*Call Me Woman*, 1988) writing both as the individual 'I' and as members of the collective community 'we' of Kuzwayo's autobiography. Bessie Head observes:

[it] puts aside the rhinoceros hide, to reveal a people with a delicate nervous balance like everyone else ... one feels as if a shadow history of South Africa has been written; there is a sense of triumph, of hope in this achievement and that one has read the true history of the land, a history that vibrates with human compassion and goodness.

(Head, 1990, 89)

The record of the lives of both Kuzwayo and Head are testaments of suffering, and hope.

Lauretta Ngcobo, Ellen Kuzwayo and others creatively utilise and subvert master narratives which would seek to subjugate their experience and prevent the expression of 'desires, on the one hand, and political demands, decisions and

discourses on the other' (Driver 51). In this respect, Zoë Wicomb is seen as re-valuing women's roles and reclaiming her version of language from the coloniser who would sanitise it of local references:

Her writing bears witness to a history of deprivation, yet it also suggests ways which subvert this history: not through political or economic change but through a psychological change whose major route is in re-writing representation. (Driver 45)

Apartheid's deliberate repression of the hopes, quality of human life, and ability to read and express experiences of and feelings about lives restricted the opportunity of writers. T.T. Moyana argues that its totalitarian laws were 'legislating literature out of existence':

An additional difficulty for the creative artist in South Africa, especially the black writer, is that life itself is too fantastic to be outstripped by the creative imagination. (Moyana 95)

Writing within a culture of oppression, with little leisure time, little education, much poverty and no access to the networks that facilitate publication, South African women have found it a particularly uphill struggle to express themselves and be heard.

UNDER APARTHEID: EXILE, SILENCE AND THE DIASPORA

During the years of apartheid, if writers (both male and female) wished to write, inevitably, about racism, they were banned, or could only do so from a position of exile, like Noni Jabavu, the first modern writer of South African women's novels. Despite the debilitating effects of apartheid, women continued to write at home or abroad. In the face of banning and exile, Amelia House left South Africa for England and Bessie Head was a stateless person for years in Botswana. Others remained behind but had their work curtailed. Ellen Kuzwayo's *Call Me Woman* (1988) illustrates how Black people have survived with fortitude. Winnie Mandela who was forced to live under house-arrest, dictated her autobiography, *Part of My Soul Went With Him*, over the phone to her publisher in 1985. Miriam Makeba related her story to James Hall. Nadine Gordimer's essays, novels and short stories provided windows into some versions of the lived political situation.

Although the political and critical arguments of Elleke Boehmer and others suggest that autobiographical forms are more appropriate in times of such oppression, clearly women did not confine their writing to autobiographical forms exclusively. Miriam Tlali, who remained in South Africa but was prevented from entering the library where her book was housed because she was Black, published *Muriel at the Metropolitan* in 1975, *Amandla, a Novel* in 1980, and *Soweto Stories* in 1989. Lauretta Ngcobo's 1981 novel, *Cross of Gold*, portrays guerrilla struggles across South Africa. It was written in exile (she left for London in 1966) and was banned in South Africa. Farida Karodia, writing from Canada, in *Daughters of the Twilight* (1986) and *Coming Home and Other Stories* (1988), reflects the

problems of ethnic groups in South Africa. Zoë Wicomb, who spent years in Britain, and now lives in Scotland, published her fictional autobiographical short story sequence/ novel, *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* in 1987. Jayapraga Reddy produced *On the Fringe of Dream-Time and Other Stories* (1987) and Agnes Sam published *Jesus is Indian and Other Stories* (1989), whilst Sheila Fugard writes as she moves between New York and South Africa.

Apartheid literally separated — divided to rule — the different racial groups comprising South Africa, and separated the experiences and writing of groups and individuals from both the wider world, and those at home. Although women were writing at home and in exile or in the diaspora, their work was not available to South African readers. Not only writing but also reading freedoms were denied — South African writing, particularly that by women, was absent from their own, (and our own) classrooms. Betty Govinden, in writing of her apartheid education, talks of a two kinds of reading. While the radical journal, *Drum*, was read at home, it never appeared in official reading. First under colonialism, then apartheid, Indigenous writing was discredited and/or unavailable. Apposite to this deprived reality, Govinden asks:

Can it be true that black women writers were writing since the turn of the century, yet they never made their way into my classrooms in this town on the north coast of Kwazulu-Natal. Even Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), though presented to me as an exemplary model of 'indigenous' writing, was not depicted for its singular South African perspective, nor for its place in feminist thinking at a time when the world was moving into the second wave of feminist thinking and writing.

(Govinden 174)

Writing that reflected her own experience was absent: 'this daily history was slighted by a politics of selection working invisibly on behalf of my colonised self' (Govinden 175). Further to this political observation Govinden comments, 'In telling our stories we attempt to understand both intellectually and emotionally' (174).

Carol Lett participates in this telling. Her story, 'Transitions' (1994), responds to the horror of apartheid by intermixing memories of her grandfather and great-grandfather, whose violent deaths remained a rumour to her. Dates and events in her own life mark responses to the condition of living under apartheid in that selected, significant personal memories parallel South Africa's development in the post-apartheid era. Factual events are interpreted both personally and in a symbolic manner. The female protagonist was born 'in December 1959, a few months before the horror of Sharpeville, when a number of people, including children, were shot dead by police' (3). A period of protest at the Pass Laws gives way to a celebratory parallel: the birth of her daughter 'in June 1990, a few months after the long-awaited release of Nelson Mandela' (3). Her story is seen in parallel to significant historical events.

Rosemary Jolly and Derek Attridge note of Elleke Boehmer's discussion (1995) of the pertinence of autobiography to South Africa, that:

The unbearable reality of the apartheid world, she suggests, resists the novelistic imagination. There are some periods, it would seem, in which the task of imagining difference — temporally speaking and with regard to the other — is less possible than at other times. (8)

It is important that we recognise in South African writing the ability to record detail and document, and still suggest that life could be other; thus harnessing both the realistic detail and the creative imaginative leap, which posits another world. In post-apartheid writing South African women are recreating visions and versions of a new present and a new future while trying to shape the past into something manageable.

The full continuum of documentary, autobiography & fiction in *Like a House on Fire* includes an interview with Gillian Slovo who wrote *Ties of Blood* (1990) after the assassination of her anti-apartheid political activist mother, Ruth First. *Ties of Blood* has a semi-autobiographical focus on Jewish families which parallels the history of South African political struggles. It deals particularly with Slovo's parents' generation. Although she constantly denied its autobiographical elements, she recognises:

The people trace the historical development that my family is part of ... it is a kind of catalogue of the anti-apartheid movement in the twentieth century, and because my parents were so active in it, obviously they participated in its development.

(Braude 264)

This fictional autobiography enables Slovo to deal with her Jewish history in both an imaginative and a documentary way, while recognising that memory can be highly selective.

THE POLITICISED HISTORY OF SPACE AND IDENTITY

In the work of Miriam Tlali, Bessie Head, and Zoë Wicomb, imagery enabling exploration of the ideas of identity and hope for creative change in the future recurs as that of location, of the house and home space, and of journeying. The familiarity of spaces, the accommodation of difference in a place (usually outside apartheid South Africa) which allows one to expand and be oneself is a crucial stimulus to the writer, and nurtures engaged, imaginative works.

Spaces in colonial discourse and representation are figured as dangerous, different, to be renamed and appropriated. J.M. Coetzee comments on this phenomenon in twentieth-century white South African poetry, arguing that:

In all the poetry commemorating meetings with the silence and emptiness of Africa ... it is hard not to read a certain historical will to see as silent and empty a land that has been, if not full of human figures, not empty of them either.(Coetzee 103)

The coloniser typically empties the spaces of Indigenous people in order to fill them with settler-colonisers. Imperial and colonial texts reinscribed southern

African landscapes as if they were women — dangerous, rich, fertile — to be possessed. Re-naming — an action that insists on the importance of location and identity — becomes a shared cultural project for South African women writers. It is an act of re-possession.

LOCATIONS

The pain of enforced removals and locations has terrible impact upon identity. For exiled and transient peoples, establishing or recuperating location is important. It would appear that the establishment of only temporary living spaces has a very destructive influence on all lives. Attempts to bring up families, with the dangers and deprivations of dispossession and transience, and the conflicts between values of the town and of rural village, are subjects explored and dramatised by Bessie Head, Miriam Tlali, Zoë Wicomb, Gcina Mhlope, Baleka Kgositsile and others, including the writers in *Like a House on Fire*. Yet it also becomes apparent that once inhabited, even these transient living spaces become communities whose existence enables a sense of identity to develop. The creative human spirit under pressure identifies with and occupies space often unrecognised as nurturing by others.

Home is an imagined, newly real location for many of those who return from exile, are re-settled and who search current locations, re-examining them with the values of 'home'.

Tell me
 Where is home
 is it the hotel room
 which hosts
 this grand occasion
 which resides
 over this honour
 which delivers to me
 the first step
 inside my country
 after 5148 nights
 away from home
 down the thin road
 of personal history
 roaming
 in search of home

(Kgositsile 'Where is home?' in Oliphant, 27)

'Home' could be in a 'cluster of dusty structures' surrounding the speaker's father's ageing body, where she lives with her children, or it could be her mother's grave. In this investigation of the nature and location of 'home', Baleka Kgositsile deals with confusions of remembered versions of home that are historically and

psychologically interrupted. The thoughts of the exile returning to an imagined home are as one with those of the returned political prisoner. We can all empathise.

Let home feed music
 Into the silence
 Surrounding the memory 'of the ex-prisoner'
 let home be
 an unfurling dawn
 ushering in the new day
 where my daughter
 will be seen and
 judged as a person

(Kgositsile 'where is home' in Oliphant, 42)¹

In theorising the notion of social agency, Carole Boyce-Davies takes up issues of identity and location. She challenges postmodernism's denigration of the subject position, arguing for the articulacy and self identification of migrant, visiting, travelling, wandering Black women — women living in exile in the diaspora or those who have been dispossessed of their homes. Johannes Smit (in *Alternation*, 1996) argues that she begins to suggest ways by which new voices, identities and locations of South African women writers might be recognised. His argument rests on Boyce-Davies' use of two positions: location (home and travelling locations) and identity, developed in relation to and apart from these locations. In South African women's writing these find expression in ways which negotiate with and then refuse the master narratives and discourses of the predominantly male, imperial and colonial past. This renegotiation is a recognition that the 'radical Black [female] diasporic subjectivity' or agency is always in process (hooks 15–22) Smit notes (202). 'As "elsewheres denote movement" Black female subjectivity asserts agency as it crosses the borders, journeys, migrates and so reclaims as it re-asserts' (quoting Boyce-Davies 37). He goes on to point out that in her work, Boyce-Davies asserts that in the context of pessimism and the inability to name which accompanies postmodernism, 'Black women not only name oppressions but also find voices in the "elsewhere" of rearticulated worlds' operating on the same impulses as "maroon societies," "slave rebellions", "underground railroads"' (Boyce-Davies 107–108, qtd in Smit 1996). Smit identifies an "uprising" consciousness' (202) which 'moves us out of postcoloniality and the state of "postness" or "afterness" and into a more radical consciousness of our creativity' (Boyce-Davies 110). Creativity appears in women's performance, photography, film, art and resistance. Women, in Boyce-Davies' analysis, establish locations outside White male imperial or colonial paradigms and set up 'different spaces' — sites in which they can develop and articulate their work, identities, versions of locations and positions, so undercutting and usurping 'master discourses' (Boyce-Davies 122).

Writing which focuses on returning to, remembering, redefining, revisiting home and the self, is produced by those who continued to reside in South Africa

during and after apartheid and those who lived in exile, returning, when it ended, either in person or in their imaginations. Re-imagining and redefining a sense of self is bound up with re-imagining and redefining locations, both historical and geographical. This imaginative, recuperative project is exemplified in the writing of Farida Karodia.

FARIDA KARODIA — AGAINST AN AFRICAN SKY

Lately the death of Tant Hester had brought home to me how much I was a product of my environment, and how neatly the external landscape fitted over the contours of the internal one.

(Karodia 30)

Farida Karodia's collection of short stories *Against an African Sky*, explores identity, return, race and gender issues. In the first title story of the collection, she takes the narrative point of view of Johan, a white Afrikaaner returning to the land his father established and settled: Padsonderend — the end of the road. The functions of the return and the tale are to settle his own conscience and move on to restitution, re-writing of histories and re-establishing a new version of his homeland for the future. Johan's story, set in post-apartheid South Africa, is a reflection of the years of apartheid and those immediately following it. It considers relationships between three people, a Black woman, Sissie, a Black man, Aaron, and Johan, an Afrikaaner. Sissie, given up by her family, educated despite her race and colour, develops her potential by becoming a doctor, so demonstrating the possibilities of Black African ability if/when given the opportunity. Johan, the landowner, gains insights into his background as the issues and politics of race in practice are crystallised following the death of his family in a car crash. Guilt over the crash elides with that derived from being a member of a privileged oppressive group. Johan discovers that his roots and relationships are more complex than imagined when Aaron, the older man, turns out to be his half brother.

Many White land owners had sexual relationships with Black women, but because of the race laws under apartheid, their mixed race children could neither acknowledge their origins nor claim any of their owed birthright, that is, education, status and inheritance:

'It's been done all over the country. White men have slept with black women since the first explorers arrived on these shores and have denied their offspring. What Willem Venter did was not unusual,' she said matter-of-factly. (17)

Aaron is a political figure. In becoming a member of the ANC, Aaron is instrumental in bringing about the new South Africa. He also places himself in a vulnerable position with regard to the police and laws of the time. Following Johan's prison visit to him after he is caught forging a false passport, Aaron chooses escape, but life on the run, matched with political success takes its toll on his health and when the men meet up it is clear that Aaron, like Johan, has returned to set his life and relationships in order.

The story offers a debate between realism and hope, idealism and the limitations of political and human relationships. It suggests that despite political idealism, few power relations seem actually to have changed in post-apartheid South Africa:

The whites had returned to their complacency, secure in the knowledge that they are still the dominant group. Now that the election is over, life has ostensibly returned to normal. I have still to take the measure of this state of 'normality'.

The rules have changed, but the game goes on as before. The election was merely a hiccup. The violence, which is confined mainly to the townships, is ignored by the white population, as long as it remains black-on-black violence. In my conversation with someone the other day, the person said: 'Who cares if a bunch of taxi drivers bump each other off?' (3)

Black Africans now buy up big houses, but everyday racism still lingers on:

It's the first thing that whites do. They separate the eating utensils as though blackness suggests contamination or infection. It's only skin colour dammit! Thank God, people are changing their attitudes. It's very slow, but eventually they'll get used to the idea that at a restaurant there are not separate cups and spoons for us. We all have to eat out of the same dishes.(39)

Upon Aaron's death, Johan recognises in his son the true inheritor of the land. This realistic, straightforwardly told tale, highlights the different kinds of lifestyles and opportunities enabled or hindered by gender and race in pre- and post-apartheid South Africa. It suggests that post-apartheid potential can be realised; some ethnicity barriers can be crossed. Karodia constructs an idealistic ending that unites new versions of location and identity. It would seem that for Black and White alike, there is a place under an African sky.

CONCLUSION

Creative isolation has been damaging to generations of South African readers and writers. Now South African women's work is being written and read. Many women are recuperating versions of their past lives through publishing abroad and at home, and being studied on the syllabi of their own country, and across the world. As Jayapraga Reddy comments of history in the written and oral transaction: '[o]ur writing tradition and culture can only be strongly built if we have a sense of the foundations on which we are building' (74).

South African women's semi-fictional autobiography and life-writing, fictional prose and poetry negotiate and refuse the dichotomies of nation/self, post-modern/subject, gender/race, fiction/documentary. This varied work helps negotiate the process of re-memembering and the reclamation of a silenced past that facilitates the construction and representation of versions of identity of the self in the context of community and location.

NOTES

¹ Andries Walker Oliphant's collection comprises poetry hitherto unpublished except in small magazines and mixes poetry of exile with work from different parts of the

country, from those who write of the political but do not let that negate their sense of style, and those who cover new themes set against the context of post apartheid.

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