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2009-02-02T11:38:06Z
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“AFRICAN DISCOURSES”: THE OLD AND THE NEW IN POST-APARTHEID ISIZULU LITERATURE AND SOUTH AFRICAN BLACK TELEVISION DRAMAS

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university, nor has it been prepared under the aegis or with the assistance of any other body or organisation or person outside the University of the Witwatersrand.

_____

(Name of Candidate)

_____ day of _____, 20_____

DEDICATION

To the living memory of my parents, Emmah Mavis and Ompiyimpi Jeremiah Dhlamini

ABSTARCT

This thesis sets out to explore the problematic perceptions regarding African indigenous language literature. The general view regarding this literature is that it is immature, irrelevant school-market driven and shows no artistic complexities and ingenuity.[1] These disparaging remarks resonated persistently after the first democratic elections in 1994. Both local and international critics expected marked shifts in post-apartheid isiZulu literary productions because factors that hampered its development have been removed. The dominant Western and postcolonial critical approaches from which these critics articulated their views, operated on assumptions that failed to look at the role and centrality of the broader concerns usually covered by this literature. Barber (1994: 3) points out that these Western and postcolonial critical approaches,

> block a properly historical localized understanding of any scene of colonial and post-independence literary production in Africa. Instead it selects and overemphasized one sliver of literary and cultural production…and this is experience'.

Furthermore it is the contention of this thesis that these critics used critical tools that are fundamentally mismatched for the types of narratives with which isiZulu literature and African-language literatures in general are engaged.

It is the view of the author of this thesis that if a new set of critical tools are used, a paradigm shift may result which allows for revisiting creative conceptualisations involved in the production of these literatures. The primary aim of this thesis is to read post-apartheid isiZulu novels and the black television dramas using theoretical tenets postulated by Karin Barber. Barber's research on African everyday culture is the key epistemological and cosmological framework with which to study post-apartheid literary and film productions that narrate the everyday life experiences of ordinary South Africans. The basic assumption is that orality which is the maximal point of reference for

[1] See Mpahlele, 1992; Kunene, D. P. 1992 and 1994; Kunene, M. 1976 and 1991; and Chapman, 1996

any African work of imagination continues to thrive in black everyday popular culture as manifest in both print and broadcast media.

The first part of this thesis deals with the use of oral genres in print media. Six novels are selected to explore the uses of proverbs, folktale motifs and naming as strategies for reading post-apartheid contemporary South African society. The thesis proceeds from an analysis of what these oral forms aim to achieve in the post-apartheid context. It is argued that through these oral verbal art forms the narratives transpose the traditional episteme and re-inscribe it for modern contemporary African society, where traditional morality is made to continue to shape and animate contemporary morality.

The second section deals with the implications of some of these traditional epistemologies in broadcast media texts. Four post-apartheid black television dramas are selected. With **Ifa LakwaMthethwa** and **Hlala Kwabafileyo**, the thesis, demonstrates how these films position the middle-class as a solution to post-apartheid leadership challenges. The discussion of **Gaz' Lam** and **Yizo Yizo** demonstrates the nature of orality, where oral texts are seen to be endlessly recycling similar themes in different media forms. The emphasis is on how renditions of texts always bring in new elements and topical issues, fresh and precise photographic capturing of key moments in society.

In view of the nature of Barber's theoretical model and that of isiZulu fiction and film, this thesis argues that it is the most appropriate to use for the analysis of African-languages literatures. Barber's theoretical model has intertextual links with the Black Film theoretical traditions in the Diaspora and the Third Cinema in Africa. These black film traditions, like Barber's model, centralise the black experience, everyday culture and orality as the basic reference for African work of imagination and aesthetics.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For a project of this magnitude, as a researcher, my ways have crisscrossed on numerous levels with a number of fascinating people, scholars, friends and acquaintances, who, when looking back, have been structurally positioned to help me grow intellectually, facilitate my progress, offer words of encouragement and support.

The first person, who features largely in mind right now, is my supervisor, Professor Isabel Hofmeyr. I wish to thank her from the bottom of my heart for hre academic guidance, her patience and the opportunities for funding she has directed me to from time to time for the completion of this study.

The other influential scholar in my academic life that I wish to express my gratitude to is Professor Nhlanhla Maake. We had many profitable discussions regarding issues and politics in African-languages literatures and from these discussions germination of a thought resulted.

My thanks also go to Professors Kupe, Peterson, Ogude for their contributions to my early drafts, especially for being discussants to the proposal. Their recommendations helped immensely in the ramification of the outlook of this study.

I have also benefitted immensely from the SLLS' Seminar Forums. My special gratitude goes to Grace Musila, an African Literature doctoral candidate, Carolyn Mckinney from the School of Education, Tom Odhiambo, a post-doctoral fellow from WISER and Professor Ogude from the African Literature Department, whose contributions with the third chapter, helped me in preparing it for publication with the **South African Journal of African Languages**. Many thanks also go to Professor Inge Kosch from UNISA and Dr Andrew van der Spuy, from the Linguistics Department for editing drafts of this article. I also extend my gratitude to Professor Koopman who has been helpful with some of the articles that were not readily accessible for the completion of this article.

I am also grateful to Professor Annette Horn for allowing me space to present a paper in the Postgraduate colloquium which created a free space of intellectual debates that helped me situate my work within a broader framework of theoretical insights on the tropes and trends in literature generally.

I also wish to thank the Tucker family, and Joyce Anderson, a Kumon South Africa specialist for reading early drafts of my chapters.

At various instances I came to a *cul de sac*, especially with the procurement of research materials and I had to depend on support staff to help. My special thanks go to Judy Marshall, a Librarian at Wartenweiller and Margaret Northey and all the staff members at the Cullen Library.

My gratitude also goes to my husband, Fanny for his emotional and financial support. He was also a true dedicated companion as I wandered about in conferences and lectures to present my ideas to my peers. His support throughout this odyssey is sincerely appreciated. My thanks also go to my sister, Zandile, who played mother to my children, Lwazi, Nolwazi and Lwazisile, as my academic and research engagements constantly deprived them of a mother. Her role playing allowed me all the time and space I needed for writing this thesis.

Finally this thesis will not have seen the light of day if it were not for the generous grants the University offered me. The University Staff Bursary Fund, the ad hoc grant and the Carnegie Time Off grant helped immensely with the procurement of research materials and for the payment of a lecturer replacement, buying me time to further research and write parts of this thesis.

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