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Trump, M.

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AUTHOR: M. Trump

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- Martin Trump

My main concerns in this essay are the difficulties of populist address in fiction; the degree to which debates taking place within a country's liberation movement are articulated in resistance literature; over-simplifications in resistance literature, which often have troubling consequences when translated into terms of political discourse; and, finally, the issue of writers being able to articulate incompatible forces within their fiction and to recognise them as being incompatible.

In exploring these questions, I will make reference to fiction that describes Southern African liberation struggles. Particularly close focus will fall on Mongane Serote's To Every Birth Its Blood, written between 1975 and 1980 and dealing with liberation struggles within South Africa. I shall compare and contrast Serote's work with Pepetela's novel Mayombe written in 1971 about MPLA guerillas operating in the Cabinda province of Angola and Stanley Nyamfukudza's novel The Non-Believer's Journey, written towards the end of the 1970s and describing events in 1974 closely related to the second Zimbabwean chimurenga.

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A major distinction between literary discourse and other social discourses (say, those of history and the social sciences) is the way literature tends to give precedence to the experiences of individuals. Forms of self-reflexive and subjective consciousness are the usual distinctive qualities of literary works. Literary discourse is a useful vehicle for articulating the desires and impulses of individuals. Stephen Clingman notes that 'fiction deals with an area of activity usually inaccessible to the sciences of greater externality: the area in which historical process is registered as the subjective experience of individuals in society'.[3]

Fiction appears particularly well-equipped to make an

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1. Pepetela, Mayombe (transl. by Michael Wolfers) (London: Heinemann AWS, 1983).
Stanley Nyamfukudza, The Non-Believer's Journey (London: Heinemann AWS, 1980 & Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1983).
Mongane Serote, To Every Birth Its Blood (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1981).
2. The point may be raised that the Angolan and Zimbabwean novels were written about moments in the liberation struggles in those countries where victory was in sight. This was not the case for Serote. Even if one grants validity to this line of argument, I don't think this substantially alters the conclusions I reach in this essay.
3. Stephen Clingman, The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: History from the Inside (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1986) 1.

important contribution to the processes of opposition to oppression in Southern Africa, precisely on account of the record it offers of the everyday experiences and feelings of people. For, as Kelwyn Sole has observed: 'There is a realisation in South Africa that working-class people's everyday activities are as important politically as any amount of slogans and rhetoric, and are a force to be reckoned with.'[4] However, as I hope to show, the role and place of fiction within the counterhegemonic cultures of different Southern African countries is far from unproblematic.

One needs to qualify one's understanding of the subjectivity emphasized in literature. The writer abstracts and, to a certain extent, invents views and experiences of history. Demythologising fiction frequently involves measuring fictional representations of history against conventional or hegemonic views of history. In the case of much Southern African fiction, the 'distance' between its representations of history and those offered by the racial capitalist discourse is particularly marked. What fiction, which forms part of the counterhegemonic discourse in fact does is to engage in a form of dialogue with the hegemonic discourse and offer a view of society and history which is its opposite in many ways. The terms of exchange within this dialogue are frequently intensely hostile.

How has Southern Africa writing subverted racial capitalist discourse? In the first place, this class of writing offers a view of history significantly different from that disseminated by the ruling hegemony. Within resistance fiction one sees racial capitalism challenged by a history of the oppressed class, which frequently draws upon oral tradition and records of collective struggle against oppression.

However, how meaningful is it to refer in this undifferentiated way to an oppressed class in Southern Africa and to a history of collective struggle against oppression? This approach is particularly prevalent among a radical intelligensia in Southern Africa - as it appears to be among many resistance writers. The Marxist notion of the ultimately dichotomous nature of class struggle - between the dominant and the oppressed class - has been particularly influential here.[5] As I hope to show, this conceptualization of society can easily lose sense of the specificities and differences

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4. Kelwyn Sole, 'Oral Performance and Social Struggle in Contemporary Black South African Literature'. In Triquarterly 69 (1987) From South Africa, 267.
5. In relation to the South African situation, this notion has crystallised around the formulation - colonialism of a special type. This, in turn, has perpetuated the sense of there being two 'nations' within South Africa - the black and the white 'nation'. For a critique of this position and the thinking underlying it, see Dirk Kotzé's 'Revisiting Colonialism of a Special Type', a paper presented at the conference of the Political Science Association of South Africa, Port Alfred, 9 - 11 October 1989.

within oppressed communities and within the ruling class.

There are a set of recurring features in Southern African history that are frequently drawn upon in resistance writing. The presence of pre-capitalist modes of production in Southern Africa is a critical element in the construction of a coherent, oppositional account of history. The experiences and memories of pre-capitalist, collectivist society loom large in the consciousness of many writers and frequently form part of the basis for a transformed vision of the future. A communalist past and the residual traces of communalism in the present feed into the vision of creating a communalist future. This view of history arises out of a narrative of colonial-racial exploitation leading to the present dislocations of late capitalism.

The consciousness of pre-capitalist modes of production and social organization is most clearly expressed in fiction by an attachment to communal storytelling traditions. In The Non-Believer's Journey, as the bus carrying Sam back to his rural home in Zimbabwe rattles to a halt at one of the many police roadblocks, he involuntarily contrasts the current situation of terror with the idyllic world of pre-colonial society described to him as a child by his grandmother. Interestingly, even as a child, Sam found these 'stories' of his grandmother difficult to believe (27-29). Nyamfukudza clearly sets out to indicate how remote the idyllic pre-capitalist past (if in fact it existed at all in such idealistic way) has become with the advent of racial capitalism in Zimbabwe. None the less, a narrative posing a counterhegemonic history which might ultimately transform existing structures and move society towards the collectivism that characterized traditional African societies is suggested in this way.

The history of oppression in Southern Africa has had a number of effects on the region's writing. The unfolding of exploitation, while attempting to divide the oppressed and often succeeding, has at the same time served as a force to unite oppressed groupings. These trends, namely of division and unity, are potentially unreconcilable. Yet few writers have perceived the situation in this way. By far the most common tendency in resistance writing has been to emphasize the unity of the oppressed. What one therefore sees is an almost overwhelming, and often not unproblematic, identification of petit-bourgeois writers with the oppressed.[6] Almost willy-nilly, writers have been dragged into a necessary commitment to the aspirations of the oppressed. Yet the

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6. See Kelwyn Sole's essays, 'Class, Continuity and Change in Black South African Literature: 1948 - 1960'. In: Bozzoli, Belinda (ed.), Labour, Townships and Protest. Studies in the Social History of the Witwatersrand, (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1979); and '"The Days of Power": Depictions of Politics and Community in Four Recent South African Novels', Research in African Literatures 1988, 19(1):65-88, for seminal explorations of these issues with reference to South African writing.

oppressed class is itself made up of several class fractions (for example, certain strata of the petit-bourgeoisie) and eccentric or dependent classes (such as the peasantry and certain ethnically distinguishable groups). And the oppressed class contains opposing political allegiances. Forms of identification the writers make with the oppressed therefore frequently conflate a set of discordant positions.

There are interesting paradoxes in the choice of languages made by Southern African writers. By far the greatest number of works are written in the languages of European dominance: English in South Africa and Zimbabwe; Portuguese in Angola and Mozambique. The widespread use of European languages by resistance writers can be seen as a gesture of protest at colonial policies of tribalism (the ruling class's 'divide and rule' programmes). This also becomes an affirmation that in each of the Southern African countries the European languages are or have been an element in the move towards the creation of unified national cultures, both as unifying vehicles in the process of mobilization and as likely contenders for becoming at least one of the national languages of the post-colonial state.[7] Writers have also claimed that European languages offer them a means of reaching readers elsewhere in Africa and in the African diaspora.[8]

While all of this is undoubtedly true, European languages in Southern Africa are closely identified with the petit-bourgeoisie. Moreover, the European languages are commonly

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7. For discussion of the reasons underlying black South African writers' choice of English as their literary medium and the historical evolution of the language debate, see Ursula Barnett's A Vision of Order - A Study of Black South African Literature in English (1914 - 1980), (London: Sinclair Browne, 1983 & Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press), in particular, the opening chapter 'A History of Black Writing in English in South Africa'. Also see Sole (1979), particularly where he writes that the use of English 'as a possible cultural unifying force among urban blacks, with political and ideological implications is one which goes back to Plaatje and John Dube' (160). See Es'kia Mphahlele's The African Image, (London: Faber, 1962):

> Now because the Government is using institutions of a fragmented and almost unrecognizable Bantu culture as an instrument of oppression, we dare not look back. We have got to wrench the tools of power from the white man's hand: one of these is literacy - the sophistication that goes with it. We have got to speak the language that all can understand - English...(193).

For a discussion of English as South Africa's national language of the future, see Njabulo Ndebele's 'The English Language and Social Change in South Africa', The English Academy Review 4 (1987), Johannesburg:1-16.

8. See Ngugi wa Thiongo's dismissal of this position in Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature, (London: James Currey, 1986).

encountered as languages of capitalist exchange. There is a close relationship between the writers' use of European languages, the forms of their writing, and market forces in Southern Africa that have promoted the use of these languages and certain literary forms and styles among an emerging petit-bourgeoisie. This is especially evident in the case of tabloids, directed at a literate petit-bourgeoisie. Magazines like Drum and Staffrider in South Africa are an important part of the history of recent fiction in this country.

Much resistance writing in the European languages, however, includes speech patterns and dialects drawn from vernacular languages. These are used as more than simply a vehicle for social realism in the writing, but also bear witness to the kinds of identification many of the writers wish to establish with the oppressed.

As one of the issues this essay addresses is the notion of writing as giving expression to the voices of the people, I can't resist quoting the following passage from Es'kia Mphahlele's novella of the 1960s, 'Mrs Plum'. The narrator, a domestic servant, reports a conversation she had with her employer's daughter:

> She [the white character] says to me she says, My mother goes to meetings many times. I ask her I say, What for? She says to me she says, For your people. I ask her I say, My people are in Phokeng far away. They have got mouths, I say. Why does she want to say something for them? Does she know what my mother and my father want to say? They can speak when they want to. Kate raises her shoulders and drops them and says, How can I tell you Karabo? I don't say your people - your family only. I mean all the black people in this country. I say Oh! What do the black people want to say? Again she raises her shoulders and drops them, taking a deep breath.[9]

It seems to me that writers in Southern Africa frequently find themselves in a not dissimilar position to the hapless white characters in this extract: desperately trying to speak for the people of their countries.

Not all of the paradoxes mentioned above are resolved (or able to be resolved) in resistance fiction.[10]

Much Southern African writing frequently draws attention to differences between the lifestyles of the ruling class and the oppressed. While the former is acknowledged to offer a vast

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9. Es'kia Mphahlele, 'Mrs Plum'. In Corner B, (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1967) 168 - 9.
10. The fullest treatment of these issues as they relate particularly to black South African writers' use of English is Michael Vaughan's 'Storytelling and Politics in Fiction'. In Rendering things Visible. Essays on South African Literary Culture of the 1970s and 1980s ed. Martin Trump (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, forthcoming).

number of material benefits, the latter is clearly depicted as being more desirable in many respects. There is, moreover, a related process of distortion, 'false consciousness', which attends people who fail to associate themselves fully with the broad concerns and aspirations of the oppressed. Tsi Molope is one such character in Serote's To Every Birth Its Blood. Similarly, in the same novel Susan Horwitz, from her position in the white society, is unable to make any sense of her life in South Africa. After the trial and sentencing of twenty five resistance leaders, she breaks down: '"I don't want any part of this madness, no, I don't, I don't want to be white, I don't want it, oh my god, I don't want it. ... I am so mixed up." ' (Serote, 1981:231-232) This is contrasted with the position of the resistance leaders: 'It was said that those men and women were strong, were fearless.' (229) There are clearly a number of problems attached to these kind of fictional descriptions. Apart from conflating the diverse positions and experiences of the oppressed (an issue we have looked at earlier), there is a similar tendency to do this with regard to the ruling class.

Resistance has largely taken the form of mobilisation among the oppressed in Southern Africa. However, this mobilisation and the strategies employed have rarely occurred without parallel processes of opposition and breakdown taking place within the ruling class itself. Moreover, within the ruling class, there are groups and individuals, and ideological tendencies, which often have a profound influence on the resistance movement. By excluding these in the often one-dimensional portrayals and caricatures of the ruling class, resistance fiction tends to disable itself.

Consider the consequences of this one-dimensionality in Serote's novel. Serote's commitment to non-racialism is undermined in his stereotypical portrayal of characters from the ruling class who are identified almost exclusively in colour terms. More problematically, Serote refuses these characters a positive role in the struggle. As a result, he forecloses on two possibilities: namely, of productive class alliances and of strategies of resistance which mobilize in terms other than those of colour. By portraying the ruling class in the way he does, there is a disquieting reproduction of the racial terms he is (one presumes) setting out to oppose. Further, as the extracts from Serote's novel indicate, he comes perilously close to the position that commitment to the resistance movement serves as an antidote to a host of personal ills. Again, it seems to me that this kind of outlook over-simplifies what are in reality complex processes and issues.[11]

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11. Kelwyn Sole notes that 'political discipline cannot be a cure for psychic disorder: the result of liberation will be a new, better, but still unstable South African society, not the undifferentiated sea at the end of all rivers'. Kelwyn Sole, '"But Then, Where Is Home?": Time, Disorder and Social Collectives in Serote's To Every Birth Its Blood'. Unpublished paper presented at the Africa Seminar of the Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 27 September 1989,

Reversing this coin, there is a large body of fiction which offers picaresque views of oppressed communities. The 'underworldism' forced upon the oppressed serves as a metaphor for people roguishly engaged in conflict with the ruling class. In similar fashion, participation in resistance activities tends to be romanticised. There are obvious ideological purposes for this kind of portrayal. Yet I would argue that these kinds of idealizations, like those we have considered earlier, paradoxically in some respects, act against the interests of a democratically-concerned resistance movement. Portrayals of idealized communities are often one-dimensional and exclude many discordant voices. This form of idealization might serve to bolster a resistance mythology which excludes oppositional and critical forces.

In order to justify the foregoing, I would like to look more closely at the three novels . Serote's novel is divided into two parts. The first deals largely with the tormented consciousness of Tsi Molope, a resident of Alexandra township. The second half of the novel describes an ever-widening network of oppositional political activists. Interestingly, most of these activists are drawn from the radical intelligensia; and although Serote describes the resistance spreading across the country and affecting workers as well as students and urban intellectuals, there is little space given to explaining the lines of communication between these different class fractions. As Kelwyn Sole indicates, 'The process of politicization is to Serote a natural, unproblematic one. Black people are, with the exception of the functionaries of the system, potentially at one in their political demands and can be easily accommodated under the auspices of the movement, for "the Movement is an idea in the mind of a people" (327).' (Sole, 1988:78) Throughout the latter part of the novel, Serote naturalizes the liberation movement. The Movement is described as being 'like the wind' (272) and 'the Movement, like the sea, is deep, vast, is reflective' (359). There is no sense of any conflict or discordance within liberation groupings, or of essentially irreconcilable differences on many central issues of strategy and ideology. In short, all disparities, all discordances are subsumed into Serote's organic images of the movement. Idealization or romanticization of the liberation struggle is clearly felt by Serote in a time of intense hardship as necessary in order to inspire change. Despite this imperative, Serote's idealizations are problematic in their own right.

Kelwyn Sole suggestively calls one of the sections of his essay on To Every Birth Its Blood, 'The Fixed Movement of Political Struggle'. It is worth quoting Sole at length here:

> The Movement may indeed be a crucial force in any future liberation of the country, and a broad alliance of anti-apartheid forces may be necessary to assure the demise of the present political authority. Yet in many senses - in terms of individual psychology, in terms of democratic

> practices, in terms of how the damaged society of South Africa can be healed - this will be an extremely problematic process, and Serote's conclusions are (it may be said) somewhat facile. What is eventually noteworthy and interesting about To Every Birth Its Blood is...the way in which the political and social difficulties Serote attempts to determine escape his ideological programme; and the manner in which what is repressed or wished away returns to haunt the book's less consciously controlled depictions and attitudes. ... The Movement exists fictionally to absorb and smooth over contradictions of individual and group behaviour and the real intricacies of South African oppositional political history, but ends up generating further contradictions due to this ubiquitous fictional presence. The Movement is, eventually, given a transformative weight it cannot bear, as it is expected to perform on all levels of human intercourse and psychology similarly. It is seen as both the political catalyst which will transfigure the oppressed people of the country and the result of that transfiguration at the same time. Furthermore, and even more damagingly, it is not only simultaneously one distinct political organisation and the combined weight of historical resistance to white rule: it comes close on occasion to being conceptualised by Serote as all that is required to solve South Africa's problems: socially, psychologically and politically... (Sole, 1989:27)

Pepetela's novel describes several months in the lives of the MPLA community based in Cabinda and the Congo during one of the most gruelling phases of the Angolan liberation struggle. We learn a great deal about the lives and conflicts of individual guerillas and about what motivates and concerns them. I would argue that there is a much closer weave in Pepetela's novel between the personal lives of the guerillas and their place in the liberation struggle than in the case of the activists described in Serote's novel. In the Angolan novel, personal history and history of commitment to MPLA continually intertwine; to the extent that personal conflicts and idiosyncrasies frequently become central preoccupations for the MPLA cadres. Pepetela is painstaking in his description of the personal and ideological conflicts which occur within the MPLA community. There are innumerable debates in the novel about a wide range of issues; many of these are left unresolved.

The event which catalyses action in Nyamfukudza's novel is the execution of an informer in a rural area of Zimbabwe. Sam, a teacher in Highfield, Salisbury, learns of his uncle's death and goes back to his family home in Mutoko to attend the funeral. There he learns that his uncle's execution was ordered by the guerillas; the man's sons were ordered to beat their father to death; the community was told by the guerillas that his uncle could not be buried with full funeral rites.[12]

12In her article 'The Zimbabwean War of Liberation: Struggles Within the Struggle', Norma Kriger deals with the violence of

It is within this bitter context that Sam tries to establish some sense of meaning. His quest comes to nothing. He quarrels violently with one of the guerilla leaders at a pungwe and is shot. The novel takes one into the heart of the conflicts that arose during the second Zimbabwean chimurenga. Nyamfukudza spares us little in his fictional post-mortem of resistance history in his country.

As my comments suggest, I think that the Angolan and Zimbabwean novels offer a more valuable record of the liberation struggles in their countries, than that offered in Serote's novel. It is interesting to note that the Angolan and Zimbabwean works encode future patterns in their countries' histories in ways that Serote's novel does not seem to. In Mayombe, the central issue of debate among the guerillas is that of tribalism and the formidable challenge facing Angolans in trying to surmount it. This debate has, of course, proved to have continuing relevance for the newly independent country. In The Non-Believer's Journey, one of the most marked areas of conflict is that between the urban consciousness of Sam and that of the rurally-based guerillas, many of whom were drawn from the rural peasantry. In an eerie way, Nyamfukudza's novel reflects with uncanny prescience on the kinds of tensions that have plagued the ZANU-PF government of Zimbabwe since independence, not the least of which is the set of disjunctions that have developed and been exacerbated between urban and rural populations. Serote's novel merely suggests the virtual truism that the liberation struggle in South Africa will drag on for a long time and that freedom will be won at tremendous cost.

What one sees more fully in the Angolan and Zimbabwean novels than in Serote's work are dialogues set up within the oppositional discourse itself. Earlier in this essay I referred to the dialogue between hegemonic and counterhegemonic discourses in Southern Africa. There are similarly intense exchanges of dialogue within the discourse of liberation itself. The degree of success a literary work achieves in dealing with resistant culture seems to me crucially dependent on the extent to which its writer is prepared to give articulation to exchanges within the resistance movement - and, indeed, within the ruling class.

Serote describes the South African liberation struggle in terms of populist-salvational rhetoric. Here are two typical examples:

> A few well-organized people have to challenge the power of the settlers, while the people watch, and if you convince the people that you know what you are doing, they in turn will lead the revolution... (78-79)

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guerillas towards the rural population of Mutoko, this being the district in which much of the action in Nyamfukudza's novel takes place. Kriger's and Nyamfukudza's records are remarkably similar. Kriger's article appears in the Journal of Southern African Studies 14 (2), January 1988, pp. 304 - 322.

> For over four centuries we have fought, man after man, woman after woman, fought with everything we had, for what seemed to us a very simple and easily understood reality: this is our land, it must bear our will. South Africa is going to be a socialist country, this is going to come about through the will, knowledge and determination of the people... (330)

There is little sense in To Every Birth Its Blood of the problems and contradictions of salvational populism. Offer the people opportunity and leadership and they will rise as one in the creation of a socialist utopia. Pepetela's and Nyamfukudza's novels are not so naïve. Both authors interrogate millenial rhetoric and recognize the formidable obstacles en route to the creation of national unity in their countries. Moreover, they are cognisant of incompatible forces within their societies (say, tribalist interests versus aspirations to national unity, and, urban versus rural consciousness) and articulate these as being incompatible. Consider the following examples which contrast strongly with those extracted from Serote's novel. In the first, Fearless, the MPLA commander in Mayombe, demystifies much of the rhetoric attached to the aims of the struggle:

> This is the difficulty. In our countries [waging liberation struggles], everything rests on a narrow nucleus, because there is a shortage of cadres, sometimes on one man. How is one to contend within a narrow group? Because it is demagogy to say that the proletariat will take power. Who takes power is a small group of men, on the best of hypotheses representing the proletariat or seeking to represent it. The lie begins with saying that the proletariat has taken power. ... At the end of a certain time, as long as there are not many mistakes nor much embezzlement of funds, the living standard will rise, does not need much to rise. Without doubt that is an advance. ... But let us not call that socialism, because it is not necessarily so. Let us not call it a proletarian State, because it is not. Let us demystify the terms. Let us end the fetishism of labels. Democracy nothing, because there will not be democracy, there will be necessarily, inevitably, dictatorship over the people. This might be necessary, I don't know. I do not see another way, but it is not ideal, that I do know. Let us be honest with ourselves. We are not going to reach 100 per cent, we will stick at 50. Why then tell the people that we are going as far as 100 per cent? (80-81)

In the following passage from The Non-Believer's Journey, Sam suggests that regardless of the outcome of the Zimbabwean liberation struggle, forms of neo-colonialism will inevitably prevail:

> From the sounds that filter to us from overseas, those whites out there have a huge stake in ensuring that whatever happens there won't be any real changes. If we escape political enslavement, they won't mind so much, as

> long as we take good care of their invested monies, go on working for peanuts, exporting all the profits back to them. I can't see any way out of that one, that's the real trap, the one that matters. (53)

There are a set of problems surrounding To Every Birth Its Blood. Earlier I indicated Serote's essentially racial understanding of the South African political situation in the novel. Here is Kelwyn Sole on this point: 'Serote's understanding of the forces at work in South African political history remains, arguably, predominantly racial. Pride in blackness is the beginning of individual and political change (Birth:139-140) and...the mechanisms of oppression are overwhelmingly understood throughout in terms of race, despite Ramono's injunction to Dikeledi that her generation has placed too much emphasis on questions of race. A class analysis is almost entirely absent from the work...' (Sole, 1989: 30)

In part, one can understand this and other difficulties of To Every Birth Its Blood in terms of the liberation discourse of the 1970s. To an extent, 'the meanings in circulation [or dominant] at a given moment specify the limits of what can be said and understood'.[13] And, typical of much resistance thinking of the 1970s, Serote's novel reveals a commitment to black populism, virtually excluding possibilities of non-racial, class-alliance resistance. Despite fleeting and admittedly cogent references to limitations of the Black Consciousness Movement (that it does not maintain adequate communication with the people it represents, and that in South Africa colour is not the issue)[14] Serote's portrayal of the Movement is dominated by ideological strains of Black Consciousness, not least of which is black populism. In a fascinating way, however, the set of incompatibilities that arise between the dominant black populist address of the novel and the brief moments of criticism of Black Consciousness, suggest Serote's awareness (possibly ill-defined or even unconscious at the time) of Black Consciousness's diminution of influence within the liberation discourse. To Every Birth Its Blood seems to fall uneasily between two ultimately incompatible positions, at a moment (the late 1970s) when a dominant ideology - Black Consciousness - is swiftly being eclipsed.

Apart from its potential exclusion of possibilities for non-racial, class-alliance resistance, there are further consequences of Serote's black populist address in the novel. There is, after all, a fundamental disjunction between the focus on forms of subjective consciousness usually highlighted in fiction and the call to the people as an undifferentiated mass.[15] In the former instance, distinctiveness and

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13. Catherine Belsey, 'Reading the Past'. In The Subject of Tragedy. Identity and difference in Renaissance Drama (London & New York: Methuen, 1985) 5.
14. See To Every Birth Its Blood, pp. 78-79; 250.
15. In a stimulating essay entitled 'The Novel as Liberal Narrative: The Possibilities of Radical Fiction' (in Works and

individuality are paramount, whereas in the latter if these qualities are not entirely irrelevant then they are at the very least severely underplayed.

Moreover, within Serote's novel, many of the characters tend to be circumscribed by over-simplified notions of 'the people' and the processes of politicization. In this regard, Nick Visser notes that in the novel, the Movement 'overlays individual choice and agency with historical inevitability'.[16] Sole adds to this debate by noting that 'the problem is that...the characters who join the Movement begin to blur into each other once they have made this choice. Their correct action - seemingly put forward for approbation - renders them less multifarious in their personal actions and responses, even if they are shown as still beset with familial and other problems. The Movement allows individuals to "happen" in an existentially and politically meaningful manner, but at the same time removes their ability to think and act at all differently.' (Sole, 1989: 32)

Finally, I would like to return to a point briefly alluded to earlier. Serote's novel gives one little sense of there being debates and discordant voices within the liberation movement. Despite brief criticisms of Black Consciousness (referred to earlier), there is a silence regarding differences in approach to strategies of resistance in South Africa. That which forms the critical centres of Pepetela's and Nyamfukudza's novels - namely, debates about liberation and the different methods of resistance - is virtually absent from Serote's work. And troublingly, this recurs in more recent works of South African resistance fiction such as Nadine Gordimer's A Sport of Nature (1987) and Mandla Langa's novels Tenderness of Blood (1987) and A Rainbow on the Paper Sky (1989).

In Serote's case, there are indications that in recent years he has become attentive to the kind of difficulties that I have referred to in this essay. Where he used to conceptualise South African politics in racial terms, he now takes cognisance of the differentiation of class in the society. 'This nation [does not] consist only of workers. It consists of other classes of society as well. ... We are in a phase in which we should be building a nation, and that nation has a class content.'[17]

Days 3 (2) 1985, 7-28), Nick Visser deals with the overwhelming influence of methodological individualism in the construction of Western liberal notions of the novel. He goes on to suggest that radical fiction tends to replace 'the ordering principles of individual subjectivity with collective protagonists' (19) and foregrounds the collective rather than the individual. These points are persuasive and relevant to a discussion about Serote's novel. However, as I have indicated, one of my difficulties with Serote's novel is that his depiction of a collective protagonist (namely, the Movement) is static rather dynamic, and this greatly diminishes the radical possibilities of his project.

16. Nick Visser, 'Fictional Projects and the Irruptions of History: Mongane Serote's To Every Birth Its Blood'. In English Academy Review 4 (1987), 75.

With regard to the portrayal of white characters in fiction and the role of whites in the liberation struggle, Serote similarly shows a shifting of ground from positions that were typified in To Every Birth Its Blood. Commenting about his colleague Mandla Langa's novel Tenderness of Blood, he notes:

> The only failing I [see] with Mandla's novel, which has become very common in black South African writing - and it's not their fault, it's really the fault of concrete political situations and historical experiences - black South Africans have only known two kinds of white people: those who defend the [government] (the security forces), and liberals.
> So, because of this, there has emerged stereotyped whites in black literature.
> We have to find a way of going beyond this - there are a number of whites who have joined the mass democratic movement; even joined the liberation movement. ...
> We should not leave whites lost in a quagmire, where they have absolutely no point of reference. Our literature should become a point of reference for them.[18]

And, finally, Serote stresses the importance of the writer being able to articulate criticism and debate about the liberation movement:

> It becomes the role of the writer to play a role where, on the one hand, you can look at the under-developed sections of our movement and be able to deal with them truthfully. And look at the highly developed elements of our movement and also deal with them truthfully. ... So there is also that role which the writer has to play - where necessary, one should be able to say: Look, we are aspiring in this direction. To give specific examples: in the sixties we had common aspirations with Frelimo, MPLA, Zanla and Zapu. Today they are in power. They have made major mistakes; they've experienced serious problems. They have learnt from these.
> It becomes necessary as a writer to examine this, and be able to look at our movement and say: are we learning from the experiences of others?[19]

It would be encouraging if this critical spirit becomes the keynote of South Africa's literature of liberation.

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17. Mongane Serote, 'Serote on politics and people'. Interview in New Nation (Johannesburg) 8 - 14 December 1988, p. 11.
18. Mongane Serote, 'The World According to Wally Serote'. Interview in New Nation (Johannesburg) 24 - 30 November 1988, p. 9.
19. Mongane Serote, 'Serote on politics and people'. New Nation, 8 - 14 December 1988, p. 11.