“Breakthroughs”: Engaging Literary “Voices” of Women Writers from the Southern African Region

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Summary

The aim of this article is to critically engage women’s oral and literary productions from the southern Africa region. This article is christened “breakthroughs” for several reasons. First, it should be taken as a major breakthrough for women of southern Africa to have grouped together and speak with one “voice” by offering new and “fresh” ways of writing a variety of histories and narratives against the backdrop of the suffocating discourses of colonialism, neocolonialism, patriarchy, racism and sexism. The second breakthrough is derived from the desire of women to redress the imbalance in southern African literary and historical anthologies and accounts, given that writing and performing were and still are generally associated with men. Thus, writing and performance in this article are taken as “political” statements that women are making in the process of telling their stories rather than remaining cloistered in male-sanctioned discourses. The third breakthrough is located within the Pan-African spirit informing the “Women Writing Africa Project”, which draws exclusively from women’s experiences in West Africa, North Africa, East and southern Africa. Although this article purposively sampled the literary works of some women included in Volume I of the project, it is hoped that the analysis of the selected literary works shall be treated as one of the “major breakthroughs” in which works written “only” by women are brought under the academic spotlight.

Opsomming

Die doel van hierdie artikel is om krities in gesprek te tree met vroue se mondelinge en literêre produksies uit die Suider-Afrikaanse streek. Die titel maak om verskeie redes melding van “deurbrake”. Eerstens moet dit as ’n groot deurbraak vir vroue van Suider-Afrika beskou word dat hulle ’n groep gevorm het en met een “stem” praat deur nuwe en “vars” maniere van skryf aan te bied vir verskeie geskiedenisse en narratiewe teen die agtergrond van die versmorende diskoerse van kolonialisme, neokolonialisme, patriargie, rassisme and seksisme. Die tweede deurbraak spruit uit die begeerte van vroue om die wanbalans in Suider-Afrikaanse literêre en historiese bloemlesings en vertellings te herstel in die lig daarvan dat skryf en opvoer oor die algemeen met mans geassosieer was en steeds word. Skryf en opvoer word dus in hierdie artikel gesien as “politieke” stellings wat vroue maak in die proses om hul verhale te vertel eerder as om gekluister te bly in manlik gesanksioneerde diskoerse. Die derde deurbraak is geleë in die Pan-Afrika-gees waardeur die “Women Writing

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Africa Project" besiel word, en wat uitsluitlik put uit vroue se ervarings in Wes-Afrika, Noord-Afrika, Oos- en Suider-Afrika. Hoewel daar vir hierdie artikel doelbewus voorbeelde geneem is uit die literêre werk van sommige vroue wat ingesluit is in Volume I van die projek, hoop ons dat die ontleding van die geselekteerde literêre werke gesien sal word as een van die "groot deurbrake" waarin werke wat "slegs" deur vroue geskryf is in die akademiese soeklig geplaas word.

Introduction: Theorising the Historical and Cultural Agency of Women from the Southern African Region

In analysing the literary works of women in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland, it is worthwhile to begin by viewing women as cultural and political actors who write in their individual capacities to challenge forces that conspire against the development of African women. Mernissi (1988) and Awe (1991) explored the need of "her story" in African historiography with their comprehensive accounts of women's agency and subordination transcending the limitations of insular discourses of colonialism, patriarchy, racism and sexism. In some parts of southern Africa such as Zimbabwe, cultural beliefs and practices, conservative discriminatory male attitudes and government policies that trivialise women's issues have, in a way, seriously undermined constitutional and statutory guarantees for women's equality. Sites of resistance for women in southern Africa, therefore, call attention to the everyday, ordinary and seemingly insignificant struggles that women have to put up in order to fight forces that undermine their development. The "sub/versions", which constitute the differential experiences of women in southern Africa, are part of the grand "project" of "subverting" internationalised and localised forms of oppression. This can be achieved if women write and perform oral narratives that can allow them to exercise self-expression, cultural creativity and political reshuffling of the status quo (Daymond, Driver, Meintjes, Molema, Musengezi, Orford & Rasebotsa 2003). The complex ways in which women in southern Africa respond to different situations are what create their multiple identities which can be defined by women's capacity to, "… accept, refuse, comply, revolt or rebel" (Veit-Wild & Naguschewski 2005: xv) against institutionalised systems of oppression.

The first book of essays specifically dealing with the history of women and gender in southern Africa was Cheryl Walker's 1990 edited volume entitled: *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945*. This volume became a "ground-breaker" in that it set a precedent for all other works that focused exclusively on women from the perspective of "gender and oppression". However, Gaidzanwa (1985) argues that although most articles included in Walker's (1990) anthology stressed structural oppression, the articles would not be emphatic on issues to do with women's agency and their capacity to transform their lives for the better. Therefore, the publication of the edited

Volume 1 about *Women Writing Africa: The Southern Region (2003)* by Daymond et al, should be taken as a major "breakthrough" in that through writing, reading and performing, women have actually "spoken" in the process of revealing their multiple subjectivities. In other words, the heterogeneous "voices" that constitute "Women Writing Africa", acknowledges that black women have been silenced for a long time on the basis of gender, class, race and creed, and that the time is ripe for women to articulate their concerns. Also, there is a recognition that since southern African countries have experienced different histories informed by colonialism and neocolonialism, women's responses to their condition of "being the oppressed ones" are varied and non-synchronic (Fabian 1983: 155). But what is significant is that, in their varied forms, the "voices" of women in southern African have been brought together so that "different historical narratives" come "into closer dialogue with each other", although they never become "a single history" (Sylvester, Wallace & Hayes 1988: 12). Thus, whether in colonial or indigenous set ups, having rights over women's bodies, minds and voices is key to an understanding of the "many" battles that women in the southern African region have to fight almost on a daily basis. When women are writing and performing their "lived" experiences, they are in the process of "making history"; of shaping their own identities among a multitude of forces with the potential of enhancing their cause or even pulling them down.

Breaking the Silence: Women's "Voices" From South Africa

The battle by South African women to [re]discover their "voices" has a long history. As far back as the 18th century, South African women had begun to challenge the ways in which missionaries perceive black women in particular and African culture in general. Their sites of struggle included letters, short fictional stories, drawings and paintings, diaries and historical accounts in which they chronicled the harsh realities of colonialism, and missionary teachings. Around the period 1860, Emma Sandile – a Xhosa woman – wrote an epistolary note narrating how she was sent to Cape Town together with her two brothers to receive a Western education so that they would become, "… hostages of peace and prosperity of their country …" (Daymond et al 2003: 91) as described by Robert Gray – then Anglican Bishop of Cape Town. This was a period between the Seventh and Eighth frontiers wars in Cape Town, where the British fought fierce battles against the Xhosa people for land ownership and political power. Sandile and her brothers were expected by the British colonial church and state to have an influence over Xhosa people, thereby smothering their rebellious attitude towards British colonialism. According to wa Thiong'o, one of the main

aims of a colonial education was to "… produce an African permanently injured by a feeling of inadequacy; a person who would look up with reverent awe to the achievements of Europe" (1981: 23) while denigrating African traditional values.

Apart from weakening the revolutionary zeal among Africans through education, British colonial education was also meant to propagate stereotypes about the gender roles that defined the "social spaces" apportioned to women. Sandile writes that while at Zonnebloem College, both girls and boys received religious instruction, but the colonial educators went further and taught girls cooking and sewing as if to confirm that the lives of women would be not defined beyond the domestic sphere. Evidently, colonialism helped to "frame" African women to be less adventurous by relegating them to less challenging jobs (Kroeze 2007). British missionaries also interfered with African cultures. Sandile reports that there was much tussle between her and the bishop following her request to go home in order to marry a neighbouring chief as was required by the Xhosa tradition. The bishop prevailed by arranging Sandile's betrothal to Ngangelizwe – a paramount Chief of the neighbouring Thembu, which was the most powerful chiefdom beyond the Xhosa-Cape frontier. The bishop had agreed that Sandile should marry Ngangelizwe simply because the chief had shown an interest in Christianity, and the British thought the marriage would serve to provide a vital link between the British and the Thembu. The story of Sandile demonstrates that for women to succeed there is a special need for women to break their "silence" so that they can begin to speak with one "voice" against the forces that contribute to their oppression.

Indeed, in a historical narrative entitled *Women's Petition: Domestic Unhappiness* written in 1908, the Indian Women's Association responded viciously against anti-Indian legislation promulgated by apartheid to discriminate against them. Act 17 of 1895 required that all Indian women working in South Africa who were not returning to India were supposed to, "… pay three pounds for a residence" (Daymond et al 2003: 155). The underlying motive was meant to drive Indian women out of South Africa or prolong indentured labour as the tax was beyond the means of many Indian women who could not afford to part with their ill-gotten wages. While the story of Sandile reflects how the British sought to use religion to force African women to conform to the dictates of British colonialism, the ordeal faced by the Indian women was informed by racism that had been deeply entrenched in the system of apartheid. Put differently, the Indian women were viewed as "second class" citizens who could not be put on an equal footing with Boer women.

However, through *The Indian Opinion* founded by Mohandas Gandhi in 1904 in South Africa, Indian newspapers published letters of protest. What is interesting is that Indian women were prepared to use every means at their disposal, such as media, to fight against institutionalised forms of

discrimination engendered by the policies of apartheid. In 1913, Act 17 of 1895 was repealed after a massive resistance campaign was mounted by the Indian Women's Association. What this demonstrated is that South African women were not to be taken for granted; women had, and still have the capacity to mobilise available resources in order to fight against forces that conspire against their advancement. By extension, it also meant that all other resistances against the draconian laws and policies instituted by apartheid could not afford to exclude women, and this is exactly what happened in 1952. Govinden in Daymond et al (2003) writes that in 1952 when African women and Indian women organised the fourth Passive Resistance Campaign, a multiracial Conference for Women in South African was held in Johannesburg. This resulted in a historic march by South African women of all race groups who converged on the Union Buildings in Pretoria to protest against apartheid policies that sidelined all "women of colour". From the narrative proffered by the Indian Women's Association, there is a clear indication that the union of South African women went beyond the artificial boundaries set by racism and the "separate development" created by apartheid. In Zimbabwe, writing and performing oral narratives by women constituted "voices" of resistance which were inspired by wars of liberation fought by Nehanda – who remains an iconic figure of "*Zvimurengas*" fought by men and women in Zimbabwe to dislodge British colonialism.

Daughters of "*Zvimurengas*": Zimbabwean Women and Stories of Liberation Struggle[s]

In 1984, Christina Rungano published the much acclaimed anthology of poetry entitled *A Storm Is Brewing*. In one of the poems, *The Woman*, the female protagonist addresses a man who pursues the pleasures of the world to show a sense of responsibility by contributing to the up-keep of the family. Spirkin defines responsibility as:

> … a state of consciousness, a feeling of duty towards society, and oneself, an awareness of the purpose of actions performed, their consequences for a certain social group, class, party, collective and oneself. Responsibility is society's means of controlling the behaviour of the individual …. As an attribute of the socially developed personality, responsibility takes the form of the spiritual aspect of all forms of the individual's activity in the moral, political, civic, legal and other spheres.
>
> (1983: 315)

Through the poem, *The Woman,* the *dramatis persona* writes about her day-to-day struggles to fend for her family, and locates in those struggles sources of her inspiration derived from the artistic beauty of labour. This contrasts sharply with the pain and discouragement that she is forced to endure from

her "culturally and traditionally" imposed position[s] of subservience. She mourns her condition of slavitude when she says:

> A minute ago I came from the well
> Where young women drew water like myself
> My body was weary and my heart tired.
> For a moment I watched the steam that rushed before me;
> I thought how fresh the smell of flowers,
> How young the grass around it.
>
> Then I got home and cooked your meal
> For you had been out drinking the pleasures of the flesh
> While I toiled in the fields.
>
> (p. 23)

From the above poetic lines, Rungano tells the sad story of a rural Zimbabwean woman who is expected, by cultural dictates, to attend to the daily chores to keep the family going. Even after doing the tiresome work of drawing water from a far distanced well, she is expected to cook for her husband who had been enjoying drinking beer with his male friends or even girlfriends. Evidently, a woman in Zimbabwe is exploited on the basis of her womanhood. She is the "mule" of the family – to use Walker's (1983) terminological – who is expected to carry out all duties that are confined to the domestic sphere. In other words, through patriarchy, a woman remains subject to forms of domination from her husband, sons and male kinsmen who expect her to perform domestic duties while they go for more enterprising jobs. The "hegemonic masculinity" (Kristeva 1991: 43) of the husband married to the *dramatis persona* in Rungano's poem is demonstrated through his demand for food when in fact he should have prepared that food when the woman was busy doing other chores. The domination does not end with the demanding of food, but it also extended to the confines of the bedroom. The female persona writes that:

> In your drunken lust
> And you made your demands
> When I explained how I was tired
> And how I feared for the child – yours; I carried
> You beat me and had your way
>
> (p. 23)

The struggles that Zimbabwean women endure every day are defined by the matrix of power. That is, they are determined by the question, "Who has the power to decide the course of action in a family set-up?" In the above scenario, the husband, in his "drunken lust", demands sex even though he is quite aware that his wife is tired and suffering from the pains of pregnancy. For self-serving interests, the husband resorts to violence and forces his way

in. By penetrating the female organ, the husband demonstrates his power to conquer the female body. In this case, the female persona becomes the “abject-subject” (Kristeva 1982: 50) who is acted upon even in her condition of “abjectivity” reflected through the tiredness of her body and pains associated with pregnancy. While the struggle by the female persona to discover her “voice”, which her husband has drowned out, is done within the domestic sphere, at a political level and through the story entitled *War Memoir*, Marevasei Kachere narrates her story about how she was involved in Zimbabwe’s liberation struggle to free herself and fellow blacks from the shackles of British colonialism. Yet, she remains bitter about having participated in the war of liberation only to be “dumped” by the leadership in post-independent Zimbabwe.

Kachere was born in Uzumba in the Murewa district in 1961. Her hope for attaining a secondary education was prematurely ended by the liberation war. Kachere testifies that she was not forced by anyone to join the liberation war, but was forced by the intolerable circumstances in which blacks lived under the Smith regime. When she crossed into Mozambique for military training, Kachere was surprised to realise that at the war front there were many girls of her age. But the hopes that initially touched the hearts of those young girls who joined the war were later to be challenged by the realities of the armed struggle and the contradictions of post-independent Zimbabwe (Rwafa 2012). For example, while at the military camp, Kachere realised that being educated was a big advantage in the camp, and it was the educated ones who usually were the first to be selected to become trainers. While at Tembwe military camp, Kachere had the nasty experience of witnessing her camp being bombed by Rhodesian forces, resulting in the death of all female combatants on duty in the kitchen. Clearly, if women and men are said to have fought as equals, this is part of political “gimmick” used by the leadership to win support from former female combatants in post-independent Zimbabwe because in reality, the place of female guerrillas even at the war front could still be associated with the kitchen (Bryce 2005). Thus, while Zimbabwe’s liberation struggle opened up some opportunities for women, it closed other “doors” or “spaces” that were strictly reserved for men. Through the narrative, Kachere is ironically saying that the rosy picture that is often painted by “official rhetoric” (Lyons 1997: 1) about women participation and their experiences during Zimbabwe’s liberation war is not altruistic. For instance, “official rhetoric” in Zimbabwe has never accepted or even hinted that some female combatants were victims of rape and sexual harassment during the liberation war. What is often brought to the surface are heroic acts associated with women like Kachere who was hit by a bullet in her leg and sustained a deep wound, and yet she survived in order to continue with the liberation struggle.

However, the "voice" of female guerrillas in Zimbabwe refuses to be totally muffled or silenced. Kachere writes that after independence in 1980, together with other female guerrillas, they expected employment because they were promised by the leadership that, in a free Zimbabwe, those who participated in the liberation struggle were supposed to get jobs. But this did happen, as only highly educated men and women were taken and given jobs in the police force, the army, or were employed to do "white collar" jobs in government offices. The sad story proffered by Kachere is one "fragment" of stories of female ex-combatants in contemporary Zimbabwe who are shunned by society because there were victims of sexual abuse during the liberation war (Lyons 1997). Kachere ends her gripping story by declaring that she would not recommend her daughter to follow in her footsteps because she feels that she was betrayed by the present ZANU PF leadership in post-independent Zimbabwe.

Echoes from the Land of Mountains and Hills: Engaging Narratives of Women from Lesotho

Writing about the experiences of women in Lesotho is like engaging echoes of "voices" from the land of mountains and hills. Through the poem, *Song of the Afflicted,* written in 1842, Molema subtly captures the lament of widowed women that falls within the nexus of traditional warfare. In Lesotho, departure for battle involved rituals, dances and songs that were orally and physically performed in order to, "… discourage cowardice and celebrate the brave deeds of warriors" (Daymond et al 2003: 85). Returning from battle involved "cleansing" rituals, the purpose of which was to mourn the fallen heroes. *Song of the Afflicted* falls within the repertoire of "mourning songs", and was considered dear to widows who, when someone died, gathered outside the village to sing and dance in chorus to the mourning tones and rhythms of the goatskin drum.

Oral narratives of the nature of *Song of the Afflicted* borrowed freely from communal material, and even solo performers created and expanded their repertoire in response to the comments, gestures and exclamations of their audiences. The musical touch within the poetics of *Song of the Afflicted* is captivating:

Widows

We are left outside!
We are left to grief!
We are left to despair,
Which only makes our woes more bitter!
Would that I had wings to fly up to the sky?

Why does not a strong cord come down from the sky?
I would tie it to me, I would mount,
I would go there to live.

(p. 86)

The reverberations of the above piece of song are captured within the lyrical intentions of the song. That is, the intention is to draw attention to the woes of widows who have lost their husbands during war. The profound feelings of grief encapsulated in the song touches the very “soul” that is wounded by the loss of human life. One of the widows actually yearns to have wings that she could use to fly up to the sky and make it her permanent residence because the “human world” is inhabitable; it is full of grief and sorrow. The utopian idealism embedded in the above piece of song points to one thing: that woman can possess feelings of love towards the husband that go beyond the grave. The collective “we” that the women use to symbolically describe their ontological positions of being the “widowed” ones shows that there can exist a strong bond of solidarity among women who have lost their husbands. This reflects positively on the struggles of women – often viewed as “shaky” in male-sanctioned discourses.

Pen Mightier Than the Sword: Namibian Women Writers and Their Challenge to Colonial Oppression

Apartheid policies were not only devastating to the lives of black South Africans; the policies were also implemented in Namibia in order to destabilise peace initiatives of black Namibians. Through a story entitled *Emergency Call from the Women of Namibia* written in 1973, Nehambo Magdalena Shamena chronicles her struggles with South African colonial authorities following her political activism that she carried out under the instruction of the South West Africa People’s Organization (SWAPO) political party founded in 1960. During the 1970s most Namibians suffered several dilemmas brought about by colonialism. On one hand, it was common to see Namibians aligned with colonial authorities being flogged indiscriminately by Owambo chiefs. On the other hand, South Africans subjected Namibians to torture in detention for supporting SWAPO’s revolutionary cause. Shamena, then secretary to the Women’s League of Namibians, wrote a letter to the secretary of the United Nations chronicling the atrocities that were carried out by South African authorities on Namibians. Her resistance was not tolerated by the South African administration, and in 1974 Shamena was forced into exile in Zambia, leaving her six young children behind in the care of her mother’s brother. According to Becker in Daymond et al (2003: 338), “Magdalena Shamena

became one of the first SWAPO women to undergo military training in Zambia".

In one of the touching paragraphs included in her letter, Shamena describes how Namibians suspected of supporting SWAPO were humiliated by chiefs and South African authorities:

> The women in Namibia are beaten and tortured very much, e.g. Anneli Dama and others. The women are ordered to lie on their stomach and then they are beaten shamelessly. Some of them are still in jail and suffer a lot. The freedom fighters are being beaten up by the chiefs. When the South African government could not bring in any charges against these men, they were sent to the chiefs who beat them with palm sticks ….
>
> (Daymond et al 2003: 338)

In addition to the beatings, Namibians were subjected to the draconian laws that were ruthlessly implemented in order to curtail freedom of expression, especially among the educated who were likely to act as the "voices of the voiceless" in the Namibian struggle for independence. The revolutionary consciousness started by Shamena was to find full expression in the 1990s as manifested through a story by yet another Namibian woman entitled *The Price of Freedom.* Ellen Ndeshi Namhila is the author of *The Price of Freedom* and in her story she narrates how she was forced into exile for her active participation in the liberation struggle to free Namibia from the shackles of colonialism. While in exile Namhila lived in Zambia, Angola, Gambia and Finland. The corrosive insecurity of being a refugee is what inspired her to write about the experiences of women as refugees. The tough experiences encountered by Namhila also mirror the experiences of female refugees from South Africa and Zimbabwe. This commonality in terms of experience shows that southern Africa women, though separated geographically, can speak with one "voice" because of their condition of "abjectivity" engendered by colonialism. Orford in Daymond et al (2003: 474) asserts that, "In many cases women were expected to revert to subordinate social roles, something unacceptable to most after their experience either as combatants or as independent equals during the struggle". While the story of Namhila describes events of exile, her story also explores the difficulties faced by women who returned home after long years in exile. To capture the contradictions of "home coming" Namhila writes that:

> When we were in exile, in the struggle, in the refugee camps and in foreign countries, I did not question my national identity. I felt strongly Namibian. I wanted to return home to Namibia, so that I could reclaim my identity, and my rightful place in society, having lost all my childhood during the long, long years of the apartheid war. While I was in exile I remembered home through things I had known. Now that I am in Namibia all that I knew of Namibia, of home, has changed. I am finding myself lost in my own country

> … If I am lost, if my past is lost amongst historical events over which I have no control, who then shall or remake my history.
>
> (Daymond et al 2003: 472)

Through the above piece Namhila testifies in earnest that exile has made her lose identity and history; she is left with nothing that she can use to narrate regarding her past. The “present” is also as elusive as the past because she cannot relate herself to the changes and experiences that Namibia has gone through since her exile. Evidently, the condition of hopelessness that that lingers in Namhila’s life tells a story about the presence of some “pathologies of colonialism” (Fanon 1967: 141) that still continue to haunt the lives of most black people in post-independent Africa.

Fighting for Royalty: The Case of the Queen of Swaziland

The letter written by the Queen of Swaziland, Regent Labotsibeni, entitled *Address to the Resident Commissioner,* clearly demonstrates that women can speak with “power” to “power” so that a change to the status quo can be effected. Kanduza in Daymond et al (2003) writes that during her regency in 1900, Queen Labotsibeni fought the British over land and established a financial system that still stands intact in Swaziland in order to buy back the land. As a grandmother and queen, she had brought up Sobhuza II as a “Swazi prince” whose spirit was in total “accord with the traditions and the feelings and the aspirations of his countrymen” (Kanduza in Daymond et al 2003: 171). She claimed that she did so with “clean hands” – without selling a “single right” or land that belonged to the Swazi nation to the British. It can be commented that few African leaders could say this at the end of their term in office. In singling out her status as a woman who has done wonders for the Swazi people, Labotsibeni both reminds Swazi patriarchy of its “domineering attitude”, as well as challenges scholars looking for radical feminism in Africa to also salvage its “voice” in the past history of the continent. Labotsibeni’s radicalism is also encapsulated in the changes that she instituted in Swaziland. She fought against patriarchal forms of domination, neocolonialism, Western imposed structural adjustment programmes and corruption.

To demonstrate her agency and commitment to serve the Swazi people, Labotsibeni wrote a convincing letter to the British Resident Commissioner for Swaziland requesting permission for Prince Sobhuza II to become the King of Swaziland. One memorable passage in her letter merits our attention here:

> The Swazi nation placed me in charge of the whole affairs of their country as Queen, in the place of their dead King, and I have acted as Regent during the minority of two of their minor kings. Bhunu died after only a short life

> leaving me with responsibility of bringing up his infant son and heir. I rejoice that I now present him to Your Honour, in your capacity as head of the Administration of Swaziland.
>
> (Kanduza in Daymond et al 2003: 172)

The case of the Queen of Swaziland demonstrates that, given the chance, women can excel to great heights, and can even rule with impartiality as required in democratic set ups. Also, by preparing and installing a man on the throne, the queen demonstrated that she is not selfish; for, if she was a selfish woman, she could have installed a person of her choice who is not supported by the Swazi succession policy. Undoubtedly, the story of Labotsibeni reflects the fact that women can make rational decisions, and this is contrary to stereotypes socially and culturally constructed to depict women as "weak" and "irrational" (Bhabha 1996: 40) beings who fail to make informed decisions on critical matters.

Tell it from Kgalagadi Desert: Batswana Women's Criticism of "Cultural Imperialism" in Botswana

The story by a Batswana woman named !Unn/obe Morethlwa entitled *Tobacco, Sugar, Alcohol, and Coffee: The Things Have Turned Us Into Slaves,* is a "cry" for cultural erosion caused by Western values prevalent in Botswana in particular, and Africa at large. While living in the Ghanzi district to the south, first as part of a traditional hunting and gathering band, and then as a serf working for Afrikaner farmers, Morethlwa witnessed how Batswana ways of life were slowly and ruthlessly conquered by Western values which introduced "new" tastes in Botswana. But to demonstrate that she was committed to preserving African religion and indigenous knowledge systems that were facing the Western onslaught, Morethlwa rejected the religious teachings of Christianity in favour of her healing religion. In addition, Morethlwa built a grass hut in the bush and sustained herself as part of a socially traditional community by gathering wild foods and selling ostrich eggshell beadwork to tourists. This conscious decision to reject European "cultural imperialism" (Tomlison 1991: 44) brings to the surface a particular strain of "resistance" and "resilience" that the San gathering societies living in the Kgalagadi Desert are known to possess.

The isolation of Morethlwa's people and their hunting and gathering traditions were increasingly brought under threat by white ranchers, the so-called "modernised" Tswanas, and Herero pastoralists who wished to expand their cattle herds, and thereby "eat" into areas controlled by the San people. Morethlwa's perspective on changing times was informed by the experience of the clashes she encountered on the boundaries between her own people and incoming societies, including both black and white. In her

account, she explains, without bitterness but with clarity, the process by which the encounter with the Ghanzi settlers gradually circumscribed and ultimately destroyed the freedom of her people. Morethlwa goes on to assert that what had actually "ruined" black people's lives were basically four things brought into Africa by Western colonisers: tobacco, sugar, alcohol and coffee (Biele in Daymond et al 2003: 315). According to Morethlwa tobacco, sugar, alcohol and coffee had actually turned Africans into slaves of the white people. Her lone "cries" in the wilderness of the Kgalagadi Desert are a call for "African Renaissance" in which black people are urged to re-evaluate their past and present in order to forge ahead into the future with a clear conscience of "who really they are" (Asante 1980: 70) amid forces of "cultural imperialism" that threaten to destroy African ways of life. In yet another story written in Setwana, Keamogetswe Kwere and Lesie Kwere extended the theme of "cultural erosion" in their much acclaimed narrative entitled *We Will Be Leasing For Ourselves*. Bolaane in Daymond (2003) writes that "There is no universally accepted term for the historically marginalised people of mainly Khoesan-speaking origins". For the author, the people of Khwai who variously refer themselves as Bugakhwe or Basarwa moved to what the Kwere sisters refer to as "old Khwai" in the 1920s and 1930s. The Kwere sisters and fellow Basarwa people used to occupy a much large territory than what they are now occupying. More recently, the Basarwa have been displaced and their life substantially interfered with by conservation policies, which, for example, limit hunting to particular species and particular times of the year. In other words, the Khwai people find their traditional way of life being undermined by tourism and wildlife interests and by other groups [non-Basarwa] operating in their region. Through an interview held on 4 July 1997, one of the sisters, Keamogetswe Kwere, solemnly narrates how her people were displaced:

> The first time my uncle Kwere was moved, there were two camps: the Fauna and Game Camps. Fauna Camp was the first area to be conserved by the Batawana. But the Batawana, due to lack of resources and sound management, sought help from the Department of Wildlife to assist them in running the area. That is how Wildlife took over. My uncle Kwere agreed to leave his first area [Xhuko] without conflict with Wildlife because they told him that they would like to have without people in it. That is how he came to stay at Segagama. We ploughed at Segagama in the second year, and the following third year, Wildlife came to us again and told us that they were going to move us again.
>
> (Daymond et al 2003: 485)

From the above account, it is clear that the wildlife industry had total disregard to the life of the Basarwa people, even when indigenous land rights were acknowledged by the Botswana government who also claimed to be very active in safe-guarding the rights of local people. In academic

discourses, as in day to day social conversations, the Basarwa suffer from the widespread, and often misleading perception, that historically they were known to be "nomads" who moved from place to place in search of new hunting grounds. Thus, any wish by the Basarwa to practice "settled farming" is not taken seriously. The Basarwa's existence as a community is threatened. Their source of income is restricted to collecting and selling grass and reed for thatching roofs. The narratives proffered by the Kwere sisters about the fate of the Basarwa people reflect how a government, which claims to be representing the people, can sacrifice the "very" people it purports to protect for the sake of pursuing modernisation whose pace is dictated by foreigners from the Western world. Therefore, for the sisters to have exposed the folly of the Botswana government and the "imperial motives" of the Western world is a way of challenging Africans to rethink or re-evaluate their position *vis-à-vis* the Western world.

Conclusion

This article explored the multi-dimensional "voices" of women in the southern African region, and in the process locates the women's "sites" of resistance that go against discourses of colonialism, neocolonialism, patriarchy, racism and sexism. The article has argued that although southern African women are separated by "artificial geographical boundaries" created by colonialism, their experiences crisscross each other so that the "maze" that the experiences form symbolises the complexity of life inspired by the history of southern Africa. This article sampled stories, essays, letters, poetry and oral performances from South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Lesotho, Swaziland and Botswana. The themes that were dealt with in this article involved resistance to colonial occupation, women's struggles against domineering husbands, women's participation in the wars of liberation and their betrayal in post-independent Africa, forced marriages, women's struggles against "cultural imperialism", women's struggles against culturally imposed stereotypes, and gender oppression. Out of 120 narratives, only ten articles were sampled with the hope of providing a glimpse into heterogeneous experiences that inform the struggles of women in the southern African region.

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