

Black Afrikaans Writers: continuities and discontinuities into the early 21st century – a commentary

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This is a brief commentary on Ampie Coetzee's paper "Swart Afrikaanse Skrywers: 'n diskursiewe praktyk van die verlede" (Black Afrikaans writers: a discursive practice of the past), in which he attempts to come to grips with the discourse of Black Afrikaans writing. This phenomenon came about in the mid-1980s when members of the Department of Afrikaans and Dutch at the University of the Western Cape convened the first of four decennial symposia. These events are regarded as oppositional to the dominant Afrikaans literary tradition. Coetzee traces the origins of the constituting enunciations asking what the discourse looks like and the domain of these writers. The present commentary in response addresses in successive sections literacy as a key factor in the development of a literary tradition, the beginnings of the Black Afrikaans writers literary movement and nomenclature and its undergirding politics. Some of the significant Black Afrikaans writers are named and the commentary concludes with brief observations on the reclamation of Afrikaans, the growth in women's writing and secondary academic research.

1. Introduction

Ampie Coetzee's 2002 article "Swart Afrikaanse Skrywers: 'n diskursiewe praktyk van die verlede" (Black Afrikaans writers: a discursive practice of the past) is a serious attempt at coming to grips with the discourse of Black Afrikaans writing. His Foucauldian inspired enquiry traces the origins of the constituting enunciations asking what the discourse looks like and what is the domain of these writers.



In this sense his article serves as an introductory guide to and investigation into a literary phenomenon that was at least submerged within Afrikaans literature (see Willemse, 1999:12).

The editors of *Stilet* requested a brief note on the significance of Coetzee's paper. However, I found myself continuously filling in some of the presuppositions that may not be obvious to contemporary readers so that the paper has grown beyond the envisaged word limit. In other respects, I gloss over some of the more obvious features of Black Afrikaans writing while augmenting Coetzee's argument. Since Coetzee's paper depends largely on enunciations gleaned from work that I was intimately involved with, this contribution should be regarded as complementary rather than as a critique of his article. I rely to some extent on self-citation without which this contribution could not have been written. Foundational commentaries and works on Black Afrikaans writers are contained in the published proceedings of the symposia *Swart Afrikaanse Skrywers* (Smith, Van Gensen and Willemse, [1986]), *Die reis na Paternoster* (Willemse, Hattingh, Van Wyk & Conradie, 1997) and *'n Vlag aan die tong* (Willemse & Van Wyk, 2015).

I do not engage Coetzee's use of Foucauldian discourse analysis or his use of "minor literature" as formulated by Franz Kafka and its readaptation by Deleuze and Guattari. My own elaboration of the latter concept, namely "Three moments of minor Afrikaans literary expression", can be read in Tanure Ojaide and Joyce Ashuntantang's *Routledge Handbook of Minority Discourses in African Literature* (2020). Here, in successive sections I address literacy as a key factor in the development of a literary tradition, the beginnings of the Black Afrikaans writers literary movement, and nomenclature and its undergirding politics. I name some of the writers and conclude with brief observations on the reclamation of Afrikaans, the growth in women's writing and secondary academic research.

2. Literacy as a key factor in the development of a literary tradition

Coetzee places the development of Black Afrikaans writing somewhere in mid-space. He correctly determines that there are discontinuities between "white and black writers" which he relates to a disjuncture in Afrikaans literature (Coetzee, 2002:150). I submit that for a proper grasp of this literary movement it is crucial to comprehend the development of literacy in South Africa. The crucial discontinuities are illiteracy and the deliberate undereducation and miseducation of black people (in the overarching sense of the word) over generations. The uneven development of education, like racial, gender and class discrimination, is one of the distinctive features of life in southern Africa. Ever since the settlement of European colonialism, education has been employed as an instrument of social division. Over the centuries, the spread of literacy among black people has been fragmentary and at the very least deficient.

Coetzee (2002:149) mentions that the first published Afrikaans writer of colour, namely S.V. Petersen published his collection *Die enkeling* [The loner] in 1944. That moment itself needs to be framed against a broader background. Access to education was not at all a given for people of colour in the colonial state or the first half of the 20th century. Petersen's achievement is therefore a rare exception where millions of black South Africans had little to no access to literacy (Willemse, 2010:33-34). It was happenstance that gave Petersen the opportunity to attend one of only two high schools that catered for the secondary education of coloured (but also broadly black) students in the then Cape Province.

A literary tradition is dependent on literacy, at the very least on writers and readers. Since it mostly goes without saying Coetzee does not address this. However, one needs to amplify literacy in the context of schooling in South Africa. For generations of black South Africans quality formal education has been hard to come by (see Willemse, 2020:140-141). One of the contradictions of National Party rule between 1948 and 1994 is the expansion of black secondary and tertiary education, albeit along the lines of apartheid demarcation and differentiation. The introduction of Afrikaans mother tongue education is particularly relevant in the instance of the former Department of Coloured Affairs. The introduction of education is material in understanding the growth of literary expression among black people in the late apartheid era. Nevertheless, even these developments were interrupted. For instance, it is striking that not a single black Afrikaans writer formally debuted between 1961 and the 1976 uprising (Gerwel, [1986]: 17-18). Much of it had to do with the prevailing circumstances. The 1950s, 1960s and 1970s saw the introduction of a slew of repressive legislation that reshaped the country and temporarily silenced those forces opposed to apartheid. By the end of the 1970s many black professionals, among them hundreds of (coloured) Afrikaans-speaking teachers, emigrated from South Africa, crippling not only the education sector but also the development of potential writers.

3. The beginnings of the Black Afrikaans Writers' symposium as a literary movement

Coetzee (2002:150) asserts following Foucault that "the origins [of the discursive formation] is not important, yet a few lines later he writes that "the event of the two symposia presents the discursive practice from which a writable archive originates". Further along the paper he enquires, "Where did these enunciations originate from that led to this discursive formation" (Coetzee, 2002:157). He notes correctly that following the 1976 uprising "black Afrikaans poetry was



published more readily” (Coetzee, 2002:152). It would perhaps be more precise to argue that the intersection of colonial and apartheid oppression, literacy, access and opportunity is important for this development.

Greater levels of (advanced) education (among mostly first generation tertiary educated individuals) and the pressure cooker political environment of the late-1970s and 1980s changed the trajectory for black Afrikaans writing. By the 1980s a relatively high number of black Afrikaans writers had published their works, mostly poetry in a variety of community, activist and student magazines, literary journals, or in self-published collections and anthologies. It would be fair to suggest that much of the new writing (primarily poetry and the production of dramatic works) was in response to the highly charged political environment rather than for the sake of the literary arts *per se* (see Smith, Van Gensen & Willemse, 1986:v; Willemse, 1990). These green shoots were decisive in organising the first Black Afrikaans Writers Symposium of 1985 associated with the Department of Afrikaans and Dutch at the University of the Western Cape, followed by the decennial follow-ups of 1995, 2005 and 2015.

The Black Afrikaans Writers symposia brought together writers who had several characteristics in common (see Smith, Van Gensen & Willemse, 1986:iv; Willemse, 2015a:9,10). They mostly shared a legislated racial classification and used the Afrikaans language as a medium of literary expression. They mainly came from the Afrikaans rural areas, were fairly educated and were born in the immediate post-1948 era. In other respects they may have had disparate perceptions about a number of issues, including the function of literature or their place and role within the Afrikaans (and South African) literary systems or the value of cultural activism. They ascribed to divergent social identities and diverse political orientations, implicitly suggesting multiple ways of resolving the late apartheid crisis of the 1980s (see Smith, Van Gensen & Willemse, 1986:iv; Viljoen, 2005:95-96). While some recognised a nexus with the discourse of Black (Literary) Studies globally others may have avoided it altogether or may have been ignorant of it (see Willemse, 2015b:30-31).

Notwithstanding such differences, the Black Afrikaans Writers Symposium of 1985 and subsequent symposia bestowed an identity on a literary development that in crucial respects was antithetical to the dominant perceived notion of Afrikaans and Afrikaans literature as white, Afrikaner-centric, middle class, nationalist, pedestrian and for the most part, indifferent to the political struggles of black South Africans (see Willemse, 2015a:9-10). These writers directly challenged the institutional bias of Afrikaans literature, showing up its prejudices, hinderances and lacunae (Smith, Van Gensen & Willemse, 1986:iii; Coetzee, 2002:160-161; Viljoen, 2013). In their anti-apartheid opposition they also actively reclaimed the Afrikaans language as they sought ways of advancing the publication of

their creative work (see Willemse, 2015b:29). Against this background, the Black Afrikaans Writers symposium as a literary movement, is arguably one of the more important developments in contemporary Afrikaans literature in the latter quarter of the 20th century (Smith, Van Gensen & Willemse, 1986:iv). These developments were described in a number of academic studies, including those of Con January (1997), Julian Smith (1987) and Hein Willemse (1995, 1999, 2007).

4. The politics of naming

While the nomenclature of a literary development or movement on its face may appear to be inconsequential, it is clear as Coetzee (2002:154-157) indicates that the term “black” has been under critical discussion since the inception of the Black Afrikaans Writers symposium (see Smith, Van Gensen & Willemse, 1986:iii-iv).¹ Coetzee (2002:154-157) spends a full subsection of his article on trying to disentangle the signifier “black”.

With reference to Afrikaans literature the term counters the institutional ethnocentrism of Afrikaans literature. Writers who write Afrikaans from diverse backgrounds, be it African, coloured or Indian (to use the South African racial classifications) are included under this broad conceptual umbrella. They are included under the descriptor “black”, while with the symposia solidarity was sought with other African literary traditions (see inter alia the documented symposia proceedings, Smith, Van Gensen & Willemse, 1986:v, 1986; Willemse, Hattingh, van Wyk & Conradie, 1997; Willemse & Van Wyk, 2015; and also Willemse, 1999:14; Willemse, 2021:261). With its roots in the Black Consciousness political and student movement of the late 1960s to mid-1980s the term “black” has been used from the outset as a form of strategic essentialism, i.e. signifying apartheid opposition, bridging apartheid’s racial divides, self-affirming and redefining social identities, and galvanising political orientations into an oppositional movement practicing independence and self-reliance.

Given Coetzee’s attention to it, it is obvious that the concept of “Black Afrikaans writing” destabilises the entrenched monologic notions of “Afrikaans”, “Afrikaans literature”, “being Afrikaans speaking”, “Afrikaans writer”, “Bantu writer”, and “Coloured writer”, among others. It should be noted that in the Afrikaans language discourse of Afrikaans writing the concepts of “white Afrikaans writer” and “Afrikaner writer” are virtually absent, for the Afrikaans writer by definition is discursively presumed to be a white/Afrikaner writer.² Within the main stream of Afrikaans literature the presuppositions have been ethnocentric, so much so that a prominent critic like A.P. Grové in the early 1960s regarded an Afrikaans Jewish writer like Olga Kirsch and a writer like P.J. Philander as “foreigners” (see Willemse, 2021: 257).



Coetzee (2002:154-155) is correct in suggesting that with the passage of the anti-apartheid struggle criticism has been raised that the time for the usage of “black” as an undifferentiated politicised monolith has passed. Some of these reasons include that the term erases the multiplicity of its constituent social and cultural identities. The post-1994 era has seen the burgeoning of a variety of localised social and political identities centring around matters of indigeneity, authenticity and place, while the narrow Africanist nationalism of the governing political party alienated many in communities that were active in the broader anti-apartheid struggle. In addition, the insight that race and racial terminologies as social constructs led to an aversion in the usage of the term “black”. (It should be noted that the use of “black” in Black Consciousness terms in the 1970s and 1980s is probably *the primary* example of a deliberate counter political construct). In consequence, some commentators avoid, ignore or replace the overarching term “black”.

The post-1994 era has seen in some quarters the promotion of narrow ethnic identities by culture brokers that would have been anathema in anti-apartheid circles, while others advance the discourse of cultural minority rights and association. For instance, it should be noted that Coloured (with a capital “C” and its hip-hop variations “Kallid” or “Kullit”) is gaining currency as a mode of self-identification among urban youth. It is arguable whether as Coetzee (2002:156) suggests, quoting voices sympathetic to the “reimagination of colouredness”, that “colouredness” was sacrificed for “blackness”. It may not even be useful attempting to resolve these debates on coloured identity which are premised on longstanding continuities in social histories, animosities and allegiances.

In literary circles a substitute of choice such as “bruin skrywer” (brown writer) functions as a contemporary update of the label “kleurlingskrywer” (coloured writer) that S.V. Petersen, P.J. Philander and Adam Small publicly detested in the 1950s to 1970s. I have argued elsewhere that in terms of signification the ready replacement of “Black Afrikaans writer” with “Coloured writer” may not be an equivalent exchange (Willemse, 2015b:33). In the context of the underlying forces in Afrikaans literature the former signifies apartheid resistance, social struggle, transethnicity, and international affiliation, whereas the latter may signify accommodation rather than oppositionality. With reference to the Black Writers symposia and in terms of signification more precise substitutes for the term “black” may be “non-hegemonic”, “counterhegemonic”, “oppositional”, “resistant” or “subversive”.

Overall, almost forty years later it seems, however, that the newly minted nomenclature of the post-1994 South Africa has not yet succeeded in incorporating as the signifier “black” does, the needs and struggles of, or in highlighting broadly the sociocultural and institutional positionality of Afrikaans writers of colour (Smith, Van Gensen & Willemse, 1986:iii-iv). While the usage of the term

need not deny the multiplicity of its constituent identities the suppression of the term “black” in this respect may rather conceal writers’ marginality, and in practice prolong the deeply entrenched ethnocentrism of Afrikaans literature. Further, avoidance of the term, or the demands to be “a writer” or merely be “an Afrikaans writer” often obscure the deep fissures within the Afrikaans literary tradition rather than opening them up to examination. The substitute terminology that is often mooted does not rival the broader global signification of “black”, i.e. solidarity with the oppressed or those excluded from economic or political power, resistance to the remnants of colonialism, the valorisation of histories of indigeneity and resistance, the validation of broader indigenous histories and cultural practices, and generally, the international struggles for equity and equality.

Nonetheless, whatever the reservations on labelling, the Black Afrikaans Writers symposia gave this literary development an identity and a name (Smith, Van Gensen & Willemse, 1986:iv). It gave literary observers and commentators a way of describing a phenomenon that is significant for a whole host of reasons, not least those mentioned by Coetzee (2002:158-159), namely highlighting the limited access to publication, criticism of the processes of canonization, the efforts at the reclamation of Afrikaans or the pronounced deterritorialisation of the Afrikaans language. Secondly, naming also allowed literary commentators to record and register the processes of development, participation, access and inclusion in the overall Afrikaans literary tradition.

5. Say my name!

Since Coetzee (2002:150), following Foucault, is mainly interested in the formation of the discourse — “the author disappears, just as the book or the whole oeuvre” — it prevents him from naming individual writers involved in the Black Afrikaans Writers symposia. For my purposes, however, it is necessary to name them, even if I do not discuss their writings at any length. For further discussion of their literary contributions or merits the secondary literature should be consulted. Citing these names should at the very least give the reader an impression of the growth of Black Afrikaans writing over the past forty years.

Among the first post-1976 wave of Black Afrikaans writers, mainly poets, were Frank Anthony, Farouk Asvat, André Boezak, Floris A. Brown, Achmat Dangor, Kenneth de Bruin, Julian de Wette, Clinton V. du Plessis, Willem Fransman, Vernon February, Richard Geldenhuys, Leonard Koza, Shawn Minnies, Dikobe wa Mogale, Vincent Oliphant, Patrick J. Petersen, Peter Snyders, Marius F. Titus, Hein Willemse and Jan Wiltshire (see Gerwel, 1986:17-21; Smith, Van Gensen & Willemse, 1986; Willemse, 1990; Willemse, 2007:154-200). Julian F. Smith (1987) in his study on



Black Afrikaans community theatre in the Western Cape identifies in particular J.C. Abdool, Willie Adams, Peter Braaf, Salie Gertse, P.A. Jacobs, Peter Kaleb, Leonard Koza, Desmond Mocke, Chris Prince, Snyders, Melvin Whitebooi and Mrs D. Williams as particularly active producers of Black Afrikaans community theatre. Con January (1997) adds the names of Jolene Arendse, G.J. Lottering, Sam Muller and Felton September. Wium van Zyl (2015) continued the work of Smith and January highlighting the continuation of playwrights such as Terence Booysen, Omar Dams, Diana Ferrus, Zenobia Kloppers, Ivan Sylvester and Anthony Wilson. However, most of their theatre scripts remain unpublished, as is the work of the Pretoria playwright Robert J. Pearce (Coetzer, 2008). Although Asvat, Dangor and Mogale are listed here, they primarily write in English but at the time contributed significant work in Afrikaans dialect. As a playwright Snyders achieved noted success with *A Political Joke* (1983), while Whitebooi was for more than a decade a popular feuilletonist in an Afrikaans daily newspaper while his play *Dit sal die blêrrie dag wies!* (1984), performed by the Cape Flats Players drew enthusiastic audiences.

The last decade of the 20th century witnessed the noteworthy growth in the literary output of black Afrikaans writers. A second wave of post-1976 writers such as Freda Gygenaar, Abraham Phillips, A.H.M. Scholtz, E.K.M. Dido, Karel Benjamin, S.P. Benjamin, Mathews Phosa, Allan Boesak, Zulfah Otto-Sallies, Loit Sôls, Clive Smith, Kirby van der Merwe, Joseph Marble, Elias Nel and Catherine Willemse were published with mostly mainstream Afrikaans publishers in the immediate thawing of the apartheid state (see also Willemse, 2007:209-214). A number of writers, mostly poets, short story writers and essayists (like Heindrich Wyngaard) continued the early 1980s strategy of self-publication and distribution. In the post-2000 period, poets who gained prominence in a earlier era such as Floris Brown, Clinton V. du Plessis and Diana Ferrus continue to self-publish, while the advances in self-publishing also encouraged a new generation of writers to self-publish, for instance Dudley C. Brandt's *Portret in die gang* (2014), Willa Boezak's translations of the Psalms into Kaaps and his biographical and historiographical studies, inter alia *Griekwaheld – die merkwaardige lewe van A.A.S. le Fleur I* (2018) and *Só glo ons. Die Khoi-San van Suid-Afrika* (2007). Overall, between 1990 and 2005, Rudi Venter (2015:64) establishes “that 70 new Afrikaans fiction titles” were published for the adult market.

In the post-2000 era a third wave of writers, broadly categorised as black, has come to the fore. Given the debates around social identity alluded to earlier, many of them may take issue with the broad “black” categorisation employed here. The reality is that the worlds that they inhabit, their relationship to the Afrikaans literary canon and the materiality of their writing differs vastly different from that of their white Afrikaans counterparts. In this period a number of diverse novelists and autobiographers were published, among them Simon Bruinders, Olivia Coetzee, Zain

Eckleton, Jenna-Leigh February, Brian Fredericks, John Fredericks, Fatima [Osman], Hemelbesem (Simon Witbooi), Valda Jansen, Chys Rhys, Jeremy Vearey, Bettina Wyngaard; the poets Ronelda Kamfer, Lynthia Julius, Andy Paulse, Jolyn Phillips, Shirmoney Rhode, and Nathan Trantaal, and the playwrights Christo Davids and Amy Jephta.

All these authors to a greater or lesser extent are opening up sociocultural (often working class or fringe) worlds that may be unknown to many of their readers, while they themselves are validating their lived experiences. While the Black Afrikaans Writers symposia and several prominent writers of earlier periods focused on broader sociopolitical themes the writers of the early 21st generation focus primarily on *petite histoires*, the histories of localities and place, such as coloured township life (see Van Wyk, 2018; Willemse, 2020:146-148; Willemse, 2021:259-261). Whereas writers of a previous generation virtually had no access to mainstream publishing, the present generation of writers has found a greater measure of accessibility with the mainstream Afrikaans publishing industry even if traces of an ethnocentric institutional bias remain.

6. The reclamation of Afrikaans

The concept of “minor literature” that Kafka formulated and was elaborated upon by Deleuze and Guattari comprises inter alia the traits of collectivity, sociocultural resistance and politicisation (see Coetzee, 2002:160-163). These characteristics could indeed be readily applied to the Black Afrikaans Writers symposia (see Willemse, 2020). Coetzee (2002:151) is aware of the saliency of the politics of language, asserting that there is a discontinuity when writers of colour are confronted with “the language of the white man in its standardised form”. One of the far-reaching consequences of Afrikaner nationalist mythmaking is the construction of Afrikaans as “a white man’s language” and the dissemination of this notion through the education system, the popular media and political machinations. The history of the Afrikaans language is multifaceted, its origins variegated and its speakers diverse (see also Willemse 2020, 2021). The Black Afrikaans symposium in itself was an act of reclamation of Afrikaans, especially following the epoch-defining uprising of 1976, triggered by the imposition of Afrikaans language instruction in the Department of Education and Training (the euphemistically renamed Department of Bantu Education).

One of the constant themes during the Black Writers symposia has been writing in dialect, especially the case of Kaaps (Coetzee, 2002:159-160, 161).³ Similar sentiments characterised the hip-hop culture of the late 1980s with musical groups such as Prophets of da City and Brasse van die Kaap. In the post-2000 era, the Afrikaans musical theatre performances revived the Cape histories of *métissage* and creolisation leading to renewed activist reclamation of Afrikaans, this



time around focusing most clearly on the adoption of the Cape Vernacular variety of Afrikaans (also known as Kaaps) as a signifier of cultural distinction and authenticity. Individual performers such as Hemelbesem (Simon Witbooi), Churchill Naude, Early B, Frazer Barry, Jitsvinger, and Linkris among others build on these foundations and most forcefully established Afrikaans hip-hop as a contemporary musical genre.

Linked to this development in hip-hop culture is the current prominence of Kaaps as a literary medium with practitioners such as Trantaal, Olivia Coetzee and Rhys. The deterritorialisation of a language variety such as Kaaps most prominently practiced by Adam Small in the 1960s, actively advanced by Peter Snyders, Marius F. Titus and Loit Sôls in the 1980s and 1990s, has gained a foothold in the mainstream Afrikaans media. Trantaal, Coetzee, Rhys and on occasion Anastasia de Vries primarily write newspapers columns in Kaaps and develop projects primarily based on it. (On the other hand, the newspaper columnists Willem Fransman, Bettina Wyngaard and Heindrich Wyngaard do not as a rule use literary dialect). While these authors advance an agenda of identity and social authenticity, they do not avoid the pitfalls of eye dialect or literary dialect, namely the cultivation of a spectre of exoticism, the perpetuation of social stereotypes while underexploring the possibilities of linguistic and artistic innovation.

7. The writing of women and the continuity of academic studies

For understandable reasons, Coetzee does not address the increased prominence of women. Only following the first two symposia did women come to the fore with E.K.M. Dido, Ronelda Kamfer, Valda Jansen and Bettina Wyngaard the most prominent among them. Catherine Willemse, Jenna-Leigh February, Nongeteni Mfengu and Fatima [Osman] published autobiographies; Frieda Gygenaar wrote romances and Zulfah Otto-Sallies published a youth novel. Among the poets Ronelda S. Kamfer has gained wide prominence with a succession of notable collections while Diana Ferrus has been acclaimed for her poetry on female subjugation and reparation. Bettina Wyngaard links up with an increasingly popular trend in Afrikaans writing, namely crime writing. Both she and Valda Jansen won awards for their first novels *Troos vir die gebrokenes* (Comfort for the Brokenhearted, 2009) and *Hy kom met die skoenlappers* (He comes with the butterflies, 2016) respectively. Amy Jephta's play *Kristalvlakte* (Crystal Plains, 2016) was well-received and lately she has branched out into film-production, debuting with *Barakat* (2020).

The Black Afrikaans Writers symposia most directly highlighted the lacunae of the Afrikaans canon (Smith, Van Gensen & Willemse, 1986:iv; Coetzee, 2002:158). In 2016 the Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns awarded the Hertzog Prize to Adam Small, a long-standing omission that highlighted the

ethnocentricity of Afrikaans letters (see also Van Wyk, 1999). It is noteworthy that the first collection of Hertzog Prize homages was dedicated to Small (see Van der Elst, 2017). While *Perspektief en profiel* previously only profiled Adam Small (Olivier, 1999) its post-2000 version includes P.J. Philander (Hugo, 2006), A.H.M. Scholtz (Renders, 2006), and E.K.M. Dido (De Villiers, 2006).

It is obvious that in recent years, apart from the contributions to the published proceedings of the Black Afrikaans Writers symposia, a relatively high number of academic studies has been completed on Black Afrikaans writing. The recognition of these writers has therefore gained considerable currency. A random, incomplete selection of recent studies reveals that the following studies were completed: on Black Afrikaans poets (Almano, 2001), women poets (Bonthuys, 2020; Pakendorf, 2011), semiotic meaning in the work of Small, Snyders and Pearce (Ernest, 2006), space, identity and voice of the marginalised in Dido's novels (de Villiers, 2004; Lewis, 2005; Van Zyl, 2006; Colyn, 2010), the autodidactical writing of Phillips and Scholtz in autobiographical texts within the Afrikaans literary system (Van der Merwe, 2004; Renders, 2006; Moon 2009; Jacobs, 2013, 2016), naming and "name stripping" in South African literary texts (Chaudhari, 2013); pain and pathos in inter alia the work of Adam Small (Woest, 2006), gangster violence and sexuality (Visagie, 2003), identity in inter alia Kirby van der Merwe's *Klapperhaar slaap nooit stil nie* (Van Wyk, 2003; Viljoen, 2004), and ecological concerns in Bruinders' work (Meyer, 2017).

8. Conclusion

In this commentary on Coetzee's paper I have pointed out that literacy is a key factor in the development of a literary tradition and that the uneven development of education directly impacted the development of a literary culture among black Afrikaans speakers. The growth of the Black Afrikaans Writers literary movement in the mid-1980s is directly attributable to the highly charged political environment of the period rather than literary production as such. Nonetheless, as a literary movement is it significant in that writers of colour claim Afrikaans as their language using it unabashedly within the broader anti-apartheid struggle. Nomenclature remains a sticky point. I have argued that the efforts to replace the term "black" have generally not been successful while avoidance may serve to obscure the deep fissures in the Afrikaans literary tradition. Lately, writers, theatre producers and activists influenced by contemporary hip-hop culture have claimed Afrikaans, and particularly Kaaps, as their language of authenticity and social resistance. Lastly, I have noted the growth in the writing by women and the increasing output in academic research. Although there is certainly movement regarding the greater incorporation and acknowledgement of Afrikaans writers of a variety backgrounds, social orientations or cultural proclivities, much still has to be done to address the underlying ethnocentrism of the Afrikaans literary canon.



The notability of Coetzee's paper lies in drawing our attention to core debates and the ongoing growth and development in Black Afrikaans writing. It is, however, unlikely to be a "discursive practice of the past" since the undercurrents remain ever present in contemporary Afrikaans literature.

NOTES

- 1 The debate on naming the first Black Afrikaans Writers symposium is recounted in Willemse (2015b:28): "We could not name it 'the non-hegemonic writers conference' [...] as sworn internationalists who were antiracist, anti-establishment and Marxist we clearly understood the underlying contradictions [...] we warned one another that if we are not careful the concept could easily degenerate into essentialist identity formation, mythmaking and stereotyping." All translations for the original Afrikaans are mine.
- 2 In contradistinction, in popular English language articles or academic publications published abroad the description of "white" or "Afrikaner" writer is relatively common (see e.g. Martin, 2016; Jolly, 1996).
- 3 Coetzee (2002:153) erroneously identifies Elias Nel as a writer of Kaaps. In his oral storytelling and short stories Nel in *lets goeds uit Verneukpan* (1998) and *Mafoiing en ander gelofetjies* (2001) renders in print representations of the Afrikaans dialect of the inland region of the Northern Cape. Coetzee's misreading is instructive in its unwitting association of dialect with particular social stereotypes such as "coloured speak".

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