

Logos, deconstruction-writing, ideology and the false social construction of meaning and representation of the “other” from the perspective of John 1:1

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Abstract

This article focuses primarily on meaning and representation of the “other”. The collective memory of primarily oral cultures about the ways in which knowledge about them was collected, classified and then represented in various ways to the West, and seen through the eyes of the West, and then mirrored back again to those that had been colonised, remains imperative in the discursive discourse of the “other”. Smith refers to this process as a Western discourse about the “other” which is supported by institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery (bewitchment of imperial language), doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles. This process has worked partly because of the constant interchange between the scholarly and the imaginative (false consciousness - or sophistry) construction of ideas about primary oral cultures.¹ The whole idea of the “other” is linguistically and ideologically constituted by the West and can be seen as a social construct which is in need of deconstruction. In this example, the “other” has been provided with a name, a face and a particular identity, and is represented by the indigenous people. According to Boemher, a post-colonial theorist who refers to the colonised as the colonial “other” or simply the “other,” the concept of the “other” is built on the ideas of *inter alia* Hegel and Sartre who signify it as that which is unfamiliar to the dominant subjectivity or which is against the authority of the dominant class.²

Introduction

In keeping with my article of “Deconstruction-writing, ideology and the false social construction of meaning and representation of the ‘other’, from the perspective of John 1:1”, there is a need for a paradigmatic shift from the historical tradition of Logos which is perceived as a transmission to an orality perceived speech communication. The diachronic description of the Logos-hymn in the context of the Prologue of John's Gospel can be of little help in relation to oral cultures. Critical analyses of the *Logos* hymn have helped scholars to strip away the textual layers of the *Logos* tradition and to discover an oral community underneath the written text. For Bultmann (1971) this was a Christian oral community under the Roman and Jewish oppression during Jesus Galilean ministry.

The diachronic description and interpretive interest of *Logos* in John 1v1 has resulted in several problems in understanding and interpreting the discourse of oral cultures. The historical critical method commences at a certain point in history and advances along a chronological continuum. Oral cultures rely strongly on memory to keep the traditions and cultural norms alive through cultural and religious performances of the oral socio-cultural archive of indigenous knowledges, for instance through rituals, songs, poetry, hymns and storytelling. This is clearly reflected in the ancient Palestinian cultural ethnic setting.

According to Kelber (1990), the Gospel of John was read logocentrically or orally. Hearers and readers let themselves be guided by the narrative dynamic to move from the plural *logoi* (words) to the singular understanding of the Logos in the narrative text. The written text and the incarnate *Logos* needed to be understood normatively and they served as trans-textual realities. The written text was thus not to be taken with ultimate seriousness. This is hard to comprehend in the *grammatological* age which has come to view language and literature as closed systems. Kelber observes that Western literary history has only recently begun to view writing as an end in itself. What used to matter in

¹ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing methodologies: research and indigenous people* (London: Biddles Ltd, 1999), 2.

² Elleke Boemher, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 21.

Western literature and hermeneutics was not primarily the intra-textual construction of meaning *per se* but rather the textual strategies to affect readers' intellect and imagination.³

The coming of the *Logos* in John's gospel (Jn 1:1) represents not an extra-linguistic mode of authority, but an extra-textual one. *Logos* knows no pre-word or non-linguistic metaphysics of presence. It is fundamentally *logocentric* or word-centered and it epitomises oral utterances. The oral verbalisation of the word represents an inseparable unity of the speaker and his message. *Logos* can thus be seen as an appropriate metaphor for transcendence. Like oral speech, the *Logos* is ephemeral: it has no visual or physical means of preservation. It is inaccessible to any standards of measurement. Like oral speech, the *Logos* manifests itself in the moment of verbal action. Its prime potency is sound and this can be seen as an attribute of divinity.⁴

Towards anthropology of liberation

The *Logos* as a transcendental signifier in John's gospel (Jn1:1) must find an echo in the hearts of those who have been involved in the struggle for justice and peace in South Africa. John's peasant community constituted a sect that was against the oppressive Jewish community of its day. The community responded by developing close-knit, inward-looking groups, marked by hostility to the power structures of society around them, suspicious of the motives of the authorities, and understanding themselves as engaged in the struggle of cultural and religious liberation.⁵

There are unique parallels between the liberation struggle in South Africa and that of the Galilean peasant community. The *Logos* in the Johannine narrative became a new source of power for the Galilean peasant community – a community under the social and economic oppression and false construction of the written Hebraic law. The binary opposition between speech and writing unfolded new social dynamics for further investigation in relation to the literate Hebrew elite and the oral Aramaic communities which was a common phenomenon in first-century Palestine. The coming of the *Logos* in human flesh (*sarx*) can be interpreted as a discourse of the resistance against the ruling class in Jerusalem. The authority of *Logos* was rooted in the Spirit (breath-*pneumata*) and manifested its power through the spoken word or words. The liberation of the Galilean community was rooted in the spoken authority of the words (*logoi*) of Jesus.

Over many years of working with marginalised and oppressed communities in South Africa, I observed that these communities favoured a mnemonic oral-style mode of communication. Hermeneutics of liberation interpretive interest remain unique in their social construction of the world, the people around them and the oppressed situation they find themselves in. At the centre of their interpretive interest lies a transcendental signifier or *Logos* which is closely linked to their speech as it gave meaning to their lives and their communities. What was interesting was how these communities passed on their oral tradition – through songs, poetry, ritual, storytelling or even dancing – to the extended family and how this was passed on to a whole community, from the father to the children, as was common in the Palestinian setting in the first century of the common era.

To understand the social dynamics of gossip as proposed by Botha (1998) in relation to the Jesus movement, one needs to look at the social and cultural context. The early tellers of Jesus stories were the small peasant villagers in the traditional agrarian society of first-century Palestine, specifically Galilee. In oral societies, oral recording can be seen as a method of restoring and retrieving information about the social environment.⁶

Gossip for oral communities can also be seen as resistance and subversion. According to Spacks the power of gossip can be explained as follows:

Perhaps the concept of gossip subliminally recalls ancient belief in the magic of language. The idea of talking in secret, i.e. without the subject's knowledge about someone, recalls old conceptions of words as dangerous weapons ... telling stories takes possession of other's experience: a form of magic no less potent for being familiar. Gossip means more in our communal imagination than we can sensibly explain.⁷

³ Werner Kelber, "The Authority of the Word in St. John's Gospel: Charismatic Speech, Narrative Text, Logocentric Metaphysics," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (1990):128.

⁴ Ibid., 129.

⁵ Jonathan Draper, *The Johannine Community and its Implications for a Democratic Society*, (ed.), Klaus Nürnberger, (Pietermaritzburg: Encounter Publications, 1991), 118.

⁶ Pieter J.J. Botha, "Rethinking the oral-written divide in the Gospel criticism: Jesus tradition in the light of gossip research" *Voice, Journal for Oral Studies* 1 (1998): 32.

⁷ Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Gossip* (Chicago: Chicago Press, 1986) 41.

These comments help us to understand the oral culture of first-century Palestine. The magical power of words reminds us that gossip can offer passive resistance to many forms of power. Resistance and subversion run powerfully through gossip processes. People gossip about the dominant class in order “to cut them down to size” but also to deal with situations of inferiority and oppression.⁸ Subversive and resistance communication through gossip networks enables peasants or oral communities to resist the influence of the dominant class.

The liberatory Jesus tradition was manipulated in support of the ruling class. Religion provides and sanctions the social universe of society, but it can also be manipulated by the ruling elite to legitimatise oppression. In South Africa as in first-century Palestine, the liberatory popular interpretive traditions, e.g. the spoken word, had the potential to counter the official transcript of the written law and even to turn it around.⁹

Among the ordinary people in South Africa during the apartheid struggle lies a rich culture of oral tradition which is rooted in the primordial *Logos* which can be compared with the “little tradition” of Palestine. This oral tradition possibly empowered the southern African liberation struggle. The spoken word was a source of empowerment against the written authority of the oppressive legislation. “The cultural and religious roots of Palestine are profoundly closer to the embedded religious and cultural traditions of Africa than that of modern Western post-Enlightenment religion and culture.”¹⁰

According to Frostin, the poor and marginalised create their own language of resistance over and against the dominant ideology practices.¹¹ The unwritten tradition of the South Africa liberation struggle remains the voice of the voiceless: a struggle that was never accurately recorded. At the center of the liberation struggle lies the word. It was this primordial understanding of the word that became a source of power and resistance for oral cultures in their social and political context. The historical and cultural struggles of the poor and the marginalised must be seen as a starting point of a hermeneutics of liberation or hermeneutics of suspicion.

The spoken word for the literate elite remains unfamiliar because their hermeneutical interpretation of “oral text” remains linear and inert. For oral communities, oral testimonies were the strength in uncovering the terrible atrocities of the past. Oral sources helped to uncover crimes and atrocities that had been previously denied by the dominant literate class.¹² We thus need to examine to what extent the written text was shaped and contributed to the ideology of apartheid and the dominant discourse in South African history and literature. The written text has helped to sustain the colonial vision against marginalised communities.¹³ Writing has played a unique role in shaping the ideology of the dominant class and was a major contributor in re-ordering history and creating social boundaries, shaping intellectual and ethnic inferiority of non-Eurocentric cultures, and strengthening the values and the beliefs of the dominant class against the social and economic interests of the poor and oppressed. The written text was used to implement the policies of segregation of the dominant class and to conscientise and brainwash the mindset of those who adhered and adopted such policies.

The social dynamics between the oral and literate culture are unique in their operation. Although the South African liberation struggle held strong political views, at the very heart of the struggle were the religious and cultural oral utterances of the poor and the oppressed which were reflected in traditional and political dances (*toyi toyi*), poetry songs, political songs, praise songs and circumcision songs, spiritual hymns, storytelling, proverbs, riddles, verbal arts as well as rituals. These all served as mechanisms of resistance that were used by oral communities to resist the oppressive practices and influences of the apartheid government. This oral tradition was reinforced by traditional leaders, preachers and freedom fighters of the struggle who refused to accept the oppressive social policies of the dominant literate class. Yet the voice of oral communities was not suppressed. Suppression was attempted by the dominant literate class in the dominant discourse. The oral tradition, however, remained hidden from the dominant literate discourse and was recorded in human memory by means of the construction of history which was rendered in writing. Oral cultures are the creators and guardians of a vast oral tradition, but their exclusion from government institutions limits the value of official documents produced “about” them. These ordinary “people” stories have thus been left out of the institutional and grand histories of our country.¹⁴

⁸ Pieter J.J. Botha, “Rethinking the oral–written divide in the Gospel criticism: Jesus tradition in the light of gossip research” *Voices Journal for Oral Studies* 1 (1998): 42.

⁹ Gerald West, *Prophetic Fragments* (Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1988), 30.

¹⁰ Kwesi Dickson, *Theology in Africa* (New York, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1984), 141.

¹¹ Per Frostin, *Liberation Theology in South Africa: A First world Interpretation* (Sweden: Lund University Press, 1988), 10.

¹² Mia Roth, “Communities and Apartheid using Black postgraduate students to record the local histories of an era” *Voices: Journal for Oral Studies* 1 (1998): 102.

¹³ Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 45.

¹⁴ Sy Adler, *The Politics of research during the Liberation struggle: Interviewing Black workers in South Africa*, *The International Annual of Oral History*, ed. Ronald.J. Grele, (Connecticut: Greenwood, 1990), 14.

The experience of apartheid has demonstrated different kinds of silence. There is the silence which exists in a dynamic relation with language and literature but there are also specific silences (voicelessness) imposed by historical conjunctions. "A word uttered in the kind of repressive context exemplified by apartheid evokes an awareness of particular territories forbidden for language."¹⁵ The lives and activities of oral cultures have in many ways been completely disregarded in literature. They have in fact been written out of history. History is never a representation of fact but the written text in Derridean terminology - a continual *supplement* or *difference* of meaning written. History provides one of the most fertile silences (voicelessness) by the South African black oral poets. The written text has not included a record of oral cultures.¹⁶ The systems of political and cultural domination have also determined systems of discursive and interpretive authority. According to Franz Fanon,¹⁷ political domination includes the negation of the histories of dominated peoples.

Colonialism is not satisfied merely holding people in grip by a kind of perverted logic, but turns to the past of people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it.

This view is strengthened and supported by Luli Callinicos:

One of the lesser-known crimes of apartheid, like colonialism elsewhere in Africa, has been to silence, distort and maim our history.¹⁸

The written text is a discourse in which political struggles are played out. At an ideological level the written text has the capacity to generate and sustain historical identities that have been suppressed by the dominant class. The written text can thus be regarded as a means of social control over oral communities and the socially created "other". The whole understanding of the construction of written history was thus to strengthen the elitist position in history. It was to bewitch language (vicious cycle of interpretation of deferring meaning: Derridean hermeneutics) in order to reflect the victories of the dominant class over the minds of oral cultures. The opposing view to such history lies in the oral histories of the poor and the oppressed. This calls into account views of the underprivileged, the dispossessed and defeated or those who have been historically inarticulate.¹⁹

After the inception of the new democratic era in 1994 in South Africa, oral communities could tell their stories and share their pain from an African perspective. Oral communities (non-Eurocentric) can be seen as dialogical where both the hearer and speaker are co-creators of truth and meaning as in the literate tradition of the West. Oral cultures, their traditions, culture and beliefs as well as their oral way of life have now been disclosed to the international community. They are now being hailed as symbols of the African Renaissance (rebirth of a nation) and represent the re-birth of the richness of their vast oral cultures. History is now being rewritten in honour of the unsung heroes of the liberation struggle, the ones that gave their blood for the liberation of a nation.

The liberation struggle was a long road to freedom and represents the struggle of the vast masses of oral communities that were prisoners of the ideology of apartheid. Apartheid ideology was deeply rooted in the power of the written text and had re-ordered the history of the illiterate masses in South Africa. The written text manipulated the poor and oppressed in South Africa. This resulted in slavery, exploitation, illiteracy and moral and psychological distortion of identity among people of oral cultures. Their identities were falsely constructed for these people such as the coloureds (*Hottentot*), blacks (*Kaffir*) and Indians (*Coolies*). The myths thus created are rooted in the ideology of nationalism, liberalism and imperialism which are all strongly rooted in racialism.²⁰ Oral communities failed to understand and interpret the written text which resulted in social and economic oppression. The ruling classes used writing in order to socially engineer the ideology of apartheid in the form of political treaties, diaries, Acts and edicts, administrative records and missionaries' reports- all such socially constructed documentation was designed to oppress oral communities.

In the construction of a nation under apartheid (from 1910 onwards), South Africa relied in various ways on writing in the construction of a national literature of oppression. According to Gunner, "literacy and nationalism engendered a critical mentality of dominant ideological practices, that the

¹⁵ André Brink, *Interrogating silence: New possibilities faced by South African Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 15.

¹⁶ Ibid, 18-24.

¹⁷ Frans Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1963), 210.

¹⁸ Priya Narismula, *Locating the Popular-Democratic in South Africa resistance literature in English, 1970-1990* (Durban: University of Durban Westville, 1998) 295.

¹⁹ Mia Roth, "Communities and Apartheid using Black postgraduate students to record the local histories of an era" *Voices: Journal for Oral Studies* 1 (1998): 100.

²⁰ Charles Malan, *Race and Literature* (Pinetown, Cape Town: Owen Burgess, 1987), 3 .

ability to compare, written text is part of the linkage of literacy and that the oral tradition is malleable and volatile whereas the written text remain fixed".²¹ What is clearly noticeable is that the linkage between orality-literacy was discredited in contemporary discourse in South Africa because it intended to promote a monological construction of history.

Apartheid was deeply entrenched in the constitution, and the rights, existence and civilisation of certain oral communities were ignored. South Africa's political and legal system classified people by race and accorded specific rights to identified racial groups. Apartheid ensured in writing that the white minority government, dominated by the Afrikaner National Party, maintained economic and political power over the resources of South Africa.

Apartheid policies were implemented in writing against certain oral cultures. Several apartheid "Acts" were legislated and implemented in order to ensure the power of the ruling party. The following laws operated against certain oral communities and shaped new boundaries, and created race and class classification: the Population Registration Act (1961) classified people as Bantu (Africans), coloureds (persons of mixed race), and Asians (mainly of Indian origin) in order to separate whites from non-whites and to separate one indigenous African group from another. Unjust written "laws" of apartheid treated blacks as sub-humans (less than the image of God in humankind – *imago Dei*). The implementation of the written judicial law meant that the oppressed and exploited masses were required to submit to their oppressors and exploiters. Black people remained powerless, with no access to economic and political power whereas the white minority of people maintained political and economic control.²²

White supremacy was the essential ideological anchor on which white South Africa was founded. The National Party policy of apartheid pursued their oppressive reasoning unflinchingly. As the demand for cheap black labour grew, segregation evolved logically into apartheid. So-called grand apartheid was an attempt by the white ruling class to have its cake and eat it. Cheap, non-unionised African labour was essential to maximise the profits of white capital.²³ The only basis on which the Bantu (the name apartheid ideologues gave to Africans) were allowed in "white South Africa", said MC Botha, the Minister of Bantu Administration, on August 20, 1976, was "to sell their labour and nothing else". The colonial settlement too was expressed by means of written text. Writing in the form of treaties was used to claim territory. The written treaty confirmed the right of the conqueror to the land, giving the act of conquest permanency over time and space. The history of South Africa is replete with accounts of the efforts of the literate invaders to persuade or demand that the oral traditional rulers "touch the pen". The written document justified conquest, the published proclamation established the right to rule, and the codified legal system acquired the grounds to identify the right to punish the transgressor. The written precedent extended these oppressive practices over time and space to the ever-growing body of state guardians and practitioners of the law.²⁴

The Land Act (1913) according to the imperial annexation which called in account black spots, artificial homelands, forced removals, and other manoeuvres of the colonial and apartheid government was to disinherit indigenous people of their land and wealth.²⁵

The written text was thus a vehicle of colonial authority over marginalised communities. The Group Areas Act (1948) established separate sections for each race. Members of other races were forbidden to live, work, or own land in areas belonging to other races. This formed the cornerstone of the apartheid regime. Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd implemented a policy of separate development by establishing Bantustans (homelands) for African ethnic groups by assigning them about 14% of the country's land, whereas more than 80% of South Africa's land was set aside for its white residents, despite the fact that they comprised less than 10% of the population. In these homelands, Africans were able to exercise their rights, but elsewhere their activities were strictly curtailed and they were excluded from participating in the governing of South Africa.²⁶ The Group Areas Act (1948) (by ensuring physical separation) enhanced ethnic exclusiveness, and thus guaranteed divisions of subordinate groups.

Whole territories of historical consciousness were silenced by the power establishment and invaded by the dominant discourse in order to make them inaccessible to other voices. The distortions

²¹ Liz Gunner, *The role of the Liberation struggle and in Post Apartheid Struggle* (Cape Town: David Philips, 1999), 51.

²² Fatima Meer, *Resistance in the Townships* (Durban: Madiba Publications, 1989), 20.

²³ Ben Magabane, *Social Construction of Race and Citizenship in South Africa* (Switzerland: UNRISD, 2001), 10-11.

²⁴ Jeff Guy, "Literacy and Literature" *The Oral Tradition & Innovation: New Wine in Old Bottles* ed., Edgard Sieneart (Durban: University of Natal Oral and Documentation and Research Centre, 1991), 398.

²⁵ Priya Narismula, *Locating the Popular-Democratic in South Africa resistance literature in English, 1970-1990* (Durban: University of Durban Westville, 1998), 109.

²⁶ Paul Rich, *White Power and Liberal Conscience* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1984), 10-36.

in the construction of the written text and the failure of oral communities to understand the written text resulted in these communities losing their rights to their land. Few white South Africans realise that blacks had settled in the sub-continent many centuries before the first Europeans entered the Cape of Storms. The Dutch Calvinist misinterpreted the Bible in the name of Christianity in order to instill an acceptance by the oppressed of their fate and to enslave indigenous people. They also perpetuated strategies to ensure the marginalisation of women in black societies, and to strengthen the involvement of coloured people in the Great Trek. They raped the environment in the process of taming the wilderness. The process of silencing would also include dominant myths, stories (for instance John Bunyan, David Livingstone) and travellers' adventures as well as the intervention of God in Afrikaner history.²⁷

Various laws were passed by the apartheid regime. The first series of Acts were intended to alter the demographic pattern of the country by formalising unbridgeable divisions among non-white Africans, coloureds and Indians. These laws included the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949) and The Population Registration Act 1950 (Act 30). I use "formalised", because Lord Selbourne, high commissioner for South Africa and governor of the Transvaal and Orange River Colony after the Anglo Boer war, spelled out how to separate coloureds from the Africans in order to ensure cheap labour and to deprive Africans of what he called "coloured political leadership".²⁸ The apartheid government later implemented pass laws against blacks and coloureds. South African legislation also controlled the movements of blacks and coloureds (people of mixed racial descent) under the system of apartheid or racial segregation. The earliest pass controls were developed in the 18th century by the ruling class in order to control black labour and to keep blacks and coloureds in inferior positions.

The written text represents power in a literate society. It gives the literate elite power by giving them access to the written text and print and to free themselves from the chains of social oppression. The power of the written text was further entrenched as the ruling literate class imposed two official languages (Afrikaans and English) on oral communities. These languages were foreign to primarily oral cultures. As a result, not being able to read, write or speak either of these languages meant that many blacks were excluded from the language and the culture of their oppressors. Both Afrikaans (Dutch) and English were languages of power. And thus both Afrikaans and English were languages that allowed access to social and capital control.²⁹ The Black Conscious Movement had strong objections to the use of Afrikaans. The objections were quite understandable since Afrikaans was not only the language of the oppressor but also produced literature that portrayed the black man in a negative light.

Residual orality (interface between oral and written) was used in order to restructure the mindset of oral cultures or those that were historically excluded, and to enhance rhetorical interplay between oral and written text which was used as a powerful ruler over oral communities. The reading, writing and speaking of both these languages (Afrikaans and English) were powerful mechanisms that were used by the dominant class in order to conscientise oral cultures so that they would lose touch with their ethnic languages (such as Zulu, Xhosa, Hindi, Tamil and so forth) and they had to learn to speak the language of their masters or their slave drivers. Afrikaans and English had become languages of instruction in higher educational institutions as well as in schools in order to implement the ideological beliefs and values of the government of the day.

The empire of writing which was built on colonialism and Protestant Calvinism (which sanctioned apartheid policies) was a major source that created and shaped illiteracy among blacks and those of non-Eurocentric descent in the South African context. In 1981 four million blacks in South Africa were scribally illiterate. Scribal illiteracy here refers to the total incapacity to interpret written messages. Scribal illiteracy was imposed on them by the ruling literate class as opportunities for them were denied through the rigid apartheid laws. The result of scribal illiteracy created social and economic impoverishment that led to high rates of unemployment and violence which are now carried over in terms of some core social problems in the post-apartheid era.³⁰ This clearly indicates that a number of people who were scribally illiterate possessed a high oral residue and this became a mechanism of resistance in order to secure identity, dignity, cultural values and human dignity.

The written text lay at the heart of the struggle over education, the demands for education, the debate on education and the nature of education from the 19th into the 20th century. A central feature of

²⁷ André Brink, *Interrogating silence: New possibilities faced by South African Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 15.

²⁸ Ben Magabane, *Social Construction of Race and Citizenship in South Africa* (Switzerland: UNRISD, 2001), 10-11.

²⁹ D Katamzi, *Orality and Literacy and illiteracy in the context of Education in South Africa* (Durban: Natal University, 1992), 26-27.

³⁰ Linda Wedepohl, *A survey of illiteracy in South Africa* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 1984), 4.

the policy of the dominant literate class was to restrict education on racial grounds.³¹ The introduction of a centralised state policy with Bantu education in 1953 added not only to greater control but to a more explicit racist ideology. Higher educational institutions, according to legislation (as written – *de Jure*), denied blacks, coloureds and Indians access to study at white English and Afrikaans universities. These were important institutions that were the custodians of the ideology of writing in the pre-apartheid era. Colonial empiricism was closely tied to the ideological beliefs of the ruling literate class which perpetuated racial segregation, social boundaries and the positional superiority of scientific knowledge over oral tradition. The production of knowledge became a means for colonial exploitation and subjugating the “other”.

Oral communities were seen as only “near human” or almost human, uncivilised and barbarian. According to the higher educational institutions, oral tradition could not be rated as scientific or possess empirical knowledge. Knowledge was only accepted when it was scientifically verifiable or substantiated according to the dominant class. In these institutions the whole output of knowledge was more about power and domination and to legitimise vile colonial practices against oral communities.³² Higher educational institutions were highly instrumental in the social engineering of the ideology of apartheid, promoting constructive racism as it continued to play a major role in the social engineering and restructuring of the worldview of the poor and oppressed.

Thus, in the light of this binary view between orality and literacy another category was created – that of the illiterate. The literate world is a world of power and privilege. It is defined in terms of those excluded from this world – the illiterates. In the South African racist system the historically illiterates formed the majority, and this has given many aspects of oppression a particular character which has resulted in levels of resistance and a redefining of social identity of the “other”.

Orality as social and political resistance

To acquire literacy is to acquire a social skill which was not available to all in South Africa prior to 1994. In South Africa literacy has been granted to some, and denied to others, distributed, withdrawn, appropriated and seized as part of the struggle for power and profit, and its availability will remain part of that struggle. Most of our oral communities belonged to this category, and their illiteracy is a recurring theme in their testimonies.³³

The South African liberation struggle revealed not only its desire to be free from the prison house of colonial written text but also to redefine identity in terms of racial oppression and the constructed social boundaries by the dominant class. The written text was seen as an ideological force in order to affirm political and economic legitimacy and the hidden agenda of the ruling class as it came face to face with the Black Consciousness Movement. This movement displayed the power of orality as a mechanism of resistance by marginalised communities or oral communities in their relentless struggle for freedom against the oppressors of apartheid. With the rise of the Black Conscious Movement in the late 1960s, many political organisations were banned. Thousands of people were convicted for undermining the security forces and for being members of banned political organisations. It was also a time when Robert Sobukwe, the founding president of the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and who led the 1961 Sharpsville march against the “pass laws”, was imprisoned without trial on Robben Island from 1963 to 1969. In 1964 Nelson Mandela and seven ANC members were convicted to life imprisonment in terms of the Sabotage Act.³⁴

The “oral text” that emerged in the mid-1960s played a role in the revival of resistance. The key of the popular resistance lay in the Black Conscious Movement which broke the silence of the poor and oppressed through activism and the eloquence of the charismatic leader Steve Biko. Steve Biko, the leader of SASO (South Africa Student’s Organisation) was a student at the University of Natal. It was from these circumstances that the Black Consciousness Movement arose. The movement reflected the importance of the black youth who played an important role in the liberation struggle.³⁵

The Black Consciousness Movement was critically concerned about identity. Their concern was racial identity and to contest the naturalisation of the superiority of whites rather than to engage in reverse racism. The Black Consciousness Movement concentrated on the development among oppressed people in redressing the inequalities of the political system. It challenged the unrelieved

³¹ Jeff Guy, “Literacy and Literature” *The Oral Tradition & Innovation: New Wine in Old Bottles* ed., Edgard Sieneart (Durban: University of Natal Oral and Documentation and Research Centre, 1991), 399.

³² Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing methodologies: research and indigenous people* (London: Biddles Ltd, 1999), 62.

³³ Jeff Guy, “Literacy and Literature” *The Oral Tradition & Innovation: New Wine in Old Bottles* ed., Edgard Sieneart (Durban: University of Natal Oral and Documentation and Research Centre, 1991), 394.

³⁴ Buti George Motlhabi, *The Theory and Practice of Black Resistance to Apartheid* (Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1984), 31.

³⁵ Barney Pityana, Mamphela Ramphele, Lindy Wilson *Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 1991), 119.

whiteness of the political and cultural discourse. The Black Consciousness Movement tried to re-address the systematic psychological degradation that had occurred over centuries against black people or the socially created “other” and to develop a positive identity that contradicted the logic of apartheid and colonialism.³⁶

The Black Consciousness Movement tried to address the specificities of oppression in the early 1970s by building unity among those oppressed South Africans who opposed apartheid:

We must resist the attempts by protagonists of the bantustans theory to fragment our approach.

We are oppressed not as individuals, not as Zulus, Xhosas, Vendas or Indians. We are oppressed because we are black. We must use that very concept to unite ourselves and to respond as a cohesive group.³⁷

The Black Consciousness Movement was not based on the colour of the oppressed people, but upon their common condition of oppression arising out of apartheid. The Black Consciousness Movement thus represents a dialectical moment in the political and cultural development of the liberation struggle in South Africa.

The spirit of self-assertion has been sinisterised purposely by the white press, because the white people are horrified that the black man, that is the African, coloured and the Indian, are coming together to form a single united block that will confront and demand freedom from white domination.³⁸

Biko took an unequivocal position on the question of white liberal involvement in the struggle against the supremacy by asserting that the interest of blacks and whites were diametrically opposed:

The problem is white racism and it rests squarely on the laps of the white society. The sooner the liberals realize this, the better for us blacks...White liberals must leave blacks to take care of their own business while they concern themselves with the real evil in our society white racism.³⁹

Biko rejected the involvement of white liberals in black politics because of the dominant class’ close association with the oppressive policies of apartheid. The Black Conscious Movement sought to overcome the psychological consequences of oppression and to rediscover the value of black culture and to rewrite black history: a history that has been falsely tarnished by the lies and sophistry of the oppressor. The movement opposed any form of involvement with any institution of apartheid as it re-introduced the notion of African humanism and contested the monopoly of universalism of liberal humanism which was strongly rooted in Western colonialism.⁴⁰

As the Black Conscious Movement challenged the silence and voicelessness that had been imposed on black people, it also challenged the validity of the dominant literate discourse in the construction of meaning and representation for oral communities. The level of resistance was inspired by the production of many plays, art exhibitions, songs, poetry performances and ritualised activities. This was strongly reflected in Siphso Sepamla’s poem “Now is the time”:

Now is the time to know words not to shut out their meaning. Nor to dress them in gaudy clothes.

For there have been words. Thundering like angry elements, simmering like septic wounds or silent as spooks trotting over disused graves.⁴¹

The oral power in these cultural activities was used, while the ephemeral nature of words allowed activists to escape the restrictions of political utterance. They adopted rhetoric epic forms and traditional African oral techniques of repetition, parallelism and ideophones.⁴² In Joussean terms, oral communities used their age-old mnemonic oral style to perform the socio-cultural archive of

³⁶ Buti George Motlhabi, *The Theory and Practice of Black Resistance to Apartheid* (Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1984), 148.

³⁷ Steve Biko, *I write what I like* (London: Penquin, 1988), 113.

³⁸ Michael Chapman, *Soweto Poetry* (Johannesburg: AD Donker, 1982), 109.

³⁹ Steve Biko, *I write what I like* (London: Penquin, 1988), 37.

⁴⁰ Buti George Motlhabi, *The Theory and Practice of Black Resistance to Apartheid* (Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1984), 112.

⁴¹ Siphso Sepamla, *The Blues is you and me* (Johannesburg: AD Donker, 1976), 69.

⁴² Michael Chapman, *Voices from Within: Black Poetry from Southern Africa* (Johannesburg: AD Donker, 2007), 177.

indigenous knowledge. A distinctive characteristic of political and spiritual songs was the emphasis placed on the performance to convey the verbal message. The various components of the performance constituted powerful images which enhanced the political messages and helped to sway the audience. Oral communities shaped the theme of the message throughout the performance, eliciting responses from even massive audiences.

Cries, sounds, whistling and words are different aspects of political resistance. Oral communities cannot do without cries, sounds and whistling when political words are chanted. Oral resistance messages are conveyed by these four devices and in the political mass, powerful spiritual and political cries are commonly uttered. Words accompanied by whistling carry the message to mobilise people, and to unite and strengthen them in their participation. A person outside the performance would not grasp the importance of these sounds, cries and whistles. They carry serious weight in oral communities engaged in these performances, as they carry a complete meaningful message of resistance against oppression. They unleash the spiritual strength of the one who makes them and invite the listeners to participate in the performances.⁴³

Sounds and cries chanted in spiritual and political performance are rhythmic in nature. Cries were previously used whenever Africans gathered for a social event, for example at weddings, birthdays or circumcision rites. When things are going well, the women release rhythmic, harmonious cries to express their happy emotions. One can explain such cries as a way of inviting other members of the community who are not at the gathering. It might be noted that "cries" refers to the oral phrases that constitute the beliefs and customs of Africans and oral communities.⁴⁴ Sounds and cries may seem to have little intrinsic meaning yet they carry a clear message of resistance for those involved in the performance.

Black poetry and freedom songs were much more about the development of the public voice and commitment to social justice. Speech was seen as a ruler and a mechanism of resistance against oppressive social structures. The use of oral tradition privileged the indigenous tradition against the literary tradition that the conservative liberals tried to impose. Not only were the elite Western traditions considered inimical to the interest of the oppressed people in South Africa, but there was a commitment to draw upon the disparaged tradition in which activists affirmed the struggle for liberation.⁴⁵

Pallo Jordan's foreword to A.C. Jordan's *Tales from Southern Africa* helps to clarify the reason liberal protest was unattractive to African writers who had experience of cultural traditions in which poets were central to the lives of their communities and who celebrated their poetic craft not as an elite activity but as part of a shared communal practice:

The ethos of traditional society was enshrined in an oral, religious, and literary tradition through which the community transmitted from generation to generation its customs, values and norms.

The poet and storyteller stood at the center of this tradition, as the community chroniclers, entertainers, and collective conscience. Their contribution to society was considered of great significance.⁴⁶

The public voice of the poet and storyteller suggested that his ideological mission was to articulate the experiences of the oppressed people. "Through the speaker the poet affirms his location within an indigenous oral tradition, celebrating his conjoint roles as orator, historian, seeker and healer. In the local oral tradition, music and poetry are not distinct genres, and this influence is evident in the collections of poets."⁴⁷ From the townships to the ghettos, poetry was performed. Poetry was performed in church halls, on occasions of political funerals of people shot dead by police during political uprisings and political mass meetings. This sort of poetry was very oral. It was designed to be spoken aloud to large gatherings of people.⁴⁸

These oral historians engaged in oral speech, for instance by storytelling, where the entire village and individuals would leave their homes or huts and gather in large groups in order to listen. A

⁴³ Beauty Nonceba Damane, *An Examination of Political sloganeering as a mode of communication and its relationship to the Oral tradition with special reference to South Africa* (Durban: University of Natal, 1994), 30.

⁴⁴ Beauty Nonceba Damane, *An Examination of Political sloganeering as a mode of communication and its relationship to the Oral tradition with special reference to South Africa* (Durban: University of Natal, 1994), 32.

⁴⁵ Priya Narismula, *Locating the Popular-Democratic in South Africa resistance literature in English, 1970-1990* (Durban: University of Durban Westville, 1998), 111.

⁴⁶ A C Jordan, *Tales of Southern Africa* (California: California University Press, 1973), xi.

⁴⁷ Priya Narismula, *Locating the Popular-Democratic in South Africa resistance literature in English, 1970-1990* (Durban: University of Durban Westville, 1998), 111.

⁴⁸ Jeremy Cronin, *Writing against Apartheid* (Grahamstown: Rhodes University Press, 1987), 22.

speaker demands an audience, and many of the spoken words demanded a response. In this way people were brought together and the original idea of an audience was still maintained. Oral resistance was displayed in different forms; for example a chairperson, community leader or minister would lead people in prayers, or militant and political and spiritual songs, with call and response chants. When these songs were chanted everyone engaged in performance moves. The repetition forcefully focused on the key themes and conveyed a sense of urgency and resistance. Repetition not only ensured that the audience not only grasped the message but also responded. The constant repetition helped to keep the key themes in memory.⁴⁹ The proceedings would be energised with more chants from the audience and songs and hymns which undermined the policies and practices of the dominant literate class. In churches, choirs added traditional and religious harmonies.⁵⁰

This oral tradition of resistance in marginalised churches had a solid conservative and orthodox core, consisting of a body of dominantly Christian moral and cultural values. These communities would not have survived without continually coming to terms with the urban industrial context in which they were firmly rooted.

Primarily oral communities incorporate an outstanding variety and diversity of oral forms, a continuum ranging from public reading to meaningful speech, to inchoate and confused sound, to musical expression; encompassing all the nuances of the literate, the verbal oracular and the merely vocal.⁵¹

Primary oral communities thus transmit in clear language formal prayer, sermons, hymns and ritual.

Preaching

Although people in the churches were not literate they had an oral knowledge of the Bible or the Word.⁵² The reading of the biblical text gives way to sermon and witnessing, in which an effort is made to spell out a coherent message, or to draw lessons from experience which has meaningful import for practical living. Preaching is preceded by a prolonged, laboured stumbling and repetitive reading of a short biblical extract. The written text and speech are situationally associated. The preacher is not led by or bound by a text; he is led by the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit is not confined to the written text. All the written text does is to open the door to the Spirit. Once the written text is revealed and proclaimed, the preacher is imbued with the Spirit and this explains the style of oral expression in the sermon.

The speaker impulsively leaps from one idea to another in a manner which defies Western logic, and the power of the Spirit comes in great surges, expressed in a high-pitched shouting tone, constantly climaxing and ebbing. These surges of energy evoke physical and verbal responses from the audience, of shuddering and yelping, expressions of an intense state of fervour and enthusiasm which is the human complement of the Spirit ascending among them.⁵³

Priest-like prophets of the Old Testament would preach against the evils of the ideology of apartheid in the trains along the Cape Flats, buses and on the street plains in these local communities. Religious services came to a standstill because of prophetic announcements, oral testimonies, prayers, hymns and spiritual dancing that reflected their struggles and fears of oppression.

Song

The singing styles of oral communities included introspective hymnal harmonies of Wesleyan origin mixed with mild forms of call and response styles. From the pious swaying, their moves would break into some shuffling steps in the more joyous gospel moments.⁵⁴ Hymns serve a more specific and

⁴⁹ Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 401.

⁵⁰ Ari Sitas, The voice and gesture in South Africa's revolution: a study of worker gatherings and Performance-Genres, *The international Annual of Oral History* ed., Ronald Grele (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1990), 96.

⁵¹ James Kiernan, A thriving tradition in a modern context: Patterns of oral expression in Zionist discourse, ed., Edgard Sieneart (Durban: University of Natal Oral and Documentation and Research Centre, 1991), 389.

⁵² Itumeleng Mosala, Race, Class, Gender and Gender as hermeneutical factors in the African Independent Churches, *Semeia* 73 (1996), 43-47.

⁵³ James Kiernan, A thriving tradition in a modern context: Patterns of oral expression in Zionist discourse, ed., Edgard Sieneart (Durban: University of Natal Oral and Documentation and Research Centre, 1991), 391.

⁵⁴ Ari Sitas, The voice and gesture in South Africa's revolution: a study of worker gatherings and Performance-Genres, *The international Annual of Oral History* ed., Ronald Grele (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1990), 101.

instrumental purpose as an activity within oral communities. This may be summed up by saying that the incidence of musical oral form functions to stitch the various other parts of a resistance meeting together into a single unbroken discourse. Songs and hymns are employed to integrate the meeting into a continuous flow of oral discourse, and it affords the congregation some degree of control over what transpires in the course of public speaking. There can be no speech without song.⁵⁵

Jousse reminds us that:

the laws were sung (were rhythmically recited) in order not to be forgotten as they are still sung today among the Agathyrse.⁵⁶

Rhythm is the pattern and movement of words uttered. Rhythm is a basic element of political slogans. Jousse (1997) describes these as rhythmic schemas. When these political and spiritual songs are chanted and the hands move high up and down with a clenched fist, foot tapping, marching and dancing – all these balances complement what is released verbally. However, in performance the words are chanted in such a way to accompany the gestures as it acquires a rhythmic dimension that is forceful and striking, enhancing the message conveyed verbally.⁵⁷

Prayer

It seems at many occasions that the physical spiritual presence of *Logos* was in the midst of these marginalised spiritual communities. Prayers were uttered extemporaneously as there was an unison among the congregants as they started thanking the Almighty God for social and political change in advance. The leader of the congregation was fairly free and spontaneous in style. The speaker invoked the power of the deity (Father). The style of delivery was forceful and declamatory as the speaker evoked the living presence of the Spirit in order to bring an end to social injustice and oppression (Kiernan 1991:390). Another forceful mechanism of resistance was orality and the power of ritual which can be seen as transformative in essence.

Ritual

I see no reason why we should not view ourselves as ritualising animals.⁵⁸

Apart from the loss of power in our rituals, there is still a great need among oral communities to ritualise. Ritualisation is not a process that develops by itself - it needs a body. The body has always been important in religious experiences for oral communities. Ritual and the body cannot be separated because they serve as a deep inner expression of symbolic action and attitude. Only when the body embraces the act of ritualisation can it experience a true sense of power and resistance. Ritual symbolism in oral communities is able to draw on the simplest intense sensory experience, (hearing, seeing, feeling, touching and smelling) which serves as a social system of communication.⁵⁹

The Eucharist as ritual thus became a symbol of unity in destroying the social boundaries of racial segregation. In contrast to the oppressive social context, “We are one at the Lord’s table irrespective of race, colour, and social status,” the spoken authority of the Word thus provided a sense of belonging, an identity for those under the forces of oppression as God has always been on the side of the poor and oppressed. In the Eucharist, the old oppressive social universe was challenged and even demolished as the emblems (bread and wine) became powerful instruments in building oral communities.⁶⁰ In this situation the power of ritual challenged the existing status quo and forced the old oppressive social universe to disintegrate or fuse since the power of ritual creates new norms and values in order to develop unity, homogeneity, equality and social justice in oral communities. The ideological role of the whole act of the Eucharist lay in the power of the Logos which formed a framework of solidarity for marginalised communities.

Paul expatiates on this idea in Ephesians (2v12-16) in which the Gentiles become part of the covenant of God through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. Christ’s body as an act of ritual destroys the barrier or the dividing wall of hostility (racism) through his blood (crucifixion) in order to create a

⁵⁵ James Kiernan, *A thriving tradition in a modern context: Patterns of oral expression in Zionist discourse*, ed., Edgard Sieneart (Durban: University of Natal Oral and Documentation and Research Centre, 1991), 392.

⁵⁶ Marcel Jousse, *Anthropology of Geste and Rhythm* ed., Edgard Sieneart (Durban: University of Natal, Centre for Oral Studies, 1997), 136.

⁵⁷ Marcel Jousse, *Oral Style* (New York: Garland, 1997), 127.

⁵⁸ Ronal Grimes, *Beginning in Ritual Studies* (Washington: University Press of America, 1982), 7.

⁵⁹ Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explanations of Cosmology* (New York: Pantheon, 1970), 65.

⁶⁰ Tom Driver, *The Magic of Ritual* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 158.

new community of the Spirit which is rooted and granted in Him. The ideological pole changes from the Torah (written Law) to faith in Jesus Christ. A new community of the Spirit was thus formed where there is no Jew or Gentile (black or white) but which is rooted in the incarnate reality of the living Logos. We cannot appreciate the power of ritual unless we see its usefulness to those in need, especially those who have little or no social power, and who are victims of oppression and social injustices. In the apartheid era, ritual (for instance initiation rites, eucharist, baptism and circumcision rites) became a powerful instrument of resistance against oppression and social injustice.

Maybe this was not openly displayed by oral communities because these traditional rituals were used to dismantle social injustice and destroy oppressive social universes as they became transformative instruments and symbols of resistance to marginalised communities. Western civilisation showed an antipathy to traditional ritual practices as they failed to see the power of ritual and its ability to transform communities and their existing social structures.⁶¹ Ritual belongs to those that ritualise. Apart from the symbolism in ritual it cannot be separated from human beings.

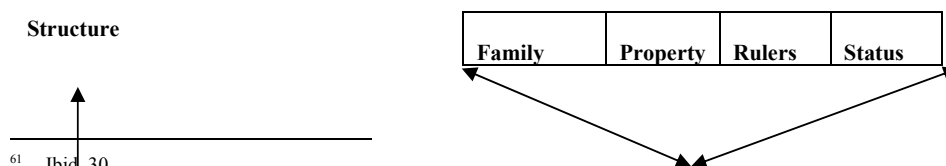
For Turner (1969) ritual is the main component in the process of social change. We fail to experience the power of ritual if we deny the reality that ritual can change the status quo or re-ordering of the existing social universe. For Driver a world that is seen by magic or spirit is a world that is ritually ordered, a world in which society is fused in a single vision which enables transformation.⁶² This view concurs with that of Grime, who also believes that ritual is magical and can be related to our own cultures.⁶³

The power of ritual changes and transforms as the ritual process takes on a new meaning. Ritual is not rigid or stereotyped but dynamic and powerful. This power is evident through the interrelations of symbols, time, space, body and social structures which make the oral performance efficient and effective. For us to experience the power of ritual we need to leave our prejudices and bias behind, and which at times calls us to conform to certain cultural and religious values of those who engage in ritualisation. The power of ritual thus touches our lives and even our bodies.

Douglas notes that ritual co-ordinates the body and brain in a mnemonic action. According to her, there are some things we cannot experience without ritual because it creates control, undoes what has been done, and at the same time looks like as if it never happened. Ritual “makes visible signs of internal states”. Its symbols only have an effect on oral communities as long as they have confidence in it because symbols have the power to work changes.⁶⁴ This is seen in the act of the ritual baptism, be it full immersion or sprinkling. The moment the ritual is performed the space, symbols and time take on a whole new meaning.

Bell (1989), who presents two approaches of change, stresses that ritual is viewed as a mechanism of continuity as it resists forces that can destroy the fabric of the community like social injustice and oppression. An example of this is how the traditional African practices (e.g. *Untagati* or *Sangoma*) were used in order to denounce Western influence of meaning through the throwing of the bones and transcendental communication (speech acts) with the gods and the ancestors. Oral communities maintain traditional African practices and rituals but at the same time resist modern Western technology and literary influence and practices by enhancing traditional practices and activities through ritual, which shows a continuity of oral history and traditional values as they show a continuity of communities.⁶⁵ Secondly, Bell (1989) believes that rituals in themselves change. Such changes remain dynamic, one example being the difference between the Eucharistic meal and the regular meal.

The Eucharistic meal takes on a new symbolic meaning as it possesses the power to perform miracles – bodily, socially and psychologically. Turner more explicitly shows how such changes take place as he bases his theory on Arnold van Gennep’s understanding of liminality. This is illustrated in the diagram below as it describes the functionalism of Turner’s approach in relation to the transformation in the whole process:



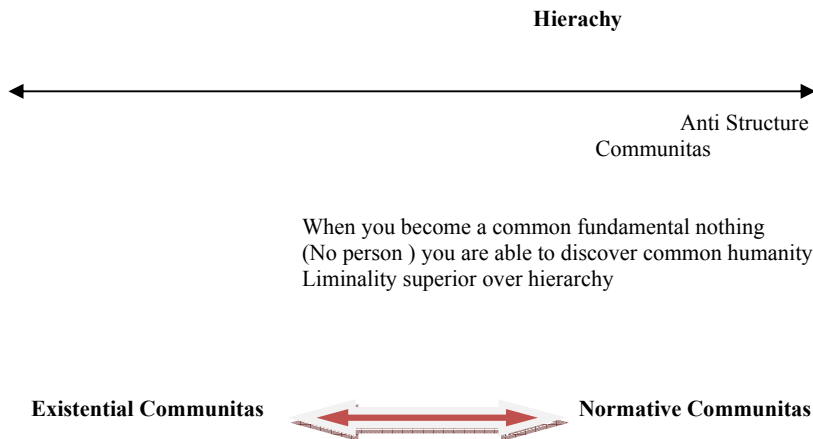
⁶¹ Ibid, 30.

⁶² Ibid, 168.

⁶³ Ronald Grimes, *Beginning in Ritual Studies* (Washington: University Press of America, 1982), 45.

⁶⁴ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (New York: Pantheon, 1966), 64-70.

⁶⁵ Catherine Bell, “Ritual Change and Changing Rituals” (New York: Pantheon, 1989), 34.



This is seen in the initiation rite of the neophyte in the Ndembu ritual process. Turner divides the whole process into three phases, e.g. separation, liminality and aggregation. The neophyte is separated from the social structures. He is then stripped of his identity and social status. In the liminal stage the transformation takes place. This distinctively separates the neophyte from other people in the community. The liminal stage is a period of social ambiguity, but it is also a time of physical and social reconstruction of status and identity. In the aggregational stage or period we see status reversal as the neophyte becomes part of the larger community in order to perform or take up his role. In this period he is in a stable state by virtue of rights and obligation. The initiated is expected to behave according to customary norms and ethical standards.⁶⁶

According to Bell (1989), Douglas (1966,1982) and Turner (1969), ritual has the power to transform culture and at the same time has the ability to challenge the status quo. In order to experience the deep transformative power of ritual, there needs to be a deep sense of seriousness on the part of those that are ritualised. This must not just be seen in our traditional African practices of (initiation, purity rites, isilumo, etc.), but its transformative power must be experienced and felt in our local churches too, as during the Sunday morning liturgy. The Eucharist and baptism bring life and transformation to our oral communities. Rituals contains power directly or indirectly as they call for sincerity and commitment of our being to conform to its transformative powers.

The power of ritual belongs to those that are ritualised. Living in a democratic era in South Africa we might think that ritual is not necessary, but the time has come to explore the reality of such power. Ritual is an integral part of us. Ritual cannot be captured in one simple theory and neither can we explain how symbols work or function by thinking or writing about them. Humans are ritual animals, therefore the cry from the core of our beingness to experience the power of ritual. The marginalised, who have no power or rights – economically, politically or socially – find hope and vindication in the power of ritual. Ritual possesses power which can be experienced in our bodies and our community. Those that have embodied it experience a deep sense of transformation. The Logos thus became a means of strengthening primarily oral cultures in their quest for social and political liberation. The voices, sounds, and gestures of primarily oral communities will continue as long as the South African cultural revolution gets people to gather in different ways.⁶⁷

Conclusion

Derrida's critique of logocentrism in privileging writing over and against speech can be regarded as a new discourse in understanding the binary opposition in the biblical narrative text of John 1v1. It seems that third-world counterparts can finally step out of the dominant discourse of Western interpretive interest which has shaped their cultural beliefs and social reality. Derrida's antithesis of the Logos or transcendental signifier can be regarded as negative theology and nihilistic in essence. An end to

⁶⁶ Victor Turner. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti Structure* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1969), 94.

⁶⁷ Sitas, A. The voice and gesture in South Africa's revolution: a study of worker gatherings and Performance-Genres, *The international Annual of Oral History* ed., Ronald Grele (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1990), 103.

metaphysics of presence or *Logos* can have dangerous effects on oral communities and the socially created “other”, especially in the South African context. Derrida’s critique can be regarded as language against language or ideology opposing ideology, enlightenment over and against deconstruction. Derrida’s philosophy perpetuates idealism and privileges Western interpretive interest which is inherently humanistic over and against *the communitas* (Latin) of oral cultures. For many hermeneuts, Derrida’s method of deconstruction has finally produced a liberating hermeneutic especially for those from developing countries, and in turn has strengthened the epistemological foundation of the enlightenment and secured the power of the written text over speech as a transcendental signifier rooted in the eternal Logos outside the realm of objectivity whose very essence is oral or metaphysics of presence.

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