

prejudices are multi-generational and thus reparation, that is to restore as far as possible the relations, also has to be multi-generational.

Narrative voice and multi-lingualism

Initially I thought I would use a first person narration since it could provide the reader with intimate emotional and psychological insights. But because of the importance of the plot, the movement among four characters and two landscapes as well as the long-time lapses in between, it became too cumbersome for a first person narrative to convey, so the third person narration seemed more appropriate for fluid transitions among complex characters.

But first let me deal with the “style” I am using. I have self-published several books in isiXhosa (*Ubuntu Bubomi, Liduduma Lidlule, Sekunjalo, Yinto Engekhooyo Leyo, Ndisinde Cebetshu, Ungowam,*) – it is therefore the language of my creativity. The characters of this novel are themselves isiXhosa with strong rural roots, so I had to maintain the thumbprint of the isiXhosa way of phrasing. African languages have a literal and figurative meaning. For example, the word *ndiyazidla* literally mean “I eat myself”, but figuratively means “I am proud”; *letlokoa* literally means “straw” but figuratively means “vanity”; *Pelu ea ithatha* literally means “my heart loves itself” but figuratively means: I am happy. For these isiXhosa voices I use mostly the literal meaning of the words, phrases and idioms – in other words, the reader can access Xhosa-usual through English unusual. I also remain faithful to isiXhosa’s way of giving „dead“ things agency e.g. “the dung breathes”. Dung is linked to cattle, and cattle are linked to the ancestors, so in a way it is quite normal“ for it to “breathe”.

Professor Russell Kaschula suggests in his “The Oppression of IsiXhosa Literature and the Irony of Transformation” (2008) that South Africa’s multilingualism should be seen, first and

foremost, as a, “resource rather than a problem”, and I share his viewpoint. The novel is written in English but the rural characters live with a much more vivid idiomatic phrasing than the mother and her husband in the township who often brings in Afrikaans words and phrases to express the individuality of their background among coloureds and Afrikaners.

For me the hardest work was to find language for rural nature. I grew up in Gugulethu, in a congested environment, separated from nature. Even though it was a challenge, my research in the rural areas saw how isiXhosa elders from the Eastern Cape opened up a wealth of birds and other animals, myths, stories and rituals. By using the five senses and a representation of daily rituals and living landscapes of rural and township communities, I tried to create a palpable and powerful sense of place for the reader.

The writing of the text has also been influenced by the poetry module I took. As I wrote I found rhythm in the voices of my characters. Though the voice of the text is rhythmic and lyrical, it differs from character to character: the nature laden, sharp wisdom of the grandmother, the younger girl busy with her clothes and boyfriends, while learning to cultivate nature from her grandmother, the anxiety ridden thoughts of the mother, the sad futile thoughts of the cuckolded husband who probably knows what is happening, but the money keeps them respectively alive.

Literature Review

Whilst writing, *I am not a Colour*, two important novels informed my work. One was Toni Morrison’s novella, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), inspired by the fact that one of Morrison’s childhood friends wanted to have blue eyes. The little black girl became obsessed with how having blue eyes could change her life:

The Bluest Eye was my effort to say something about that; to say something about why she had not, or possibly ever would have, the experience of what she possessed, also why she prayed for so radical an alteration. Implicit in her desire was racial self-loathing. And twenty years later I was still wondering about how one learns that. Who told her? Who made her feel that it was better to be a freak than what she was? Who had looked at her and found her so wanting, so small a weight on a beauty scale. The novel pecks away at the gaze that condemned her.

(Epilogue in *The Bluest Eye*, 211)

My first reaction to this book was a sense of sadness that the child's view of herself is influenced by a force that persuades her to see beauty through the eyes of a white person and a white aesthetic. Being dark skinned and with dark eyes, Pocola can never attain the "ideal look" and consequently literally and symbolically comes to embody its opposite – "ugliness". Toni Morrison's novella captures the self-loathing and crisis of identity that results.

My text also deals with questions of aesthetic, identity and racial acceptance. However in it the black girl possesses blue eyes but she is despised for it. Within a South African, black aesthetic context, girls in particular are often made to feel inadequate and have a sense of self-loathing, this time because they do not meet the isiXhosa ideal of racial "purity".

Morrison's novella also highlights the secrecy, and yet simultaneous shaming that often surrounds the sexual abuse of girls and young women. She does this by making use of colloquial African-American phrases which indicate that a terrible and taboo secret is about to be revealed:

The opening phrase of the first sentence, "Quiet as it's kept," had several attractions for me. First it was familiar phrase, familiar to me as a child listening to adults, to black women conversing with one another, telling a story, an anecdote, gossip about someone or event within the circle,

the family, the neighbourhood. The words are conspiratorial, “Shh, don’t tell anyone else,” No one is allowed to know this.” (212) 7

My text interrogates the complicity of female members of the community who blame the woman with a mixed race child as if she had any choice working as a domestic worker and supporting two families with her income.

The other novel that informed mine is Zakes Mda’s *The Madonna of Excelsior* (2002) – especially as there is not much fiction that explores the sexual exploitation of those moving from the rural areas into city townships and suburbs during the Apartheid years. Mda achieves a first-person narrative voice with a combination of gravity, acuity, humour and scope. He addresses the taboo of a “mixed-race” child born into a black community:

The midwives who attended to Niki were not astonished either. Of late they had been helping quite a few black women from Mahlatswetsa Location and the neighbouring farms, who had been giving birth to almost white babies. Or to “coloured babies”, as they were called. As if they were polychromatic. Or as if everyone else in Mahlatswetsa was trans-parent. Some barn women were already cuddling their own coloured offspring, while others stomach were expanding by day. It was a bursting of forbidden sluices that we were all talking about in *Excelsior*. (59)

Lust and loathing are the key themes in *Madonna*. Women in this narrative are lessened and projected as if they have no voice but seem to be willingly entangled in the circle of lust as, “the barn women”. The excerpt suggests that the midwives were accustomed to the reality of “coloured” or “mixed-race” babies delivered by black women in Mahlatswetsa Location.

Again, my text differs in the sense that it explores not only the lives of the offspring of the “barn women” living in communities in South Africa, but also the complexity of the relationship

between the domestic worker and Baas. Initially I treated the relationship between Nowa's mother and her employer Kobus, as rape, but whilst writing I found myself exploring the question of what if the relationship became more than that? What happens when two people are attracted to each other but racial prejudices are still rampant – especially in the white community. Does every partner have to keep their marriage mate to remain respectable middle class people? And what happens when those called *lawundini*, or *amalahle*, want to reconcile with their white fathers and vice versa? So in a way the story wrote itself through my own curiosity. 8

My text also differs from the Mda novel in other ways. Niki and her friends in *Madonna*, seem to have no sense of integrity or inner self and seem only engaged in lust. My character however, reclaims her self-worth within a relationship that has multiple emotions – among them perhaps love.



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Short Summary of Creative Process

It is my first experience to write in English. It has been difficult at times, especially to express a thought or sentence in the ways that I want. So I collided with the English grammar and initially began by writing long sentences. Gently my supervisor brought that to my attention and I learnt to shorten sentences and be aware of repetitive tones.

In the beginning I focused only on the psychological context of separation, oppression and re-traumatization of those not fitting the colour coded lenses of the perpetrators. To weave such a plot had been challenging. But the more I wrote, the more I connected to the complexities of rejection, abandonment, guilt and loss and the depth of my emotional connection surprised. The writing process had truly been transformative. I have learnt much - especially during the editing

stages. Looking into my file I see 14 drafts and I know: draft after draft, my writing skill sharpened. Draft after draft, the characters in my novel changed my life.

This creative work is a novella of approximately 20 000 words. Initially I thought I would write only five chapters for the purposes of my degree. But once I started to write I felt creatively compelled to write several more chapters. I am truly grateful to my supervisors for guiding me back to focus on each character's uniqueness and then experience the thrill of weaving each into the fabric of a much more contained narrative.

Conclusion

The writing of the novel entitled, *I am not a Colour*, has been a new, tough but enjoyable process. All my life I have been able to write books in isiXhosa, but this time I didn't know where to start. I spent much time trying to get the voice of the narrative. I could not connect with the first person voice. Initially I read a variety of novels, some by local writers and others by writers from abroad. Even though I appreciate their authenticity, I somehow failed to connect with the literary style. I decided to try to develop a voice that would honour the musicality of isiXhosa and its figurative lyricism as an honouring of authentic voice in the novel, although I quickly learnt that to the English ear it may sound too florid! So I tried to keep tight control by pruning diligently as an acknowledgement of clashing literary aesthetics. I hope to have succeeded in maintaining the necessary fine balance. I have to confess though, I thoroughly enjoyed myself. As a teacher I lived for the stolen moments in which I could return to my fiction. I am grateful for the creative writing modules I have completed. The invaluable insight and techniques I attained have been inspirational in my craft. I hope that some of this joy will spill over to the reader.

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I, Madoda Gewadi, certify that this portfolio is my own work. I understand what plagiarism is and I have used quotations and references to fully acknowledge the words and ideas of others.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Madoda Gewadi', is written over a faint, large watermark of the same name. The signature is fluid and cursive.