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Shadow Histories

Transculturation and Narrative in Afrikaans

1 Introduction

Other than the name of this special issue might suggest, the present collection of articles is not meant as a revisionist perspective on earlier, established versions of the history of language and literature in Afrikaans. Its aim is, however, closely related, and takes its cue from the title of the symposium 'Bredie van stories: herinnering en geschiedenis in recente Afrikaanse literatuur' organised in the context of the 'Week van de Afrikaanse roman', held at Leiden University in October 2014. As the use of the word 'bredie'¹ suggests, storytelling is approached as the result of stewing various different ingredients. As such, the bredie, itself a dish that combines multiple culinary traditions like Dutch and Cape Malay cooking, might serve as a good example of the idea of transculturation as a profound and inevitable mixing of voices, stories and experiences, which is the focus of this special issue. In other words, the use of history in the title of this issue does not denote a metanarrative of history, but points towards the representations of moments of intimate contact and violent clashes that form our perspectives on history in Afrikaans.

As Leon de Kock persuasively argues in his discussion of the status of South African literary history in the 1990s and early 2000s, many scholars have developed a suspicion of metanarratives like the archive, because it is often paired with a wish to make previously silenced voices heard. Although the tracing of the archive is, following Foucault, crucial to critical approaches that aim to shed light on how histories are formed, de Kock emphasises that the 'naming of parts' in any kind of revisionist project is not necessarily possible, desirable or even feasible. De Kock names three reasons for this, the first being that signs are 'contingent, culturally embedded, historically influenced and generally quite slippery' (2005: 6). Apart from this poststructuralist legacy, however, it is also the case that, as Hayden White has shown, historical narratives cannot 'escape the condition of their own tropology' (2005: 6). Taken together, these points flow into de Kock's final claim about the importance of processes of cognition, namely that any kind of interpretation is inevitably based on the perceiver's guess of how different data are *imagined* to relate (2005: 7). Any literary history, according to De Kock, thus becomes 'a play of the precise and the imprecise, of the provisional datum at hand and the imagined possibilities of its working interrelations, its inner secrets' (2005: 7).

1 Bredie is a South African stew. The Oxford English dictionary describes it as 'a traditional southern African dish consisting of a stew of meat (typically mutton) and vegetables'. The etymology is also of interest in this context of transculturation, since the word is said to be borrowed from the Indo-Portuguese Creole word *bredos*, which means 'edible greens' and goes back to the Portuguese plural of *brede*: 'any of several species of amaranth eaten for its greens, as *Amaranthus blitum*' (Merriam Webster).

The aim here is precisely to shed light on these imagined possibilities of literary histories' working relations by foregrounding and analysing texts and cultural phenomena that may help to look anew at the connections and imaginations at work in the South African cultural field. In doing so, this issue explores the relation between literary form and the concept of transculturation from various standpoints. The fact that it does so from the perspective of Afrikaans literary and cultural phenomena, is, on the one hand, a practical delimitation of what Jansen calls 'the cultural archive' later in this issue. On the other hand, however, this delimitation itself already foregrounds the extent of clashing and mixing that is at the origin of any delimited artificially collection of texts, people or events.

The special issue includes approaches that explore the questions present day interpreters of literature and culture can ask of the functions and effects of the 'archive' of South African texts (Jansen, Krog); it offers perspectives on how transculturation takes place, on the different narrative strands and traditions that can be discerned in specific cultural phenomena and representations (Kapp); it offers reflections on how to deal with these often violent spaces of transculturation, which might produce feelings of productive nostalgia (Robbe); and finally also posits this violence itself as a possible avenue of productive and imaginative thought (Roux & Nortje; Stuit). Together, the contributions to this issue bring to the fore a perspective on transculturation that is itself multiple and pinpoints its productive aspects.

2 Transculturation and Thinking Resistance to Cultural Domination

Used broadly in postcolonial literary studies (Jobs & Mackenthun 2013: 8), transculturation in the narrow sense refers to Ortiz' description of the effects of displacement on the 'steady human stream' of immigrants brought to Cuba under the auspices of Spanish colonialism:

[E]ach of them torn from his native moorings, faced with the problem of disadjustment and readjustment, of deculturation and acculturation – in a word, of transculturation (Ortiz 1995: 98).

Transculturation thus allows for a recognition of the losses and disenfranchising experiences of different cultures coming together, but also involves the 'consequent creation of new cultural phenomena' (Ortiz 1995: 103). As the contributions to this issue will also show, transculturation is thus a double process of loss and gain. As such, it is a particularly apt term for understanding the relation between the master narratives of a dominant culture and more marginalized ones, as it foregrounds the extremely particular experience of the effects of these master narratives on cultural change. Transculturation brings to the fore, so Fernando Coronil explains in his introduction to Fernando Ortiz' *Cuban Counterpoint*, how the constitution of the modern world 'has entailed the clash and disarticulation of peoples and civilizations together with the production of images of integrated cultures, bounded identities, and inexorable progress' (Ortiz 1995: xiii).

By reading the term in this fashion, Coronil addresses two important aspects of transculturation. Firstly, he places the experience of transculturation at the heart

of the construction of modernity, usefully broadening the concept beyond a usage in specific cultural settings without losing sight of cultural disarticulation and disenfranchisement. Secondly, his reading already suggests that any straightforward emphasis on neoculturation, though a decidedly emancipative gesture on the part of Ortiz, is a much more complex issue than the oft quoted and schematic rendition of the three aspects of transculturation leads one to believe. In their analysis of the opera *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha*, for instance, James Davies and Lindiwe Dovey suggest that Ortiz' own championing of new transcultural processes in Cuban popular culture is indeed very useful, but also potentially problematic. Especially with regard to Afro-Cuban musical traditions, Ortiz is said to 'at once advocate for and then racialize Afro-Cuban music' in terms of its supposed sensuality, devilry or filth (Davies & Dovey 2010: 48). Similarly, Davies and Dovey point out, Ortiz keeps in place a rigid distinction between 'high' and 'low' culture by recognizing the improvisatory and democratic potential of Afro-Cuban music in influencing conservatory trained musicians.

In Mary Louise Pratt's use of transculturation, a similar problem arises in the introduction to her renowned study *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992). There, Pratt explains that the use of the term transculturation in the title of her book reflects her efforts to avoid 'reproducing the dynamics of possession and innocence' (Pratt 2003: 6) that she analyses in travel writing. Pratt then proceeds to describe transculturation as follows:

Ethnographers have used this term to describe how subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture. While subjugated peoples cannot readily control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own, and what they use it for. Transculturation is a phenomenon of the contact zone (Pratt 2003: 6).

Indeed, in regarding what she fruitfully calls the contact zone from the perspective of transculturation, Pratt opens up an important strand of research on exactly how this contact takes place in colonial settings. However, in resorting to an investigation of the genre of travel writing, Pratt is unable to leave open a significant perspective taking place outside her rather rigid distinction between 'metropolitan cultures' and 'subjugated peoples' as evidenced in the above passage. Her questions in *Imperial Eyes* thus seem geared towards researching how 'metropolitan' cultures are absorbed by others in the contact zone, but leaves unaddressed 'that the centre was *unable* to recognize the materials from the periphery as constituting Knowledge' (Parry 2004: 9, see also Jobs & Mackenthun 2013: 11). As Benita Parry rightfully argues, Pratt's use of the term implies a 'solipsistic notion' of transculturation that seems to foreclose analyses of the double effect of transculturation as formulated by Ortiz (2004: 9). A transculturation that is about more than absorbing enforced cultural values, and also entails relinquishing the loss of one's own cultural moorings in favour of unknown and new cultural forms, remains out of sight.

Yet, Parry's critique on Pratt is perhaps overly harsh, especially when considering Pratt's explicit emphasis in the quote given above on the *use* of absorbed cultural material by subjugated peoples. As Kwame Anthony Appiah has also argued in his refutation of the point of view that globalisation will inevitably lead to cultural homogenisation:

Talk of cultural imperialism structuring the consciousness of those in the periphery treats [people] as *tabula rasae* on which global capitalism's moving finger writes its message, leaving behind another homogenized consumer as it moves on. It is deeply condescending, and it isn't true (Appiah 2004: 111).

The fact that Pratt resorts to the phrase 'what they use it for', from this perspective thus also opens up the possibility of thinking a strategic transculturation, even if the choice for travel writing tends to dictate a metropolitan perspective in Pratt's own close readings.

A possible way of thinking through the idea of strategic transculturation comes to the fore in Walter Mignolo's and Freya Schiwy's description of transculturation, where they provide an approach that is, perhaps, more 'true' to Ortiz' emancipatory vision. In their description of the Zapatista movement, Mignolo and Schiwy insist on an elaboration of the concept of transculturation to those processes that are still a result of 'colonial difference', but do not necessarily entail an exchange between the 'territorial internal domain of empires' and the often passively regarded periphery (Mignolo & Schiwy 2007: 28). Instead, they argue, the analytical gaze of transculturation and translation should be directed at those instances structured by the contact between groups who are disenfranchised and placed in the periphery, even if crucial differences in relation to the presumed centre still exist. The transcultural processes occurring between groups of this kind (for instance, between people speaking Tojolabal and Aymara in the Mexican context of the Zapatista movement) would allow for a more sustained analysis and critique of the ways in which peripheries relate to presumed centres of cultural domination.

Although potentially very productive for analysing the lived experiences of transculturation, the proposed emancipation of the peripheral view that Mignolo and Schiwy seem to hint at is still firmly positioned within the framework of what they insist on calling colonial difference. Colonial difference, here, refers to the unequal effects of translation in colonising gestures, most clearly defined in what Mignolo and Schiwy (2007: 15) call 'the translation machine', by which they mean the twin colonial occupations of writing grammars of indigenous languages and consequently using those translations for conversion purposes. It remains to be seen, however, to what extent a decolonisation of cosmologies that deviate from the Western perspective, even if these cosmologies consist of transcultural perspectives shared between groups located in the periphery, is useful in thinking about cultural change that is not based on yet another system of binary differentiation.

An important contrast to this mode of thought is formed by Bhabha's work on hybridity and cultural translation, which allows for a positive emphasis on the neocultural aspects of transculturation without losing sight of the 'master narratives' of cultural domination in which it takes place. The implicit notion of strategy in Bhabha's work, thus provides possible ways of thinking about 'how newness enters the world' (Bhabha 2004). In *The Location of Culture*, in his chapter about dissemination, Bhabha provides the idea of the supplement as a concrete way in which cultural hybridity is, in fact, located in *writing*. This location is, however, not the result of a simple mixing of binaries or of a straightforward in-

introduction of multiple perspectives. Rather, it is a strategic *placing* of various perspectives that are different from those at the centre of the dominant cultural master narrative. Bhabha gives the useful example of the supplementary question in British parliamentary procedures, where the supplementary question is attached to the order paper of the minister's response:

Coming 'after' the original, or in 'addition to' it, gives the supplementary question the advantage of introducing a sense of 'secondariness' or belatedness into the structure of the original demand. The supplementary strategy suggests that adding 'to' need not 'add up' but may disturb the calculation (Bhabha 2004: 222).

So even if the present writing comes later in time, it may still change the original structure of the cultural formation it is asking questions about. As Bhabha's formulation suggests, the supplement is not necessarily a way of making the original narrative more complete, but rather to question and disturb the ways in which dominant cultural narratives work to create an illusory sense of origin and wholeness, as was also suggested by Coronil's reading of transculturation as an important drive in the construction of modernity given above. In this way, Bhabha's treatment of the Derridean notion of the supplement becomes a powerful way of thinking through the possibilities of offering a transcultural moment at the start of any question, rather than inscribing it afterwards, when the stakes are already set.

3 Transculturation and Narrative in Afrikaans

In contemporary South African critical and cultural discourses such an exploration of supplementary perspectives is already under way. Crucially, it takes place as an exploration of transculturation in terms of inclusivity, rather than in binary terms. This does not mean, however, that radical difference needs to be eliminated or cannot be respected. Chielozone Eze (2015), for instance, discerns a clear trend towards what he calls 'transcultural affinity' in contemporary South African public discourse. Drawing on work by people like Tutu, Comaroff and Comaroff, Ramose, Ndebele, Mbembe, Krog, and Nutall, Eze aims to put the spotlight on a current of thought that seeks to address transcultural processes in terms of affinity and common ground. In order to take on board this different worldview, Eze refers to Welsh' definition of transculturation:

[T]he concept of transculturality aims for [a] multi-meshed and inclusive, not separatist and exclusive, understanding of culture. It intends a culture and society whose pragmatic feats exist not in delimitation, but in the ability to link and undergo transition (Welsh qtd. in Eze 2015: 219).

This conception posits transculturality not as a way to acknowledge the loss of cultural agency in favour of new cultural dispositions, but rather emphasises its ethical potential. Transcultural affinity, Eze argues, 'instantiates in human relations what is already evident in culture', namely that any cultural matrix is always already transcultural in nature. In South Africa, especially, this is reflected in a sustained body of writing seeking to 'break down artificial boundaries created by centuries of racist [and] classicist ideologies' (Eze 2015: 219).

As Sarah Nuttall points out, however, breaking down the boundaries of the divisions of the past is, if indeed a crucial step, not enough. Entanglement, for Nuttall, represents a way of working with 'difference and sameness but also with their limits, their predicaments, their moments of complication' (Nuttall 2009: 1). Herein, entanglement seeks to acknowledge the possibilities and limits of both difference *and* sameness. From the perspective of transculturation, then, entanglement offers ways of reading the contact zone that offer new perspectives on the South African public sphere, but also to 'properly transnational conversations' (Nuttall 2009: 11). As Nuttall suggests, this conversation has everything to do with making room for talking about 'human enfoldedness' as a 'utopian horizon' without losing sight of 'what is going on' (Nuttall 2009: 1, 11).

This special issue is meant to place emphasis on the role of literary form and narrative in moments of transcultural contact and affinity as described by Eze and theorized by Nuttall. All contributions, although in different ways, deal with the relationship between transculturation and narrative in an attempt to explore how language use and storytelling determine the ways in which cultures, groups and individuals relate to each other. In this sense, the issue tries to 'supplement' Afrikaans literary and cultural history in terms of Bhabha, rather to create a revisionist perspective. In offering analyses of various representations of historically grounded and culturally specific transcultural processes in Afrikaans literature, this issue seeks to provide what could be called, in the Dutch context, an unexpected prism on and supplement to the ways in which transculturation can be thought, both in and outside South Africa.

The issue opens with Ena Jansen's perspective on the dramatic change taking place after 1994 in the representation of domestic workers in South African literature. As Jansen shows, domestic workers are no longer represented as almost ghostly figures that disappeared to the background as soon as the duties they were hired to perform were fulfilled. Instead, they step out of the shadow of history in powerful and productive ways, with their own status, autonomy and a striking physical presence and materiality. In her article, Jansen explores a number of texts in which the position of domestic workers is further explored from the perspective of their role as intermediaries between the city, the townships and the rural. In this investigation, the literary representations under discussion offer a widely recognizable and familiar, yet unexpected perspective on 'maid and madam' situations. Jansen discusses the mutual influence, the entanglement, if you will, between domestic workers and the families for whom they worked, and, as such, makes visible a deeply divisive, but transcultured space at the heart of South African everyday life, as well as its literary and cultural archive.

Antjie Krog investigates a very specific archive consisting of a number of affidavits by Afrikaner women who were sexually assaulted and raped by the British forces during the South African War. Krog suggests how after the end of the war, these affidavits were initially gathered to be instrumentalised by the broader Boer community to demonstrate and condemn the barbarism of the British enemy. By analysing these testimonies through the frame of narrative and agency, Krog's article discusses the ways in which these affidavits, 'foreground sexual violence and its complex relationships with power, vocabulary, event and context' (see this volume 301). Krog shows where parts of these statements are likely to be influenced

by the cultural narratives around female sexuality current at the time, but also where these cultural frames leave gaps of interpretation. In zooming in on these gaps, the article offers a glimpse of the agency of the women behind the affidavits and reveals a double or hidden transcultural process in the period of transition after the South African War: the negotiation of the individual agency of women who had to live with being violated, and the imagined needs of their broader community takes central stage. From these personal and institutional entanglements, transculturation becomes a verb, a doing, as well as a layered process of strategic positioning and potential opposition. This article powerfully demonstrates how processes of transculturation are extremely difficult to capture in narrative form, because the normative and institutionalised position of the person doing the 'transculturating' often prevents the telling and making visible of the 'actual' story. Because these important affidavits were shelved the moment the war ended and then embargoed until recently, this article also testifies to the massive failure of transcultural processes to make any of these specific voices heard in any context.

A different shadow history is discussed in Tertius Kapp's article, where he analyses the subculture and language of the South African Number gangs, which are most influential in South African prisons and Coloured communities. Although the gangs have become increasingly visible in South African cultural landscapes, most people are not familiar with their highly ritualised and symbolically driven culture. For instance, stories about the gang's inception in the Johannesburg area as the city came into being, still form the basis for the hierarchical structure and social codes in the gangs. In his article, Kapp undertakes an exploration of the status of these narratives and combines literary analysis with social-anthropological, ethnographic and linguistic sources in order to better understand this subculture's semantic space. In exploring prison gang language and the different stories that structure gang history, Kapp manages to shed light on the transcultural processes taking place in this context by viewing the gangs from the perspective of Halliday's anti-language and the genre of the epic. Through these tools, Kapp manages to make visible how different cultural traditions collide and mix within the extremely structured gang narratives and how they stand in a dialectical relation to dominant colonial discourses in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Ksenia Robbe's discussion of *A Change of Tongue* and *Begging to be Black* by Antjie Krog furthers the discussion by foregrounding the role of time and transition in transcultural processes. In her article, Robbe proposes a new perspective on Krog's recent work in prose that differs from a framing through melancholia and mourning for the violence of the past. Instead, Robbe focuses on the use of nostalgia, which makes it possible to look anew at the bonds with European heritage and culture in Krog's work. By drawing on the concept of provincialisation, Robbe manages to tease out Krog's critique on centralised perspectives and their seemingly inevitable ties to history and locality. In her analysis of the moments of transition that feature in the books – namely that from a pre-colonial to a colonial period during and after the South African War; the meetings between King Moshoeshoe and the Frenchman Casalis; and the transition from Apartheid to a democratic South Africa – Robbe explicates how Krog takes on, not just the relations between people from different cultural backgrounds, but also the relation between time and space in transcultural moments. Specifically, Robbe shows how

these moments of transition can serve to rethink the hierarchical and violent inequalities of those who meet in any contact zone.

Hanneke Stuit takes up the issue of violence and conflict in her discussion of prison gang narratives in an analysis of Tertius Kapp's play *Rooiland*. The play takes place in an unspecified South African prison during an immanent gang war within its walls and relies heavily on prison gang histories, which are often referred to as 'mythologies'. Stuit asks exactly what the 'mythical' entails in the context of Kapp's text and explores the use of the concepts of mythology and transculturation as described by Barthes and Ortiz for reading the extremely dense layering of signification in the play. The reading of the play suggests that mythology as described by Barthes is a complex and gritty process of violent interaction that can be better understood by seeing it as a transcultural process of simultaneous renewal and loss of individual attachments. It will be argued that the play helps to understand the profound mixing of cultural strands at moments when ideology is solidified in shared narratives about what counts as a communal origin. Specifically, the play places volatile and violent processes of transculturation and cultural appropriation at the core of prison gang narratives.

The question of how to deal with such spaces and traces of violence productively is taken up by Alwyn Roux and Elizabeth Louise Nortjé in their discussion of Breyten Breytenbach's open letters to Nelson Mandela. In their analysis of these letters, Roux and Nortjé focus on how Breytenbach's combination of different disparate images of the South African landscape identifies challenges embodied in the country and potentially creates alternative future imaginings of change. The article zooms in on the representations of the 'dead ends' of violence in these texts, and asks how the impasse of violence can paradoxically still contribute to rewriting and understanding the South African (social) landscape.

Together, the contributions explore, but also demonstrate the use of the concept of transculturation for understanding and analysing Afrikaans literary and cultural phenomena. But they are also much more than this; they do not merely fill gaps in terms of histories of representation in the South African context, but also show the limitations and possibilities for survival or cultural renewal in transitory and transcultural moments. The specific engagements with transculturation and affiliated concepts like transition and cultural translation in this special issue foreground the importance of representation, time and processuality in thinking contact zones between people, ideologies and texts. To be sure, the issue makes clear that violence is involved in (representing) such moments of transition and transculturation, but it also provides, hopefully, avenues for thinking this violence productively.

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