

**Breaking Silences: Voicing Subaltern Consciousness in Mtutuzeli
Nyoka's *I Speak to the Silent***

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Official historical narratives, particularly in Third World countries have been criticised for adopting the biases and omissions of colonialist historiography. The tendency is to celebrate 'great men' at the expense of the 'subaltern masses' particularly women and children. Most of South Africa's resistance literature, for example, that of J.M Coetzee, Lewis Nkosi and Alex LaGuma, focus on black people as the marginalised group in apartheid South Africa. This paper is more specific as it focuses on Mtutuzeli Nyoka's first novel: *I speak to the Silent*, which seeks to give a voice to particular groups of people (women, children and students) who have been silenced by colonialist and nationalist historiographies of apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. Names like Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, Oliver Tambo, and Walter Sisulu (to mention just but a few) constitute the epicenter of South African nationalist historiography, yet we forget that there were other people, undocumented in our historical mega-narratives, who also contributed immensely to the present democratic dispensation. It is these unsung heroes and s/heroes, relegated to the periphery of official history that Nyoka retrieves and celebrates in his silence-breaking novel, *I Speak to the Silent*.

This paper takes up the concept of subalternity espoused by the Subaltern Studies historians to identify and analyse the silences and omissions in nationalist historiography. The word subaltern can be defined as 'the general attribute of subordination... whether it is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and

office or in any other way' (Guha 2000, 3). Following the works of the Subaltern Studies group, this article highlights and interrogates silences and caesuras in colonialist and nationalist narratives of South Africa's anti-apartheid struggle. The point is that nationalist narratives tend to be elitist and exclusive like colonial narratives hence their silence on the subaltern's role in the struggle for liberation. Responding to the efforts of the Subaltern Studies historians, Spivak argues that the attempt to retrieve the voices of the subaltern is futile because 'the 'subaltern' cannot appear without the thought of the 'elite' (Spivak 1987, 203). The elite, particularly politicians and those at their service, wield discursive power which enables them to misrepresent the subaltern. The subaltern cannot speak because they do not have discursive power. Edward Said's (1978) concept of Orientalism is useful in understanding the role of discourse in the construction and misrepresentation of the other, particularly in nationalist discourses of liberation.

Although Spivak claims that the voice of the subaltern cannot be retrieved, Mtutuzeli Nyoka's *I Speak to the Silent* imaginatively captures the contributions of ordinary men and women to the anti-apartheid struggle. These contributions are usually treated as marginal in official narratives. The concept of subalternity 'registers how the knowledge we construct and impart [...] is structured by the absence, difficulty or impossibility of representation of the subaltern' (Beverly 2004, 40). The concept is a 'lens' that allows us to 'see' the impossibility of attempting to retrieve subaltern voices. Its complexity is aptly captured by Rigoberto Menchu's conclusion in his testimonio: 'I am still keeping secret what I think no one should know. Not even anthropologists or intellectuals can find out all our secrets' (Mato 2010, 63). Menchu's declaration expresses the ultimate elusiveness of the 'truth' with a capital letter 'T'. The true history of the anti-apartheid struggle resides with those who actually participated in it and yet they cannot speak because they do not have

discursive power. In the case of South Africa, this inevitably raises questions about the usefulness of the Truth and Reconciliation hearings, whether it is possible to know the truth given that truth resides with individuals who may decide not to tell, like Rigoberto Menchu.

Nyoka's preoccupation with the contributions of ordinary people is in tandem with the Subaltern Studies project. It also resonates with efforts by postcolonial theorists, for example Homi Bhabha and Bill Ashcroft, to inscribe the agency of the marginalised in dominant narratives. Homi Bhabha's (1994) 'third space of enunciation' is an alternative space that seeks to retrieve the stifled voice of the other. On the other hand, Bill Ashcroft's (2001) postcolonial transformation celebrates subtle forms of resistance by the marginalised in order to emphasise their role in the liberation enterprise. The central focus of subaltern studies, as Marshall puts it, is the power and problem of representation and its task is the dismantling of subalternity itself (Stichele and Penner 2005, 96). Guha notes that 'the historiography of Indian nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitism- colonialist elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism' (2000, 2). This historiography 'fails to acknowledge, far less interpret, the contribution made by the people *on their own*, that is *independently of the elite* to the making and development of this nationalism' (2000, 2). Whilst colonialist historiography is fraught with biases and omissions about the colonised, nationalist historiography blurs the contributions of ordinary people through umbrella terms like the 'masses,' which deprive them of their subjectivity and political consciousness.

We have seen through the works of Frantz Fanon (1952) that colonial discourse seeks to misrepresent the colonised as incapable of mapping and determining their own destinies. Colonial discourse portrays nationalist revolutions as 'rebellions' which, for their lack of support from the masses, were immediately

crushed by the colonisers. This colonialist tactic of misrepresentation by omission is adopted by nationalist historians who focus on tracing and magnifying the deeds of particular great men. The vocabulary of nationalist historiography exemplifies these biases. Liberation fighters are often conceptualised as ‘boys/ amajaha’ as if to imply that women never participated in the struggle. Mtutuzeli Nyoka’s novel challenges these historical omissions by reinserting the story of Sindiswa into the grand narrative of South Africa’s anti-apartheid struggle. Nyoka’s narrative avoids the temptation to hero-worship personalities by placing Sindiswa and Sizeka (two women who valiantly stood against apartheid repression) at the centre of his narrative. His point is that the struggle against apartheid was not an elite initiative but a people oriented insurgency which was not necessarily spearheaded by specific national icons.

Contextualizing subalternity: *I Speak to the Silent*

Perhaps what is curious about Nyoka’s narrative is that it is told from the perspective of a man, Hambile Kondile- who is identified as a husband and a father. This in itself is a problem; as Spivak says, ‘there is always a counterpointing suggestion [...] that subaltern studies is subject to the cathexis of the elite, that it is never fully recoverable, that it is always askew from its received signifiers, indeed that it is effaced even as it is disclosed, that it is irreducibly discursive’ (Spivak 1987, 203). Crucially, for Spivak, subalternity is a position without identity (Morton 2007, 97). The same can be said of the story of Sindiswa for it is mediated by her father, Kondile, a man who never supported her revolutionary efforts in the first place. As a father, Kondile is primarily interested in getting his daughter fit into the apartheid system through acquiring a good education. Kondile sees education for his daughter as the only way she could escape black poverty fostered by the apartheid system. When Sindiswa comes back home following a strike at Lovedale College, her father

is worried that his 'beautiful [...] talented and intelligent [daughter is] about to come to grief' (Nyoka 2005, 76). Unlike his daughter, who is a revolutionary firebrand of her time, Kondile is a submissive man (perhaps a coward too) who has accepted his underdog position in the apartheid caste hierarchy. He does not even seem to realise that the education he wants his daughter to acquire is strategically designed to make her a slave.

The fact that Sindiswa's story is mediated means that part of her voice is irrecoverable. We can only know what she stood for, her values, through her father. She is doubly silenced because firstly her voice has been appropriated by her father; and secondly, those who witness her sufferings are reluctant to speak for her. However, Nyoka makes an important point that the history of anti-apartheid consciousness in South Africa involves not only the elite but also women and children, particularly students. 'Parallel to the domain of elite politics, there existed throughout the colonial period another domain [...] in which the principal actors were not the dominant groups of the indigenous society or the colonial authorities but the subaltern classes and groups constituting the mass of the laboring population [...] that is the people' (Guha 2000, 3). This view subverts the tendency in nationalist historiography, as in colonialist ideology, to uncritically hero-worship personalities. In Nyoka's novel, Raymond Mbete (the nationalist representative in exile) symbolises those heroes who are celebrated by mainstream South African historiography. 'Comrade Ray' as he is affectionately known is however a wolf in sheep's skin, a liberation hero who abuses the trust bestowed on him by the people of South Africa. As the man in charge of the liberation front in exile and the refugee centre in Lesotho, Raymond Mbete is feared and revered for he has power over the lives of many desperate refugees fleeing apartheid repression. We are told that he is not 'a good man' for, instead of giving a home to the exiles; he uses his position and

power to obtain sexual favours from desperate female refugees (Nyoka 2005, 125). It is ironic that the same Raymond Mbete, a monster in exile, is celebrated as a nationalist and a selfless hero of the anti-apartheid struggle at home. Nyoka makes it clear that the historical knowledge that citizens have about 'Comrade Ray' is mediated by power- it is a construct of nationalist historiography. This is what Guha calls 'the ideological character of historiography' (2000, 3). History does not only reflect what happened in the past but also the biases and omissions of the historian. Sindiswa, the brave student activist, is forgotten while Mbete, the rapist, is hero-worshipped. To make matters worse no one is prepared to tell Sindiswa's story including those who witnessed her experiences.

The most important point that Nyoka raises is that selfish and hypocritical tendencies are not necessarily a phenomenon of the post-apartheid era; they are carried over from the struggle into the democratic dispensation. Many people at the refugee centre witnessed Sindiswa's experiences at the hands of Raymond Mbete but no one spoke because they were afraid of being victimised. Kondile believes that this conspiracy of silence, which is engrained in our national cultures makes evil reign because 'iniquity is not only the work of the evil among us, but also a product of the silence of those who bear witness to it' (Nyoka 2005, 8). This silence is explicitly dramatised in court where Kondile is being tried for the murder of Raymond Mbete. People who actually knew of Raymond Mbete's abuses decide to keep quiet and suppress justice. It is ironic that during the court proceedings Sindiswa's death is peripheral while Mbete's takes the centre stage. Again we are reminded of the predicament of the subaltern who is a mere statistic in nationalist historiography. The people are caught up in the euphoria of nationalistic jingoism. They refuse to condemn Mbete even after one of his witnesses, Anil, falters in court, proving that his testimony is false. Perhaps this is the reason why Kondile opts for retributive justice.

Kondile believes that ordinary people can make a difference if they have ‘courage and demonstrate the power of uncorrupted virtue and the truth’ (Nyoka 2005, 8). This assertion, however, is problematic because truth is relative and contingent. The power of ‘uncorrupted virtue and the truth,’ especially in the context of political developments in the twenty first century is rather far-fetched. Sometimes the truth alone cannot set you free unless it is aligned with power. Iraq’s Saddam Hussein is a case in point. Similarly Raymond Mbete’s compatriot (Anil) denies having known Sindiswa in order to maintain his image as a hero of the anti-apartheid struggle, thus deliberately subverting justice. His testimony is taken as the ‘truth’ and is actually used to prosecute and imprison Hambile Kondile – the man whose daughter was raped and driven into promiscuity. The tragedies in the novel - Sindiswa’s death and Kondile’s life imprisonment - are consequences of the fear to speak the truth. Sindiswa is raped and driven into prostitution; yet there are people around her (including Fikile, her husband) who keep quiet because they are afraid of Raymond Mbete. Mrs. Mbete actually witnesses the first rape incident that takes Sindiswa’s virginity, but she keeps quiet. Perhaps the question is whether the less powerful can speak without risking their security.

Kondile is sentenced to life imprisonment for murdering Raymond Mbete, ‘an innocent man, a father as well as a husband’ (Nyoka 2005, 3). What is much more fascinating with the prosecution of Kondile is that it epitomises the complicit synergy between nationalist and colonialist discourses. Nationalist discourse inherited some of the prejudices of colonialism. Judge Boschoff, who passes the judgment against Kondile, is a representative of colonial injustice because he is the same man who was responsible for incarcerating blacks during apartheid. We are told that he is ‘the same judge who disparaged a black woman who had been raped by a farmer and his sons’ (Nyoka 2005, 3). He is also ‘the same judge who set free a white man for burning an

old native woman who had failed to pay rent' (Nyoka 2005, 3). Hambile Kondile loses the murder case because the people *know* Raymond Mbetse as a hero. Kondile, however, is satisfied with what he has done because it gives him peace of mind. He feels avenged and by extension Sindiswa is vindicated too. The implication is that the only way the subaltern can be reconstituted into the mainstream narrative is by deconstructing nationalist historiography. Spivak has argued that deconstruction's 'greatest gift' is that while it questions 'the authority of the investigating subject,' 'it always in certain ways falls prey to its own work' (Spivak 1987, 201). *I Speak to the Silent* is thus not only a critique of South Africa's 'nationalist history', but also an indictment of the much celebrated democratic dispensation which has maintained old structures of repression. The novel unravels some 'truths' that have been hidden under the carpet of truth and reconciliation. For example Kondile is still heavily dependent on his white masters in the new South Africa. It is Blithdale who organises a lawyer for his defense. What exactly is the meaning of independence for the black South African? Does it mean self-determination or it is the continuation of the same old system with new overseers.

Representation as voice

Although it might seem impossible to recover the subaltern voice in its fullness, as Spivak argues, the attempt to recognise its presence in discourse, as Nyoka does, is indeed commendable. In *I Speak to the Silent*, the story is actually told by default because Kondile does not want his story to be recorded. He is persuaded to do so by a white friend John Smith, who has also been hired by Simon Blithdale to 'record the story and write a book on it' (Nyoka 2005, 6). This is perhaps an allusion to what some critics have seen as the patronization or commercialisation of Nelson Mandela

by the white community. Why should the history of the oppressed be mediated by the oppressor?

Although Kondile attempts to recover marginalised narratives, he also constructs a new hegemonic narrative that objectifies by speaking for the other. Sindiswa's story cannot be retrieved even through the 'truth hearings' because some of the perpetrators of apartheid violence refuse to testify. It is interesting to note that John Smith (a white man) 'ha[s] been hired by Simon Blithdale (Kondile's master) to record the story of Kondile's life and perhaps write a book on it' (Nyoka 2005, 6). Why does Simon want the story of Kondile's daughter to be heard? He pressurises Kondile to speak, if not for himself at least for his daughter, Sindiswa (Nyoka 2005, 7). Simon's letter to Kondile states that silence does not lessen pain; one can only liberate oneself through talking (Nyoka 2005, 7). It is however worthy asking if mere talking as we see in the truth hearings can really liberate. Another question is why white people are interested in the story of Sindiswa. Are they the right people to be 'financing' the recovery of her voice?

Although Kondile has become a mouthpiece of the subaltern, his testimony is unreliable because it is inspired by selfish considerations. One may see Kondile as a version of Raymond Mbete. While Mbete rapes young girls at the Refugee Centre to satisfy his rapacious sexual appetite, Kondile kills for the selfish purpose of avenging the death of his only begotten daughter. Both are individualistic and unconcerned about the larger picture of the liberation struggle. Perhaps Mbete's weakness, typical of some heroes of nationalism, is that he refuses to acknowledge his shortcomings as a human being. He is like Lucifer, unrepentant and therefore unforgivable. Kondile only starts to appreciate the struggle after his journey to Lesotho. Before that, his mission was to bring his daughter back home.

It is critical to note that post-apartheid South Africa, as reflected in the text, has done very little to recognise and appreciate ordinary men and women who made huge sacrifices for the anti-apartheid struggle. Sindiswa sacrificed her studies, brilliant as she was, for the anti-apartheid struggle. She risked her life addressing dangerous anti-apartheid meetings, educating young people about the oppressive conditions of apartheid South Africa. Sindiswa is a selfless heroine. Unlike her father, she sees beyond her individual needs. For Sindiswa, the struggle comes first before her immediate family. That's why, when she goes underground, she asks Mr. Blithdale not to reveal her whereabouts to anyone, even her parents. Her confrontation with the apartheid regime is in tandem with the Subaltern Studies enterprise, for it contradicts Marxist historicism which deprives pre-capitalist societies of the ability to challenge oppression. Evidently, the people of Alice are politically conscious. They prove that consciousness is not only confined to the elite, for example Tonjeni and Siwisa (elite activists in the novel) but it also extends to the common man in the street.

Kondile acknowledges that his story has 'a strong bias' and 'a lot of anger' (Nyoka 2005, 8) because he is driven by the passion for revenge. Unlike his daughter, who is selflessly committed to the struggle, Kondile's is limited by his obligation to fatherhood and his love for his daughter. His descent into a gloomy life, following the disappearance of Sindiswa shows that his concern is for his nuclear family rather than for the country as a whole. He only begins to understand the bigger picture of the struggle when he goes to Lesotho, where he is told about his daughter's selfless commitment. The graves of young people who sacrificed their lives for the anti-apartheid struggle, the story of Tshepho (only seventeen years old) who stood his ground for an hour firing at the Boer commandos and the case of Zola, the invalid who perpetually makes animal-like sounds, are some of the realities that arouse his

consciousness. Before the journey to Lesotho, Kondile is thoroughly egocentric. He does not know, neither does he appreciate, the challenges of life in exile. His primary concern is his daughter. He does not seem to realise that his daughter is a freedom-fighter who has given her life to the struggle and does not belong to him anymore. The journey to Lesotho is thus an orientation and a soul-searching reflection on the gruesome history of the anti-apartheid struggle. The journey brings out the secrets of the struggle- the abuses of power by Anil and Mbetse at the Refugee Centre, as well as Sindiswa's degeneration from an innocent virgin to an alcoholic, a smoker and a prostitute.

Subaltern s/heroes of the anti-apartheid struggle

Nyoka's novel gives a voice to those (particularly women) whose contributions are not recorded in national annals. Oftentimes women's contributions are either misrepresented or not represented at all. However, *I Speak to the Silent* puts the efforts of women like Sindiswa, Shiela and Sizeka at the fore of the anti-apartheid struggle. In fact, Kondile realises and acknowledges that much of his life has been shaped by women. Throughout the turmoil and trials of the anti-apartheid effort his wife 'endured and showed rare insight and unfaltering courage' (Nyoka 2005, 10). On the other hand, it is his daughter, Sindiswa, who, 'like a warrior on horseback in ancient times with colorful banners flying above her, chased the enemy with stones and fire' (Nyoka 2005, 10). Thus, *I Speak to the Silent* celebrates the unsung heroes and heroines of the struggle against apartheid. It opens spaces within nationalist historiography so as to inscribe women like Nomsa (Kondile's wife), Sindiswa (the brave student activist) and Sizeka (leader of the first demonstration in Alice). As a wife and mother, Nomsa stands out as a reservoir of patience and resilience. She supports her husband in times of trials and tribulations.

Frequently, women are expected to break down in the face of difficult challenges, but Nomsa is able to contain the trauma of losing her only daughter. She is even strong enough to reconcile with her enemy, Mrs. Mbetse. When Kondile is taken for interrogations by Niehaus, she persistently goes to the prison with food. Above all, she has the guts to wait for her husband until his return without lapsing into despair. On the other hand, Sindiswa is a warrior, intelligent and brave. Most narratives of the struggle have tended to relieve women of military roles in the struggle. For example, women in Zimbabwe's liberation war are often projected as cooks and nurses. Writing on the history of liberation in Zimbabwe, Tanya Lyons argues that 'historiography and official discourse have easily excluded women from the active political and military arena. [Although] African women were involved in military operations, the evidence of their actions remains mostly obscured by masculine versions of history' (Lyons 2004, 70). In Nyoka's novel, Sindiswa is a leader and so is Sizeka who is shot by 'a stray bullet' while leading a demonstration. These are some of the crucial undocumented roles that women played in the anti-apartheid struggle. Although the story of liberation is often portrayed as the story of men, there are women too who were brave enough to walk through the Hogsback forests like Sheila and Sindiswa did. Guha insists that what is clearly left out in this clearly unhistorical historiography is the politics of the people (2000, 3).

Sindiswa is a woman who refuses to bow down to oppression. At an early age, she begins to question her surroundings. She describes the relationship between her father and Blithdale as that of a dog and its master (Nyoka 2005, 15). The Blithdales, for all their humanitarian gestures to Kondile's family, would often, as Kondile tells us, speak derogatively about natives in their presence. 'What I always found fascinating about white people were the derogatory statements, often made thoughtlessly, about natives in their presence. Whites seemed either impervious or

indifferent to the effect such insults had on the native. I could not decide if they thought us deaf, or if they simply did not see us' (Nyoka 2005, 63). While Kondile opts for submission like Uncle Tom of the Deep South, Sindiswa is irrepressible. She challenges the master-servant relationship between her father and the Blithdales. She also mocks her father's Uncle Tom mentality and prompts him to rethink his relationship with the Blithdales. 'Wouldn't you want to live in a house like Mr. Blithdale's one day? Don't you want to see one of your people someday become a leader of this country?' (Nyoka 2005, 17). These are questions that even her father is scared to ask.

Nyoka also subverts the usual discourse that confines women to the domestic space. Sindiswa is a revolutionary par excellence. During her time at Lovedale College, she is described as having been 'rapacious in the manner in which she devoured information and ideas' (Nyoka 2005, 58). The novel also underscores the role played by the youth during the struggle against apartheid. Most young people 'were more zealous and forthright, while their parents were restrained, patient and indirect. It was through the passion of the young that a timid and apathetic populace could be mobilized' (Nyoka 2005, 61). Following her death in exile, Sindiswa is described as 'a hero fallen in the course of the struggle' (Nyoka 2005, 17). Sister Grace describes her as one who had solid values and many special qualities... a young woman of great intelligence and caring, (Nyoka 2005, 136), a fearless soldier (143). She is depicted as a clever woman who, on several occasions, managed to escape state agents. In spite of all the roadblocks set up around the town, she slipped through and went to far-off places such as East London and Cape Town (Nyoka 2005, 100). Kondile also acknowledges that 'her bravery raised [their] hopes and made [them] believe that the impossible was indeed possible' (Nyoka 2005, 102).

Sindiswa is thus the unsung hero of South Africa's struggle against apartheid. The same is true of Sheila, Sindiswa's friend who is so committed to the cause that she refuses to reveal her friend's whereabouts even to her parents. Kondile tells us that 'she prudently and adamantly refused to reveal Sindiswa's whereabouts to us, despite our heartfelt appeals' (Nyoka 2005, 83). Most of these young people who sacrificed their lives for the struggle are not even represented in nationalist historiography. For example, Sizeka's story is unknown yet she 'was the first victim of the unrest in Alice.' The stories of Sizeka, Sindiswa and Sheila point to the silences in our discourses of liberation, the omissions in our histories and the falsehoods in our criteria of according hero's status. The narrator is affirmative: 'I am sure when the real history of our country is written her name will not appear anywhere, not even in the footnotes' (Nyoka 2005, 84). Yet Sizeka, the first victim of apartheid brutality in Alice, was shot in action, leading a group of protesting children.

Nationalist historiography is preoccupied with the history of 'super nationalists' who are often men. Guha argues that 'the general orientation is to represent nationalism as primarily an idealist venture in which the indigenous elite led the people from subjugation to freedom' (2000, 2). The efforts of ordinary people, particularly women and children are forgotten. This is a trend in most African countries. While the history of South Africa is the history of Nelson Mandela, the history of Zimbabwe is the history of Robert Mugabe. The Sindiswas and Sizekas of this world are forgotten. Yet it is Sindiswa who brings a revolutionary consciousness, not only to her family, but also to Alice and even beyond. Her father is brutalised at the hospital because of her involvement in the struggle. He is 'pushed and slapped right there in the hospital, in front of the watching doctors and nurses'... 'If the culprits were not apprehended, their families became the scapegoats who bore the brunt of state anger' (Nyoka 2005, 92-93). Sindiswa's parents are also

psychologically harassed by Sergeant Goosen who ‘makes lewd gestures with his hips to suggest that if he found Sindiswa he would rape her’ (Nyoka 2005, 83). This paper argues that nationalist historiography is equally bourgeois and exclusive. It has adopted the colonialist tradition of suppressing subaltern voices. Morton affirms that ‘the logic of exclusion that defines and threatens the coherence of Western philosophical discourse is equivalent to the political logic of exclusion that defines the hegemonic discourse of the elite bourgeois nationalist historiography’ (2007, 104). What has surfaced in the preceding pages ‘is something different from the unitary, closed, evolutionary narratives of historiography as we have traditionally known it: as we have been seeing in historiographic metafiction as well, we now get to the histories (in the plural) of the losers as well as the winners, of the regional and colonial, as well as the centrist, of the unsung many as well as the sung few, and I might add, of women as well as men’ (Hutcheon 2002, 63).

In conclusion, *I Speak to the Silent* is indeed a novel that opens an invaluable debate in South African literature. Firstly, it challenges male-centric representations of the nationalist struggle which focus on the contributions of the elite, particularly politicians at the expense of ordinary people. Secondly, it questions the hero’s status of some personalities that are celebrated by official historiography, for example Raymond Mbete who is a hypocrite and a rapist. The struggle against apartheid, as Nyoka presents it in his novel, should not be limited to the contributions of particular figures who are known and celebrated in nationalist narratives, rather it should encapsulate the efforts of ordinary people like Sindiswa and Sizeka, who are not necessarily represented at national level. Most importantly, *I Speak to the Silent* challenges South African historiography by incorporating the contributions of personalities (women, children and students) and locales (Alice) that are not

represented in nationalist narratives. The novel relates the history of Alice, a place which is hardly known in national archives except through the University of Fort Hare and the great men who passed through it. Since 1994, South Africa has tended to focus on celebrating the dawn of democracy, but few have paused to ask if the so called democracy has brought any meaningful changes not only to the lives of the marginalised but also to the discursive regimes that represent them. For all his daughter's sacrifices to the anti-apartheid struggle, Hambile Kondile remains 'a simple man, a Xhosa and an African, whose life is of no significance to the world' (Nyoka 2005, 9). Thus Mtutuzeli Nyoka's work questions not only the elitism of South Africa's nationalist historiography, its omissions and biases, but also the usefulness of the Truth and Reconciliation hearings, which formed the basis of South Africa's democracy.

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