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Articulating the Unsayable: An Exploration of “Visible Voices” in Sifiso Nyathi’s *the Other Presence*

Nelson Mlambo¹, Coletta Kandemiri²

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the insightful nuances about narratives and contemporary life from the award winning Namibian writer, Sifiso Nyathi. The paper arises from the realisation of the paucity of literature in Namibia to tackle sensitive issues and the more often peripheral recognition of the power that fiction has to comment and bring insight to socio-cultural and economic issues. The chosen methodology is literary analysis and the concern that informs this paper is on how narratives demonstrate an apt ability to communicate concerns and sensibilities that both haunt and inspire contemporary societies. The paper demonstrates how literature (fiction) and language open up fissures to spell out the ‘unsayable’, the taboo, and the often whispered and not yet said “other presence” in contemporary life. This is a way of questioning, voicing, re-examining and articulating certain truths which are supposedly veiled and unrepresentable, whose grammars of articulation often evade quantitative analysis. Through the chosen novel, the paper projected the ‘multivoiceness’ of literature in as much as it represents the gamut of HIV/AIDS in conservative communities, the contested terrain of superstition, the supernatural, belief and witchcraft. The ultimate conclusion is that literature is a powerful tool for the articulation of core concerns and issues in contemporary Africa and that through his novel; Nyathi managed to make visible the qualitative facets of life like pain, bereavement, culture, HIV/AIDS, religion and stigma. It suffices therefore say that educational, cultural, the civic society and policy makers heed the wisdom enshrined in the creative arts in order to find multifaceted ways of handling the horrors faced by the people on a daily basis.

¹ Dr Nelson Mlambo, Lecturer – Department of Language and Literature studies, University of Namibia, Email: mlambons@yahoo.co.uk.

² Coletta Kandemiri, Researcher, Department of Language and Literature Studies, University of Namibia, Email: colettakandemiri173@gmail.com.

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1.0 Introduction and background

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate how reading Sifiso Nyathi's novel *The other presence* powerfully posits the fact that human beings are *homo narrans* (story narrators) and that their stories weave diplomatically into the fabric of human thinking, consciousness, fears and hopes for didactic reasons. Through the novel, Nyathi shows how fiction makes the socio-political, cultural and spiritual find concretisation and become more meaningful, resonant, tangible and imaginatively visible. Set in postcolonial Namibia, whose literature is often overshadowed by the prominence of South African, Zimbabwean and Angolan literature, Nyathi's novel comes with a certain measure of verisimilitude, potency and verve. This is further evidenced by the dearth of academic literature commenting on Namibian literature in general and the socio-political and cultural relevance of fiction (Mlambo, 2014). This is a critical concern which needs attention considering the burgeoning of works of fiction in Namibia. *The other presence's* prominence in Namibian literature arises from its articulation of sensitive contemporary realities; the voicing of the postcolonial condition of Africans in Africa is confronted head-on and the role and relevance of fiction is made clear through the novel's eloquent presentation of alternative realities. The focus of the paper therefore is to critically analyse the novel *The other presence* and discuss the salient post-colonial concerns and unsayables faced by the Namibian people in general and Kwena people in particular.

At the launch of the novel on 27 May 2008 Dr Richard Kamwi, the then Minister of Health and Social Services highlighted how the book "is informative, challenging, provocative, and will promote the debate that is necessary to overcome the myths that perpetuate ignorance". This paper therefore seeks to take this thread of argument from there through propounding the novel's call for an action-oriented approach", especially taking note of how the ravages of HIV/AIDS still haunt many communities. Scanty attention has been paid to how the creative arts contribute to socio-cultural development (Mlambo, 2014) in Namibia, which is generally regarded as a peace haven and an example of democracy, stability and prosperity. However such generalisations often camouflage the traumas, ills and challenges the nation faces and it is such silences that this paper seeks to break by presenting and voicing some realities faced by other parts of the society. The setting of the book is therefore particularly telling inasmuch as the major theme (HIV/AIDS) has been reported to have climaxed at 43% among pregnant women in the Caprivi region, (now called Zambezi region) where the book is set. As Achebe once remarked, the novelist is a teacher and consequently "... the writer cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must be done" (Kangira, 2012, pp. 24), it is therefore critical that such a task be furthered, first through the fictionalisation of such stories and through the literary analysis of the fiction, which is the focus of this paper. Therefore it is worth noting that the creative arts in the form of literature (fiction) give us a recipe and a formula which nurtures us into an ability that enables us to understand our real world and yonder. The conceptualisation of the "unsayable" and the "visible" voices in fiction stems from the understanding that story telling encourages that which till now has been silenced and subdued to be fossilised in a meaningful and memorable way (Boehmer, 2009). Literature has the power to collapse and freeze most Berlin walls that have been standing for so long, silencing and suppressing issues that affect societies on a daily basis. Literature can capture the subjective aspect of social reality, at the same time simultaneously allowing an objective knowledge of the word. Literature allows writers to bring to the table wide ranging shades of opinions for exploration and thus allowing for multi-voicing on contentious issues and opening up constructive possibilities (Barber, 2009).

The question now becomes; how do we represent the alternative realities of our post-colonial times, with the aftermaths of colonialism still constitutive and visible in our daily lives? How do structures and codes of writing offer us a mode of addressing, interrogating and thinking through some of the most

difficult preoccupations and challenges of our times with our African culture in a moribund state? Answering these questions can be made possible by recognising that fictional writing allows us to read the word and the world, and that writing goes beyond the taboo, the forbidden and disregarded truths of everyday lives. It becomes the duty of the writer as asserted by Achebe to teach society through writing, through literature, to read both the word and the world.

1.01 Research methodology

The method applied in this paper is primarily a qualitative, desk top literary analysis of the novel *The other presence* by Sifiso Nyathi. The relevance of this approach lies in its ability to provide complex textual descriptions of the core concerns of the paper, and how it provides information about the “human” side of issues (Mlambo, 2014, Vambe, 2003). Qualitative research design is essentially interpretive and it is concerned with the understanding of experiences and interpretations of the social world. Moreover, the population of the study is the literary texts written in postcolonial Namibia in English. The novel has been purposively sampled since in purposive sampling researchers handpick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgment of their topicality and in this paper the novel by Nyathi covers the core aims of the study. The study was carried out through an in-depth analysis of the novel where the emerging themes were identified and analysed. The main data analysis method used in the study is content analysis. Through the nuanced analysis of the contemporary realities facing the people, the paper therefore contributes significantly to the scant literature on Namibian fiction in general and particularly to the literary criticism of Nyathi’s works.

1.02 Aims

This paper aims to:

- Firstly demonstrate the nuanced constructive possibilities available in writing.
- Secondly, to explore the representational power of fiction in expressing the ‘unsayables’ in the text *The Other Presence*.
- Thirdly, to illustrate how certain truths are only available qualitatively through the grammar of fiction.
- Lastly, to demonstrate the power of resisting the resistance of contemporary concerns in our lives.

2.0 Analysis and Discussion: Self-evident truths in *The Other Presence*

Expressing concerns, issues and fluid realities through written language inevitably brings some immortalised meaning to them. Nyathi in this novel appropriately employs emotive language to register the core emotional feelings that MaSimanga is going through, making felt and profound her sense of pain, sorrow, bereavement and emotion. The reader is made to easily slip and step into MaSimanga’s shoes. Noteworthy is that pain is an emotion that cannot be measured quantitatively and this sense of being immeasurable is what Nyathi articulates, as the reader is made to feel and participate in her sorrow, pain and grief. The reader is made to imagine and register the extent of MaSimanga’s pain and sorrow through Nyathi’s recounting of the deaths of her five children and husband within a short space of time as noted from by Nyathi (2008) that:

Two years after grieving the passing away of her beloved husband, her third born girl followed him... The following year two of her sons followed. They passed away in the space of about three months. Other than Akapelwa, the other most recent death of one of her children was that of her second born daughter who passed away after a short illness. Just like Akapelwa, all of MaSimanga’s children underwent a similar process before they bid farewell to this earth (pp 6 - 7).

In African societies like the Kwena village, death is something that can be dreadful and heartwrenching. Death is something that can never be readily accepted no matter how many occasions one encounters

it. Death is everywhere and there is no country without a grave but it becomes an issue for concern if five children from the same family die unceremoniously within a short space of time, with their illnesses marked by the same pattern of symptoms. It becomes a mystery and an unsayable such that though MaSimanga is told that Akapelwa had succumbed to HIV and AIDS, she still cannot take it.

MaSimanga is however, resistant to the truth. She is in a silenced state and shies from the culprit responsible for her children's deaths since they had all died in the same way and rationally, she had been informed about the cause of Akapelwa's death. It is painful to lose so many children and MaSimanga deserves sympathy but to some extent she is to blame, for she represents societies resistant to the truth. Such resistance creates a great wall that obstructs and hinders any efforts in trying to curb and bring the HIV and AIDS pandemic under control and through fiction, the taboo, and the subdued and silenced realities get coded in a form acceptable to the public sphere.

Nyathi employs realism, a style in writing where literature represents life as it is. Through Nyathi's novel literature is presented as having that power to communicate openly issues that society may consider difficult to discourse. MaSimanga chooses not to accept reality, the reality that HIV and AIDS is present and a reality. She instead resorts to pointing a finger to Elder Sinvula as the prime suspect responsible for the deaths in her compound. Nyathi through *The Other Presence* (2008), thus advocates for society to change their attitudes and accept the presence of the deadly pandemic. The fictionalisation of these "unsayables", that which societies like the Kwena village is not prepared to dare say, thus get scripted and this opens up avenues for the readers to begin to conceive of meanings that cannot be openly discussed. By accepting the presence of HIV and AIDS, the society gets to learn about the disease, know how it is spread and ways of preventing and minimizing risks of contracting the disease. Society is made to view their current life from a different but positive perspective. That way, humanity can possibly gain absolute control over the pandemic and this pandemic by extension includes other ills and unsaid horrors like xenophobia, corruption, despotism, dictatorship and greed which still remain challenges in Africa.

The phenomenal and the supernatural in *The Other Presence*, where Elder Neo instructs and dismisses a whirlwind, is an area that needs a critical discussion. A whirlwind is non-human and belongs to the supernatural. Nyathi attests that the supernatural is not visible to our naked eye but influences our lives directly and indirectly. It is a power that operates within its own spheres and is directly linked to human beings and the universe. Thus we human beings talk of the 'spiritual realms' which is the area or space occupied by these bodiless, supernatural forces, whose presence can only be felt by the unusual manifestations that become visible to human eyes. The presence of the supernatural manifests in different ways, anywhere and anyhow, with some of the prevalent manifestations being easily identified and properly handled by human beings.

In *The Other Presence*, Elder Neo is that kind who knows how to converse with the supernatural. Elder Neo's chants and actions certainly dismiss the rigid Afro-pessimistic perspectives that condemn miraculous displays from Africa as witchcraft, voodoo and superstition. In this case the supernatural and miraculous in *The Other Presence* manifests in the form of a violent whirlwind and Elder Neo calms it and dismisses it instantly:

As the whirlwind circled the anthills, Neo, one of the elders of the village stood up, uttered a few inaudible words and advanced in its direction... Neo pulled out a container of snuff from his pocket. He then poured some into his hand, sniffed it up his nose before he sprinkled the rest in the air and spoke some words to the wind... the whirlwind that had approached to a stretch of about one hundred metres from the homestead became still. It remained there for a while and moved rapidly in a circle digging deeper into the soil as it uprooted dead wood of the forest straight into the sky (Nyathi, 2008, p. 2).

Neo manages to give instructions to the whirlwind because he is vested with the powers that enable him to discourse with the supernatural, to the extent of commanding it by giving orders and instructions.

The notion that the supernatural does exist is widely acknowledged but with little understanding of what will really be taking place. Appiah (1992) notes that the world of the spirits is not metaphorical or imaginary, it is more real than the world of the everyday (p. 146), reinforcing the idea that the supernatural does exist in its invisible nature. Omeregebe (1990) asserts:

There are mystical or supernatural forces which defy any scientific analysis or explanation. These forces surpass and sometimes counteract physical forces. They can be manipulated by man and employed for both good and evil purposes as protection, prevention of calamities, cure of disease, procreation and bringing about sickness, death and other kinds of misfortunes. (p. 26)

Now that the supernatural can be manipulated by the human beings, in the novel Sinvula is a victim of circumstances as he is falsely accused to have stage managed Akapelwa's death. He supposedly used remote controlled powers so that it would appear as if Akapelwa had died from any other disease, even the deadly HIV and AIDS. As noted in the text (p. 14), "... wizards and witches kill through masquerading their misdeeds as common ailments such as malaria and flu, as well as natural elements such as wind, lightning or fire." This gives the impression that these supernaturals with their apt invisibility attribute do not have absolute power over human beings. If the human being can tamper with the spirits, then to some extent the spiritual habitation and its inhabitants is not as powerful as perceived by human beings. Mbiti (1989) posits that:

Spirits as a group have more power than men, just as in a physical sense the lions do. Yet, in some ways men are better off, and right human specialists can manipulate or control the spirits as they wish. Man paradoxically may fear, or dread the spirits and yet they can drive the same spirits away or use them to human advantage. (p. 78)

This leaves a lot to be desired on the behavioural patterns and existence of spiritualism. If men, human beings, can manipulate the spirits to their own egoistic human advantage, then it means there are weak points in the existence and operations of the metaphysical. Nyathi created the character of Elder Neo to bring out the idea that there truly exists a link between the natural and the supernatural. Neo is vested with the powers to challenge and command the supernatural. On the other hand, Nyathi is also alerting society about how these powers operate for both good and evil. The same powers can be abused by human beings in order to harm other human beings for selfish gains and satiation of personal desires. This further awakens the reader's conscience about the existence, presence and influence of invisible supernatural forces that we co-habit with. Therefore by joining together and juxtaposing these oddities and incommensurabilities, Nyathi resists the silences around realities which he believes form part and parcel of the Kwena people as a microcosm of the larger society.

On the issue of superstitions and the supernatural in the novel, Elder Sinvula encounters two black cats mating and an owl hooting at him on his way to the doctor to enquire the truth concerning Akapelwa's death (p. 32). This foreboding was a premonition that something was going to happen. As a Christian, Sinvula dismisses all this by taking up a church hymn but deep down his heart, as an African, he knew that what he had encountered were premonitions. Do these forebodings really signal the happening of some things in people's lives? Or it all depends on personal beliefs? In *The Other Presence*, the incident of the vulture is witnessed by everyone at Akapelwa's funeral. Nyathi crystallises it on paper to trigger the release of hormonal adrenaline in the reader and through the funereal atmosphere presented, most important is how Nyathi presents alternative realities whose voices and presence refuse to be muffled by modernity. This is noted when:

Elder Situmbeko then seized the podium again to continue with his work. Just before he could cast dust and ash into their place, part of the gathering dominated by young women sprang to their feet. MaSimanga who was seated just in front of them screamed along with them. Their eyes were fixed on a bird that had strangely fallen from the skies onto the casket. It was a dead vulture. It looked like something that had died a long time ago. A few moments after its fall, an owl landed on a huge tree whose branch hung just above the casket.

It hooted and ran its eyes energetically around the gathering. Embraced with fear, a stampede almost ensued from the ordeal as everyone braced themselves for the fear that something very tragic would immediately happen (Nyathi, 2008, pp. 102 – 103).

Faced with such an event, how are people supposed to react? Nyathi therefore presents the Kwena people as real people with real challenges, both physical and spiritual. From the passage we learn that “everyone braced themselves for the fear that something tragic would immediately happen.” Whether one is superstitious or not, after witnessing such an event, a sense of believing is bound to crop up since seeing is believing. Thus, literature is a powerful vector that can change the shape of public values and ethos. Elder Neo with his ability to discourse with these unusual and frightening happenings, again manages to put the situation back to normal by sending the vulture and the owl away:

It was the courage of Elder Neo that tempered their nerves. He walked towards the casket and looked straight into the eyes of the supposed ‘man’ inside the vulture. “I charge your vile intentions and execrable desire to find place elsewhere away from the clean dwellings of the living. I condemn you to the skulls of darkness where you belong. Leave at once, I say” commanded Neo angrily. The vulture that looked dead at first now blinked its eyes and lifted itself onto its limbs. It pranced a little on the casket and flapped its wings loudly before taking off. It lifted itself into the air and flew towards the forest. The owl that had all along been looking from the branch hooted again and took off as well and followed the vulture (Nyathi, 2008, pp. 103).

This becomes self-evident that the world the Kwena people live in is no ordinary world but one that is complex. Through *The Other Presence*, the reader gets to read both the word and the world. The reader gets to know the other side of life when the ‘the other presence’ becomes present to the real world of everyday people.

On the issue of herbalists, witchdoctors and ancestral spirits, the terms can best be defined depending on the context in which they are being used and on individual beliefs relating to the matter. According to the Oxford Dictionary, a herbalist is one who grows, sells or uses herbs for medical purposes; while a witchdoctor refers to a person who is believed to have special magic powers that can be used to heal people, though connotatively this now has a strongly aberrant dimension.

Christianity came to Africa alongside colonialism. Colonialism is a form of oppression and so is Christianity. Embracing Christianity to some extent is clear admission that our own African Religious institutions are inferior to those of the colonisers. Our own African ways of communicating and worshipping Musikavanhu (Shona) Kalunga (Oshiwambo) Creator – God has been deemed inferior to that of the Christian religion. *The Other Presence* is set in postcolonial times and Christianity is lingering heavily amongst the black societies. This is the reason why herbalist and witchdoctors are still considered as heathen. The Christian doctrine strongly denounces African traditions in order to achieve total conquest. In *The Other Presence* Namukolo is presented as loyal to her church, her being assigned as deaconess and all that she says and does in defence of her Christian religion proves that African cultural traditions are not proper. This is so because Christianity like any other form of oppression brainwashes its victims and kills their mental capabilities slowly but effectively. Christianity is there to destroy the African way of communicating with our God, Musikavanhu, Kalunga. In other words

Christianity destroys the African, just like colonialism, but in a subtle way. Tension mounts between Christianity and African tradition in *The Other Presence* where it reads:

The mourners, who believed strongly in a bad spirit that hovered over the compound, were many in number. They did not believe a prayer alone would suffice to cast off the spell. Besides, within the compound itself, there was a diviner who was invited to ensure that the death of Akapelwa could be researched. (Nyathi, 2008, pp. 66)

From an African worldview and the Kwena people in particular, some issues cannot be solved by prayers alone, people have to seek the divine through the African way and it applies to those who are Christians or non-Christians, believers and non-believers. The presence of a diviner at MaSimanga's compound is an indication that the problem at hand also needs an African remedy. This now reveals power behind literature in that a writer, Nyathi in this case, exposes some of the issues that people would not have stopped a while and think deeply about. It is through literature that a people learn their history, culture and ethos and how they came to be what and where they are. It is through the same literature that a people can change their course of living and adopt a better life for them and the future generations. Thus through the rendering of a form of syncretism, Nyathi offers a valuable lesson on religious tolerance, accepting and embracing diversity and cultivating peaceful conflict resolution measures which are more open and universal.

Furthermore, still on the issue of religion, of much concern is the mushrooming of churches all over the place. Christianity is thus projected as a religion that moves and changes with the times. At first it came to Africa as an aid for conquest, it became a means to colonise. In *The Mis-education of the Negro*, Woodson (1990) posits that "if you control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his action." Christianity was used as a tool to brainwash and control Africans so that they cannot rebel against colonialism. Christianity thus was hijacked and used as a tool to eliminate African traditions and with that colonialists got total control over the Africans – total conquest. *The Other Presence* is thus a bold voice that continues to shout out loudly that in the present day that the same Christianity is being hijacked and used for bogus activities. Nyathi is warning society to be on the lookout of unscrupulous criminals who are turning churches into money making businesses. A good reference point in *The Other Presence* is the good Reverend Guiseb:

Reverend Guiseb was visiting the North Eastern part of the country on a Christian mission. He had been informed about the death of a relative of one of his congregation members. When he was approached to offer a sermon at this event, he suddenly thought about how he would supplement the small pennies he had been left with. He needed these pennies to purchase the fresh fish of the Great Zambezi River which he would have to transport back home. The central part of Namibia ate fish from the salty waters of the Great Atlantic. Very few of those in the central parts had the opportunity of getting closer to the fresh fish from the fresh waters of the flowing river. The fish was known to be much tastier than the ones from the ocean. He was excited to take up the opportunity of preaching at this wake. He anticipated a good fee. (Nyathi, 2008, pp. 49)

The death of a human being becomes an opportunity for the 'good reverend' to meet some of the demands of his desires. Already this shows that criminals are masking behind Christianity because of selfishness and greed. They are pretending to be preaching the word of God but with intentions for personal gains. At the funeral Reverend Guiseb does not preach at all, all he asks for is "money, beasts, goats and even chickens were welcome" (Nyathi, 2008, pp. 51). A good reverend, a man of God, is surely out on a 'Christian mission' to milk and drain fellow African people of their wealth. Ridiculing "a man of God, the anointed one" and indeed daring to lampoon the vulture-like tendencies of Christianity may seem like blasphemy. It is an unsayable in some African communities but Nyathi unmasks the rot and the personal aggrandisement missions of the wolves in sheep skins like Reverend Guiseb as the Bible itself calls them.

The issue of education is also highlighted. Nyathi is cautioning society to be on the look-out for the type of education that they are acquiring, whether it is education for development or education for destruction. Education for development is education that benefits both the one educated and the society that he lives in. Whereas education for destruction is education that destroys the one who receives it and contributes totally nothing to the development of the community. In chapter 6 of *The Other Presence*, Thomas has just returned from the United States of America where he graduated with a Master's degree in Social Sciences majoring in Sociology and Psychology. He also had Black History and International Politics as his minors (p. 21). Du Bois (1994) in *The Souls of Black Folk* gives an insight on what the land that Thomas had gone to for his education is like when he says that, "America is a world which yields a black man no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world." Thus Thomas returns home to Africa culturally castrated, he does not know even how to dress at a funeral as noted below:

The expectations in terms of dressing code at such gatherings, was decent clothing that one would wear to formal places such as the church. To the contrary, *new* Thomas brought something *new* to the community. His baggy jeans hung below the upper part of his buttocks. One could see perfectly well that the traditional way tying the belt around the waist was now a thing of the past. Thomas's pants now sat right on the cleavage of his buttocks so that the valley between his buttocks would alert an indifferent passer-by. (Nyathi, 2008, pp. 21-22)

This is a clear indication that Thomas has lost grip of his cultural footing, he is now a misfit and a cultural renegade fallen from grace. The type of education he received in the United States of America is a destructive type of education. It made Thomas forget completely who he was and where he had come from, notably by embracing a foreign culture which sharply contradicts with his own African culture. Embracing a foreign culture at the expense of one's own is a sign of inferiority complex. This leads to one's own destruction and being labelled a social outcast. Thomas has become culturally dislocated by negating his African-ness and his identity. With the exception of his skin colour which is innate, nothing else about him is left that gives a true reflection of a true African as noted by his neurotic behaviour in the following passage from *The Other Presence*:

Another notably distinct and new characteristic Thomas had acquired was an accent. His English words were now pushed through his nose. Every vowel or consonant that passed through his mouth was nasalised. This also affected his accent in his own mother tongue. He seemed desperate to sound very English. Whenever he spoke in whatever languages, he drew a huge fit of laughter from his silent critics. (Nyathi, 2008, pp. 21-22)

Instead of Thomas being an educated member in society worthy of emulation and a role model, he turns out to be a laughing stock because he has allowed an alien culture and an alien language to interfere with his own rich African culture and African language. This brings to our attention the notion of mimicry which is the imitation of dress, manners and language of the dominant culture by the oppressed. The type of education and culture that Thomas got exposed to only leads to culture moribund.

Through the character Kachana, the author also highlights the shortcomings of modernity and warns people to be aware of such cultures that effectively change their lives for the worst if embraced without caution. The powerful force entwined with modernity made Kachana to think that being dark skinned meant being ugly. She resorted to the use of skin lightening creams in order to transform her skin to a fairer one as noted from the text:

In spite of her neat appearance (Kachana), her excessive usage of western chemicals to change her skin from pitch black to pale tone had cost her dearly. Her skin looked like the ashes of her burnt person. It had developed many patches of black and reddish spots. (Nyathi, 2008, pp. 4)

The culture of lightening and bleaching of the skin by Africans is a racial issue in that it relates to the devaluing and denigration of black African women and their physical appearance. The white people propounded their definition of *beauty* in their own context and applied it across all races such that they automatically gained superiority as they 'the Caucasian race' only had the attributes that matched their definition. The other races, Africa included, were affected as inferiority complex was implanted in them. That is the reason why Kachana bleached her skin and unfortunately she got disfigured. In other words, Nyathi is saying that blindly embracing modernism to a greater extent disfigures one's culture. Also, two cultures cannot coexist, because of the exploitative and discriminatory nature that the powerful one always has over the weaker one.

To some extent, Thomas and Kachana must not be treated with animosity. Thomas is a victim of powerful forces that are beyond his control. The environment he got exposed to when he went to America for his studies convinced him that being African is not good enough, but foolish enough; same with Kachana who got blown away with modernism. These two characters are a typical reflection of psychological warfare. Psychological warfare refers to the use of propaganda, threats and other psychological techniques to mislead, intimidate, demoralise, or otherwise influence the thinking or behaviour of an opponent, in this case Thomas and Kachana. These two were intimidated, misled and forced to repudiate their own identity as Africans. Thus Nyathi through literature is calling on the society to be careful when it comes to the type of education they may intend to pursue and cultures they may try to embrace. The moral lesson behind the roles played by Kachana and Thomas in *The Other Presence* is that the type of education we get and the type of culture we try to embrace determine the type of people we become in society. Nyathi is raising levels of consciousness of his fellow Africans about the harm caused by external oppressive forces to African cultural values and sense of self that come in the form of education and modernity.

According to Achebe (1988), it is the novelist's duty to re-educate his society through literary works. His duty entails the correcting of distortions of Africa imposed on the world by the forces of oppression. Africans are a people with their way of doing their own things. There are ways of doing specific things that have been practiced in Africa and have been carried down from generation to generation. In *The Other Presence*, Nyathi reminds society about some of the scientific African ways of preserving food. This is a powerful way of representing our history, digging deep into scientific African ways of conserving food that can still be used in the present day. He writes about the way meat can be preserved and last longer:

...today what hung there was not clothes but meat that was cut into long strings. It was salted and dried so that it could be preserved and used during the mourning ritual (Nyathi, 2008, pp. 5).

Literature is a reflection of reality and Nyathi uses realism, a style in literature that shows things and this brings up the aspect of verisimilitude. The issues that the author raises in contemporary society are things the reader can readily relate to because they are true and are happening - they are authentic in the way they are presented. Ojinmah (1991) echoes Achebe when he says, "the African writer must not only rescue his society's past, but must also be a commentator on its present course (p. 5)." Thus in *The Other Presence*, issues such as HIV and Aids, the mushrooming of fake churches and modernism are highlighted, they are the contemporary unsayables.

The writer also gets the opportunity to remind society that they are Africans and African people believe in communalism. This idea of communalism brings people together and strongly encourages sharing and working together. It strongly discourages individualism, for self-ness does not build a nation. The coming together of the villagers in *The Other Presence* highlights the communal nature of African people. Sharing brings people together - it unites people and is also a tenet of communalism as noted from the text:

The elders shared the calabash. It contained the village's favourite brew. One by one they sipped it. Each had his turn of the calabash as it was passed from one elder to the other in an orderly fashion. (Nyathi, 2008, pp. 4)

Also MaSimanga, Namukolo and Chuma share chunks of red soil brought out to the surface by ants (pp 14-15). Africans do not share edibles only, they share burdens as well. MaSimanga has fallen victim of the death of her son Akapelwa and the whole village throngs her homestead to share the bereavement. They communally grieve together with MaSimanga to lessen the affliction on her. This brings to attention the aspect of *Ubuntu* which encourages communalism and opposes individualism.

In *The Other Presence*, the writer balances his views about the deaths that are seemingly to be mainly caused by the deadly pandemic. He reminds society that death is not only caused by HIV and AIDS alone. The death of MaSimanga's husband in a road accident and that of Chuma after being severely attacked by a python, make the statement as a reminder to society that death can still occur through other means other than the deadly pandemic. Rogers (1976) notes that the:

African writer must be accountable to his society, if he fails to respond to the social and political issues of his age, 'to espouse the right and just causes of his people, he is no better than the absurd man in the proverb who deserts his burning house to pursue a rat fleeing from the flames. (p. 1)

It is a prerequisite that a writer leads his society, he must help educate it, reclaim its defamed past heritage, be its critic and mentor. Nyathi responds to the issues that are affecting his society by addressing the issues through the grammar of fiction. He uses different characters each with a different role and characteristics as a style of articulating his concerns. Still on the issue of the writer's accountability to his society Chukwudi, (1981) notes that the:

The African writer cannot afford the luxury of withdrawing into the cocoon of creativity in the name of art for art's sake. As a participant in the drama of social change in Africa, he can use his skills to help shape the future of society. (p. 13)

A writer thus cannot detach himself from his society. He has to be part of his society, he writes about his society hence he is expected to be accountable for his society. A writer looks out for social and cultural erosion or any other forms of mishaps and addresses such issues through his works and provides a solution as a way forward for the society into its future. Chukwudi (1981) further notes that there is a direct relationship between literature and social institutions, with criticising these institutions being the principal function of literature and eventually bringing about desirable changes in society (p. 11). Closely relating to the *The Other Presence*, Nyathi advises society to go and get tested through Doctor Castro, who tactfully addresses the issue of HIV and AIDS, at the end of the text, though not mentioning the disease by its name but referring it to as 'the other presence', and the importance of getting tested. Dr Castro is unlike Thomas who is blunt and lacks tact on the ways of articulating HIV and AIDS issues. Thomas may be telling the truth but it is not proper the way he says it. This form of communication results in discord and fails to achieve what it must. Doctor Castro is an outsider and a communist, yet he is diplomatic. When he speaks of the 'unsayables' he is very convincing, his choice of words turns the villagers gathered at the funeral to his attention. This can be seen from the following lines when Doctor Castro says:

I want to agree with many, some of whom are here with us, that there is always another presence that is responsible for our deaths. However, I also want to tell you that there is also another presence inside our bodies that can kill indiscriminately. It has neither colour nor race. It knows no sex or gender. It conquers all. Sometimes, it can wipe away a clan, a family or a tribe... So please, please, please, come to the hospital and I will test you. (Nyathi, 2008, pp. 110)

Nyathi tactfully brings out the power of grammatical representation of fiction in *The Other Presence*. He uses simple English in his text and this makes the text readily available to the majority of readers. The language used is reader friendly and it is easy to understand the message that the writer is trying to put across. In an essay 'The Writer and His Community' Achebe (1988) states that:

The African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost. (p. 41)

Through literature and using simple English there is a successful depiction of issues that are directly linked to society as the text is a sharp portrayal of societal realities. It is the representational power of the grammar of fiction that makes *The Other Presence* an authentic and mirror reflection of society.

3.0 Conclusion

Narrative fiction has an apt ability to report on issues that haunt our contemporary societies; issues that are considered as taboo, the unsayables, the unmentionable, the prohibited and the forbidden in our society's daily lives. Thus literature's faculties are able to resist the resistance of contemporary concerns in our lives. Through the powerful grammatical representational of fiction, new insights to these issues are ascertained. Re-examining these issues affords us the opportunity to critically question and appreciate the changing world paradigm. The silencing of silence can find clear and qualitative grammars of articulation through literature. Nyathi's novel therefore is a bold voice of reason and relevance in as much as it voices and renders more immediate and felt contemporary realities haunting the present day world. It is noteworthy therefore that Nyathi's novel has been translated into many languages for easy and wider accessibility and also that it has been incorporated into curricula both at secondary school and institutions of higher learning in Namibia. However, policy developers, the civic society, politicians, community development specialists, communication experts, linguists and cultural performers need to seriously consider the issues raised in the novel, debate them and devise ways of practically facing them. These are critical concerns faced by the majority of the citizens on a daily basis and book publishers are especially recommended to make the novel more available in every bookshop in the country. In addition, Abraham (as cited in Achebe, 1988), "why should African literary creators be exempted from the services that they themselves recognise as genuine?" therefore a clarion call is upon future literary creators to also write fiction that can articulate the unsayables" and become "the metaphorical "visible voices" to join Nyathi's melody.

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