Chapter 1

Thetha Sizwe: Challenging Gender Fixities through Interventions from the Margins Using African Languages

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Introduction

Our purpose in this argument is to respond to a dearth that defines the debate that is curated in, and in part addressed by, the intervention in this chapter. Empirical studies of gender and language have, essentially, been conducted in northern contexts (notably the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Europe) as motivated in, for example, *Gender and Language in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Atanga, Ellece, Litosselliti and Sunderland 2011) and *Language and Gender* (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2013; Talbot 2020). Although not fully grounded in a specific focus on gender and language, some formidable shaping texts have emerged that cover, in part, the layered and dynamic complexities of Zulu identities (see, for example, Carlton, Laband and Sithole 2008), with the gendered perspectives being strongest in a volume that proposes a compendium of things Zulu yet lacking in teasing out some of the underlying political nuances in terms of language. More recently, taking a self-reflective and confessional approach to a history of language, written as a linguistic biography in literary theoretical terms, Sanders (2016) offers some persuasive psychoanalytical insights into the history of Zulu, which he claims are critical to shaping subjectivity. (Though not directly addressing gender, some useful insights speak to issues of gender, masculinity and coloniality.) Most recently and resonating very well with the question of politics and language (including race), Rudwick's (2022) linguistic anthropological insights draw on insights from isiZulu and Afrikaans speakers about power, ideology and gender, reflecting over two decades of solid linguistic research in South Africa.

Beyond a few exceptions in the Southern (African) contexts (see, for example, De Kadt 2002; Milani 2015; Mateveke 2017; Reddy and De Kadt 2006) and intermittent papers in the *South African*

Journal of African Languages addressing gender and language, there is a dearth of interventions that foreground the dynamic tensions and opportunities in African languages, in particular. The contributors to this collection endeavour to address this dearth by proposing some theoretical tools contained in this volume. The landscape, however, has changed since this observation, even as these changes continue to play out in the non-heteronormative gender economy—Fiereck, Hoad and Mupotsa's (2020) 'Time Out of Joint: The Queer and Customary in Africa' being but one example in an edited special issue of *GLQ* that delicately analyses the relationship between customary conceptions of gender, language and the political, to demonstrate the multivariance(s) of sexuality in Africa and our need to study it. Central, here, is the prospect of how language includes and excludes, but more importantly, how language is often used injuriously to also name and shame. Herein lie the imbrications reinforced in predominately heteronormative culture, patriarchal language and the social institutions that regulate and govern society. As indicated earlier, it is the aim of this chapter, within the overall context of this volume, to contribute to the study of this inter-relational confluence that—using the Foucauldian notion of governmentality (Lemke 2015; Macleod and Durrheim 2002)—bears down on the lives of the sexual subject and being. The connectedness of gender, culture, language and society (see Jourdan and Tuite 2006; Stanlaw, Adachi and Salzman 2017), combined with context, location, position and history, gives us an impetus to interrogate the political conditions of possibility under which sexual subjects exist on the African continent, while also responding to the dearth first identified by Atanga et al. (2011). Our intervention is not predetermined, singular, insular or outside the growing body of scholarship that is considering such questions and analyses (see, for example, Nyeck 2021) in nuanced conceptual terms.

Additionally, and as precursors to Fiereck et al. (2020), antecedents that take the political seriously (see Epprecht 2004, 2013; Nyeck and Epprecht 2013) as it is interwoven with the confluence of culture, gender, language and social institutions that bear down on the subjectivity of the sexual subject—*Queer in Africa: LGBTQI Identities, Citizenship, and Activism* (Matebeni, Monro and Reddy 2018)—add a critical and incisive voice to arguments about the politics of gender and sexualities in African contexts. Keeping in mind our preoccupation, which deals with the concepts of gender—as a set of ideas—and language, as it defines—willing and unwilling life (including representing those that are perceived to be abject)—the possibilities of those who are 'spoken of' (*abo ku thethwa*

ngabo).[1] *Queer in Africa* explicitly applies to the relationship between language and gender in the analysis presented by Mary Hames (2018), wherein she thinks through the phenomenon of 'Lesbian Students in the Academy: Invisible, Assimilated, or Ignored?'.[2] Moreover, Hames' interventions motivate a useful contribution in response to the shortfalls identified by Atanga et al. (2011) and to which we propose a response within this argument.

Concerning the theorisation of gender and sexuality on the continent using African languages, this gap must be qualified in that we (here) wish to take a moment to articulate and extrapolate what is embedded in the concept of *Thetha Sizwe*. Additionally, it cannot go unstated that the theorisation to which we refer should not be taken to mean that African languages lack theoretical depth and sophistication, for the objection to such an assertion lies in the question, 'how would African intellectual and political thought have developed insights into the complexities of African societies that boast of laudable civilisation across the continent if they did not have theory?' As such, when we refer to theorisation, the proper concept—possibly—is one that seeks to take the reader into the confidence of a nuanced, rich and deeper understanding of our languages, linguistics (and their politics and politicisation) that is deferential in kind and illumining to academe. We must be clear in indicating that the discussion we are curating with the theoretical articulation suggested by this chapter is not an exhaustive one implying closure but rather one that must and ought to inspire further thinking and similar projects in other disciplines.

In our engagement below, the concept of *Thetha Sizwe* is representative of two meanings.

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1 Readers familiar with the Nguni language cluster will note that, here, we refer to the idea of 'uku thetha' as it finds expression in the language of isiXhosa. This conception of 'speaking' has radical implications when read against Matebeni et al. (2018) insofar as they address themselves to the life/lives of those who are always spoken of as a mode of being 'managed' and 'tolerated' in an anti-Queer, cis-heteronormative, patriarchal society that is always violent to 'feminised' (Kumalo 2019) and, necessarily, Othered bodies. It is here that Thetha Sizwe finds its interventionist agenda, seeking to subvert discourses of power that are exclusionary owing to their hegemonic dominance.

2 Without taking away from the analysis presented by Hames (2018), it is useful to note that the conception of '*inkonkoni*' (which is orthographically represented as *'unkonkoni'* (Hames 2018: 143) outside of its common orthography as written here), encountered in her analysis, is itself misrepresented insofar as it is viewed as a derogatory concept by her study's participants. This volume, perhaps, will demonstrate how critical interventions of language might illumine our understandings in ways that go beyond the common parlance vis-à-vis the use of certain terms within the everyday world that is defined by structures of power, domination and the Othering of those who are always located as subjects of hegemonic identities. Less pretentiously, if one interrogates the word, they will find its meaning to be a designator for the sacred object used by traditional healers in the process of divination, which—in itself—is already revealing of the concept '*inkonkoni*', those who exhibit same-sex desire. The commonalities would be surfaced in an etymological analysis of the two concepts. However, it is not within the scope of this essay to apply itself to this distinction.

The first instance suggests the call and response—a dialogical approach of a speaker addressing a hearer. *Thetha Sizwe*, in such a schema, has epistemic implications insofar as the hearer hears the speaker through the social conferral of credibility to the speaker by their hearer. In other words, 'epistemic implications' reveal that the communicative concept of *thetha sizwe* has cognitive, conscious, cerebral overtones: it implies knowledge effects and is about knowing. As the editors of the collection, we subsequently wish to pose a series of questions to our readers: do you hear the epistemic claims contained in the music, literature, poetry and art of our genders, sexualities, languages and culture(s)? Are you ready to engage in such an exchange, which has left us (in our collective efforts to bring this text to completion—as contributors and editors) in awe and deep admiration of the capacity of our people and their languages? With the legislative moves that seek to see the use of indigenous languages in the scientific system of the country, are we—as members positioned within academia—ready to take the function, knowledge, depth and opportunities that lie in our languages seriously?

While this book is not an analysis of thematic considerations that define the scholarly area of epistemic justice, insofar as such questions as those posed above are of an epistemic justice inclination, the kinds of contributions that constitute this volume demonstrate its saliency to this disciplinary area of interest. This is to say that the chapters contained in the book outline, through systematic engagement with gender, sexuality, music, literature, poetry and cultural institutions, *how* a living conception of epistemology informs resistance and theorisation in spaces that have always been located at the margins. Such an informing process might even allow the reader of epistemology to broaden their horizons with respect to how they understand, think about and theorise epistemic justice and epistemology as a fundamental subset of philosophy proper. Importantly, what such a conception of *Thetha Sizwe*—in the dialogical format—does is that it enables us to liberate ourselves from the hubris that has always held the position of a need to capacitate our languages through notions of 'intellectualisation' (cf. Kumalo 2020, when he writes about developing theory using historical artefacts in Boucher's *Language, Culture and Decolonisation*). Simply, what is motivated in this chapter and demonstrated in this volume is that African languages have always been intellectual in the function of intellection. Surely, therein lies the intellectual capacity of indigenous languages. In other words, we motivate that it is pre-given as a communicative expression and invitation that requires further engagement. For this reason, the collection suggests what we consider a new concept vis-à-vis debates of intellectualisation.

Secondly, the concept is denotative of a national speech act, in the sense of a nation speaking—a matter that is taken up in Chapter 7 by Kumalo and Zondi when they use the work of Veena Das to

think through the concept of language as institution. The concept of a national speech act is not only limited to this chapter, however; it is also found in the thinking of theoretical contributions that engage feminist styles of resistance in women's writing, women's music and the uses of poetry that mount a socio-political critique. *Thetha Sizwe*, in this secondary function, builds from the first conceptual move in that the questions we posed are answered in the affirmative. We are actively forging ahead with African languages in their upward trajectory and use in the scientific system of the country, therefore let the nation speak! African languages need to resist the paternalistic intervention that they need capacitation. On the contrary, our languages need attention, historical tracing and study, but more importantly, they need the space from which to speak! While we hear the epistemic claims that are contained in the life stories, music, literature and gender and sexual narratives of our people, we simultaneously recognise the nation (in its concomitant capacity to create, insofar as we do not abjure the categories of Blackness and, more importantly, Blackness as it is representative of indigenous ways of life and being).

Thetha Sizwe as a national speech act, as the nation speaking, is a fundamental intellectual shift insofar as we recognise that the histories of our people, the oppression of colonial invasion and epistemic slighting are all an ongoing intellectual and political project that require(s/d) correcting and repair since the dawn of democracy in South Africa. In the concept of recognition lies a deeply fundamental human act that understands that we are not invalids waiting to learn from the great traditions of colonial masters. In isiZulu alone, we have a plethora of literary genres that give us a home, a base from which to speak, a language that commands respect and deferential treatment by any scholar who takes themselves seriously—and here we list *inganekwane* (folktale)*, insumansumane* (myth)*, umlando* (historical narrative)*, inkondlo* (poem) and indaba. In styling *Thetha Sizwe* as a national speech act, we seek to dislodge the deeply epistemically racist assumptions that our languages need appropriating—a claim that comes from scholars who know very little about our languages and yet have the intellectual hubris to claim that African languages ought to borrow from languages such as English. Such a position is not merely punted by us, as the volume editors, without scholarly substantiation and evidence but is self-evident in the two chapters of the book that are written in isiZulu. *Thetha Sizwe*, as a recognised national speech act, shifts the gaze from a colonial centre and takes the notion of inter-epistemic exchange seriously.

Recognising this gap—insofar as such connections are sorely lacking in the theorisation of the location of our languages—and continuing in the trajectory of Fiereck et al. (2020), this volume takes a cue from these studies in responding to the need to scrutinising the diversity theorised by Matebeni et al. (2018), as it exists in Africa—and in our case—at the southernmost tip of the African

continent. The objective lies in showcasing the relationship between language, cultures and conceptions of gender and sexuality (and their politics) while deploying sexuality (closely aligned to gender) as a lens through which to use the linguistic richness that has for so long been silenced, repressed, if not erased. It is important to note that before the historical fact of colonisation that was not predicated on an existential necessity, the multivariance of genders and sexualities that existed in Africa and in the societies in which we apply ourselves, in the analyses presented in this volume, were not exclusionary and constricted as they are today (cf. Murray and Roscoe 2021). The contention, expressed in the notion of enabling the room for sexuality to act as a lens, is to counter the reinforced socially constructed heteronormative restrictions that came to define our societies shaped and influenced by colonial strictures of reading and ordering our worlds. This claim finds its confirmation in the scholarship of Amadiume (1987), Mudimbe (1988), Mignolo and Vásquez (2013), Mohanty (1991; 2003) and Oyěwùmí (1997), to mention a few scholars who have critiqued and problematised western epistemic colonialism and paradigms, and ways of seeing and structuring the world and decolonising knowledge (Alcoff 2007, 2011, 2017).

To this end, multivariance[3], as explored in this chapter, is an appeal to culture and its centrality, specifically in the context of language, for language is always rooted in and expressive of culture. Culture is a conundrum, especially in human and social contexts, because beyond its root meaning of shared values, ideas and symbols that pattern our lives, it is simultaneously elusive and illusive and indeed implies complex systems of articulation and understanding that are deeply and inherently contested. This appeal has previously been theorised by Kumalo and Gama (2018) in their analysis of Trengrove's *Inxeba*, wherein the authors make a case for the need to transform and change the fixities that define cultural conceptions. They make this proposition by appealing to how Trengrove subverts the socially constructed cultural space of 'manhood' and initiation within the Xhosa custom of *ulwaluko*. This contestation and subversion allow for a revisionist approach to interpretations of culture and its constructions, circulation and reproductions. There can be binary approaches: one that sticks with culture as it is inherited (implying that it is unform and static) and a secondary approach that contests culture and its trajectory (which recognises and rethinks its dynamism and fluidity). In this volume, the essays/analyses/arguments demonstrate modes of subversion that counter grand narratives that respond to subaltern and marginalised voices (Spivak and Riach 2016) within the scheme of the perceived role of culture as a monolithic social institution

3 By multivariance, we imply the rich diversity of African languages, their conceptual dimensions, which further imply that we need recourse to the idea that all languages do not simply represent a grammar, syntax and semantics but they are—in their use—fundamentally complex, contested and multidimensional.

that is uniform and unchanging. Responding to this conundrum, in their argument, Kumalo and Gama (2018: 2) suggest the notion of 'action-as-legislation', which they define as follows:

> [m]anhood, as we use it in this paper, is in line with the Arendtian ([1954]/1994:441) suggestion which posits action as legislation. Action, in terms of manhood, denotes acting in such a way that the principles of an individual's action could become the general law, and to be a man of goodwill represents a constant concern—not with obedience to the existing laws but with legislating through one's actions.

The relationship between genders, languages and cultures can thus also be better served using a discourse analytical framework that remains scarce (Atanga et al. 2011) on the continent. In addressing this gap, this collection highlights and engages the issues/questions shaping languages, cultures and genders in South Africa while drawing from contexts a bit further afield, such as Nigeria. As outlined in note 2 in this essay, the reader is invited to think with us when we suggest that conceptions of sexuality require space for articulation and realisation, using an altogether different and fresh vocabulary—as suggested in this volume through the use of African languages—that has suffered at the hands of violent repression, owing to the impositions of coloniality and colonialism. To suggest a fresh vocabulary means a system of recognition(s) as attached to the questions we posed above; a fresh vocabulary can and ought to be found in our languages by recognising *Thetha Sizwe* as a national speech act. In other words, we are searching for epistemic freedom as a corrective to epistemic violence. It is important to bear in mind that as this is a nascent area of scholarship, there will and should be contestations—rooted in the process of correcting misreadings that are informed by a lack of understanding of historical (indigenous) terms that have been refracted, owing to the incongruencies created by colonial imposition.

To say that this is a burgeoning area of scholarship is rooted in our observation of work dedicated to studying African languages and cultures as they contribute to how we understand the world(s) we inhabit. Put another way, a study of this nature that locates culture in conversation with language (insofar as we treat the languages of the margins that have always been 'Othered') is novel and is a rationale of this volume. While we acknowledge that there has been work on language in disciplines such as sociolinguistics and lexicography, and cultural anthropology, sociology and political studies have paid attention to the uses of culture, the merging of the two—as they concern the lived realities of peoples of the South—is something rare, which culminates in our positioning this argument as one that gives birth to a nascent area of study that we hope will inspire more engagement in this direction.

Returning to the facilitation of breathing (life) into African languages and cultures in our theorisation, we must motivate how we conclude that these epistemic frameworks have been at the receiving end of injustice(s). The claim that the ideas and modes of life that are recuperated, explored and interrogated in this volume have been at the receiving end of silencing and repression is rooted in Mazrui's (1978) seminal argument, wherein he demonstrates how colonial education went to the extent of shaming the existing moral codes around sex and sexuality in Africa. His (Mazrui 1978: 26) exposition of the issue treats the importation of a Victorian moral economy that created a society 'where the novel was read in family gatherings; where, therefore, the novelist was expected to avoid topics which might cause embarrassment to the young, especially young girls.' Moreover, and with this thinking in mind: 'This is why the early missionaries, who were also founders of Africa's early schools, were somewhat shocked at what they considered a rather loose sexual morality among the Africans' (Mazrui 1978: 26). In correcting this problem, which was only a problem insofar as it was an ethnocentric arrogance (accompanied by violence), the colonial missionary education *pioneers* unsurprisingly 'sought to bring under control both in schools and in the villages as a whole [...] sex in all its manifestations. And they sought to do this by proceeding to discourage "important areas of African cultural life, on the assumption that these contributed to moral laxity and sinful appetite."'

The ideas in this volume re-member these modes of life while exploring their nuances, multivariance and textures by drawing from culture, language and literature. Such an approach resurfaces the relationship between literary studies and cultural practices to the extent that the two are intimately interwoven—for an aesthetic object (for example, a literary text, a work of art, a piece of music) can only be truly appreciated if its audience is familiar with its substantiating (situational) cultural practices. This relationship takes us back to the one on the intricate modes of existence between language and culture.

Put differently, the collection pushes the conceptual move by substantially drawing on studies that relate to women's experiences as a way of demonstrating that women need to lead the way in discussions that subvert patriarchal power. Moreover, the need to position women in this way inspires allyship with all genders and sexualities that have been relegated to the realm of a confined and domesticated life that has restricted the capacity to participate in public affairs and the polity. Positioning the volume in this format is informed by an appreciation of the pride of place assigned to conceptions of understanding society that are liberated from the categories that were imposed on the continent through bifurcating gender economies that established systems of hierarchy and, subsequently, domination. The rationale behind such a move is premised on feminist philosophy,

specifically the thinking of Drucilla Cornell (1995: 78) when she makes a case for an ethical feminism, which indicates 'the aspiration to a nonviolent relationship to the "Other" and to "Otherness" in the widest possible sense. This assumes responsibility to struggle against appropriating the 'Other' into any system of meaning that would deny her difference and singularity.'

The work presented in this volume thus takes as its overarching question the interrogation of what it would mean to resist systems of domination that deny most women their singularity, which is to say, their agency and epistemic status as actors within the structural inequalities of society—as has been the case since the imposition of systems of power that construct our worlds in diverse ways in the (post)-colonial era. We recognise that our societies, having internalised imported moral economies, have dramatically shifted from what they were before colonial imposition. This is not, however, to advocate for a project that attempts to recover a lost world, as such an approach would merely be symptomatic of essentialist thinking, which has already been troubled by a series of scholars who have treated the matter in the past, be they writing in the post-colonial tradition (Mamdani 2001, 2017) or the decolonial tradition (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018; Nyoka 2020; Sithole 2020). Rather, the objective is to enlist in resistance struggles while demonstrating how this structure of resistance has always persisted and continues to persist in the linguistic dimension that shapes African languages. Enlisting in such a struggle also reveals the differences that define how two world views differ. But instead of simply using difference as a point of contention, we aim to demonstrate how such differences can assist in waging war against hegemonic strictures of thinking that lock people into cages of inferiority and hopelessness, to borrow from Morrison (1993).

In so enlisting in the theoretical (proverbial) struggle against patriarchal dominations, we do not do this alone but employ the tools and resources of feminist intellectuals in their multiplicities (and in their differences) as they exist on the African continent and regionally. Such a plethora of ideas concerning the liberation of women—as said, liberation is theorised by feminists and queer thinkers, which also privileges the singularity outlined by Cornell's (1995) ethical feminism—draws from the aesthetic objects produced in the indigenous languages of the country. The appeal to an indigenous and decolonised local aesthetic does not foreclose our ability to draw from theoretical feminist developments—as outlined by African feminists across Africa (cf. Mama 2007; Tamale 2020). Moreover, and importantly, our privileging of the aesthetic allows us to advance Cornell's (1995: 77) feminist call to struggle, wherein she draws our attention to 'what has been traditionally thought [of] as the aesthetic in feminist politics.' In this instance, Cornell (1995) privileges the function of imagination insofar as imagination allows us to rethink and fashion new worlds, which advances our objectives while taking care to substantiate our reasoning against being seen as attempting to conjure up past and extinct worlds.

In keeping with this line of thinking, we should clear up the distinction between re-membering and fashioning new worlds. In the first instance, we take re-membering to mean the project of attending to the displacement, dislocation and abjection (indeed pathologising) moves that have torn apart cultures, belief systems and moral economies—to the extent that such a project has instituted structures of domination and oppression.[4] These systems of domination and oppression have been diagnosed as coloniality in the contemporary age, where the ghost of coloniality still defines our conceptions of the world. Re-membering means attending to this ghost (exorcising it) to prime (and redraft) the canvas for imagining new worlds, which, of course, is the second conceptual move that we attend to. The exorcism, here, is done by appealing to the concept of dialogue as an iterative process (*Thetha Sizwe*)—both individual and communing together, which signifies the process of creating (in the aesthetic sense) as a collective. This process of creation is what gives rise to the notion of the national speech act, to which we referred above. Creation, in this regard, becomes a collective project, a public affair—revolutionary in the Arendtian (1966–1967) sense of *Revolution and Freedom* (see Hiruta 2019).

As is already well known, it is only aesthetic insofar as the artist(s) has an audience that will receive the object and respond to its capacity to express, capture and be a symbol of the beautiful and sublime. In this sense, the communicative correlation is clear: just as *thetha sizwe* is about the capacity to 'hear and speak'; similarly, language and literature induce the prospect of layered meanings that enable ongoing reinterpretation precisely because we can hear, speak and listen. The aesthetic, so construed, is a dialogical process informed by the pioneering work of Bakhtin (1982), which is also captured by the notion of the call and response that is embedded in the notion of *Thetha Sizwe*—speak and let us hear; create and let us receive that which has been created. *Thetha Sizwe* is thus, in some instances, also different from simply allowing the nation to speak (denotative of a collective process of governance that allows the polity to co-create its own possibilities). In the aesthetic component, that of an audience, we find the notion of *Thetha Sizwe* as it carries its double meaning: first, *Thetha*, denoting a community with which one dialogues in the process of speaking (and speaking is but another mode of acting and creating). In the second sense, *Sizwe*, as denotative of the aesthetic at work, we find the notion of hearing—here, the aesthetic that can be understood as the poetic compositions that are under investigation in the treatises compiled in the collection, the music that is analysed in these treatises, and the novels and writing strategies that

4 Here, oppression is used in line with Anne Cudd's (2006) *Analysing Oppression*, insofar as her analysis has allowed for the detailed study of systems that instantiate oppression and allow us to attend to the manifold challenges that come with this reality.

are interrogated. Our curatorial decisions in shaping this volume together with authors have been given the act of motivating the process of speaking and being heard and co-creating knowledge insofar as these strategies are emblematic of the design and sequence of the chapters. In this idea of hearing, *Sizwe* moves from a noun (*iSizwe*—a nation) to a verb (*sizwe*—action-in-hearing as the act that inspires doing, which corrects that which is socially problematic or an illness that requires our attention).

In dealing with a social issue, collective dialogue appeals to and underwrites the philosophies of African people(s)—who find generative modes of addressing social ills through mediated dialogue and conversation. In this regard, creating becomes a focal point of analysis since creating can mean creating either music, poetry, paintings, literature or a polity that is ethically conducive to the flourishing of all within said polity. Collective imaginings of new worlds attend to the contemporary scourges that define society all around us, with gender-based violence being but one example of the social issues that require collective struggle in addressing the behaviour of men and the violence perpetrated against women and children in South Africa.

The process of dialoguing in priming a canvas for new aesthetic possibilities does not denote the ascription of definitive categories that have led to where we are—in need of new modes of thinking and theorising that borrow from systems of thought that were once thought mythological and fictitious by a system captivated by its own 'narcotic narcissism', to borrow once more from Morrison (1993). Ours is cautious in an attempt not to recreate the problems identified by Cornell (1995) as we go about re-membering our disavowed cultures, worlds and modes of being. In her own words (Cornell 1995: 77):

> Indeed, the labelling process has served as a *pharmakon*, both 'curing' and 'poisoning' our minds by closing them to the important ethical and political issues that are advanced by re-thinking the significance of the limit of the symbolic order, of the world structured not only by conventional meaning but by the fantasies that give body and weight to our form of life.

We read this labelling process as the rigidities of the social structures imposed by language and culture, creating the falsities of worlds unchanged, unchangeable and unchanging. With the feminist struggle in mind, a struggle that aims to create an alignment of the ethical with the aesthetic, *Thetha Sizwe* offers some tools to begin building this new and imagined world predicated on the ethical relationality between the self and the *Other*. Put simply, the conceptual frame of this

volume encourages modes of unlearning—and re-learning that culture is not a static phenomenon but rather a dynamic process; all fixities about it can be challenged, altered and changed. *Thetha Sizwe* accentuates language as a powerful tool that societies can mobilise in the feminist struggle to reclaim power in an African perspective while constructing identities and expressing individuality aligned to collective struggles.

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