As Loreto Todd and Ian Hancock have stated “In the four centuries since the time of Shakespeare, English has changed from a relatively unimportant European language with perhaps four million speakers into an international language used in every continent by approximately eight hundred million people” (2001:9). But can one speak of one Global or International English or should we rather be speaking of different “Englishes”, each with characteristics and peculiarities of its own? This present article aims to explore the manner in which South African English, one of the so-called “New Englishes” has developed over time and become distinct from other Englishes such as British, American or Australian English. In any case, we should be wary of the labels applied to language varieties because as Tom McArthur explains “The “New Englishes” are often so called because English-language scholarship took serious note of them only from c.1980. In most cases they date back 100-200 years.” (2001: 9)

Background about South Africa

The Republic of South Africa is located at the very tip of the African continent bathed by the Atlantic and Indian oceans. Further north lie its closest neighbours: Namibia, Botswana and Zimbabwe and to the east, Mozambique and Swaziland. Its other neighbour is Lesotho, an independent country which is surrounded by South Africa. In 1652, and as a consequence of the discovery of the Cape of Good Hope by Bartholomeu Dias in 1488 as well as Vasco de Gama’s discovery of the Cape Sea Route in 1498, the Dutch East Indian company founded a refreshment station in the region that would later come to be known as Cape Town. This became a British colony in 1806 thus marking the beginning of a South African British culture which was strengthened with the arrival of the first settlers in 1820, who were responsible for its dispersion further north and east as a result of the Great Trek: a major exodus from the Cape.

The conflict known as the Boer War was triggered by the discovery of gold and diamonds which became a focus for an arduous struggle for the control of the region's mineral wealth among the European colonizing powers, eventually won by the British Empire. The late 19th century also saw internal military conflict, between a population of Dutch origin settlers/colonizers and the imperial British authorities, known as the Boer Wars. Legal racial segregation, later to be known as Apartheid, was institutionalized as early as 1881 under the Pretoria Convention which marked the end of the first Boer War between the Boers in the Transvaal and The United Kingdom. Under this convention, the South African republic regained self-government under British suzerainty. South Africa was granted limited independence in 1910 as a British Dominion but would only gain its political independence in 1961 when it was declared a republic. The Apartheid policy was continued until 1990 when negotiations were held with the African National Congress (ANC), led by Nelson Mandela, that led to the dismantling of racially motivated laws and which culminated in the long awaited truly democratic elections held in 1994.

The languages spoken in South Africa

The first official language in the Cape Colony was Dutch. However, in 1882 it was replaced by English as a result of a policy of Anglicization at the time. With the Union of South Africa in 1910, which resulted in the union of the former Boer republics of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State with The Cape and Natal colonies, English and Dutch became instituted as the country's two official languages. Dutch was replaced by Afrikaans in 1925:

The most widely spoken non-African language of South Africa is Afrikaans. Today it is regarded as a separate entity rather than as a dialect or variant of Dutch, though it only took shape as a formal language towards the end of the nineteenth century. During the early days of the Dutch settlement it was known variously as Cape
Dutch or South African Dutch, or simple “the taal” (language) of hearth and home, and it was used alongside the formal speech of the Netherlands.” (Elmes, 2001: 84)

With the passing of time, Afrikaans and its speakers came to be associated with the Apartheid policy, social exclusion and injustice. Many racial connotations arose: “Afrikaans speakers are by no means exclusively white, yet in recent history the language has been deeply mired in the racist administrations of the apartheid era. In fact, despite centuries of linguistic interaction between the communities there are still, it seems, strong divisions in south Africa between those who speak English and those who retain Afrikaans as their first language of choice.” (Elmes, 2001:84) John Kani, a well known South African actor who is also a writer and the Artistic Director of The Market Theatre of Johannesburg explains this aversion to Afrikaans by saying that:

We turned it around as the most powerful weapon of making the master understand in his language, understand in his culture, that we are free Africans and that this is our land. The thing that prompted English was that the Africans immediately recognized Afrikaans as the language of the oppressor, so they then preferred basically to speak English, because after 1848 it’s almost as if the English began to say “It’s not us, it’s them! As far as we are concerned you could be free today- though we will do nothing about it, we will not assist you in getting free today- but do not blame us any more. We're not in government, we're now in opposition”. (Elmes, 2001: 88)

Indeed, English came to be accepted as the language of opposition when it was adopted by the ANC as their and the country’s language of struggle. It was at the heart of the racial conflict in 1976 in Soweto during the Soweto riots when an attempt was made to teach Maths and some other subjects in Afrikaans: “English gradually became the language of opposition; even more so following the declaration of an apartheid policy in 1948….Afrikaans by contrast, has become the language of the oppressor, the language of the hated passbooks.” (McCrum et al, 1986, 304/305).

Nowadays, South Africa is a country which is known for its diversity in various walks of life. In common with several other British ex-colonies in Africa (Nigeria and Kenya, for example), South Africa is a multilingual country but it has an unusually high total of eleven official languages (Afrikaans, English, IsiNdebele, IsiXhosa, IsiZulu, Sespedi, Sesotho, Setswana, SiSwati, Tshivenda and Xitsonga) which are granted equal status by the country’s constitution so as to cater for the country’s diversity in terms of its people and cultures. The following languages are also mentioned in the constitution despite not being official languages: Khoi, Nama and San languages, sign language, Arabic, German, Greek, Gujarati, Hebrew, Hindi, Portuguese, Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu. A few indigenous creoles and pidgins are also spoken. As Dr Neville Alexander from the University of Cape Town points out, this was one of the central concerns throughout the negotiation process that led to the country’s first non-racial elections in 1994.

“Before the first non-racial elections in April 1994 most people assumed that English would become the only, or at least the main language of teaching in educational institutions. ... the dialectic of South African history, however ordained otherwise. Because of the passionate commitment of white Afrikaans-speaking South Africans to their language, their political representatives during the negotiation process in the early 90s insisted on the continued equality of Afrikaans with English as a condition for ceding office to the representatives of the liberation movement. These, in turn, for obvious political reasons could not concede to Afrikaans what they did not also give to the indigenous languages. Hence, the 11 official languages of the new South Africa.” (Neville, 2000.)

A different perspective on the significance of English to the general population should also be noted: “The new political dispensation that began in 1994 has accelerated the spread and value of English among the Blacks and, by extension, this institutionalized BSAE across a wider array of social domains despite the constitutional commitments to 11 official languages. It has indeed been attested that English has, in the post-apartheid era, become the most dominant official language that is used in the media, technology, commerce and government due to its association with social mobility.” (Makalela 2004: 357)
In addition, English has a special status as the most commonly spoken language in official and commercial public life. It is the country’s *Lingua Franca*, a condition that in itself is not without a certain amount of controversy as Penny Silva, The Editor of the *Oxford Dictionary of South African English* explains:

“English has a very powerful role in South Africa today. It’s quite a paradoxical role, I feel. People have a mixed attitude to it if it’s not their own language. It’s seen as a major resource, and for the upwardly mobile it’s the language of business, education, the media, international discussion. And so people have a tremendous ambition to learn it and to speak it well. But I would say that it’s also seen as probably a bit of a juggernaut, and I think there’s a lot of worry amongst speakers of smaller languages in South Africa, especially the African languages, that English is going to sweep all before it. But there’s no doubt that it has played an extremely important role in communication, starting really from the time of negotiations, just before the change of government. For quite a few decades it had been a Cinderella, and I think at that point it came back into its own again” (Elmes, 2001: 81).

It is a compulsory subject in all schools in addition to being the medium of instruction in many schools and universities.

English is currently the dominant language of teaching in South Africa. Indeed for most children of an African-language background almost all education after the first three years of schooling is in English. …The 1997 policy was intended to sustain the home language throughout the educational career of the learner, preferably as a medium, but in any case as a subject. In practice, however, it is not possible for children from an African language background to receive instruction through the medium of their home language beyond Grade 3 or 4. In fact one of the ineffable ironies of the new South Africa is that the only children who have mother tongue education (L1-medium) are precisely those who have been advantaged in most other respects in the course of South Africa’s history: English and Afrikaans speaking children.

(Neville, 2000)

Estimates based on the 2001 census reveal that 45% of the South African population has a knowledge of spoken English. However, it is interesting to note that it is only the fifth most spoken home language. According to the 2001 census, IsiZulu is the mother tongue of 23.8% of the South African population, followed by IsiXhosa (17.6%), Afrikaans (13.3%), Sepedi (9.4%) and finally, English and Setswana (8.2% respectively).

It is somewhat surprising that one in every three English speakers are from a European derived community: both the South African Asian and Chinese communities are largely English speaking communities as well as retaining their languages of origin. The result of all this linguistic diversity is that English has been established as a unique variety containing strong influences from Afrikaans and the country’s many African languages. Thus, South African English is spiced with various words and phrases from Afrikaans, IsiZulu and Nama to mention just a few.

**South African English**

As Tom McArthur points out South African English is becoming more and more autonomous which has inevitably led to “a strengthening of confidence in the local variety of English (…) The accelerated development, in for example, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa, of dictionary and other projects that increase the cohesion and autonomy of their own Englishes and reduce dependence on UK and US standards. Such developments tend to go hand-in-hand with a sympathetic approach to both endangered indigenous languages and “heritage languages” of immigrants in such countries.” (2001: 10). Social variation is a characteristic that is present in South African English. This variation has been divided into three main groups: Cultivated, General and Broad English. The first is close to Received Pronunciation and is associated with the upper class. General English is representative of the middle class and lastly, broad English is associated with the working class in addition to speakers of an Afrikaans descent who speak English as a second language.

**Lexicon**

The vocabulary of a language reflects more than mere words, which in turn, represent the reality around us. Vocabulary goes as far as to reflect a country’s people and culture. As
Charles Barber suggests, “It is perhaps in vocabulary that we see the greatest divergence between the different varieties of English as a first language.” (2000: 252.) This because, life in the new colonies was indeed very divergent to what it had been in the old European continent. As such, the settlers in the new colonies rapidly felt an urgent need to adapt already existing or old words in the English language or even to create new ones, so as to express the reality in which they now found themselves in. This gave rise to the creation of a whole new lexicon capable of meeting the needs of a new society and environment. As such, South African English has received many loans from the many native languages spoken in the country as this is the most common way of forming new vocabulary.

Afrikaans has provided a number of significant contributions to South African English. As Elmes stresses: “About half the words in the national lexicon that are distinctively South African originate in Afrikaans: words such as “kloof” (valley), “veld” (open country) and “dorp” (village).” (Elmes, 2001:85) Penny Silva considers that this process of assimilation began immediately upon the settler’s arrival in the country:

“They started from the very first day. People landed on the beach at Port Elizabeth and they were collected by Dutch farmers in their wagons and taken up the country to the area of Grahamstown, and they picked up words. You can imagine somebody sitting in the back of a wagon and pointing at an animal or plant that they saw and the Dutch farmer giving them the name of it.”

In the early diaries, in the first few months, you find the words just popping up as though they’re known already. They arrived in April 1820 and by late April, early May, the diaries are starting to reflect words like “kraal” as the word for a cattle enclosure, and like “Boer”, because of the farmers’ names for themselves. You get a lot of wagon terminology too - “trek” for the journey that you do, the “voorlooper” for the man who led the cattle. The “voorlooper” was a young boy who took the “riem” as it was called - the leather thong- and led the oxen along. And your wagon pole, to which the oxen were attached was called the “diesselboom”, and that starts coming in with all sorts of odd, strange spellings. “Thistleboon” was one Anglicised form of it. The wagon chest was the “voorkis”, and that replaces English in most of the diaries that you find- all sorts of quite technical language coming in from the whole business of using wagons and travelling.” (Elmes, 2001:85).

Afrikaans words linked to the country’s climate and foods have also entered the language and are still in use to this very day. “Biltong” (a type of dried meat) is much adored by South Africans as are “beskuit” (dried hard rusks). South Africa’s warm climate often invites its inhabitants to make a “braai” (barbecue) where they “braai” “braaivleis” (the meat cooked on the barbecue) and “mealies” (an ear of maize) accompanied by “pap” (a porridge made from “mealie”). “Boerewors” (a spicy farmer type sausage usually made from beef) or “sosaties” (kebabs on a stick) are also a national favourite. South African “naartjies” (an orange coloured citrus fruit similar to tangerines) have quite a reputation. “Potjiekos” (a rich stew cooked in a three-legged cast-iron pot over a fire) is one of the country’s traditional dishes. However, the Afrikaans influence is much vaster than the above mentioned topics. Many children run around in “tekkies” (trainers) and many people drive a “bakkie” (a pickup truck). If you get into a fight, you can always “bliksem” (beat up or punch) your aggressor. The list is endless.

South African English has adopted numerous influences from many of the local indigenous African languages such as “the Khoi which contributed the click sounds to the Xhosa language, and to English such words as “gnu” or “eina”.

If the Cape Dutch speakers contributed the largest number of items to the South African lexicon, at 10 per cent the influence of indigenous African languages is also considerable. The most important is that of the Khoi, a collective term for a large number of gentle, pastoral small tribes of indigenous African people (who were not Bantu), found all along the Cape coast from Cape Town into the interior. They were previously known by the term- now deemed unacceptable- Hottentot.” (Elms, 2001: 86)

Penny Silva explains that: “A very central word in South African English from the Khoi language is the local word for “ouch”, which in South African English is “eina”. I don’t think any South African children would say “ouch!”, they all say “eina!”...” (Elmes, 2001:87). The word “khaya” (home) has been loaned from the Nguni group of languages. “Mampara” (meaning an idiot or silly person) has been adopted from the Sotho languages.
A number of Zulu words have also been taken on by South African English. Take for example words like “donga” (a type of ditch found in South Africa from the Zulu word for “wall”), “indaba” (conference) which in Zulu means “a matter for discussion”, “shongololo” (the Zulu and Xhosa word for millipede), “amasi” or “maas” (a popular drink made from sour milk), “gogo” (a grandmother or elderly woman) or “bonsella” (a surprise gift or bribe) to mention just a few.

South African English also contains quite a number of words with strong political associations as a result of the political situation that the country was subject to for several decades. “Apartheid” (the Afrikaans word for apart-ness) was the name given to the racial segregation policy in vigor from 1948-90. “Homelands” was a term which designated the “independent” states in which black South Africans were forced to take citizenship under the Apartheid policy. “Madiba” is the affectionate name which Nelson Mandela is known by and which was derived from the actual name of his clan. “Townships” were the black suburbs on the outskirts of cities and towns in which the black South Africans were forced to live in under the Apartheid policy. The “State President” was the head of state from 1962-94. Nowadays the term “President” is used.

Yet, the most offensive term used during the Apartheid era which has caused much controversy in South Africa as to whether or not it should be included in the South African English Dictionary, is the term “kaffir”. Melvyn Bragg thinks that the term had a non-African origin: “Kaffir was used to insult the British in India before English absorbed it as an insult-word in South Africa” (2003: 289). But, according to Penny Silva, Editor of the Oxford Dictionary of South African English:

> “It is actually from Arabic and it means “infidel”. It was used down the east coast of Africa, but it’s like “nigger”, it’s as appalling, and was used in everyday speech all the time by, for instance, policemen arresting people on Pass laws, people being put in jail for hardly anything. If a white person was walking down the street and a black person got in their way they would be told “Kaffir, get out of my way! It was that kind of appalling racial contempt which really hit at the core of people’s beings. And it was so strongly regarded that it is now in fact illegal to use it, and if you use it you can be taken to court and you can be charged with what’s called “crime and injury”, which is derogatory behavior, insult.” (Elmes, 2001: 94)

Although the majority of South African vocabulary is easily understood by British and American speakers of the English language, a few particularities are to be found which is demonstrated by the following examples: “biscuit” is the equivalent to the American term “cookie”. “Cookie” in South Africa is used to designate a cupcake. “Buck” is the term commonly used to refer to a Rand, the country’s national currency. A “café” is a convenience store and not a coffee shop. “Candy floss” is the South African equivalent for the American term cotton candy. “Costume” is the word used in South Africa for a swimming or bathing costume. A “chemist” not only refers to a person specialized in Chemistry, but also to a pharmacy or drugstore. Once again the list could go on.

The phenomenon of “code-mixing”, whereby speakers choose from more than one linguistic resource to construct their discourse is commonplace: “A similar thing is happening in South Africa where local words now sit alongside Standard English, indicating total acceptance and signalling the birth of another new English” (Bragg, 2003: 308). This is certainly true of the Indian community which is considered to be a community with strong roots in South Africa. The first Indian immigrants arrived in Natal in South Africa in 1860 to set up plantations. They continue to constitute a “diverse community speaking at least five or six languages even today including Hindi, Tamil, Telagu, Gujarati, Urdu, and finally in Cape Town a small language called Kokani which originated south of Bombay. (Elmes, 2001: 92). As such a number of Indian words have found their way into South African English such as “brinjal” (eggplant), a “bunny chow” (a loaf of bread filled with curry which is a speciality in Natal particularly among the Durban Indian community) or even the particular spelling of “samoosa” for the Indian word samosa (chamuça in Portuguese).

With time, this community came to use a very widespread form of what was known as “broken English”, perhaps most famously commented on by M.K.Gandhi (1869-1948) during his time as
a political activist in South Africa, and which has several generations later produced a local “variety of English which mixes features of Indian, South African, Standard British, creole and foreign language learning Englishes in a fascinating way” (Crystal 2003: 356). One such feature is the use of question tags:

Now in many varieties of English throughout the world the rules are too complex because you have a choice of pronouns, you have a choice of verbs- you could say “isn’t”, “aren’t”, “weren’t”, “didn’t”, “don’t”. And in many varieties of English one universal tag is used, and in India it is “isn’t it?” So you would say “Ji ll is your sister, isn’t it?”, or “You are coming, isn’t it?” In South Africa this has stabilized, and we’ve reduced it even further to simply “isn’t?”. So you would say “Joan is coming, isn’t?”, and that means “Joan is coming, isn’t she?. Or “He did it, isn’t?”, and that means “He did it, didn’t he?” (Mesthrie R. in Elmes: 2001: 93).

Pronunciation

There are a number of distinctive sounds which distinguish the pronunciation of South African English. One should start off by stressing the fact that South African English is non-rhotic. This means that the letter R in words like water and butter is not pronounced. The /r/ in the final position of a word will only be pronounced in the case of it being followed by a word beginning with a vowel sound:

“In rhotic accents, r is pronounced wherever it is orthographically present: for example, in run, barrel, beard, war, worker. In non-rhotic accents, r is pronounced in only two situations: in syllable-initial position (as in run) and inter-vocally (as in barrel). In such accents it does not occur post-vocally (as in beard, war, worker) unless a vowel follows, so that in the writer’s friend no r is pronounced, but it is pronounced in the writer is my friend.” (McArthur, 2001:13)

Vowels

Much can be said on this subtopic of SAE. The following subsection aims to highlight a few of the most common characteristics that are to be found. South African English has what is called a “kit-bit split”. This can be considered as being the most distinctive feature of SAE. Basically it means that the words kit [kɪt] and bit [bɪt] do not rhyme: The sound [ɪ] is used when it occurs next to velars (consonants which are articulated with the back part of the tongue [the dorsum] against the soft palate, the back part of the roof of the mouth, known also as the velum) as in the case of the following words: kiss, gift, lick, big, sing and kit after /h/ (hit), at the beginning of a word as is the case of the word “inn”, and before /ʃ/ (fish). Some speakers also use this sound before /tʃ/ or /dʒ/. On the other hand, [æ] is used before words such as limb, dinner, limited and bit.

In Cultivated and General SAE the pronunciation of /æ/ is slightly raised (as in trap). However, in Broad varieties, it is often raised to [e]. This means that /æ/ almost becomes /e/ for some speakers, as can be exemplified by the typical SAE pronunciation of the very name of the country South Africa, which is pronounced as South Efrica.

The /ɑː/ sound in the word foot is generally pronounced as high, back centralised [ɑː]. It is interesting to note that there is very little lip rounding in comparison to other L1 varieties of English worldwide. The pronunciation of [o] with added lip-rounding only occurs in Broad SAE in the case of Afrikaans English.

The /ɑː/ vowel sound in the case of words such as bath is usually a low and fully back, [ɑː]. This low and fully back [ɑː] distinguishes SAE from the other Southern Hemisphere varieties (AusE and NZE). Another indicator of SAE is the unstressed vowel at the end of words such as happy, which is usually half-long.

Consonants

Plosives

The following voiced and voiceless plosives (a consonant sound which is produced by stopping the airflow in the vocal tract) are distinctive in South African English: /p, b, t, d, k, g/. These
sounds are generally unaspirated in all positions of broad South African English thereby distinguishing it from the remaining formerly mentioned subcategories, namely general and cultivated South African English. On the other hand, in the other varieties of SAE a voiceless plosive is aspirated (a strong burst of air which is produced with the release of some obstruents) when it comes before a stressed syllable. In the case of Broad South African English, this contrast is neutralised. Alternatively, these speakers have a tendency to pronounce the /t/ and /d/ sounds with some detention by articulating the tongue against the upper teeth.

**Fricatives and Affricates**

A velar fricative phoneme is one of the rare varieties that may be found in the case of South African English. However, this only occurs in the case of words that have been borrowed from Afrikaans, Xhosa, Scots and German as can be verified by the words gogga /xoxə/ meaning insect in Afrikaans or the word Bach in German.

A stereotypical feature of Broad South African Afrikaans English is the tendency to pronounce the sound /θ/ as /f/. Thus, the “th” sound is merged with other sounds as in the case of the word three which is pronounced as free. This also occurs in the case of Cockney English. Another tendency is to pronounce the sound /h/ as a voiced /ɦ/ when it comes before a stressed vowel.

**Sonorants**

In the case of Broad and a number of General SAE varieties, the sound /j/ is strengthened to [ɣ] before a high front vowel as is the case in the word yield /ɣɪːld/. As far as Cultivated and General SAE are concerned, the sound /r/ is usually considered to be postalveolar (“[Postalveolar consonants are consonants which are produced when the tongue is near to or alternatively,] when it touches the back of the alveolar ridge. This is located further back in the mouth than the alveolar consonants, which are at the ridge itself, but not as far back as the hard palate (the place of articulation for palatal consonants). However, Broad varieties often have an [ɾ] or sometimes even a trilled [r]. The latter is more common in the case of the Afrikaans English as a second language, though it is sometimes stigmatised as marker of Broad SAE. Even though South African English is non-rhotic there is some evidence of the presence of a postvocalic /r/ in some Broad Cape varieties as is the case of -er suffixes (e.g. writer). This can be explained by the influence of Afrikaans. It could also be a remnant of (non-RP) British English which was brought over by the settlers. It is interesting to note that the Postvocalic /r/ seems to be becoming a part of the younger generation’s speech as a direct result of the influence of the American dialect.

Social factors are not alone in determining the accents of English speakers in South Africa: “Lanham and McDonald’s sociohistorical description of South African English (1979) illustrates the interaction of social and regional factors in different varieties of this form of English. They show how the settlement of different regions in South Africa by different social groups from England has contributed to present-day patterns of social and regional variation” (Graddol et al, 1996: 275/276) whereby in the eastern Cape both middle and working class speakers are likely to use the more extreme or “broad” variety.

**South African Cultural Life.**

In terms of literary output, South Africa’s cultural scene is dominated by two Nobel Prize winners: Nadine Gordimer and J.M. Coetzee. Gordimer began publishing in the 1950s (short stories and later novels) and was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1991. Her work incorporates both liberal and radical attitudes, articulating the social contradictions and moral complexities of a white author confronted with the effects of colonialism and racial segregation, perhaps most powerfully in “Judy’s People” (1981). Coetzee was awarded the same prize in 2003 having already published a substantial body of work, beginning in the 1970s, and having previously won two Booker prizes in Britain, in 1983 for “Life and Times of Michael K” and in 1999 for “Disgrace”. His work generally deals with local perspectives on issues of history,
authority and power, even within the structure of a fictionalised memoir of his life: the third in his series being “Summertime” (2009).

There is also a more populist strand within this heritage dating back to the late 19th century. Rider Haggard produced many bestsellers telling tales of heroic Englishmen and their adventures in the “dark” continent, including “King Soloman’s Mines” (1886) and “She” (1887), both of which have been adapted for the cinema. From the 1960s, Wilbur Smith’s fast moving narratives provided a more recent best-selling variation of the white man’s adventure theme with added sex and violence with works such as “Where the Lion Feeds” (1964) and “The Sound of Thunder” (1966). In these works the native African population is rarely fully characterised, fulfilling the function of loyal servant or menacing threat, something which clearly has been redressed in the literature produced by Black South Africans which can be traced back to the publication in 1930 of “Mhundi” by Sol Thekiso Plaatje. In addition to his literary significance, Plaatje was also a founding father of the ANC, indeed it is hard to separate literature from politics in this setting. For example, Alan Paton, whose 1948 novel “Cry, The Beloved Country” became a worldwide success later lead the Liberal Party and championed non-violent opposition to apartheid or Breyten Breytenbach’s 1976 work “A Season in Paradise” or André Brink who published “A Dry White Season” in 1982: two writers who had huge problems with the white supremacist regime. Nowadays, writers such as Zakes Mda (Commonwealth Prize winner for “The Heart of Redness” in 2001), K Sello Duiker (“The Quiet Violence of Dreams” in 2001) and Zoe Wicomb (M-Net Book Prize winner for “David’s Story” in 2001) continue to examine South Africa’s past and present tensions and legacies and continue to redefine South Africa’s hybrid literary identity while the mantle of producing bestsellers has passed to John van de Ruit and his “Spud” series (2006 Booksellers award).

Literature provides much of the inspiration for films which deal with the South African context: notable examples would be the 1989 production of “A Dry White Season” starring Donald Sutherland and Marlon Brando or “Cry, The Beloved Country” starring James Earl Jones and Richard Harris (released in 1995) or the 2002 adaptation of “Promised Land” based on the Afrikaans novel “Na die Geliefde Land” (1972) by Karel Schoeman. The best selling book of all time in South Africa, the above mentioned “Spud” is also being developed for the big screen by Rogue Star Films, a local company that has been responsible for several recent successes: “The Story of an African Farm” (2004), “U- Carmen E-khayelitsha”, a Golden Bear winner at the Berlin Film Festival in 2005, “Big Fellas”, a 2007 comedy and “Confessions of a Gambler”, a 2008 adaptation of the award winning novel by Rayda Jacobs about a female, Muslim gambling addict. Film makers in South Africa take risks: “Son of Man” is a 2005 film directed by Mark Dornford-May which was the first South African movie to make its debut at Sundance Film Festival in the USA; it places Jesus in a contemporary context of segregation and conflict in southern Africa: the struggle to find peace and love and survive deception and betrayal. Or “District 9”, a 2009 film directed by Neill Blomkamp and produced by Peter Jackson (director of the “Lord of the Rings” trilogy) and inspired by historical events and issues from the apartheid era (segregation/forced relocation) but situated in a science fiction context and making use of a false documentary style. The film has recently been on general release in Portugal and received very positive reviews.

The music scene in South Africa is focused around four major centres, Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban and Bloemfontein, where all manner of musical genres are in evidence and local talent is actively promoted; for example Bloemfontein has a reputation for both Afrikaans based music and heavy metal whereas Cape Town has a more experimental, underground emphasis. Pop styles are based on two major sources, Zulu isicathamiya singing and harmonic mbaqanga but two of the country’s most famous international artists, Miriam Makeba (1932/2008) and Ladysmith Black Mambazo trace their origins back to different genres. Miriam Makeba was a central figure in the African jazz scene throughout the 1950s and by the early 1960s, she was an international star and brought attention to South African apartheid. She married the Black Panther activist Stokely Carmichael in the USA and for many years never returned to South
Africa, campaigning abroad against social injustice. Ladysmith Black Mambazo arose in the 1960s, with their roots in gospel and a capella style music and became perhaps the biggest isicathamiya stars in South Africa's history. In 1986, Paul Simon (of Simon and Garfunkel fame) included the group on his extremely popular Graceland album and its subsequent tour of 1987 and they achieved an international status which is still valid today.

The English language has indeed become a valuable tool in South Africa. Not only does it reflect the variety and richness of the South African culture and reality but it can also be considered to be an empowering and liberating tool of expression. As John Kani puts it:

The English language is able to evoke within the culture of people that catalyst that made them go back to their own language with greater pride and greater interest of finding out more about it. Because it could even be explained in English how important it is not to loose your language, how important it is to hold on to your culture, how important it is to retain the Xhosa in you- all this could be explained in English. So the English became a used tool for us, to further our own aims of the African agenda.

When I stand on the stage as Othello, don’t be misled, I’m thinking in Xhosa, I’m not thinking in English. I still go to sleep at night and dream in my native language. I have to dream in Xhosa. But my children grow up with the two languages at the same time from age day one. We speak to them in both languages- I have eight children- so they are quite conversant in both languages. So we’re able to cross-think in both languages.

So we have colonised English to make it serve us in repayment of what Queen Victoria did to us. So we have a slave called English, and it serves us well.” (Elmes, Simon, 2001: 95).

Bibliography


Electronic resources: