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COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES

**Peleforo GON COULIBALY University**

**Côte d'Ivoire**

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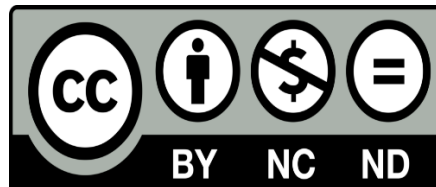
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## **EDITORIAL**

Among the Senufos from the north of Côte d'Ivoire, the sacred grove is called "Sinzang". The first of these would date from the time of the patriarch and leader of Korhogo SORO Zouakagnon (1840-1894). It is the tutelary space of the initiatory institute of the secret society: the Poro. These sacred forests exist in all the villages of the region and are highly protected and managed. The proof is that in their midst, adolescents perform the rite of passage leading them to the age of maturity. The "Sinzang" is also the centre of intergenerational knowledge transmission. Thus, the teaching of ancestral knowledge, ontology and cosmogony-contributing to the future spiritual, moral and social formation of the Senufo elite-is associated with this pantheon.

In line with this pedagogical and academic logic, the SINZANG Journal aims to promote African and Western humanities in Literature, Language, Communication and Education Sciences. To do this, it is part of a process of promoting the reflections and studies conducted by Teachers-Researchers and Researchers for the sustainable development of society.

As distinctive signs of "Sinzang", Jacqueline DELANGE, in *Arts et peuple Sénoufo de l'Afrique noire*, identifies among others the huts, earth cones and statues (masks). The visual identity of this magazine presents two masks, one symbolizing ancestral knowledge and the other Western science. The two facing the entrance of a sacred hut express the encounter of diverse knowledge put at the service of humanity. *In fine*, they export to other horizons, hence the idea of huts in perspective.

SINZANG is a pluridisciplinary and biannual peer-reviewed scientific journal. It is published in English and French but also accepts work written in German and Spanish. Moreover, depending on the requests made at the discretion of its review committee, it may issue special thematic publications and conference proceedings.

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## ÉDITORIAL

Chez les Sénoufos du nord de la Côte d'Ivoire, le bosquet sacré est communément appelé « Sinzang ». Les premiers du genre dateraient de l'époque du patriarche et chef de Korhogo SORO Zouakagnon (1840-1894). C'est l'espace tutélaire de l'institut initiatique de la société secrète : le Poro. Lieux fortement protégés et aménagés à l'envi, ces forêts sacrées existent dans tous les villages de la région. La preuve en est qu'en leur sein, les adolescents effectuent le rite de passage les amenant à l'âge de la maturité. Le « Sinzang » est aussi le haut lieu de la transmission de la connaissance intergénérationnelle. Ainsi, l'enseignement du savoir ancestral, de l'ontologie et la cosmogonie- contribuant à la formation spirituelle, morale et sociale de l'élite Sénoufo de demain-est associé à ce panthéon.

S'inscrivant dans cette logique pédagogique et académique, la Revue SINZANG ambitionne de faire la promotion des humanités tant africaine qu'occidentale dans le domaine de la Littérature, des Sciences du Langage, de la Communication et de l'Éducation. Pour ce faire, elle s'inscrit dans une démarche de vulgarisation des réflexions et des études menées par les Enseignants-Chercheurs et des Chercheurs pour le développement durable de la société.

Comme signes distinctifs du « Sinzang », Jacqueline DELANGE, dans *Arts et peuple Sénoufo de l'Afrique noire*, identifie entre autres les cases, les cônes en terre et les statues (masques). L'identité visuelle de cette revue présentant deux masques, l'un symbolisant le savoir ancestral et l'autre la science occidentale. Les deux se faisant face à l'entrée d'une case sacrée expriment la rencontre de connaissances diverses mis au service de l'humanité. In fine, elles s'exportent vers d'autres horizons ; d'où l'idée des cases en perspective.

SINZANG est une revue pluridisciplinaire à comité de lecture et scientifique. Elle est bilingue : éditée en anglais et en français. Mais elle accepte également les travaux écrits en allemand et en espagnol. C'est une revue semestrielle, tenant deux parutions l'an. Au demeurant, elle peut

procéder, selon les demandes ou les sollicitations formulées à l'appréciation de son comité de lecture, à des parutions spéciales thématiques et à la diffusion d'actes de colloque.

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**  
**TABLE DES MATIERES**

- 1. GASTRONOMIE, COMMUNICATION ET PRINCIPES DE MARQUAGE SYMBOLIQUE DANS LA PROMOTION DU TOURISME LOCAL IVOIRIEN**  
..... Khan KOUAME (khankouame@gamil.com/  
.....Sainghot SOUMAHORO (sainghotsoum777@gmail.com) (Côte d’Ivoire) \_ P.1-24
- 2. EFFICACITÉ DU SPONSORING DES PARRAINEURS DE LA LIGUE DES CHAMPIONS UEFA 2025 EN TERMES D’ATTITUDE SUR LES POPULATIONS KORHOGOLAISES**  
.....Katia OUATTARA (ouattarakatia@yahoo.com) (Côte d’Ivoire) \_P.25-42
- 3. L’ORPAILLAGE ILLÉGAL, FACTEUR DE RISQUE SUR LA SANTÉ ET L’ENVIRONNEMENT NATUREL : CAS DE ZAGUINASSO EN CÔTE D’IVOIRE**  
.....Doffou Brice Anicet YAVO (anicetyavo@upgc.ci) /  
Francis Pacôme KOUAKOU (kouakoufp@yahoo.fr) (Côte d’Ivoire) \_P.43-57
- 4. YA KOI DE CHARLES NOKAN : UNE DRAMATISATION DU TRAGIQUE**  
.....Bangali DOUMBIA (bangalidoumbia.bd@gmail.com) (Côte d’Ivoire) \_P.58-70
- 5. MODERNITY: A NECESSARY EVIL? A POSTCOLONIAL READING OF ISHMAEL BEAH’S *RADIANCE OF TOMORROW***  
.....Kouakou Antony ANDE (andekouakou@yahoo.fr) (Côte d’Ivoire) \_P.71-83
- 6. ORAL LEGACIES IN ANDRÉ BRINK’S *A CHAIN OF VOICES AND IMAGININGS OF SAND***  
..Oumarou DIABAGATE (Oumaroudibagate75@gmail.com) (Côte d’Ivoire) \_P.84-100
- 7. GENRE DES ENSEIGNANTS, TYPE D’ÉVALUATION ET PERFORMANCES SCOLAIRES DES ÉLÈVES DU SECONDAIRE**  
.....Zakari MAHAMADOU (zakmohd4@yahoo.fr) (Niger) \_P.101-116
- 8. STYLE IN SOME SELECTED POEMS BY ATUKWEI JOHN OKAI AND WYSTAN HUGH AUDEN**  
.....Sansan SIB (sibsansan01@gmail.com) (Côte d’Ivoire) \_P.117-136
- 9. LA PROBLÉMATIQUE DU DÉVELOPPEMENT D’UNE CONSCIENCE D’OPÉRATIONS MÉTALINGUISTIQUES DANS L’ENSEIGNEMENT DE LA GRAMMAIRE DES LANGUES ÉTRANGÈRES**  
....Kouakou Yannick KONDRO (yannickkondro@yahoo.fr) (Côte d’Ivoire) \_P.137-150
- 10. CHARACTERS AND DYSTOPIA IN THOMAS HARDY’S *THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE***  
.....Julien Tanoé AFFI (affijulien@gmail.com) (Côte d’Ivoire) \_P.151-161

**11. CONTRIBUTION DE L'IRONIE AU STYLE DU ROMAN *LES SOLEILS DES INDÉPENDANCES* D'AHMADOU KOUROUMA**

.....Abdoulaye SERE (lucasere2015@gmail.com) /  
Tégawendé Donatien NANA (tegawendedonatienana@gmail.com) (Burkina Faso)  
P\_162-175

**12. LESLIE SILKO MARMON'S CEREMONY: THE CARICATURE OF THE INDIANS' ALIENATION**

.....Acho Patrice ADOUPO (adoupo\_acho@yahoo.fr) (Côte d'Ivoire) \_P.176-191

**13. LECTURE INTERSECTIONNELLE DU FÉMINICIDE ET DES VIOLENCES ENVERS LES FEMMES DANS *SALVAGE THE BONES* ET *SING, UNBURIED, SING* DE JESMYN WARD**

.....Selay Marius KOUASSI (lebonselay@yahoo.fr) (Côte d'Ivoire) \_P.192-208

**14. ANALYSE STYLOLINGUISTIQUE DE *BISTOURI DES LARMES* DE RAMONU SANUSI**

Eiloghosa ENOGIOMWAN (Eiloghosa.enogiomwan@uniben.edu)  
(Nigéria) \_P.209-226

**15. LE RYTHME NARRATIF DE LA SUBORDINATIVE RELATIVE DANS LES STRUCTURES PROVERBIALES**

.....Kouadio Wilfried Cédric N'DRI (cedrickouadio@gmail.com)/  
.....Mohamed CAMARA (mohcame@yahoo.fr) (Côte d'Ivoire) \_P. 227-239

**16. THE AMERICAN POLICE AS A TOOL OF WHITE SYSTEMIC OPPRESSION: A STUDY OF ANGIE THOMAS' *THE HATE U GIVE***

.....Ollo Désiré HIEN (hiendesire6@gmail.com) (Côte d'Ivoire) \_P.240-250





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## **ORAL LEGACIES IN ANDRÉ BRINK'S *A CHAIN OF VOICES* AND *IMAGININGS OF SAND***

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article examines the strategic use of narrative techniques in André Brink's *A Chain of Voices* and *Imaginings of Sand*, situating his work within postcolonial theory and debates on cultural resistance in South Africa. It argues that Brink draws on African oral traditions not merely for aesthetic effect, but as politically charged interventions. Through polyphonic storytelling, fragmented temporality, and collective narration, he disrupts colonial and patriarchal discourses. The study explores how Brink's engagement with orality challenges dominant narrative authority and foregrounds marginalized voices. Ultimately, the article contends that Brink transforms the novel into a space of memory, resistance, and narrative reclamation.

**Keywords:** engagement-memory-orality-postcolonial-resistance

### **LES HÉRITAGES ORAUX DANS *A CHAIN OF VOICES* ET *IMAGININGS OF SAND* D'ANDRÉ BRINK**

### **RÉSUMÉ**

Cet article analyse l'usage stratégique des techniques narratives dans *A Chain of Voices* et *Imaginings of Sand* d'André Brink, en inscrivant son œuvre dans le cadre de la théorie postcoloniale et des débats sur la résistance culturelle en Afrique du Sud. Il soutient que Brink mobilise les traditions orales africaines non pas seulement à des fins esthétiques, mais comme des interventions politiquement engagées. À travers la polyphonie, la temporalité fragmentée et la narration collective, l'auteur déstabilise les discours coloniaux et patriarcaux. L'étude examine comment l'oralité, chez Brink, remet en question l'autorité narrative dominante et met en lumière les voix marginalisées. En définitive, Brink transforme le roman en un espace de mémoire, de résistance et de réappropriation narrative.

**Mots clés :** engagement-mémoire-oralité-postcoloniale-résistance

## INTRODUCTION

The legacy of colonialism and Apartheid continues to shape South African literature, where storytelling has long served as a mode of political resistance and cultural preservation. Within this context, orality emerges not merely as a stylistic feature, but also as a dynamic epistemological and ideological framework. Scholars like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Ruth Finnegan have highlighted how orature sustains indigenous knowledge systems and challenges Eurocentric literary hierarchies.

Specifically to Brink's storytelling strategies, some literary critics have devoted some insights on how stories are embedded in his craftsmanship. In her essay «Giving Voice: Narrating silence, history and memory in André Brink's *The Other Side of Silence* and *Before I Forget*» (2005), Sue Kossew examines Brink's two most recent novels, namely *The Other Side of Silence* and *Before I Forget*, in which characters draw attention to the problems associated with the reconstructive and appropriative storytelling, making his texts the intersections of narrative, history and memory. Elmar Lehmann's paper entitled «Brinkmanship: Storytelling and the Novelist» (2005) analyzes the works of André Brink, as a criticism of the Apartheid regime, centering on the collocation of storytelling and personal narrative in the author's novels. All this highlights themes of collective memory, the responsibility of the writer, and the complexities of identity in a changing socio-political landscape. The investigation demonstrates how Brink's protagonists navigate their histories and the cultural contexts of South Africa, ultimately underlining the redemptive power of storytelling in the face of subjugation. As it can be noticed, while Kossew's work emphasizes the aesthetic dimension of Brink's fiction, Lehmann is rather engrossed with the political nature of the author's text by showing the resistance deployed through the Brinkian fiction.

As far as this article is concerned, it echoes the subversion of the master discourses of the oppressor that is factual in Lehmann's article. In fact, this article examines how André Brink appropriates African oral traditions in *A Chain of Voices* and *Imaginations of Sand* to contest dominant historical narratives and recover marginalized voices. Moving beyond aesthetic function, Brink's engagement with orality is approached as a narrative strategy of resistance and ethical reorientation.

The study explores the following core questions: How does Brink use orality to disrupt colonial and patriarchal discourses? In what ways does storytelling enable the reconfiguration of historical memory and subaltern agency? Through close textual analysis grounded in postcolonial theory, the article argues that Brink redefines the novel as a site of cultural memory and political reclamation.

## **1. ORALITY AS A NARRATIVE STRUCTURE**

The narrative structure refers to the underlying framework that organizes and delivers a story: the sequencing of events, the choice of narrative voice, the use of perspective, and the rhythm of storytelling itself. In classical narratology (e.g., Genette, Chatman), this structure often relies on linearity, causality, and a single, authoritative narrator. However, oral traditions challenge and expand this model. In African orature, the narrative structure tends to be non-linear, multi-voiced, dialogic, and often communal, privileging cyclical temporality and participatory narration over singular plot progression.

In Brink's fiction, particularly in *A Chain of Voices* and *Imaginings of Sand*, the incorporation of orality does not merely appear in the content or theme but reshapes the narrative architecture itself. By adopting techniques such as polyphonic narration, fragmented chronology, repetition, and proverbial language, Brink reconfigures the novel's structure to mirror the oral storytelling process. This results in what may be termed a hybrid narrative structure, a literary form that fuses Western novelistic conventions with African oral aesthetics.

Thus, orality operates as a true narrative structure within Brink's work: it determines how the story is told, who gets to speak, how time unfolds, and how meaning is constructed. It challenges the dominance of linear, Eurocentric modes of narration and instead centers a pluralistic, culturally resonant, and politically subversive form of storytelling, one that foregrounds collective memory, ancestral voice, and historical reparation.

Brink's *A Chain of Voices* is a powerful embodiment of orality through its polyphonic structure. The novel tells the story of a slave rebellion in 1825 Cape Colony through multiple narrators, each offering a personal version of events. This

fragmented, multi-voiced narrative mirrors the communal storytelling of African oral traditions, where history is never singular, but layered through various perspectives and voices:

Now out of the shadow of death we're all looking back over the past. And perhaps someone will hear us calling out, all these voices in the great silence, all of us together, each one forever alone. We go on talking and talking, an endless chain of voices, all together yet all apart, all different yet all the same, and the separate links might lie but the chain is the truth. And the name of the chain is Houd-den-Bek (A. Brink, 1982, p431).

The metaphor of “a chain of voices” explicitly stages the narrative as communal and multi-voiced rather than singular. It emphasizes orality: “talking and talking,” “voices,” “someone will hear us calling out”, this is orality in performance. It shows that meaning is constructed not by one isolated voice, but via a network of voices, an oral structure in the form of many narrators. In traditional oral societies, stories are often told in dialogic form, allowing each speaker to contribute to a collective memory. Brink adopts this strategy by refusing to centralize one authoritative narrator. Instead, we hear from slaves, slave-owners, women, and children, each voice contributing to a larger mosaic of social memory. The structure itself is dialogic, echoing Bakhtin’s concept of polyphony, but grounded in African oral tradition, where storytelling is shared and participatory.

For example, the voice of Galant, the rebellion’s leader, is presented alongside that of his master, Nicolaas, and other participants, both complicit and resistant. Each voice contradicts, overlaps, or amplifies the others, creating a layered and non-linear historiography. This is a structural manifestation of orality: the story is contested, and reconstructed through many mouths. The structure takes on oral quality, not linear, not monologic, but circular, layered, and participatory. Orality determines how the story is told, not just what is told.

Orality finds its strongest expression in *Imaginations of Sand* through the voice of the grandmother, Ouma Kristina, who functions as a griot-like figure, recounting family histories and ancestral tales to her granddaughter Kristien. These stories, filled with myth, folklore, and anecdote, interrupt the linear narrative and structure the novel. Ouma’s storytelling is emblematic of oral transmission: she passes down wisdom, trauma, and resistance through spoken word. The structure of the novel

echoes this rhythm alternating between Kristien's present-day reflections and Ouma's mythic past.

Brink uses oral narratives as a means of recovering silenced histories. Ouma Kristina, insists on sharing both familial and national memories orally, asserting that: "The only way to keep the truth alive is to tell it again and again, until it becomes a part of who we are" (A. Brink, 1997, p. 112). This emphasis on repetition and transmission underlines how oral tradition resists erasure and revision, especially under the weight of official histories.

Through both novels, Brink not only dramatizes the multiple voices of the past but also foregrounds the oral nature of memory itself fluid, contested, and collective. In doing so, he challenges the singularity of written history and reclaims storytelling as a site of resistance and cultural continuity. This reclamation of storytelling not only questions dominant historical narratives but also opens a space for narrative forms such as magic realism, grounded in orality.

#### *1-1- Magic Realism rooted in Orality*

André Brink's *Imaginations of Sand* resists conventional literary classification, oscillating between the structure of a novel and that of an oral tale. Its seven expansive, titled chapters mirror the episodic, cyclical nature of oral storytelling traditions, where each narrative functions like a "spoken memory" passed down across generations. In the third chapter, "Coffin," Brink introduces a world where the boundaries between reality, fiction, and the marvellous dissolve, a defining feature of magic realism, which, as W. B. Faris observes, involves "the presence of the supernatural in an otherwise realistic narrative" without narrative hesitation (2004, p. 7).

In this chapter, "the coffin" is not simply a vessel for death; it becomes a metaphorical threshold between past and present, memory and forgetting. It serves as a symbol of both personal and national mourning. Kristien's interaction with "the coffin" evokes not horror, but a dreamlike communion with her grandmother and her ancestry: "I lay there, inside her coffin, and it was as though I could hear her voice telling me the stories all over again" (A. Brink, 1997, p.344). This surreal, introspective

moment is typical of magic realism's collapse of temporal and spatial boundaries, where the dead speak and the past is palpably present.

The presence of Ouma Kristina from beyond the grave through visions, dreams, and memories illustrates how magical realism facilitates the persistence of ancestral voices and the haunting of the present by suppressed or unacknowledged histories. As Stephen Slemon argues, magical realism in postcolonial literature often serves as a "mode for expressing the inexpressible experience of colonized societies" (1988, p.9) and functions as a strategy for contesting dominant historical narratives. In this context, the supernatural does not operate as escapist fantasy but emerges as a political and epistemological tool for recovering repressed cultural memory, particularly those silenced by apartheid, colonialism, and patriarchy.

In *Imaginings of Sand*, Ouma Kristina's storytelling becomes the novel's central narrative engine. Her tales interweaving personal myth, folktale, and political reflection are never questioned by her granddaughter Kristien or by the broader narrative voice. This uncritical acceptance of the supernatural aligns with Amaryll Chanady's definition of magical realism as a mode in which the author "does not explain the supernatural elements, treating them as if they were a natural part of reality" (1985, p. 21). When Ouma implores Kristien, "You have to listen, my kind. You have to remember. Otherwise, it's all lost. All gone. And then we die for real", (1997, p.48). Her voice transcends death, demanding remembrance and responsibility. Her spectral presence not only resists erasure but also becomes a conduit for ancestral knowledge, transmitted through oral tradition and embedded in a distinctly female genealogy of storytelling. As she declares, "Every woman in our family carried stories in her belly, like children", (A. Brink, 1997, p.73) the act of storytelling becomes a corporeal and political form of inheritance.

In both novels, magical realism becomes a narrative mode that resists closure. It validates indigenous epistemologies, oral traditions, and spiritual worldviews as legitimate means of accessing truth and history. The supernatural, treated not as anomaly but as an integral part of reality, functions as a counter-discursive strategy that reclaims silenced voices and affirms the continuity of memory across generations. Through this lens, magical realism in Brink's work offers not only a literary device but

a postcolonial methodology, one that insists on listening to the dead, acknowledging the violence of the past, and imagining new futures rooted in the act of remembrance.

In *Imaginings of Sand*, the intersection of orality and magic realism becomes a narrative strategy to reimagine post-Apartheid South Africa. The “coffin” symbolizes a country in transition: the old order is dying, and the future depends on confronting and “burying” the sins of the past. The oral, magical, and historical elements work together to produce what Brenda Cooper terms “the magical real as the terrain on which postcolonial transformation is imagined” (1998, p. 2). Thus, Brink uses magic realism not merely as an aesthetic choice but as a postcolonial tool of memory and healing, grounded in orality, ancestral wisdom, and the supernatural reanimation of silenced voices.

Many characters in *Imaginings of Sand* appear as supernatural beings, blending myth and memory in ways that are central to the novel’s magic realist framework. One of the most striking examples is Kamma Maria, who transforms into a tree before disappearing by magic: “And then, all of a sudden, she changed into a tree, a small thorn tree, with ample space for birds in her branches, and shadow below for her two mahems” (A. Brink, 1997, p. 192). This metamorphosis transcends conventional notions of death; rather than perishing, Kamma undergoes a symbolic rebirth, returning to the Earth not as absence, but as an enduring, living presence. Her transformation aligns with Wendy B. Faris’ observation that in magic realist texts, “the physical is transformed in ways that suggest deeper metaphysical or spiritual significance” (2004, p. 21). By turning into a tree, a symbol traditionally associated with fertility and endurance, Kamma becomes a living monument of ancestral memory and resistance.

In this act, Kamma ceases to be merely a historical or fictional figure; she is transformed into a symbol of strength and rootedness, anchoring future generations to a past that defies erasure. Her magical transformation offers a counter-narrative to colonial historiography, which has often silenced or distorted the lives of black South African women. Brink uses this transformation to critique the colonial appropriation and mythologizing of black female bodies, often framed within Christian or biblical allegories. Kamma’s transcendence resists this framework. As Stephen Slemon notes,

postcolonial magic realism functions to “dismantle dominant imperial narratives by re-centring the mythic and the marginal” (1988, p.9). In this context, Brink not only re-centres a black woman as a sacred, powerful figure, but also demythologizes the white colonial narrative that historically used biblical justification to subjugate and “civilize” black women.

By granting Kamma both voice and transcendence, Brink challenges the historical silencing of women like her. Her magical transformation becomes an act of resistance, what Brenda Cooper describes as the “subversive potential of magical realism in postcolonial texts to recuperate the lost voices of women and the dispossessed” (1998, p. 64). In transforming into a tree, Kamma embodies a form of living history, a presence that persists, reminding both characters and readers that the past is not dead, it is rooted in the very soil of the present.

The atmosphere of surreality is amplified by the appearance of giant birds which came to surround Ouma as if to announce to her the imminence of her disappearance. After her death, the marvellous invades the entire story. Even though she has died, she still seems present not just in memory, but in the strange feeling that something of her remains in the world. She is never fully gone. Her granddaughter, Kristien, remains by her coffin, facing a reality that feels both real and strangely unreal:

In the midst of all this, Ouma at rest in her coffin. The lid had been screwed down, only the small hatch over the face lay folded back on its hinges. Below it, her small dried-apricot face, hard and brittle and half-transparent like papyrus, inscribed with the hieroglyphs of her long life. (A. Brink, 1997, p. 344)

The image of Ouma’s face half-transparent like papyrus and covered in hieroglyphs goes beyond realistic description and enters a magical universe. Her body becomes like a text that needs to be read and understood, showing that death hasn’t silenced her but has made her a keeper of hidden memories. This dreamlike scene blurs the line between life and death, history and myth, reflecting a key idea of magical realism; that the real and the magical can exist together in the same story.

In this context, the presence of birds in the novel is not accidental. In African cultural cosmology, their role is deeply symbolic and spiritual. Birds are seen as

intermediaries between the visible and invisible worlds, playing an essential role in mythology, religious beliefs and narratives. In *Imaginings of Sand*, Ouma believes that the souls of deceased women are reincarnated into birds. She declared to Kristen that “birds are the spirits of dead women” (A. Brink, 1997, p.237). The birds function as an avatar for the ancestors, carrying Ouma beyond mortality. Her transformation aligns with the Khoikhoi belief that birds are the spirits of dead women, a statement she makes explicitly in her stories. Birds are also associated with omens.

The image of birds gathering at her funeral recalls ritual mourning and communal storytelling. Kristen sensed something amiss when Ouma appeared to her in a vision, riding on the back of a great bird. Kristen witnessed a huge flock of birds forming a cloud as if they have to pay homage and include her in the spirit world. For Kamma Maria, the first woman to offer her virginity to end the conflict between the Boers and her tribe, birds and ants are charged with profound meanings, acting as bridges between man, nature and the divine.

In a word, the bird becomes a sacred channel of divine communication: “there wasn't an animal or a bird in those plains she did not speak” (A. Brink, 1997, p.182). At the end of the story, Kristien accepts with a certain serenity that this movement has been accomplished to the end and she can do nothing about it. “Nothing I could imagine could outdo this. Reality had cancelled itself.”(A. Brink, 1997, p 87).

By placing magical realism at the heart of his work, Brink uses it in a way that fits organically into the African context he evokes. This context is deeply informed by oral storytelling traditions, where myth, legend, and lived experience coexist without sharp boundaries. As B. Cooper notes, “magical realism in African literature often arises from a worldview in which the spiritual, the historical, and the everyday are in constant conversation” (1998, p.26).

In *Imaginings of Sand*, this narrative mode becomes a way to restore silenced histories and suppressed voices particularly those of women through forms that are themselves resistant to fixed categories. In one of Ouma’s most haunting memories, she recalls a woman “buried with her tongue cut out, because her words were too dangerous” (A. Brink, 1997, p. 137). This chilling image reveals how deeply the novel

links storytelling, trauma, and survival. Magical realism becomes a tool to “create a world in which repressed truths can speak through dreams, visions, and ancestral voices” (S. Slemon, 1995, p. 411). In this way, *Imaginations of Sand* offers a new approach to South African identity under the seal of imagination and speech by revisiting South African history through a matrilineal line of emblematic characters from the sources of colonial history to the last tremors of the old order and the first democratic elections.

This description translates into a mode of transmission rooted in orality, shaped by a tale-like structure that traces the contours of the novel. Brink’s storytelling style, rich in repetition, embedded narration, and ancestral memory, reflects what I. Okpewho identifies as “a performative engagement with the past, where the act of narration becomes a social and ethical practice” (1992, p.54). The novel’s specificity lies in its ability to confront the silences and oppressions that punctuate South African history through a form of fiction that foregrounds freedom of invention. This narrative strategy reaches a particular compelling articulation in *A Chain of Voices* where Brink employs a polyphonic structure to recover marginalized perspectives and disrupt the singular authority of official historical discourse.

#### 1-2-*A Chain of Voices*, a Polyphonic Narrative

In *A Chain of Voices*, André Brink constructs a profoundly polyphonic narrative, incorporating the perspectives of over thirty different characters. The narrative voice is frequently decentralized, as Brink delegates narration to a wide range of individuals (slaves, slave-owners, women, children, and outsiders), each recounting events, experiences, and perceptions from their own vantage point. This multiplicity of voices builds a layered historical account, offering a mosaic of testimonies that reflect the complex social and racial tensions of 19th-century colonial South Africa.

As Ma-Rose, Piet, Barend, Nicolaas, and especially Galant take turns speaking, the novel echoes the structure of African oral traditions, where storytelling is dialogic and memory is communal. For example, Ma-Rose’s narrative introduces a deeply personal, emotive layer to the rebellion: “He was born in chains, my Galant, and even

in his dreams he heard the rattle of them. And now they say he is dangerous.” (A. Brink, 1982, p. 52). Her words do not just offer testimony, they preserve and perform memory, in the way oral traditions often do.

This polyphony also appears in the characters’ moral and emotional views. Nicolaas, a white farmer and one of the colonists, expresses a cold utilitarian view of slavery: “Without the whip, there is no work. Without fear, they will turn wild.” (Brink, 1982, p. 89). In stark contrast, Galant, a central figure in the rebellion, interrupts and disrupts the narrative with fiery resistance: “You say I am a slave. But I am a man. And no man will live forever on his knees.” (p. 145). His voice, filled with righteous anger and consciousness resists not only the literal oppression of slavery but also the discursive control of the dominant narrative. Galant’s interjections embody what Mikhail Bakhtin famously called “heteroglossia”, the presence of multiple, irreducible voices and ideological perspectives within a single text.

In this way, *A Chain of Voices* becomes a narrative of polyphonic resistance, rooted in oral tradition that uses the novel form to expose the fractures of colonialism, and to restore dignity and voice to those historically silenced. Galant’s declaration: “Now I’m taking my life in my own hands...” (Brink, 1982, p.376) is a textbook example of Jakobson’s “expressive function of language” (1987, p.69). The language is saturated with emotion, agency, and self-assertion, conveying Galant’s inner resistance and reclamation of identity against the oppressive system of slavery.

Through such utterances, the individual “I” asserts itself in defiance of systemic dehumanization. This polyphonic structure is further informed by the traditions of African oral literature. Brink draws upon these oral roots not only in the multiplicity of narrators but also in the narrative freedom granted to characters such as Ma-Rose. She is free to reinterpret and reinvent her own story, offering numerous revisions or contradictory versions which mirrors the fluidity and adaptability of oral traditions. As André Brink acknowledged in a 1983 interview with Stephen Gray, oral storytelling in African cultures emphasizes the act of retelling as a means of reshaping both collective memory and individual truth.

*A Chain of Voices* rejects linear historiography in favour of a polyphonic structure, presenting a succession of interlinked testimonies that form a dialogic “chain” of voices. This narrative approach disrupts authoritative, colonial historiography and redistributes narrative agency to the historically silenced, enacting what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o famously terms the “decolonization of the mind.” The novel also draws heavily on the formal qualities of African oral traditions. Brink employs formulaic and cyclical expressions characteristic of oral storytelling; for instance, Ma-Rose, the novel’s spiritual and narrative center opens her section with a rhythmic phrase reminiscent of the archetypal “once upon a time” motif.

Once upon a time the sun was shining  
Once upon a time there were two boys [...]  
Once upon a time there was a woman  
Once upon a time there was a dam  
Once upon a time there was a mountain (A.Brink,1982,p 78).

This rhythmic refrain marks a break in everyday life and transports the audience into a liminal space, as is typical of oral performances in African traditions. According to Ruth Finnegan, oral storytelling is distinguished by its ability to "suspend ordinary temporality" and create "a shared imaginative universe" (1992, p 11). In Brink’s novel, this effect serves to momentarily detach the narrative from historical time and anchor it in mythic time, thus universalizing the struggle and suffering of his characters.

The use of oral forms in *A Chain of Voices* also functions as a tribute to the memory of ancestors, whose histories and voices have often been silenced or distorted by colonial historiography. Brink’s decision to infuse the novel with overt markers of orality is an ideological and artistic gesture that aims to recover those submerged voices. As the narrator states or rather performs through Ma-Rose’s voice, this act of storytelling becomes an act of preservation, a means of transmitting cultural and historical knowledge across generations. In so doing, the narrative moves beyond mere recollection, positioning orality as a conduit through which myth and cultural meaning are continually reshaped.

## 2- ORALITY AS A VEHICLE FOR MYTHS

André Brink's fiction is deeply rooted in African oral traditions, drawing on myth, legend, and folktale to construct narratives that resist colonial and Apartheid ideologies. As Gilbert Durand observes: "au sein du récit littéraire oral ou écrit, les séparations entre le mythe, la légende, le conte et le roman sont floues" (1971, p. 12). Brink deliberately blurs these lines to challenge the Western literary canon and insert a plurality of marginalized voices. Myths in his novels are not mere fictions, but as Mircea Eliade emphasizes "true stories" that serve as models for behaviour and encode sacred knowledge.

Thus, Brink elevates oral myth to a politically and morally charged narrative strategy. This is particularly evident in *Imaginations of Sand*, where the character Ouma Kristina embodies a mythic matriarchal figure and spiritual mediator. Her serpentine symbolism, often associated with transformation, and her storytelling transmit ancestral knowledge to her granddaughter Kristien, offering counter-histories that contest patriarchal Afrikaner nationalism. Ouma's declaration that "birds are the spirits of dead women," (p.237) followed by the image of a flock gathering at her funeral, reinforces the ritualistic and spiritual function of orality in linking the living with the ancestral. Kristien's eventual realization that "History is not an impersonal force that sweeps us along like a flood; it is as real and physical as this body" (p.338) underscores Brink's use of embodied memory and feminine knowledge as a mode of resistance.

Similarly, in *An Instant in the Wind*, Brink reworks the colonial myth of Monomotapa, the legendary golden kingdom of the African interior as a lens to critique settler greed and the ideological fantasy underpinning imperial conquest. Elisabeth's invocation of this myth while lost in the veld with Adam, a fugitive slave, lays bare the illusionary foundation of colonial exploration.

Brink also engages with the biblical myth of Eden: Adam and Elisabeth's life in the wilderness evokes a state of original innocence, where traditional hierarchies dissolve in favour of emotional intimacy and mutual dependence. Elisabeth's request: "You must show me everything you know [...] how to stop blood with spider webs [...]"

how to learn from birds when to watch out for snakes” (Brink, 1976, p. 118) symbolizes a reversal of colonial power, with the black man as teacher and the white woman as initiate. This dynamic is reinforced when Elisabeth observes, “Look: I’m nearly as brown as you,” (p176) signalling her symbolic departure from whiteness and alignment with a shared human vulnerability. Adam’s declaration “Then allow me to stay mad and to go on thinking!” (p. 177) directly challenges the colonial presumption that rationality and intellectual agency are exclusive attributes of whiteness. By asserting his capacity for thought even in a state deemed "madness" by colonial standards, Adam reclaims epistemic autonomy and repositions the Black subject as a thinking, knowing individual, capable of resisting the discursive frameworks that have historically denied him subjectivity. The use of Eden as a metaphor allows Brink to recast the “original sin” as Apartheid, a fall that may be transcended through love and ethical interdependence. This theme also resonates in *A Chain of Voices*, where Brink’s polyphonic narrative structure foregrounds the collective memory and agency of the enslaved. The observation that “Galant has many fathers. No one is his father, and everybody is” (A. Brink, 1982, p25) endows the rebel figure with mythic dimensions, making him a vessel for communal identity.

Meanwhile, the voice of Ma-Rose “To know is not enough. One must try to understand too” (A. Brink, 1982, p. 19) reflects Brink’s moral imperative that knowledge be accompanied by empathy. The haunting presence of the enslaved, described as “like shadows, like cats [...] looking down as one came past,” (A. Brink, 1982, p. 86) reveals the silent power of the oppressed, whose gaze unsettles and reclaims narrative space. Across these works, Brink’s integration of orality and myth serves not only as a stylistic device but as a political and ethical intervention, reclaiming suppressed histories and imagining pathways toward reconciliation and transformation.

In *A Chain of Voices*, Brink invokes classical mythology, specifically the myth of Sisyphus to frame the existential defiance of his characters. Galant, the leader of a slave rebellion, becomes a Camusian figure who embraces his fate with dignity and awareness. Like Sisyphus, Galant resists despair by finding meaning in resistance: “the weak ones get nothing. Only those who deserve freedom will get it” (p388), the text implies, he embodies moral autonomy. Referencing Camus’s reading of Sisyphus,

Galant's revolt is not futile but philosophical: a refusal to accept the absurdity of oppression without critique or consciousness. Brink's use of myth, therefore, is not merely decorative or symbolic. As C. Griaule contends "le mythe n'est pas seulement révélateur des représentations d'une certaine époque, il est aussi le moyen de changer les paradigmes sociaux et d'agir sur l'histoire." (2009, p. 120). In this sense, Brink's mythic references are never passive allusions, they are tools of ideological resistance, designed to inspire new models of social being.

André Brink's engagement with orality and myth is a deliberate aesthetic and political strategy. By weaving together African oral forms, biblical allegory, and classical mythology, he constructs a hybrid narrative voice that undermines colonial epistemologies. Myths in Brink's novels are not static symbols but dynamic frameworks for critique, transformation, and liberation. In reclaiming these stories for the oppressed, Brink shows that fiction grounded in myth can also be a powerful act of historical intervention and knowledge transmission. Such reclamation of myth as historical intervention paves the way for an exploration of storytelling as mode of epistemological transmission.

### **3-STORYTELLING AS KNOWLEDGE TRANSMISSION**

In *Imaginations of Sand*, André Brink draws extensively from oral tradition, positioning storytelling as a central mode of knowledge transmission. The novel embodies what Bhabha (1994) terms the vernacular cosmopolitanism of postcolonial literature reclaiming silenced histories through local, embodied forms of narration. Ouma Kristina's stories passed down to her granddaughter, Kristien, trace the trajectory of Afrikaner history from the time of colonization to the present. Her narratives, though not always historically verifiable, hold imaginative and symbolic truth. As Klopper insightfully observes: "Kristina's storytelling is not simply historical recounting but an act of reimagining history from the margins, through the body and voice of the female narrator" (D. Klopper, 2006, p. 115).

Through these tales, Kristien not only inherits her grandmother's memories but also reclaims her own subjectivity. Storytelling becomes a space for female empowerment, enabling Kristien to reject the patriarchal roles her family expects of

her. In this intergenerational exchange, orality functions as a moral and cultural pedagogy, echoing traditional African knowledge systems where wisdom is transmitted from the eldest to the youngest, from grandmother to granddaughter.

The title *Imaginings of Sand* itself evokes the texture of oral storytelling fluid, shifting, but enduring. Much like folktales, the stories are porous, blending myth and memory, fact and fiction. What matters, ultimately, is not historical fidelity, but the preservation of communal memory and cultural identity through narration. In Brink's novels, storytelling becomes both decolonial and feminist interventions, allowing silenced women's voices to enter the national narrative. As Kristien listens, absorbs, and later reclaims these stories, she not only heals from personal loss but reconnects with a deeper ancestral lineage, one that resists both Apartheid's historical violence and Afrikaner patriarchy.

## **CONCLUSION**

In reimagining the contours of narrative form, André Brink's fiction emerges as a powerful site of cultural resistance and political engagement. By drawing on African oral traditions and embracing multi-voiced, non-linear, and communal storytelling techniques, Brink challenges dominant colonial and Apartheid-era narratives, asserting alternative modes of historical and cultural representation. His strategic use of orality not only subverts established narrative hierarchies but also reclaims suppressed voices and fragmented identities, contributing to a broader postcolonial project of decolonizing literature and memory. Ultimately, Brink's work exemplifies how narrative form itself can become a means of resistance, capable of unsettling hegemonic power and fostering spaces for dialogue, memory, and transformation in post-Apartheid South Africa.

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