

## Fragments of Defiance: Narrative Interventions in the Fiction of Ndebele and Dangor

Manish, Research Scholar, Department of English, NIILM University, Kaithal (Haryana)

Dr. Ashok Kumar, Professor, Department of English, NIILM University, Kaithal (Haryana)

### Abstract

This study investigates how Njabulo Ndebele and Achmat Dangor use storytelling as a method of resistance against racial and colonial oppression in South Africa. Both writers question the vast, politically noisy narratives of apartheid literature by diverting their attention to modest, ordinary moments and quiet acts of human dignity. Ndebele, in his collection *Fools and Other Stories* (1983), argues that regular Black South African life has been disregarded in favour of dramatic protest literature, and that real literary strength rests in what he calls the 'rediscovery of the ordinary.' Dangor, writing across the transition period from apartheid to democracy, analyses how deeply trauma, silence, and psychological damage stay rooted in individuals and communities long when political change arrives. Together, these authors propose a paradigm of narrative intervention that is neither merely protest nor simple celebration, but something more honest: the fractured, nuanced, and genuinely human experience of living during and overcoming oppression. This thesis contends that both writers use narrative fragmentation, interior consciousness, and the depiction of silent or disadvantaged voices to conduct acts of literary disobedience that go beyond political sloganeering into the domain of true human complexity.

**Keywords:** Narrative Resistance, Apartheid Literature, Ordinary Life Discourse, Psychological Trauma

### 1. Introduction

South African literature created under and after apartheid is typically seen as loud, urgent, and politically forthright, shouting its outrage at the world. While such writing is brave and necessary, other South African writers have taken a different road. They contend and demonstrate in their fiction that literature's true force rests in depth, not spectacle, and in slow, meticulous attention to human life as it is lived. Njabulo S. Ndebele and Achmat Dangor are key figures in this calmer, more sophisticated style.

Ndebele, a 1948-born writer, academic, and thinker, has changed South African literary culture through her fiction and essays. Even though *Fools and Other Stories* was released before apartheid ended, it won the 1984 Noma Award for Publishing in Africa and remains a foundational work of post-apartheid literary ideas. Dangor, a novelist, poet, and activist from 1948 to 2018, lived through decades of South African political upheaval. His novel *Bitter Fruit* (2001), shortlisted for the 2004 Booker Prize, is considered one of the most important works on apartheid's consequences and the TRC's agonizing incompleteness.

This article compares these two writers to analyze a shared project: narrative form as political and cultural disobedience. Ndebele and Dangor care about human behavior beyond political jargon. They are concerned in consciousness, memory, guilt, desire, quiet, and the difficult business of trying to live a dignified life amid degrading surroundings. This paper argues that both writers use narrative interventions—deliberate formal and thematic choices that disrupt South African storytelling and open up new spaces for understanding human experience in the context of racial oppression and its aftermath.

The paper follows this order. Section Two uses narrative, power, and resistance theories from Homi Bhabha, Michel de Certeau, and Elleke Boehmer to build the theoretical framework. Section Three explores Ndebele's 'rediscovery of the everyday' in his short stories. Section Four examines Dangor and how *Bitter Fruit* exploits narrative fragmentation and bodily suffering to heal TRC wounds. Section Five examines silence and voice in both writers. Section Six covers form politics and literary-historical relevance of their interventions. Section Seven concludes.

## 2. Theoretical Framework: Narrative, Power, and Resistance

To comprehend more deeply the literary endeavors of Njabulo Ndebele and Achmat Dangor, it becomes essential to situate their works within a broader theoretical framework that examines the relationship between narrative, power, and resistance. Their writings do not merely depict oppression; rather, they subtly interrogate the mechanisms through which power operates in everyday life and how individuals negotiate, resist, and reconfigure such structures through lived experiences. Michel de Certeau's influential work *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) provides a foundational lens through which this dynamic can be understood. De Certeau challenges the conventional notion that individuals are passive subjects under dominant systems such as colonialism or apartheid. Instead, he foregrounds the agency of ordinary people, arguing that resistance often occurs not through overt confrontation but through what he terms "tactics"—small, adaptive, and often invisible practices that allow individuals to maneuver within imposed structures. These tactics are not grand acts of rebellion but subtle acts of survival and reappropriation.

When applied to the literary worlds of Ndebele and Dangor, this perspective becomes particularly illuminating. Their narratives do not center on dramatic political uprisings or overt ideological resistance; rather, they highlight the quiet resilience embedded in everyday life. In Ndebele's insistence on the "rediscovery of the ordinary," we see a deliberate shift away from spectacular representations of oppression towards a focus on mundane experiences that reveal deeper truths about human dignity. Similarly, Dangor's exploration of memory, silence, and psychological fragmentation can be interpreted as narrative tactics that expose how individuals internalize and subtly resist systemic violence. Literature, in this sense, functions as a tactical space—one that reclaims meaning, identity, and voice within an oppressive socio-political order (de Certeau, 1984, p. xiv).

Complementing this understanding is Homi K. Bhabha's concept of the "third space," articulated in *The Location of Culture* (1994). Bhabha's theory disrupts binary oppositions such as colonizer/colonized or resistance/compliance, proposing instead that identity is formed in an in-between, hybrid space where meanings are constantly negotiated. This "third space" becomes a site of cultural translation and transformation, where fixed identities dissolve into fluid, evolving forms.

The works of Ndebele and Dangor can be read as inhabiting precisely this interstitial terrain. Their narratives resist being categorized as purely oppositional or celebratory. Instead, they dwell in ambiguity—capturing the contradictions, tensions, and unresolved complexities of life under and beyond apartheid. This hybridity is not a weakness but a form of resistance in itself, as it destabilizes dominant narratives that seek clarity, closure, and ideological certainty. Through fragmented storytelling, shifting perspectives, and interiorized narration, both writers construct a literary space that reflects the unstable and negotiated nature of postcolonial identity (Bhabha, 1994, p. 36).

Elleke Boehmer's work further deepens this analysis by drawing attention to the politics of representation within postcolonial literature. In *Stories of Women* (2005), Boehmer critiques the tendency of nationalist and anti-colonial narratives to privilege heroic, public, and often masculine forms of resistance, thereby marginalizing quieter, more intimate experiences. She emphasizes that the lives of women, children, and psychologically traumatized individuals are frequently excluded from dominant historical and literary accounts.

Ndebele and Dangor's writings can be seen as a corrective to this exclusion. Their narratives deliberately foreground marginalized voices, bringing into focus those who exist at the peripheries of both political struggle and literary representation. By centering stories of domestic life, emotional struggle, and internal conflict, they challenge the hierarchy of narratives that privileges public over private and spectacle over subtlety. In doing so, they expand the scope of resistance literature, suggesting that the act of storytelling itself—

especially when it recovers silenced voices—is a profound political intervention (Boehmer, 2005, p. 22).

Finally, Rita Barnard's *Apartheid and Beyond* (2007) offers a crucial perspective on the temporal dimension of South African literature, particularly in the post-apartheid context. Barnard argues that the end of apartheid did not signify a clean break from the past; rather, the legacy of apartheid continues to haunt the present in complex and often unresolved ways. She critiques narratives that seek closure or resolution, suggesting instead that the most compelling literary works are those that engage with the persistence of trauma, memory, and historical residue.

This notion of “haunting” is central to understanding Dangor's and, to a certain extent, Ndebele's narrative strategies. Dangor's work, especially, is marked by an acute awareness of how past injustices linger within individual psyches and social structures. His characters often inhabit spaces of ambiguity, where the boundaries between past and present blur, and where healing is neither immediate nor complete. Ndebele, too, resists simplistic resolutions, choosing instead to dwell on the complexities of ordinary life as it unfolds within a historically burdened context. Their narratives do not offer easy answers; rather, they insist on the necessity of living with unresolved tensions, thereby reflecting a more honest and nuanced representation of post-apartheid reality (Barnard, 2007, p. 11).

### **3. Njabulo Ndebele and the Rediscovery of the Ordinary**

In his seminal essay “Turkish Tales and Some Thoughts on South African Fiction” (1984), Njabulo Ndebele advances a striking and intellectually provocative critique of apartheid-era South African literature. Contrary to expectations that literature under oppression should foreground dramatic resistance, Ndebele argues that much of Black South African writing had become excessively “spectacular”—preoccupied with overt, confrontational depictions of racial conflict. While such representations were politically urgent, he contends that they paradoxically resulted in a form of literary limitation rather than enrichment.

At the core of his argument lies a profound observation: the oppressor not only controls material conditions but also shapes the framework through which reality is perceived and represented. As Ndebele notes, “the oppressor has defined the world,” and Black writers, by responding primarily to this imposed definition, risk reproducing its logic (Ndebele, 1994, p. 41). This insight aligns closely with broader postcolonial critiques of epistemic domination, where power operates not only through coercion but also through controlling the narratives that define social reality. Consequently, literature that focuses solely on spectacular conflict—victims, villains, and visible oppression—may unintentionally reinforce the very structures it seeks to resist by limiting the scope of representation.

Ndebele's proposed alternative—the “rediscovery of the ordinary”—should not be misunderstood as a retreat from political engagement. Rather, it represents a radical reconfiguration of what constitutes the political. By shifting attention from public spectacle to private experience, Ndebele expands the terrain of resistance to include the subtle, everyday dimensions of life under apartheid. In his view, oppression is not confined to overt acts of violence such as arrests, police brutality, or institutional segregation; it also manifests in the gradual erosion of selfhood, the distortion of interpersonal relationships, and the suppression of aspirations and emotional vitality. Through his short fiction, Ndebele demonstrates that the ordinary is not apolitical but deeply political in its own right. The everyday becomes a site where power is internalized, negotiated, and occasionally resisted. By portraying moments of humor, tenderness, vulnerability, and contradiction, he restores a sense of full humanity to Black South African life—countering the reductive portrayals imposed by apartheid ideology. In this sense, his narrative strategy functions as an act of epistemic resistance: it refuses to allow Black existence to be defined solely by suffering or struggle and instead insists on its richness, complexity, and dignity (Ndebele, 1994, p. 47). This commitment to interiority and

complexity is most powerfully realized in the title story of *Fools and Other Stories*. The narrative centers on Zamani, a young man on the threshold of higher education, whose encounters with Zani—a disgraced yet defiant teacher—form the emotional and intellectual core of the text. What distinguishes this story is not its plot but its psychological depth. Told entirely from Zamani’s perspective, the narrative immerses the reader in the consciousness of a young Black man navigating ambition, uncertainty, and social constraint within a marginalised urban environment.

Ndebele’s emphasis on interior life here is itself a profoundly political gesture. Under apartheid, Black individuals were systematically denied subjectivity; they were reduced to categories—laborers, subjects, bodies—rather than recognized as thinking, feeling, and complex human beings. By foregrounding Zamani’s inner world—his doubts, desires, moral conflicts, and perceptions—Ndebele asserts a form of narrative humanization that directly challenges the dehumanizing logic of the apartheid state (Ndebele, 1994, p. 52). The act of representing a rich interior consciousness thus becomes an act of resistance, one that operates at the level of representation rather than overt protest. The relationship between Zamani and Zani further complicates the narrative, moving beyond simplistic binaries of heroism and failure. Zani, often perceived as a “fool,” embodies a fractured form of resistance—one shaped by disillusionment, compromise, and lingering defiance. His character resists easy categorization, reflecting the ambiguities inherent in living under prolonged oppression. The climactic confrontation between Zamani and Zani, marked by both humiliation and recognition, refuses to offer closure or moral resolution. This deliberate openness is significant. As critics such as Attridge and Jolly (1998, p. 7) suggest, the refusal of narrative closure can itself function as a form of resistance, disrupting the expectation that literature should provide clear answers or ideological certainty. Instead, Ndebele leaves the reader with unresolved tensions, emphasizing that human experience—especially under conditions of oppression—is inherently complex, contradictory, and ongoing. In doing so, he challenges the reduction of literature to a didactic tool and reasserts its capacity to engage with the ambiguities of lived reality. A similar narrative strategy is evident in “The Prophetess,” another story from the collection. Here, the focus shifts to a young boy sent to fetch holy water from a local spiritual figure. On the surface, the narrative appears simple, even mundane; yet its significance lies precisely in this simplicity. The story unfolds through the child’s perspective, capturing a world shaped by curiosity, fear, wonder, and sensory experience. The broader political context of apartheid remains present but is refracted through the boy’s limited understanding, rendering it a background condition rather than the central focus.

This narrative choice is crucial. By prioritizing the child’s experiential world, Ndebele resists the tendency to subsume all aspects of life under the framework of political struggle. He demonstrates that even within a deeply oppressive system, individuals continue to experience emotions, relationships, and moments of transcendence that cannot be fully explained by political analysis alone. To ignore these dimensions—or to reduce them solely to manifestations of oppression—is, as critics have noted, a form of symbolic violence (Chapman, 2002, p. 18). It denies individuals the fullness of their humanity and perpetuates a narrow understanding of what constitutes meaningful experience.

#### **4. Achmat Dangor and the Unhealed Wound**

While Njabulo Ndebele’s literary project is primarily concerned with reimagining everyday life under apartheid, Achmat Dangor’s *Bitter Fruit* (2001) shifts the focus to what follows the formal end of apartheid, interrogating the afterlife of violence in post-apartheid South Africa. The novel is situated in the early years of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), a moment marked by national attempts to confront the past through processes of testimony, confession, and forgiveness. However, Dangor complicates this narrative of reconciliation by exposing the profound disconnect between public healing and private suffering.

At the center of *Bitter Fruit* lies a deeply traumatic event: the rape of Lydia by a white security officer, Du Bois, witnessed by her husband Silas, who remains immobilized by fear. This act of violence is not confined to the past; rather, it persists as an unspoken wound that shapes the emotional and psychological lives of the family for decades. The narrative begins when Silas unexpectedly encounters Du Bois years later, triggering a rupture in the fragile silence that has sustained the family. This moment is not simply a plot device but a symbolic return of the repressed, demonstrating how unresolved trauma inevitably resurfaces, disrupting attempts at normalcy (Dangor, 2001, p. 3).

Dangor's narrative technique is central to the novel's exploration of trauma. The story unfolds through a fragmented structure, shifting across multiple perspectives, temporal layers, and narrative modes—including realism, dream sequences, and symbolic imagery. This fragmentation is not merely stylistic but deeply thematic. Drawing on trauma theory, particularly Cathy Caruth's assertion that trauma resists coherent narration and instead emerges through discontinuous, repetitive, and symptomatic expressions, Dangor constructs a form that mirrors the psychological realities of his characters (Caruth, 1996, p. 4).

For Lydia, Silas, and their son Mikey, memory does not exist as a stable, linear narrative but as a series of intrusive fragments—moments that cannot be fully articulated or integrated into a cohesive understanding of the self. The past is not something that can be neatly remembered and resolved; it remains an open wound, repeatedly interrupting the present (Dangor, 2001, p. 27). In this sense, the novel resists the conventional narrative of healing and instead foregrounds the enduring, destabilizing nature of trauma. The political backdrop of the TRC further intensifies this tension between narrative and experience. The TRC was designed to produce a structured form of truth: perpetrators would confess, victims would be acknowledged, and the nation would collectively move toward reconciliation. Yet, as Dangor's novel reveals, this process is fundamentally limited. While the TRC operates within a framework of public discourse and legal recognition, it often fails to address the deeply intimate, embodied, and psychological dimensions of violence.

Lydia's rape, for instance, cannot be adequately articulated within the formal mechanisms of the TRC. It is not merely a political crime but a violation that penetrates the most personal aspects of identity, sexuality, and selfhood. As scholars such as Rita Barnard (2007, p. 45) and Fiona Ross (2003, p. 31) have argued, the language of reconciliation often struggles to accommodate such deeply private experiences, leading to a gap between official narratives of healing and the lived realities of survivors. Dangor's novel exposes this gap, suggesting that true reconciliation cannot be achieved through institutional processes alone.

Mikey, the son born from Lydia's rape, embodies this unresolved tension between past and present. Raised without knowledge of his origins, Mikey's identity is built on silence and partial truths. When he eventually discovers the circumstances of his birth, the revelation destabilizes his sense of self, leading to actions that are marked by confusion, anger, and emotional fragmentation. His confrontation with Du Bois is not framed as a moment of heroic justice but as a deeply troubled response to a fractured identity.

Dangor deliberately resists transforming Mikey into a symbol of redemption or resistance. Instead, he presents him as a complex individual whose actions cannot be easily interpreted within moral or political frameworks. This approach mirrors Ndebele's refusal to construct Zamani as a clear moral figure, highlighting a shared commitment to representing human complexity over ideological clarity (Samuelson, 2007, p. 19). Both writers challenge the expectation that literature must produce exemplary figures or definitive resolutions, emphasizing instead the ambiguities of lived experience.

Another significant dimension of *Bitter Fruit* is its sustained attention to the body as a site where history is inscribed and remembered. Lydia's body, in particular, becomes a repository of trauma—carrying the physical and emotional imprint of violence in ways that exceed verbal

articulation. Dangor's narrative frequently returns to sensory experiences—desire, discomfort, pain, and even moments of pleasure—demonstrating how the body retains memories that the mind may attempt to suppress. This focus on embodiment challenges abstract or purely ideological interpretations of apartheid. By foregrounding the material, physical consequences of violence, Dangor insists that political history cannot be separated from its corporeal effects. As Pumla Gqola (2001, p. 112) suggests, the body in South African literature is not merely a biological entity but a historical text, marked by layers of oppression, resistance, and memory. Dangor's attention to bodily experience thus serves as a powerful critique of narratives that seek to sanitize or simplify the past.

### 5. Silence, Voice, and the Politics of Telling

The notion of quiet manifests as one of the most significant and cohesive themes in the writings of Njabulo Ndebele and Achmat Dangor. Silence in their narratives is not only the lack of words; it is a complicated, deep, and politically charged phenomena. Both authors are profoundly engaged in examining what remains unexpressed—the repressed memories, silenced voices, and inexpressible experiences that elude the confines of prevailing political discourse. By doing this, they change the way we think about narrative from a way to end quiet to a way to deal with it, let it stay, echo, and make us think.

Crucially, neither Ndebele nor Dangor endeavors to "fill" silence with conclusive explanations or moral judgments. Instead, they see silence as a useful area that encourages readers to deal with uncertainty, discomfort, and incompleteness. Their narratives resist the urge to make silence easier to understand or turn it into obvious political messages. Instead, they keep it unclear, knowing that some experiences, especially those influenced by oppression and trauma, can't be properly expressed in traditional language.

#### Ndebele: Silence and the Recovery of the Ordinary

In Ndebele's writing, silence is strongly related to his criticism of what he calls the "spectacular" aspect of literature from the apartheid era. He contends that the prevalence of dramatic clashes between Black and white individuals frequently obscures the calmer, more intimate aspects of Black South African existence. In this framework that is based on spectacles, everyday experiences that are full of small emotions, inner tensions, and brief moments of connection are hidden.

So, Ndebele's way of telling stories is to slow them down on purpose. By concentrating on seemingly little instances—a child's quest for water, a young man's silent scrutiny of adult exchanges—he constructs narrative realms where silence becomes discernible. These moments are not void; they are rich with significance, uncovering dimensions of experience that would otherwise go unrecognized (Ndebele, 1994, p. 58). In this situation, silence is a way to fight against too much representation. It goes against the idea that writing always has to be loud, theatrical, and very political. Ndebele shows that the deepest truths of being human often come to light when we are quiet and think about them. By letting quiet hang around, he encourages readers to think more thoroughly about the textures of everyday life. This brings back a sense of human depth and dignity that apartheid speech tried to destroy.

#### Dangor: Silence, Trauma, and the Boundaries of Expression

Ndebele's silences are based on the politics of representation, while Dangor's silences are more directly linked to trauma and shame. In *Bitter Fruit*, silence serves not merely as a narrative device but as a psychological and societal phenomenon influenced by the brutal reality of apartheid. Lydia's silence over her rape cannot be interpreted merely as a personal coping strategy. It is firmly rooted in a socio-political framework where the violation of Black women's bodies was systematically overlooked, trivialized, or rendered unthinkable in legal and public discourse.

Fiona Ross (2003, p. 22) says that the situations under which victims are required to speak are typically full of humiliation, power imbalances, and not enough recognition. Dangor's story

does a great job of showing this conflict. Lydia's silence does not signify a failure to articulate; rather, it illustrates the inability of language to express the profundity of her experience. Her trauma is difficult to put into words, not because it doesn't have meaning, but because the language we have isn't enough to hold it. The TRC procedure makes this situation even more complicated. Dangor's novel suggests that institutionalized forms of testimony may not always create a truly secure or meaningful place for expression, even when they seem to urge victims to speak out and share their stories. The expectation to "speak" ironically transforms into an additional sort of pressure, predicated on the belief that healing can be attained solely through narration. Dangor contests this premise by demonstrating that many sensations are inherently inexpressible, and that imposing them into structured narratives may jeopardize or trivialize their meaning.

### **Familial Silence: The Intimate Aspect of Political Violence**

Ndebele and Dangor investigate silence within the familial context, extending beyond individual and societal dimensions. These familial silences—between husband and wife, father and kid, siblings—are not apart from the larger political picture; instead, they are very much affected by it. The family acts as a small version of the larger society, where the repercussions of systemic oppression are felt, talked about, and often not talked about at all. In Ndebele's work, families are seen dealing with the problems of living in a township, where lack of money, being watched, and societal expectations make it hard to talk to each other openly. Silence may serve as a protective strategy, a means of maintaining dignity and emotional equilibrium during external adversity. But it also shows how hard it is to communicate yourself, especially when people don't have the words or room to completely describe their experiences.

Dangor's depiction of familial quiet is more explicitly detrimental. In *Bitter Fruit*, a secret that is too hard to share and too important to ignore breaks up the family. The secrecy about Lydia's rape affects every part of family life, changing how people relate to each other, who they are, and how they feel. It makes people feel distant and disconnected, especially between parents and their child, because Mikey is growing up without knowing the truth about where he came from. This silence is not just a lack of communication; it is an active force that shapes how the family interacts, causing stress, confusion, and mental breakdown. According to Attridge and Jolly (1998, p. 15), these silences illustrate the pervasive influence of political violence in personal spheres, rendering the family a space where the repercussions of history are experienced daily.

### **6. The Politics of Narrative Form**

Ndebele and Dangor both agree that form is not neutral. The way a story is told—its point of view, its structure, its vocabulary, and the pauses it makes—are always political choices, even if the writer doesn't realize it. Both authors have made conscious and purposeful choices about form that reflect their political and moral beliefs.

It is important that Ndebele chose to create short stories instead of novels. The short tale format facilitates an intense, prolonged concentration on a singular instant, a solitary awareness, or a fleeting interaction. It doesn't call for the broad historical overview that the apartheid novel often felt it had to give. Ndebele is already making a point about what matters by writing in short form: not the big picture of history, but the specific weight of a single experience (Ndebele, 1994, p. 62). His narrative perspective—almost always close to a single character's interior—reinforces this dedication to the particular and the human.

Dangor's formal choices in *Bitter Fruit* are just as thought out. As mentioned above, the novel's broken structure is a formal representation of trauma and how it affects memory and identity. But Dangor also makes fascinating choices about words. The prose of the book is sometimes poetic, sometimes bland and clinical, and sometimes even hallucinogenic. These changes in register are not random; they show how different characters are feeling at the time, and they go

against the concept that there is only one right way to tell this story. The novel's many voices and registers are a democratic gesture in and of themselves: no one point of view is allowed to explain all (Clingman, 1986, p. 17).

Both authors employ a technique known as strategic incompleteness. Neither *Fools and Other Stories* nor *Bitter Fruit* gives its readers the peace of mind that comes with resolution. Conflicts remain unresolved, inquiries unaddressed, and injuries unhealed. This lack of fullness is not a failure of skill; it is a need for honesty. In a time when both pro- and anti-apartheid political stories were full of strong claims about how things are and how they should be, both writers are showing a different kind of intellectual courage: the courage to say, "We don't know how this ends, and maybe that's the most honest thing we can say" (Barnard, 2007, p. 62). Both authors actively counter the prevalent inclination—found in both South African and global discourses on South African literature—to diminish the literature to mere historical records or political assertions. Ndebele has unequivocally contended that South African literature must be assessed on literary criteria, rather than only on political considerations (Ndebele, 1994, p. 29). In an interview held shortly before his death, Dangor characterized his writing as an endeavor to discover language sufficient for sensations that elude expression (Titlestad, 2013, p. 44). In this way, both writers are champions for literature as literature, or as something that does things that political analysis alone cannot do.

## 7. Conclusion

The works of Njabulo Ndebele and Achmat Dangor exemplify two of the most profound and enduring explorations of the role of South African literature in confronting the violence of apartheid and its consequences. Both authors dismiss simplistic solutions, whether such solutions manifest as the heroic story of resistance or the jubilant narrative of emancipation. Both assert the richness, interiority, and irreducible humanity of the individuals they portray. And both employ the formal parts of a story—like point of view, structure, language, and silence—as tools to make this point.

The phrase "fragments of defiance," which is the title of this article, is meant to show both the formal and thematic aspects of their work. The fragments allude to the disjointed, fragmentary, and fragmented manner in which both authors narrate their experiences, challenging the illusion of the overarching narrative's totality. The defiance alludes to the political and ethical conviction that drives this formal choice: the reluctance to accept that Black South African life can be sufficiently depicted by spectacular protest literature, or that post-apartheid living can be adequately captured by celebrations of the new South Africa.

Ndebele and Dangor teach us that the loudest literary response to political violence isn't always the best one. Sometimes, the most defiant thing you can do is to slowly, carefully, and painfully convey the truth about what it's like to be a person in an inhuman system and what it's like to keep being a person when the system has officially changed but the wounds it left behind have not. In this way, they not only add to South African literary culture, but they also add to the larger question of what literature is for and what it can achieve that other types of knowledge can't.

## Works Cited

1. Attridge, D. and Jolly, R. (eds.) (1998) *Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid, and Democracy, 1970–1995*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
2. Barnard, R. (2007) *Apartheid and Beyond: South African Writers and the Politics of Place*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
3. Bhabha, H.K. (1994) *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.
4. Boehmer, E. (2005) *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
5. Caruth, C. (1996) *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

6. Chapman, M. (2002) Southern African Literatures. 2nd edn. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.
7. Clingman, S. (1986) The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: History from the Inside. London: Allen and Unwin.
8. Dangor, A. (2001) Bitter Fruit. Cape Town: Kwela Books.
9. de Certeau, M. (1984) The Practice of Everyday Life. Trans. S. Rendall. Berkeley: University of California Press.
10. Gqola, P.D. (2001) 'Defining People: Analysing Power, Language and Representation in Metaphors of the New South Africa.' Transformation, 47, pp. 94–106.
11. Ndebele, N.S. (1983) Fools and Other Stories. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.
12. Ndebele, N.S. (1994) South African Literature and Culture: Rediscovery of the Ordinary. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
13. Ross, F.C. (2003) Bearing Witness: Women and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. London: Pluto Press.
14. Samuelson, M. (2007) Remembering the Nation, Dismembering Women? Stories of the South African Transition. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.
15. Titlestad, M. (2013) 'Interview with Achmat Dangor.' Journal of Literary Studies, 29(2), pp. 38–51.

