Literature and Social Justice: Poetic Voices and the Quest for a Just Society in Namibia

Mbongeni Malaba

To cite this article: Mbongeni Malaba (2015) Literature and Social Justice: Poetic Voices and the Quest for a Just Society in Namibia, English Academy Review, 32:1, 54-69, DOI: 10.1080/10131752.2015.1034945

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10131752.2015.1034945

Published online: 18 May 2015.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 47

View related articles

View Crossmark data
Literature and Social Justice: Poetic Voices and the Quest for a Just Society in Namibia*

Mbonengi Malaba
Department of English Studies
Pietermaritzburg Campus
University of KwaZulu-Natal
South Africa
malabamz@ukzn.ac.za

This article analyses six anthologies of Namibian poetry dating from 1982 until 2005. It first discusses the role of poetry as a means of raising the political consciousness of participants in the Namibian war of liberation, and the tension between party-political propaganda and aesthetic merit. Due cognizance is taken of SWAPO’s resolution to declare English as the official language at Independence, and the article explores the use of the English language in early and contemporary black Namibian poetry. The central focus is on evaluating the representation of issues relating to the quest for social justice in South West Africa/Namibia. This focus highlights the presence of ‘the five faces of oppression’ identified by Iris Young (in Sharon Gewirtz. 1998. Conceptualising social justice in education: mapping the territory. *Journal of Educational Policy* 13 (4): 469-470) in both the colonial and neo-colonial eras. Selected poems from the chosen anthologies representing the SWAPO cadres are analysed in relation to the colonial era. These deal with the motivations of various recruits, who were propelled by the desire to fight colonial injustice, which was manifested in the exploitation and marginalization of the black people of Namibia. Their sense of powerlessness led to the adoption of military force in the battle against imperialism, as violence seemed the only means through which political freedom could be attained. However, the defeat of the South African forces did not lead to an end to the exploitation: the new ruling elite seemed determined to preserve political privileges, rather than to pursue the original goals of the revolution. Selected poems from the more recent anthologies express the ongoing need to fight for equality, freedom and an end to exploitation in the political, economic and domestic spheres.

**Key words:** colonial exploitation; exploitation of women; literary merit; literature of combat; Namibian poetry; neo-colonial exploitation; social justice

*This article was originally a paper read at the 2014 English Academy Conference.*
The definition of ‘social justice’ that underpins this article is taken from Sharon Gewirtz’s summary of the socialist feminist theorist Iris Young’s views: ‘Young’s approach to justice rests on a conceptualisation of injustice based on a detailed explication of “five faces of oppression”: exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence’ (Gerwirtz 1998, 469–470).

This formulation is apt when discussing Namibian poetry, given the historical background of the nation. The evaluation of two anthologies of early Namibian writing in English that forms the initial part of this article foregrounds the challenges posed by the choice of the South West African People’s Organization (SWAPO) to adopt English as the official language once independence was gained. Very few of the party members were proficient in English and, as seen in the pioneering anthologies, *It Is No More a Cry – Namibian Poetry in Exile and Essays on Literature in Resistance and Nation Building* (Melber 2004) and *Through the Flames: Poems from the Namibian Liberation Struggle* (Patermann and Mbumba 2004), SWAPO consciously promoted the writing of poetry as a means of raising the level of political consciousness of its members while in exile. The editors of both collections concede that literary merit was not uppermost in terms of their criteria for selection; instead, the emphasis was on furthering the ideological agenda of the movement. In his introductory essay to the original edition of *It Is No More a Cry*, ‘Colonialism, Culture and Resistance: The Case of Namibia’, Henning Melber states:

> The poetry enclosed in the following pages . . . is created by young people who decided to leave their mother-country to contribute to the liberation – not as poets, but as individuals of the new Namibian nation. Their poetry is born out of the ambition to articulate the current modes of thought, to share their feelings and stimulate their fellow-Namibians. In the words of Fanon, this is a ‘literature of combat’. . . (Melber 2004, 26)

It is thus not surprising that the subject matter of the poems revolves around the themes of ‘exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence’ mentioned above.

In another essay, ‘The Namibian Literature of Combat’, besides outlining the historical background of Namibia, Melber addresses the issue of aesthetic merit:

> Far from being produced as fine art, poetry serves mainly as a direct expression of political thought and agitation. As in many other societies of Southern Africa, Namibian poetry (sic) is a very popular and common cultural articulation, which is used as an instrument for carrying a message directly to the people. At present poems are an inseparable part of SWAPO’s ideological and propagandistic campaign and a mirror of the people’s aims and desires within the struggle. (Melber 2004, 77)

In a similar vein, the editors of *Through the Flames* concede:

> We have no ambition to publish high poetic art. The selection of the best poems from this collection is left to the future. We want to direct the attention of those who read these
poems to life whether close to the reader or far way, life in the liberation struggle cut off from the country of ancestors, childhood, youth and family. (Patermann and Mbumba 2004, 13)

Most of the poems can be characterized as prose chopped up to look like verse, as seen in Gerald Tjozongoro’s ‘Namibian Contract Worker’, which catalogues the ‘misery and want’ of ‘Living in deplorable conditions’ and the grinding ‘poverty’ of those ‘Forced’ by the South West Africa Native Labour Agency into working for the Tsumeb Corporation, mining copper that is exported to America and Britain. The poem foregrounds how Namibia’s resources are used to develop the imperialists’ businesses, rather than to develop the local economy (Paterman and Mbumba 2004, 13). Parallelism in and of itself cannot rescue the prosaic nature of the poem. It contrasts sharply with the lyrical power, exquisite humour and pulsating rhythm of Antonio Jacinto’s ‘Letter from a Contract Worker’, which offers a devastating critique of the evils of exploitation, marginalization and powerlessness that lie at the heart of the cruel, manipulative and cynical ploy of the contract labour system that preyed on illiterate men (Moore and Beier 1986, 35–36).

The last three stanzas of Nguno Wakolele’s ‘We Are Leaving You’ focus on the goal of the liberation struggle:

They want to have a real life  
They want to be seen as real men,  
To share the property of you – Namibia  
To have the same right as every human-being.

But don’t be afraid – my Fatherland  
We are coming back again  
To free you from all those evils,  
Bringing you a new life and to build a new nation.

Yes, we are coming back again  
And everybody will be satisfied and happy,  
To see the fruits of our actions  
To see his brothers and sisters in a free Namibia. (Melber 2004, 44)

These sentiments resonate with Bell’s assertion that: ‘The goal of social justice . . . is full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs’ (in Hackman 2005, 103).

The title of Melber’s anthology is drawn from one of Franz Tshirunga’s poems, ‘It Is No More a Cry’, a poem that could have done with editorial attention, given the pervasive grammatical mistakes that point to the fact that many Namibians were introduced to English while in exile, as the colonial languages they might have been familiar with were German and Afrikaans:
Time and again you we tell
So friendly and peacefully
To regard us the same as you
But no human response
So satanic you stare us
Like we have no souls
Like we have no bloodstream

When we cry for human recognition
Blood and oxygen is taken away
from us
Like we are flies
The hell out of us is beaten
Like you do to a beast

Now we stop our pleadings
It’s no more a cry
but a fight
This time, not for Black dignity
But a struggle for national liberation
A battle against exploitation it is.

You racist watch
Listen to the drillings
A march to last ever
No matter for thousand years
Even for a millennium
It’s a march to victory

We fear not your beatings
Neither your brutal bombardments
For you cannot smash our strength
We are so united and strong
Your flesh and heart we shall bear. (Melber 2004, 46)

The poet struggles to articulate the failure of the colonial regime to respect the dignity and humanity of the black people in South West Africa (as Namibia was known prior to independence), highlighting the marginalization and powerlessness articulated by Young. The poem suggests that this lack of respect drove many to strive for political power.

The violence and oppression it reveals justifies the liberation struggle as a war that seeks to restore the dignity of black people, despite the claim to the contrary in the middle stanza. If one of SWAPO’s goals was to promote the use of English, one would think that more attention would have been paid to language usage, in order
to facilitate the dissemination of knowledge about the root causes of the conflict in Namibia. Tshirunga’s other poem in the anthology, ‘Freedom’ (Melber 2004, 48), confirms his inability to express his thoughts clearly. The challenges arising from the use of ‘Namglish’, as it is jocularly known, persist in Namibia to this day (Malaba 2010).

The battle for ‘full and equal participation’ in South West Africa went beyond the complaints of men who had few options besides migrant labour. As Nancy Fraser highlights, at the heart of the quest for social justice lies the need to challenge ‘gender-coded patterns of cultural value’ (1998, 10). A couple of poems in *Through the Flames* mobilize the symbol of the motherland. For example, Elina Ndadi’s ‘Mother Open the Fire’ places a Mother at the centre of the quest for ‘liberty’, as her son seeks her blessing before participating in the struggle:

Mother awake and open the fire  
Awake, the time has come  
The time of fire and victory  
For your children mother  
Awake and open the fire.

Where the way towards freedom  
The way for your sons and daughters  
To follow it mother  
Awake and open the fire.

In this moment the time has come  
The time of misery and sufferings  
Mother there’s no time  
Our people have no liberty mother  
Awake and open the fire.

It’s you, mother free your land  
It’s been a victim of apartheid  
Awake and free your children  
Your nation, your Africa, mother  
Awake and open the fire.

My child, I understand  
My child, I am awake  
I have to fight for our rights  
I have to fight to establish peace  
And I must fight for our time  
Together with my sons and daughters  
We demand liberty with fire  
To fight for revolution
And die for her!

My son, do not fear
Forward march
Don’t be afraid
March to the capital city
Raise the SWAPO flags
And VIVA SAM NUJOMA
Command your people
To victory
Raise the SWAPO flags
And DOWN WITH IMPERIALISM
The blood of my sons
Has not gone in vain
Together with them in spirit
SWAPO will win
And Namibia must be free!

With that blood!!
With that blood!!
With that blood!! (Patermann and Mbumba 2004, 55–57)

Despite the blatant sloganeering, this is an interesting poem that hints at a possible intergenerational tension, given the son’s assumption that his mother is asleep, metaphorically. The son’s dependence on his mother is underlined by his desire that she lead her children to battle. Her patience and understanding are revealed in her response, which shows that she is well aware of the oppressive environment that circumscribes their rights. The concluding stanza reveals her staunch allegiance to SWAPO and celebration of its leader, Sam Nujoma, her willing sacrifice of her sons and her certainty that victory will come ‘With that blood!!’. Significantly, the painting that accompanies this poem foregrounds two Herero matriarchs in traditional dress – the headdress is emblematic of their willingness to ‘take the bull by the horns’, so to speak. They are flanked by their offspring, beside a barbed wire fence, a symbol of the restrictions that surround them. An explanatory note states: ‘This dialogue is dedicated to the 10th of December, the Namibian Women’s Day.’ Manfred Hinz’s glossary explains the significance of the commemoration:

10th December, 1959: OPO (the Ovamboland People’s Organization, which later became an important part of SWAPO) together with SWANU and the Chief’s Council, formed a united front of opposition to the racists’ attempt to drive the African population of Windhoek from the Old Location into the new ghetto of Katutura. Police fired on the unarmed demonstrators, killing [sic] 13 people and wounding 52. Many more were arrested. (In Patermann and Mbumba 2004, 85)
The bravery of Namibian women and their contribution to the struggle are thus acknowledged. The most accomplished poem in Through the Flames is Maria Namunyela’s ‘The Parting’, which is a tender evocation of a family member’s departure, perhaps to join the liberation struggle:

If we do meet again
Why should we not smile
If not, well then
This parting is well made
Fare thee well my dear
As you go my dear

I accompany you with God’s guidance
Do not feel depressed
Because everything that has an end
Must have the beginning
Just like the days we have been together

Distance will now separate us in body
But not in soul or spirit or love
In fact our love will only grow stronger
And our hearts fonder for each other
Until the day we shall meet again

In the greatness of our love
Is the anxiety which both of us
Will experience when you go
For there is no greater happiness in life
Than to love and to be loved

When you finally go
Live, but a simple life (Patermann and Mbumba 2004, 22)

The poem is silent on the context of the departure; however, if the conjecture that the one departing is going to war is correct, then the depth of emotion expressed shows how his/her decision to leave points to the fact that the love for his/her motherland transcends that for the beloved. The ambivalence over whether or not they shall ‘meet again’ does not negate the resolution that:

This parting is well made
Fare thee well my dear
The benediction reflects the speaker’s strong conviction that the choice to leave is just, and, in a sense, divinely ordained. The departure paradoxically strengthens their bond, despite the ‘anxiety’ mentioned in the next stanza.

If the poem is a romantic one, then it bears eloquent testimony that normal life continues in the midst of strife; what matters is that ‘Love conquers all’. The repetition of ‘my dear’ lends credence to such an interpretation. If the two are close family members, or friends, then the depth of that bond is mirrored in the blessing implied in the concluding lines:

When you finally go  
Live, but a simple life

The fact that the poem lends itself to multiple interpretations is a welcome change from the propagandistic tenor of the other poems in this anthology, and it reinforces the view that there is more to life than politics or ideology.

The quest for social justice links the work of the next generation of Namibian writers with that of the pioneering generation considered above. The optimistic note found in the poems heralding the birth of an independent Namibia gives way to more sceptical voices that express a sense that the ideals that drove the battle for freedom have been betrayed. Christi Warner’s haunting poem, ‘Less Ordinary’, portrays a world governed not by ubuntu, an acknowledgement of the needs and welfare of others, but by a preoccupation with one’s own concerns:

An ordinary sunny day, working day for me  
I passed this house. Just an ordinary square  
with an ordinary fence – made of ordinary wire  
With a keen desire to help me see this . . .

Old woman, sitting staring at the distance  
Further down the street . . . Where she left her mind  
6 months now: less ordinary if you think

I turned, and said hello! First time in 6 months  
First time in 6 months she found my eyes  
I rescued her from the distance just for a second though  
The longest second I’ve ever been bestowed with  
And in this little time I saw something more.  
I felt something more . . .

I am convinced ‘cause my jaw almost touched the dusty road  
Less ordinary – if you think

An ordinary sunny day, working day for me  
But I couldn’t pass this house. I had a keen desire
to step behind the fence made of ordinary wire
to say more than hello to this . . .
Old woman, sitting staring at the distance
Hoping that maybe she’d help me see
What was further down the street . . . (Molapong, Warner and Winterfeldt 2005, 35)

The opening stanzas of the poem draw attention to the ‘ordinary’ nature of the
location, juxtaposed with the extraordinary fixation of an old woman on ‘what was
further down the street’. The subtle changes in the rhythm found in the poem capture
the persona’s engagement with a figure she/he has ignored for six months, which
precipitates a profound re-evaluation of her/his perspective. The fact that it takes
six months for the persona to initiate contact with the old woman, who traditionally
should be respected, speaks volumes about the atomized nature of contemporary
urban life in Africa. Ubuntu takes over and the persona, though on her way to work,
decides to spare some time to grasp what lies behind the woman’s strange behaviour:

I found the gate, my behind found an empty drum
My hand shamelessly found her shoulder
 – an ordinary gesture
Again she found my eyes and this time I had a smile
but not as old as hers not as warm as hers
‘He’s coming home,’ she said.
 ‘They say the heroes have all come home.
Not true, because he is still coming.
 ‘The 21st of March has not yet reached him.’
She seemed convinced ‘cause her eyes danced with
hope
She spoke of how the war was raw
and how he had to leave with the heroes
 in search of peace
I knew the salt had left my eyes
 when her hand tried to soak it up
Then and there I knew too that my 14 years of peace
 in this land of the brave
had not yet begun for this old woman
 sitting staring at the distance further down the
street.
Her hero had not yet returned.
But ‘he’s coming home,’ she said.

An ordinary sunny day, no working day for me
I passed this house. Just an ordinary square
with an ordinary fence – made of ordinary wire
which helped me see the reality of this . . .
Old woman, sitting staring at the distance
further down the street . . . 14 years now:
Still waiting for her war to end in this land with no war (Molapong, Warner and Winterfeldt 2005, 35)

This powerful poem challenges ‘ordinary’ Namibians to examine their lives, to open their eyes to the reality surrounding them, day in and day out, and to heed the signs around them that indicate that all is not well in ‘the land of the brave’. It suggests that if they ‘shamelessly’ identify with the marginalized in their community, they will be able to see beyond the seemingly bizarre behaviour of some people, and to understand their underlying trauma. The old woman’s ‘hope’, which is significantly foregrounded in the poem, sheds light on how ‘the war was raw’ for those whose children did not return, whose bravery was taken for granted by those at whose behest they fought, and that no one cared to provide counselling for the ones still grieving their loss. Social justice can be measured by how society treats its most vulnerable members; the poem starkly lays bare the reality that political independence is not necessarily synonymous with the establishment of a society that eradicates the ‘five faces of oppression’: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence.

A recurrent theme in contemporary Namibian poetry is the exploitation of domestic workers. As Fraser points out:

From a distributive perspective, gender is a basic organising principle of the economic structure of society. On the one hand, it structures the fundamental division between paid ‘productive’ labour and unpaid ‘reproductive’ and domestic labor, assigning women primary responsibility for the latter. On the other hand, gender also structures the division within the paid labour between higher-paid, male-dominated, manufacturing and professional occupations and lower paid, female dominated ‘pink collar’ and domestic service occupations. The result is an economic structure that generates gender-specific forms of distributive injustice. (Fraser 1998, 2)

In a colonial and, indeed post-colonial, context – like that in Namibia – colour compounds the discrimination experienced by black or non-white women. In Christi Warner’s ‘The image on a picture I’ve kept’, the persona lauds the love and support given to her by her mother and grandmother, but laments the exploitation they endured:

Yeah, mama’s eyes swam with care
Hiding exhaustion and pain
Her rough hands, ballooned feet, unfolded the story of a cleaner
A cleaner for three miesies in town
Rewarding? Yeah, apparently. Rewarding her just enough
Just enough for grandma and me
Just enough for our monthly roof
Just enough to warm a feast for our hungry insides
Yeah, hard work paid mom and grandma’s one-way ticket
Hosted them in a yard under a thick blanket of gravel
And left me as a child of the stars
A loner seeking trails of posterity
Eating rich, I explored the taste of drought from one buffet to the next
Warmed up and garnished by the stench that creeps inside the greedy piggy bin of every restaurant (Kgobetsi 2000, 48)

The sardonic tone underscores the structural inequality that is rife in this society in which white women exploit black women by paying them wages that barely meet their basic requirements: this is emphasized by the fourfold repetition of ‘Just enough’, which reinforces the injustice of the situation. There is a hint that the burden of washing other people’s laundry might have contributed to the mother and grandmother’s deaths. The net result is the reduction of the persona to a vagrant, ‘Eating rich’ from dustbins. Warner’s evocative diction is striking and enhances the message of the poem.

Taimi Nghikembua’s ‘Magdalena’ deftly captures the stress endured by a servant who, in order to avoid criticism, anticipates her employer’s needs:

From her cottage
that has the same stink
as the stagnant water behind it,
she heads for the door.

She climbs the stairs.
She moves to the children’s room,
to make endless beds
as if in a motel.
She refers to this as Disney Island.
Has a child of her own
that owns not a single bear.

She vacuums the golden mats.
Her coarse hands touch nothing
bigger than a dollar coin.
Magdalena buzzes in the laundry.
She scrubs the garments
so they shine
as if in a palace,
not as if they belong to a Magdalena.

She imagines the owner’s eyes
had she not polished the window
nor cleaned the microwave.
In the kitchen
she takes bread from a lunchbox.
Like a thief she steals her time.
Magdalena sits on the stairs
and sinks her face into her hands. (Haarhoff 1997, 22)

The poet captures the trying context in which Magdalena has to summon the strength to carry on working hard, despite a minimal return. The text suggests that she confronts the inequitable nature of her society, characterized by an ever-widening gulf between the haves and the have-nots, every day. The closing lines starkly capture her despair: despite her hard work for a very demanding employer, Magdalena cannot afford to buy a single bear for her child. The opulence of the environment which she keeps in tip top condition contrasts sharply with that of the dingy circumstances in which she herself lives. Yet somehow she must find the strength to carry on, in order to provide the most basic needs for herself and her child.

The vulnerability of women is reinforced by their position at the base of the pyramid in Namibian society. Their exploitation goes beyond the economic sphere, to that of sexual abuse at the hands of those they love. This can be seen in Christi Warner’s poem ‘Her wish’ (Molapong, Warner and Winterfeldt 2005, 40), and in the evil of domestic violence found in ‘Battered paintings for sale’ (Kgobetsi 2000, 54–55). The instances of abuse represented in these two poems call to mind Iris Young’s definition of ‘justice as freedom from oppressive relations’ (Gerwirtz 1998, 472).

Fraser stresses the importance of ‘participatory parity’ (Fraser 1998, 3), which is one of the benchmarks of a just society. The poem ‘An African Woman’ by Victoria Hasheela, which serves as a preface to Oliver Ruppel’s Women and Custom in Namibia: Cultural Practice versus Gender Equality?, details the anguish caused by male chauvinism masquerading as a cultural norm, and bears testimony to the importance of poetry in the struggle for social justice in Namibia:

I’m an African woman
A victim of culture
I have no rights
I do whatever he says

I am the first wife
I thought I’d be the only one
But after one year
There were two of us

I was taken by surprise
I didn’t see it coming
I was only told
The day that she arrived
He said it’s his right
He says I’ve no say
He said it’s his house
He said it’s Africa

This is the fifth year
There are now five of us
I wonder if he’ll get more
I still have no say

He is a proud king
I gave him two sons
But I am feeling ill
There’s a disease in me
I wonder if culture will ever change
I wonder if this will go on and on
I wonder how many more generations
Will experience this trauma

They say it is culture
It is not his fault
He found it there
But I really wonder
If it’s not about time
To stop this trauma
And let culture go (in Ruppel 2008, 5)

The structure of the poem captures the stunned disbelief that characterizes the narrator’s shock as she recounts the disintegration of her dream of a monogamous marriage. Even the production of two sons, which she thought would shore up her position in a patriarchal society that valorizes the generation of male heirs, is not sufficient to earn her husband’s respect. As the poem progresses, however, there is a change in tone; the last two stanzas intimate a shift from parading the speaker’s victim status to an adoption of an attitude that questions the assumptions that lie at the core of this society’s culture.

This poem depicts how injustice is entrenched through the manner in which women are socialized to accept structural inequality in society, denied a sense of agency, conditioned into accepting male authority unquestioningly and reduced to the level of goods and chattels. Despite the persona’s subservience, the poem concludes on an optimistic note, which articulates the dawn of a new consciousness, as the persona ponders the fundamental injustice of her predicament. Cultural norms should evolve to accommodate new ways of thinking and behaviour – in an age of HIV and AIDS women must assert their right to good health and self-realization. As Hackman argues, ‘social justice . . . requires an examination of systems of power
and oppression combined with a prolonged emphasis on social change’ (Hackman 2005, 104).

It is important to note that poor men also suffer, as can be seen in Masule Sibanga’s ‘The Ice Cream Seller’, the concluding lines of which reflect his indigent existence:

At the death of the month
he comes home carrying
an-ever lean pay packet.
to feed for (sic) seven mouths.
His children chant at him
Songs of praise.
‘Ngele, ngelee, ngelee’ (in Haarhoff 1997, 69)

The poems analysed in this study turn the spotlight glaringly on the reality that social justice, which was profoundly lacking in colonial South West Africa, is yet to be achieved in Namibia. The values that ought to have formed the basis for a new society call for a transformation of the mind-set of the citizens. Liberation must amount to more than freedom from colonial oppression: it must also free people from the harsh grip of patriarchy, which knows no colour. It needs to facilitate the development of conditions that allow people to realize their full potential, as Andre du Pisani eloquently asserts in his poem ‘Freedom’:

Freedom burns in the heart
runs in the veins, permeates the sinews of life
bursts forth like verdure of spring;
combustive, energetic, pulsating,
a dangerous youth . . .

After love, the most difficult to taste
easily lost in the rust of indifference
a nebulous, illusive dream
a seam ravaged by time
yet: indissolubly part of the human spirit

Freedom keystone of a trinity:
Liberty, Equality, Fraternity
fertilizer of the oil of Life
irrepressible dandelion that grows in cracks  (Du Pisani 2000, 58)

The rich, evocative images that permeate this poem capture the passion that lay at the heart of the struggle for freedom in Namibia, a recurrent theme in the poems analysed in the opening section of this study. The abundant symbols of organic growth point to the multifaceted nature of life. The ‘illusive dream’ of independence needs to evolve into a reality that is manifested in society at grass roots level. The penultimate stanza foregrounds the indissoluble human spirit, and on a political level
the rousing call of the French Revolution becomes a rallying force that cautions the citizens to remain vigilant in safeguarding the goals of the liberation struggle in the face of ‘the rust of indifference.’

This study supports Fraser’s conclusion that social justice calls for engagement ‘on the plane of moral philosophy . . . [and] on the plane of social theory’. Such justice encompasses ‘the complex relations between interest and identity, economy and culture, class and status in contemporary globalizing capitalist society’ (Fraser 1998, abstract). It is central to building a stable and equitable society that ensures a dignified life for everyone. The poetry that has been examined consistently calls for such social justice.

References

MBONGENI ZIKHETHELE MALABA studied at what was then the University of Rhodesia, and was awarded a Beit Trust Postgraduate Fellowship that enabled him to obtain a doctorate at the University of York’s Centre for Southern African Studies. He returned to lecture at the University of Zimbabwe, for eighteen and a half years, before he joined the University of Namibia as an Associate Professor in 1994, and then served as Head of the English Department. He is currently a professor of English studies and the Academic Leader of the School of Arts at UKZN in Pietermaritzburg.