

**The Dialectic Between African and Black  
Aesthetics in Some South African  
Short Stories**

**Dennis Sipho Nakasa**

The copyright of this thesis vests in the author. No quotation from it or information derived from it is to be published without full acknowledgement of the source. The thesis is to be used for private study or non-commercial research purposes only.

Published by the University of Cape Town (UCT) in terms of the non-exclusive license granted to UCT by the author.

**The Dialectic Between African and Black  
Aesthetics in Some South African  
Short Stories**

---

**Dennis Siphon Nakasa**

**A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Arts  
University of Cape Town  
for the Degree of Master of Arts**

**ABSTRACT**

Most current studies on 'African' and/or 'Black' literature in South Africa appear to ignore the contradictions underlying the valuative concepts 'African' and 'Black'. This (Jamesonian) unconsciousness has led, primarily, to a situation where writers and critics assume generally that the concepts 'African' and 'Black' are synonymous and interchangeable. This study argues that such an attitude either unconsciously represses an awareness of the distinctive aspects of the world view connotations of these concepts or deliberately suppresses them.

The theoretical and pragmatic approach which this study adopts to explore the distinctive aspects of the world view connotations of these concepts takes the form, initially, of a critique of such assumptions and their connotations. It is argued that any misconceptions about the relations between the concepts 'African' and 'Black' can only be elucidated through a rigorous and distinct definition of each of these concepts and the respective world views embodied in them.

Each of the variables of these definitions is also examined thoroughly through an application of, inter alia, Frederick Jameson's 'dialectical' theory of textual criticism, Pierre Macherey's 'theory of literary production' and also through the post-colonial notions of 'hybridity'

and 'syncreticity' propounded by Bill Ashcroft et.al (eds). In this way the study examines the dialectical interplay between, for instance, such oppositional notions as 'African' and 'Western' (place-conscious), 'Black' and 'White' (race-conscious), and other forms of ideological 'dominance' and 'marginality' reflected in the 'African' and/or 'Black' writers' motivations for the acquisition, appropriation and uses of the language of the 'other' (i.e. English) and its literary discourse in South Africa, Africa and elsewhere in the world.

A close textual reading of the stories in Mthobi Mutloatse's (ed) Forced Landing, Mbulelo Mzamane's (ed) Hungry Flames underlies an examination of the processes of anthologisation and their implications of aesthetic collectivism, reconstruction and world view monolithicism which repress the distinctive world outlooks of the stories in these anthologies. The notions of aesthetic monolithicism implicit in each of these anthologies are interrogated via the editors' truistic assumptions about the organic nature of the relations between the concepts 'African' and 'Black'.

The notion of a monolithic 'African' and 'Black' aesthetic is further decentred through a close textual reading of the uses of the 'African' and 'Black' valuative concepts in the short story collections The Living and the Dead and In Corner B by Es'kia (formerly Ezekiel) Mphahlele.

The humanistic pronouncements in Mphahlele's critical and short story texts suggest various ways of resolving the racial demarcations in both the 'Black' and 'White' South African literary formations. According to Mphahlele, a predominant racial consciousness inherent in the racial capitalist mode of economic production has deprived South African literature and culture an opportunity of creating a national humanistic and 'Afrocentric' form of aesthetic consciousness.

The logical consequence of such a deprivation has been that the racial impediments toward the formation of a single national literature will have to be dismantled before the vision of a humanistic and 'Afrocentric' aesthetic can be realised in South Africa. The dismantling of both the 'Black' and 'White' monolithic forms of consciousness may pave the way toward the attainment of a synthetic and place-centred humanistic aesthetic. Such a dismantling of racial monolithicism will, hopefully, stimulate a debate on the question of an equally humanistic economic mode of production.

## Contents

|                                                                                                                                                |      |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| Contents                                                                                                                                       | iv   |
| Acknowledgements                                                                                                                               | vii  |
| Preface                                                                                                                                        | viii |
| <br>                                                                                                                                           |      |
| Introduction                                                                                                                                   | 1    |
| <br>                                                                                                                                           |      |
| Chapter 1      The Language Question and the<br>African/Black Short Story Writer<br>in South Africa: Towards a<br>Dialectical Aesthetic Theory | 15   |
| <br>                                                                                                                                           |      |
| 1.1 The Problem and its Context                                                                                                                | 15   |
| 1.1.1 The African Aesthetic                                                                                                                    | 16   |
| 1.1.2 The Black Aesthetic                                                                                                                      | 20   |
| 1.2 Ideological Currents of the African and<br>Black Aesthetic                                                                                 | 23   |
| 1.3 Preliminary Observations on the<br>Language Question                                                                                       | 25   |
| 1.3.1 The Historical Context of the Language<br>Question                                                                                       | 29   |
| 1.3.2 The Literary Choice of English                                                                                                           | 33   |
| 1.3.3 Bantu Education and Language Alternatives                                                                                                | 40   |
| 1.3.4 A Return to the Roots                                                                                                                    | 45   |
| 1.3.5 Language/s and Institutions                                                                                                              | 50   |
| 1.4 Audience and Literary Criticism                                                                                                            | 53   |
| 1.4.1 Storytelling                                                                                                                             | 59   |
| Notes                                                                                                                                          | 62   |

|           |                                                                                                                            |     |
|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Chapter 2 | <b>The Collective and Reconstructive Aesthetic in Mutloatse's <u>Forced Landing</u> and Mzamane's <u>Hungry Flames</u></b> | 69  |
| 2.1       | Anthologisation                                                                                                            | 69  |
| 2.1.1     | The Collective Aesthetic ideology in Mutloatse's Anthology                                                                 | 73  |
| 2.1.2     | The Search for Authenticity                                                                                                | 81  |
| 2.1.3     | Mzamane's Anthology Project                                                                                                | 83  |
| 2.2       | Critical Practice and Aesthetic Ideology                                                                                   | 86  |
| 2.3       | A Dialectical Reading of Selected Stories                                                                                  | 91  |
| 2.3.1     | Nkosi's Concept of Temporal Difference                                                                                     | 93  |
| 2.3.2     | Religion and World Outlook in Conflict                                                                                     | 111 |
| 2.3.3     | Africanising the Trombone                                                                                                  | 121 |
| 2.3.4     | Conquest and Settlement                                                                                                    | 131 |
| 2.3.5     | Mphahlele's African Paradox                                                                                                | 137 |
| 2.3.6     | The Context of Soweto Riots                                                                                                | 142 |
| 2.3.7     | Ndebele and the Township Intellectuals                                                                                     | 150 |
| 2.3.8     | The Effect of Chiaroscuro in Matthews's 'The park'                                                                         | 158 |
| 2.4       | Conclusion                                                                                                                 | 159 |
|           | Notes                                                                                                                      | 161 |
| Chapter 3 | <b>Elements of a Hybrid and Synthetic Discourse in Mphahlele's <u>The Living and the Dead</u> and <u>In Corner B</u></b>   | 171 |



|         |                                                                                                              |     |
|---------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 3.1     | Introduction                                                                                                 | 171 |
| 3.2     | The Black and White Racial Dialectic                                                                         | 173 |
| 3.3     | The African Image                                                                                            | 176 |
| 3.3.1   | African Humanism                                                                                             | 178 |
| 3.4     | Language, Writer and Storyteller                                                                             | 181 |
| 3.5     | Headnote on the Story Collections                                                                            | 189 |
| 3.6     | Master-Servant Relationship in <u>The Living and the Dead</u>                                                | 190 |
| 3.6.1   | 'The Living and the Dead'                                                                                    | 191 |
| 3.6.1.1 | Structural Aspects                                                                                           | 192 |
| 3.6.1.2 | The Master Servant Relationship                                                                              | 192 |
| 3.6.2   | 'The Master of Doornvlei': A Variation on the Master/Servant Relationship Theme                              | 196 |
| 3.6.3   | The Liberal Predicament in 'We'll Have Dinner at Eight'                                                      | 204 |
| 3.6.4   | Images of Feminity and Masculinity: 'The Woman' and 'The Suitcase'                                           | 210 |
| 3.7     | <u>In Corner B</u>                                                                                           | 217 |
| 3.7.1   | Identity at a Racial Crossroads: 'A Point of Identity'                                                       | 217 |
| 3.7.2   | 'Mrs Plum' and the Dilemmas of Liberalism                                                                    | 225 |
| 3.7.3   | The Presentation of African, Black and White Images: 'In Corner B', 'The Barber of Bariga' and other Stories | 233 |
| 3.8     | Conclusion                                                                                                   | 237 |
|         | Notes                                                                                                        | 238 |
|         | Conclusion                                                                                                   | 248 |
|         | Bibliography                                                                                                 | 257 |

### Acknowledgements

I would like to convey my sincerest thanks to my supervisor, Professor Andre Brink, for his unwavering intellectual support, patience, perceptive criticism and friendship. I would also like to thank Professor J.M. Coetzee for introducing me to the strategies of manipulating research tools. And special thanks to the following people: the University of Cape Town's Interlibrary Loans and African Studies library staff members, Professor Martin West and to Doctor Cliff Dikeni who, each in their own way, always made it a point that I managed to get whatever assistance I had requested.

## Preface

The study of literature has always been my passionate area of interest. It was for this reason that in 1987, during my undergraduate years at university, the question which forms the subject of this thesis was first formulated in my mind and has always been persistent in the various ways in which it manifests itself. The intellectual and political vigour with which this question presented itself on numerous academic and general social occasions in South Africa turned it into my inevitable area of study.

The persistence of this question led me into various interrogative literary and cultural forays which, among others, included a significant private correspondence with Es'kia Mphahlele who was then Professor of Comparative and African Literature at the University of the Witwatersrand. In his response (March 4, 1987) to my question on the cultural and literary meanings of the concepts 'African' and 'Black' as they are used in South Africa, Mphahlele argued vigorously that

We are African & should not accept the term  
"Black", which the white media have latched  
on to as a way of depriving us of our Africanity,  
since they feel excluded .

My initial reaction to this response took the form of a conviction that there was something strange about the way writers and critics use the concepts 'African' and 'Black'.

Even though I was then unable to formulate this question in academically lucid terms, its persistence continued to sharpen my perception of it.

The problems surrounding this question became even more clear~~ly~~ in the aforementioned letter, Mphahlele offered an elaboration of the literary connotations of what he termed the 'African experience':

The literature produced out of an African experience - geographic and spiritual and emotional-intellectual - must rightly be called "African Lit." It is not a European or Asian or American experience for the most part, whether in the indigenous or European languages. It is the kind of experience a non-African could never imitate or simulate successfully.

Even though Mphahlele had initially negated the validity of notions like 'Black Languages' and 'Black culture', he proceeded towards a political concession to the concept 'Black':

"Black" should only be used as a convenient political term for all who are not officially classed as "White"... "African" refers to a cultural fact.

My exploration of the interplay between the concepts 'African' and 'Black' in this thesis should however not be seen as an extension of my private discussion with Mphahlele. Although its critical focus does reflect on Mphahlele's pronouncements, its critique of the world view of these concepts has its own theoretical momentum.

## Introduction

This study examines the various epistemic and ideological meanings attributed by short story writers and literary critics to the concepts 'African' and 'Black' in South Africa, Africa and elsewhere in the world. Its focus dwells, mainly, on some assumptions about the nature, content and form of the relations which are considered generally by writers and critics to prevail between the concepts 'African' and 'Black'.

It is this study's main contention that the concepts 'African' and 'Black' have a 'contradictory' or 'dialectical' 'aesthetic' relationship which is either consciously or unconsciously repressed and concealed in, particularly, South African literary discourse. This repression and masking of the dialectical interplay between the concepts 'African' and 'Black' has led to a situation where writers, critics and readers generally perceive these concepts to have an unproblematic symbiotic relationship in terms of which they could, without any conceptual justification, interchange.

In the light of this terminological confusion and indeterminacy, an imperative for a critical, ideological and conceptual clarity has given impetus to this study's interventionist stance. This intervention has also been necessitated by a misleading and pervasive silence on the part of writers and critics about the contradictions underlying their discourse on 'African' and 'Black' as 'aesthetic' concepts.

Such an interventionist stance demands a rigorous questioning of any claims about a homologous relationship between the concepts 'African' and 'Black'. It does this by drawing a qualitative distinction between the independent meanings of these concepts. Once they are distinguished clearly from each other, it then becomes apparent that arguments in favour of their synonymy tend to serve a specific purpose of mystifying the complex contradictions in their respective world outlooks.

The method used to arrive at this exposition of the contradictions in the concepts 'African' and 'Black' consists largely of, on the one hand, an application of a 'dialectical' critical reading of pronouncements on the two concepts and, on the other hand, a discursive critique of the complex interplay between the post-colonial concepts of a 'Western' 'centre' and an 'African' and/or 'Black' 'margin'. These methods are reinforced by a close textual analysis of the use of the 'aesthetic' concepts 'African' and 'Black' in selected short story texts.

Two anthologies, Forced Landing (Mutloatse 1988) and Hungry Flames (Mzamane 1986), were selected for two specific reasons: the notion of anthologisation serves an implicit function of creating a collective, reconstructive and monolithic 'African' and/or 'Black' aesthetic, whereas the introductions to both these anthologies are used specifically by the editors as avenues for critical commentary and reflective exegesis on the politics of the 'African' and 'Black' aesthetic. Some stories in Es'kia Mphahlele's collections The Living and the Dead (1962) and In Corner B (1967) are subsequently used to decentre Mutloatse's and Mzamane's notions of a collective and monolithic 'African' and 'Black' view of the world. While a particular focus on the works of a writer of Mphahlele's stature enunciates a complex and contradictory interplay between the concepts 'African' and 'Black', such a focus also offers some suggestions on the possibilities for a resolution of these contradictions.

### **Organization of the Thesis**

The thesis consists of three chapters which have their own internal logical structure as well an organic relationship with one another. The specific aspect/s of the African and/or Black dialectic investigated in each of these chapters and the arguments to which such an investigation gives rise, constitute my effort to measure the extent and

nature of the silences pervading the 'African' and/or 'Black' aesthetic discourse.

Chapter One deals with both the theoretical and operational aspects of aesthetic construction through and within language. It begins with a contextualization of the problem of defining the 'African' and 'Black' forms of aesthetic consciousness and proceeds to actual definitions of the 'aesthetic' concepts 'African' and 'Black'. These definitions are backed up by an appraisal of the methods and procedures for a critical examination of the various assumptions underlying the problem of aesthetic valuation. This problem is examined further within the context of language appropriation by African and/or Black writers, particularly in South Africa. The notion of language appropriation is also interrogated through the methodology of the 'dialectic' of otherness.

Chapter Two examines the efforts of collectivizing the project of aesthetic reconstruction by the African and/or Black short story writers. The two anthologies by Mutloatse and Mzamane receive a critical treatment which probes and problematises, as I indicated earlier, the notion of short story anthologisation. Since the introductions to these anthologies serve the twofold function of both introducing and commenting on the context/s of literary production in South Africa, they are therefore perceived as constituting the theoretical and critical underpinnings of a dialectical aesthetic.



My response to these underpinnings has been to consider the editors' collective and reconstructive treatment of their valuative connotations as marking the beginning of the journey toward measuring the depths of aesthetic silence (in terms of Macherey's (1978) formulation). - a silence which, as it were, exhibits some underlying gaps about the relations between the 'African' and 'Black' notions of valuation.

For the purpose of achieving a coherence between theory and practice, four stories from each of these anthologies have been selected for scrutiny of their treatment of the concepts 'African' and 'Black'. These include, from Mutloatse's anthology, 'A Different Time' (Chicks Nkosi), 'African Trombone' (Xolile Guma), 'Heaven is Not Closed' (Bessie Head) and 'Forced Landing' (Manthatha Tsedu). Other stories from this anthology illuminating more indirectly the concepts 'African' and 'Black' are also referred to in order to illustrate some specific arguments pertaining to the notions of aesthetic collectivism and reconstruction.

The stories from Mzamane's anthology include 'Grieg on a Stolen Piano' (Ezekiel Mphahlele), 'The Day of the Riots' (Mbulelo Mzamane), 'The Music of the Violin' (Njabulo Ndebele) and 'The Park' (James Matthews). Other stories from Mutloatse's anthology are also used as illustrative material.

At the beginning of Chapter Two, some theoretical directions evaluating the ideology of aesthetic

`collectivism' and `reconstruction' are delineated through an examination of the editors' attempts to assign a collective identity to stories by authors who have their own distinct and individual world views. My tentative conclusions here point to the disparities and ideological incongruities permeating the editors' notions of aesthetic collectivity and reconstruction.

Chapter Three focuses on an individual author, Esk'ia (formerly Ezekiel) Mphahlele. Mphahlele, as I point out below, is a significant writer who, in spite of a long period of exile, has lived before 1948 and during the post-'76 and the 1980s crises of apartheid in South Africa. As one of the older generation of writers in South Africa Mphahlele's literary output and his active participation in `African' and/or `Black' cultural and literary matters should justify this separate chapter for a critical examination of both his critical and creative contributions to the development of `African' and/or `Black' literature.

Chapter Three commences, therefore, with a theoretical critique of Mphahlele's pronouncements on the `African' and/or `Black' aesthetic notions, locating these pronouncements within a broad range of the literary preoccupations which delineate the contours of Mphahlele's world view. Through an analysis of, *inter alia*, such theoretical texts as The African Image (1962 and 1974 editions), Voices in the Whirlwind (1972) and other texts illuminating the conceptions underlying Mphahlele's approach

to the question of African and Black aesthetic otherness. However, it is primarily in his stories that one is able to gain a comprehensive insight into Mphahlele's application of his theoretical concerns.

From a critical analysis of some stories in The Living and the Dead and In Corner B, one gains a deeper insight into the complexity of the problem of aesthetic valuation revolving around a combination of factors concealing and revealing the repressed points of disjuncture and synthesis in Mphahlele's 'African' and 'Black' discourse. Stories taken from The Living and the Dead include 'The Living and the Dead', 'The Master of Doornvlei', 'We'll Have Dinner at Eight' and, finally, the pair 'The Woman' and 'The Suitcase'. Each of these raises in profound ways some aspects of the 'African' and 'Black' dialectic. From In Corner B the following four stories are selected: 'A Point of Identity', 'Mrs Plum', 'In Corner B' and 'The Barber of Bariga'. The stories collected in the latter anthology develop, in a complex manner, the themes and concerns raised in the former collection. This is also indicated by Mphahlele's subsequent inclusion in In Corner B of stories such as 'The Living and the Dead' and 'The Master of Doornvlei' which first appeared in The Living and the Dead.

The analysis of the stories in both collections concentrates, initially, on the thematic and structural aspects of narrative and then proceeds to a specific ideological examination of the uses of the concepts 'African' and 'Black' in Mphahlele's discourse. Some tentative conclusions are drawn from the ideological motivation underlying Mphahlele's use of the concepts African and Black. These conclusions suggest the various possibilities of aesthetic synthesis.

### **Definition of Key Concepts**

Certain problematic concepts such as dialectic and aesthetic have, as a matter of priority, to be distinctly and qualitatively examined because of their status as methodological signposts of this study. Whatever critical enquiry these concepts are subjected to paves the way for a rigorous definition of the concepts 'African' and 'Black' which is undertaken in Chapter One of this study.

### **The Concept of Dialectic**

A significant operational definition of the notion of dialectic is offered by Pierre Macherey who perceives literary form and content as essentially constructed out of the gaps and silences permeating literary texts:

What is important in a work is what it does not say. This is not the same as the careless notation 'what it refuses to say,' although that would in itself be interesting: a method might be built on it, with the task of *measuring silences*, whether acknowledged or unacknowledged. But rather this, what the work *cannot* say is important, because there the elaboration of the utterance is carried out, in a sort of journey to silence (1978:87).

The enquiry into the figurative and ideological silence about the nature of the relations prevailing between the concepts 'African' and 'Black' represents an epistemic breaking of this silence.

We cannot, according to Macherey, claim to know what a literary work says without knowing precisely what it does not say. Macherey's assertion cultivates a fertile ground for raising the following crucial question about the discourse on the concepts 'African' and 'Black' : do writers and critics in South Africa and elsewhere in the world permit the concepts 'African' and 'Black' to reveal much of significance about their contents and the relation prevailing between them? In other words, do these concepts silently say something about themselves and their referential value? Questions like these compel writers and critics to confront radically the contradictions inherent in the tension between what the literary texts declare and what they repress about the actual value and aesthetic function of the concepts 'African' and 'Black'.

This notion of dialectical contradiction, according to Yu Kharin, lies at the core of all the processes of cognition:

The relation of the opposition of objects of reality, and of their properties, expresses in a developed form the contradictoriness that is inherent in all things and is already contained in differences (Kharin 1981:124).

The differences between what the text says and what it does not say express the problematics of the very notion of reality. Kharin's notion of contradictoriness will, as a methodological concept, be useful in charting the methodological course of our journey to the silences, if any, prevailing in assumptions about the literary value of the concepts 'African' and 'Black'.

Within the South African literary context the notion of contradictoriness expresses its urgency through the political demarcation between White and Black literary values. Even this demarcation further reflects the contradictions of consciousness which, as I argue in my first chapter, characterise the colonialist and imperialist legitimation of the phenomenon of racial, nationalist and geographic predications of social identity.

Another contribution to the debate on the nature of the form and content of a dialectical critical method is offered by Frederic Jameson who, contrary to Macherey's assumptions about the incoherence of a literary work, locates the text at the centre of all contradictions of consciousness and their resolution:

Rather, it seems to me that the initial problem which a dialectical theory of literature

has to face is that of the unity of the literary work itself, its existence as a complete thing, as an autonomous whole, which, indeed, resists assimilation to the totality of the historical here and now... (Jameson 1974:313).

Although a literary work may be perceived as an autonomous entity, it is my argument that its autonomy is both sociologically and historically indeterminate. Its conception and production take place within specific socio-historical conditions determining (and, indeed, lending shape to) the form and content of the categories of its consciousness.

In its attempt to explain the contradictions between subject and object, form and content, and also between the coherence and incoherence of its world view, the literary work too often finds its internal reality either in a conflictual or conformist relation to an indeterminate external form of reality. In so far as post-1948 literary works in South Africa found their autonomy challenged by the oppressive conditions of literary production under apartheid, they, in turn, also sought to challenge these conditions by being placed at the centre of the anti-apartheid struggle.

The writers sometimes also responded to these challenges by using their literary works in exploring ways of constructing an alternative cultural and social identity while at the same time grappling with the preservation of the autonomy of their works. These challenges opened, in my

view, new avenues of using literary discourse as a vehicle of searching for an enduring and unifying post-colonial and post-apartheid aesthetic.

### **The Concept of Aesthetic**

The perennial concern of this aesthetic enquiry is the question: how do African and/or Black writers in South Africa chart the course toward a resolution of the conceptual and ideological complexities inherent in the construction of valuative notions of form and content? Although no immediate answers to this question can be provided, my discussion of the main problems surrounding the notions of aesthetic valuation will touch on various strategies of formulating an enlightening response to the intricacies of aesthetic valuation.

The use of the term 'aesthetic' throughout this study moves away from the limited vision of traditional definitions which associate it with the subjective notions of beauty, visual appearance and a disinterested contemplation of art (Williams 1983:32). Its usage, in the context of this study, refers specifically to the aggregate of cultural, social and political values contributive to the construction of identity in a text. These values, in my view, occupy the central and crucial matrix of aesthetic consciousness. A plausible exposition on the nature of



`aesthetic' valuation and the problems associated with it is posited by Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) `distinction' between the process of production (economic capital) and social origin (cultural capital) as determinants of aesthetic attitudes (Burger 1992:22).

The capacity for making distinctions or acknowledging differences and similarities between the properties of concepts and objects is, according to Bourdieu's thesis, influenced by what he terms the `class-specific habitus' or practice-unifying and practice-generating principle (Burger 1992:23). It is in accordance with class socialization at the family and institutional (educational) levels that, in terms of Bourdieu's formulation, the social conflict in value judgements becomes manifest. This analysis of the social conception and function of values has profound implications for this study's concern with defining the form, content and function of `African' and `Black' aesthetic values. One cannot hope to accomplish this task without tracing the `class-specific habitus' (Bourdieu 1984) of short story writers who refer to themselves or are sometimes referred to as `African' and/or `Black' writers.

Apart from Bourdieu's analyses of the concept of aesthetic value and the problems surrounding the very notion of `aesthetic valuation' (Burger 1992:25-29), Theodor Adorno's (1986) contribution to a theoretical discussion of prospects for a materialist aesthetic is also pertinent to this study. His analysis of the contradictions between

subject and object, internal and external dialectic of aesthetic production is an illuminating contribution to our perception of the workings of the notions of contradiction and synthesis in 'African' and 'Black' approaches to aesthetic valuation.

While Adorno's aesthetic theory accepts the contributions and impingements of politics on the formulation of aesthetic stances in literature, it also cautions against the tendencies, common in some Marxist aesthetic formulations, of treating politics as a decisive factor in aesthetic valuation:

While in art formal characteristics must not be interpreted in directly political terms, they do have substantive implications including political ones. All genuinely modern art seeks the liberation of form. This trend is a cipher for the liberation of society, for form...represents the relation that the work of art has to society (Adorno 1986:361)

The conditions of literary production in South Africa, as I indicated earlier, have been subsisting under the oppressive political conditions of apartheid. But even if this is the case, the liberation of form and of aesthetic consciousness from political constraints is, in my view, a daunting challenge to the assumptions of, respectively, an Africa-centred and Black-centred aesthetic form of literary valuation.

## Chapter 1

### The Language Question and the African/Black Short Story Writer in South Africa: Towards a Dialectical Aesthetic Theory

#### 1.1 The Problem and its Context

Before the linguistic aspects of the literary consciousness of African and/or Black writers in South Africa can be examined, one needs to identify and define concretely the variables in the object of this study's investigation. The crux of the problem on which this study focuses is the epistemic and ideological question about the relationship between the concepts 'African' and 'Black'. My examination of this question, in this study, takes the form of a critique of the various assumptions the writers and critics in South Africa and elsewhere in the world often make about the literary and political meanings of the aesthetic concepts 'African' and 'Black'. In academic and general public forms of discourse one encounters frequently a confounding synonymous use of the concepts 'African' and 'Black'.

In order to perceive clearly the aesthetic, epistemic and ideological function of these concepts, this study proposes to enquire, as a point of departure, whether these concepts

initially had/have or do not have any capability of independent existence as literary and/or ideological terms.

This question is for any critical sensitivity, clarity and terminological exactitude which can be arrived at only through a rigorous definition of the concepts 'African' and 'Black'.

### 1.1.1 The African Aesthetic

There are two important definitions of the African aesthetic which lay an emphasis on place consciousness as the cornerstone of a process of perceiving Africa as a dialectical other of, for example, a Western form of aesthetic consciousness. The first definition is offered by Nadine Gordimer and the second one by Christopher Miller.

In her definition of the writing practice in Africa Gordimer argues that:

...African writing is writing done in any language by Africans themselves and by others of whatever skin colour who share with Africans the experience of having been shaped, mentally and spiritually, by Africa rather than anywhere else in the world (1974:5).

Although Gordimer's definition raises important observations about the signification of place (Africa) as a signifier and signified of the 'African' literary aesthetic, it is, however, not without some inherent contradictions. Some of these contradictions are illuminated by her assumptions

about the relations between, on the one hand, the 'Africans' (place-centred definition) and 'other people of whatever skin colour' (race-centred definition) and, on the other hand, those between Africa and anywhere else in the world.<sup>1</sup>

If place consciousness is the sole determinant of an Africa-centred aesthetic valuation, any equation of this consciousness with colour (racial) concerns tend to distort Gordimer's discourse on otherness. The experience of being shaped mentally and spiritually by Africa is, in my view, not a cognate of the racial experience. The element of contradictoriness between Africa and what Gordimer characterizes as 'anywhere else in the world' establishes a dialectic of 'otherness' limiting its terms of reference to the epistemic and ideological parameters of a place conscious discourse. The point of departure of this discourse is an assumption that a race-conscious otherness occupies a level of discourse whose language is distinct from that of, for instance, an Afrocentric or place centred discourse.

Miller's definition differs substantially from Gordimer's in that the level of its discourse explores the possibility and conditions of an epistemic break by the Western subject from the ideological totality of an imperialist critical discourse:

...what options are really open to a Western reader of non-Western literature? Claiming a break with his/her own culture and critical upbringing, can he/she read the other, the African, as if from an authentically African

point of view, interpreting Africa in African terms, perceiving rather than projecting? (1990:1).

This question forms the core of my exposition on the ways and means of exploring the intricacies of a place-centred definition of otherness. Miller's question, however, expresses profound concerns about the Western other's desire to effect an epistemic break from the ideological totality of the dominant discourse.

In reply to Miller's question I can, for instance, posit a contention that there is no such a thing as an authentic reading of the text/subtext of either a Western or African other. One is presented, at any moment of deciding consciously to read the other's text, with an historical choice of reading that text either through the prism of imperialist discourse or through a meta-critical and ideologically profound engagement with the other's text. It is, according to De Man, only through a conscious act of 'renouncing the nostalgia and the desire for totalization and also with a non-imperialist tolerance of difference' (Miller 1990:7) that the conditions for the Western other's way of 'knowing' the African other, and vice versa, become possible. One can, consequently, infer from De Man's pronouncements that the epistemological and ideological conditions of otherness are premised, as it were, on a strict requisite of accepting a critical tolerance and transhistorical difference as constitutive norms of a plausible discourse of otherness.

There is, in my view, a stark hiatus in the inherent holistic predications of both Gordimer's and Miller's definitions. This hiatus arises from these writers' failure to consider the heterogeneous nature of the cultural, political and historical realities of Africa. When arguing about the heterogeneity of discourse and conditions of existence in Africa, Amilcar Cabral contends that within the monolithic Africa there are many cultural Africas:

The fact of recognizing the existence of common and particular features in the cultures of African peoples, independent of the colour of their skin, does not necessarily imply that one and only one culture exists on the continent. In the same way that from an economic and political viewpoint we can recognize the several Africas, so also there are many African cultures (1973:51).

This recognition of the heterogeneous nature of cultural existence in Africa should serve as a caution to those who propagate the idea that Africa has a single monolithic cultural identity. Another noteworthy point in Cabral's observation lies in its recognition of the possibility of formulating an Afrocentric world outlook independently of the racial dialectic of aesthetic consciousness. This is the possibility of aesthetic consciousness with which, in my view, many Afrocentric writers in South Africa have not come to terms. Any plausible definition of an African aesthetic should, according to Cabral, take cognisance of how the heterogeneity of place-consciousness is central to any conceptualization of the notion of an Afrocentric aesthetic.

### 1.1.2 The Black Aesthetic

Notions of Blackness presuppose by the very nature of their racial predications a dialectic of contradiction in which racial consciousness demarcates aesthetic boundaries. Any definitions of the Black aesthetic place the experiencing subject, the racial subject, at the centre of a social and political crisis permeating the dialectic of aesthetic consciousness. Any researcher or critic of the presentations of a racially determined aesthetic consciousness should be aware of the humanly divisive nature of racially expressed stances of aesthetic otherness.

The 'Black' aesthetic, in the view of Pio Zirimu (1973), is an oppositional dialectic of a White aesthetic consciousness. Zirimu formulates his views on 'Black' and 'White' aesthetic otherness in the form of a question about the essential contradictions of a racial otherness:

It may well be asked whether or not there is a black aesthetic distinct from, say, a white aesthetic. And in any case what does "black" contrast with? (1973:58).

Zirimu's formulation considers the essence of the Black aesthetic as definable in terms of its opposition to, say, a White aesthetic consciousness. If Blackness is accepted as a contrast of Whiteness what, then, are the conditions under which such a form of aesthetic consciousness may thrive?



As the rationale behind aesthetic consciousness, race determines the form and nature of the contrast between Black and White aesthetic otherness. It is therefore imperative that before one analyses the manifestations of racial consciousness in South Africa, one should define the universal conceptions of race as a cultural, social and political phenomenon:

Race has become a trope of ultimate, irreducible difference between cultures, linguistic groups, or adherents of specific belief systems which—more often than not—also have fundamentally opposed economic interests. Race is the ultimate trope of difference because it is so very arbitrary in its application. The biological criteria used to determine "difference" in sex simply do not hold when applied to "race." Yet we carelessly use language in such a way as to will this sense of natural difference into our formulations (Gates 1986:5).

To will this kind of unnatural difference has always been the point of departure of the pseudoscience of racial discourse.

Although race has long been considered a fiction in biological sciences, it has, like nazism and other aberrant ideologies,<sup>2</sup> also generated an ideological discourse with its own pseudo history. The desire for difference which, for instance, the racial ideology always sought to reinforce in South Africa is, as Nkosi (1983:31-32) observes, an untenable and terminologically dubious discourse. The dubiousness of its terminological shifts from Black to Non-White in South Africa reflected an ideological indeterminacy characteristic of pseudoscientific discourse.

In South Africa race has been so pernicious in its hold over the national consciousness that, from the period of colonization to that of asserting White supremacist ideologies through an apartheid pseudoscience, that it culminated in what Derrida terms 'a quasi-ontological segregation engendered by an obsessive preoccupation with the ideology of apartitionality' (1986:133). This quasi-ontological segregation also resulted in the creation along racial lines of Black and White South African literary streams.

These streams reflected, in turn, a deeply underlying psycho-ideological apartition of the notions of aesthetic and human valuation. When, for instance, the Black Consciousness ideology coined the slogan 'Black is beautiful' it was, according to Abraham Kinfe (1991:45), a slogan meant to counter the dominance of White racism which was rooted in the perception of Black as an inferior other of White. The aesthetic consciousness of the Black trope functions as a cognate of what Gordimer (1977) terms 'White Consciousness'.<sup>3</sup>

From the foregoing discussion of the African and Black forms of aesthetic consciousness, it would seem that one would not have exhaustively addressed the concerns of this chapter without directing our focus to the most contentious issue; the construction of one's identity through the linguistic and ideological resources of the other. It is only when we have contextualised the question of ideological

and/or Black writers that the argument of this chapter can refine, clarify and impart a coherent perspective on the social and political origins of the African and Black valuative concepts.

## **1.2 Ideological Currents of the African and Black Aesthetic**

Contradictions in the assumptions of Africa-centred and Black-centred world outlooks express the ideological currents designating particular socio-political stances. A pertinent epistemic and ideological question which should be posed is whether it is possible, at any given moment of one's consciousness, to step out of one's 'Africanness' or 'Blackness'? This question can be rephrased in the following manner: do the concepts 'Africanness' and 'Blackness' constitute a binding and arbitrary totality which is definitive of the consciousness and disposition of those who subscribe to their prescriptions? Although no easy answers can be provided, an enquiry into the prescriptions of African and Black concepts should yield illuminating responses.

It is my argument here that, because of the racial-capitalist mode of economic and cultural production in South

Africa, Afrocentricity represents a rear-guard ideological stance. The stance of Blackness represents, on the other hand, an ideological advance inclined towards an expurgation of racial inferiority at the economic, political and literary levels. The fact that South Africa's political economy is a racial capitalist mode of production means that one cannot hope to rid this system of its class exploitative relations without getting rid of the dialectic of Black inferiority and White superiority inherent in the dominant mode of production.<sup>4</sup> The class underpinnings of the Black world outlook give it an immediacy surpassing any Afrocentric concerns with place consciousness.

At the literary and cultural levels of production the Black intellectuals have been kept away from total integration with their White middle class counterparts by the racial exclusivity of the dominant ideology. Although both the African and Black aesthetic models engage, as I argued earlier in this chapter, this dominant Eurocentric and White cultural and literary model, they do so from different ideological stances. The most notable difference has to do with the immediacy and materiality of the politics of racial otherness. The experience of racial oppression predicated on the ideological legitimation of racial otherness gave rise, according to Bessie Head, to a situation where

...skins were to be constantly legislated for, the white skin being a passport to paradise and many privileges; the black skin being a kind of

rhinoceros hide at which are hurled tear gas,  
batons, bullets and ferocious police dogs  
(Khuzwayo 1985:xiii).

It is this experience of racial battery and harassment which defines the materiality of the Black world outlook as representing an advance against the totalizing hegemony of White otherness. Since, according to Frantz Fanon, 'It is the racist who creates his inferior' (1991:93), the dialectic of Black inferiority and White superiority on which the dominant ideology thrives gave rise to the White oppositional stance of the Black world outlook.

### **1.3 Preliminary Observations on the Language Question**

The question of which language/s is/are considered as national literary language/s, occupies a central place in the literary culture of any country. Its centrality derives from the fact that it is through an appropriation of a written literary language and, to some extent, of the oral forms of literary discourse that writers establish a communicative relationship between themselves and their audiences.

In this regard, any examination of the nature of South African literary forms which excludes the language question is bound to miss an examination of the most basic aspect through which writers construct their texts. It is my hope

that by examining the language question in South African literary discourse, we should be able to account for the reasons why those writers who either refer to themselves or are referred to by critics as either African or Black writers, and are sometimes synonymously referred to as Black African writers, use a foreign language like English for their literary communication. In other words, researchers, scholars and literary critics should be able to explain what happens when someone uses another's language as his/her literary language without necessarily appropriating the cultural background and world view of such an adopted language.

It is this chapter's argument that in our multilingual South African society, the 'African' and/or 'Black' short story writer who elects to write in English, does so either because of a perception of English as an international language or because of certain compelling political and historical realities privileging the literary use of English. Do the 'African' and/or 'Black' short story writers who use English as their literary language do so purely out of a 'linguistic choice' of English or does the legacy of colonial and imperial conquest compel these writers to adopt positions where English becomes, in the face of the conquered status of their languages, the only language suited to the writer's task of asserting the political and nationalist aspirations of his/her community?

Implicit in the question above is an assumption that any literary use of a language, be it through reading or writing, implies a certain level of education in the intricacies of that language. What this means, then, is that any 'African' and/or 'Black' writer in South Africa who uses English for literary purposes has either the elementary or professional reading and, therefore, writing skills which place him/her in a position radically different from, say, that of an illiterate person. An 'African' and/or 'Black' writer, whether from the rural areas or townships, who has read the English literary canon of writers such as Shakespeare, Donne, Keats, Lawrence and others, cannot pretend to be in the same position as a township reader whose reading may be limited to James Hadley Chase, Barbara Cartland, Wilbur Smith and other works of a thriller-type popular fictional genre.

The comparison would be inappropriate, not because of the superiority of one type of literature over the other, but because of the critical demands each of these literary forms address to the reader. It is for these reasons of literary training and critical ability that one can argue that, by virtue of their intellectual positions<sup>5</sup>, 'African' and/or 'Black' short story writers in South Africa work within a neo-colonial literary tradition. When the 'African' and/or 'Black' writers in South Africa want to write about the cultural, political and historical struggles of their communities they find themselves having to perform these

tasks through a language, English, into which they have only been professionally socialized: they find themselves at a linguistic crossroads of having to use English as their literary language whilst retaining their indigenous cultural backgrounds as sources of their stories.

Given this linguistically and ideologically problematic situation confronting 'African' and/or 'Black' English short story writers, the following question may be asked: do these writers choose to write in English or does English choose and instal them as its own writers? Deliberations on this question should shed some light on the literary and ideological origins and meaning of such concepts and expressions as 'African' or 'Black' writer, 'writers of English expression,' 'Anglophone writers,' 'post-colonial writers' and others loosely used in South African and 'African' literary discourse. A critical examination of these concepts and expressions should yield illuminating results for our understanding and perception of the complexities of the language question in South Africa. The nature and form of that understanding and perception, even if it is not falling within the immediate scope of this chapter, should hopefully contribute to the theoretical and ideological debates on language started by Obi Wali and subsequently taken up by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o.<sup>6</sup>



### 1.3.1. The Historical Context of the Language Question

It was also through the 'Négritude' contribution of writers like Léopold Senghor, Aimé Césaire and others that the language question became a contentious issue within the circles of the 'new élite' which emerged in the 19th century from missionary institutions in Africa. At a conference entitled 'African Literature and the Universities' held in Dakar, Senegal, and Freetown, Sierra Leone, Léopold Senghor, one of the founders of négritude, summarized the 'Francophone' post-colonial linguistic and ideological situation in the following terms:

Our position as colonial peoples meant we had to submit to the language of our colonisers or, to put it more accurately, to the policy of assimilation (Moore 1965: 14).

Not all the delegates, however, shared Senghor's perception and pronouncements on the post-colonial linguistic and ideological situation of Africa.

Some Anglophone delegates like Ezekiel Mphahlele who, in his 'A Reply' (Moore 1965) to W. Jeanpiere's 'Négritude and its Enemies' (Moore 1965), articulated an anti-assimilationist stance against the Francophone Négritude exponents. This resulted in the ideological polarization of delegates.

It is instructive to examine more closely the conceptual and ideological stance of an anti-assimilationist writer like Mphahlele in order to gain an insight into Anglophone

It is instructive to examine more closely the conceptual and ideological stance of an anti-assimilationist writer like Mphahlele in order to gain an insight into Anglophone concerns which, in turn, would enable us to critique the social position of the new élite and its post-colonial entanglement in the dialectic of African and/or Black aesthetics in South Africa. This analysis should also shed some light on the social position of the élite vis à vis the masses and their languages and cultures.

In his reply to Senghor's and Jeanpierre's acquiescent stances on linguistic and ideological assimilation, Mphahlele posited his anti-assimilationist stance on an ahistorically expository level:

We acknowledge that negritude as a socio-political concept defines the mind of the assimilated African in French speaking territories. The British never set out to assimilate their colonial subjects. They hate to see people come out of their culture to emulate them (the British). They like the exotic African, not the one who tries to speak, walk and eat like them. They love Africans in museum cases, so they left much of African culture intact (Moore 1965: 26).

The ahistoricism of Mphahlele's stance lies primarily in its reactive tendencies based on his generalizations on the relation between British colonization and the colonized subjects. Both Senghor's and Mphahlele's stances also created an impression which assumed that in assimilationist and anti-assimilationist stances there were no middle positions.

It is my contention that the post-colonial literary and cultural condition in Africa has created a space in which languages such as English and French have themselves undergone a process of transformation leading to the birth of completely new forms of these languages. This is evident in the stories of writers like Chicks Nkosi, Manthatha Tsedu, Mbulelo Mzamane and others in which one finds a mixture of Zulu, Tswana, Afrikaans, English and other narrative styles (oral and written narrative modes) and linguistic codes and expressions creating literary conditions conducive to the birth of a new form/s of English which 'differ' markedly from the standard English version.

Even if this new version of language has been born, the task of examining the social position of an unassimilated African and/or Black intellectual still remains a paramount part of our critical enquiry. The pertinent question here is: if, in their attempts to bring about an élite in Africa and in South Africa, the British had no intention of creating 'Africans' who were to emulate them, what, then, were the British motives in providing education to the indigenous peoples? Although there can be no absolute answers to this question, one possible direction of answering it lies in the examination of the formation of social classes and the attendant relations of domination and subservience which characterized the colonial conditions in Africa and especially in South Africa.

At the heart of the indirect or unassimilationist colonial policy of the British, the driving force behind that policy was an imperialist motive of wealth accumulation.<sup>7</sup> Wealth could not be accumulated without the existence of an abundant labour force that was to remain dominated and loyal to its masters. The creation of a labour force also necessitated the provision of education to the providers of labour.<sup>8</sup> It was at this point that the interests of wealth creation and industrial growth in South Africa also necessitated the provision of education to the indigenous peoples from whom a large pool of labour was drawn. The provision of a British oriented education system to the indigenous peoples in South Africa brought into being a new African and/or Black élite whose emergent writers historically found themselves in an ideological situation in which the '...best of African literature reflects a colonial dependency' (Nkosi 1979:2). This kind of colonial dependency has led to a 'meta-colonial' condition which has been termed 'self-enslavement or auto-colonization' (Moore 1965: 25), and which lies, primarily, in the post-colonial objectification of the linguistic and ideological self-definition of writers from the new élite. Just as Mphahlele warned that 'Négritude men should not pretend that this is an entirely African concept' (Moore 1965: 25), we can also contend that the concepts 'African' and 'Black', as historical and world view concepts, are not restricted to the continent of Africa

### 1.3.2 The Literary Choice Of English

The choice of English as a literary language by African and/or Black short story writers in South Africa is a choice which, as I indicated earlier, was either consciously or unconsciously made. It is a choice which writers had to make within an historical context determined and defined by the conditions of political, economic and cultural conquest and domination of indigenous languages and their cultural contexts. It is within this context that any consideration of the language question finds itself inevitably drawn into a broad conflict of values which ensued between the English colonizers and the colonized indigenous 'Bantu'<sup>9</sup>.

Colonial and imperialist penetrations into South Africa and the political consequences of this penetration established an encounter and interaction between the English language and its indigenous counterparts. This was an encounter and interaction whose impact was radically to alter the status of indigenous languages such as Zulu, Xhosa, Tswana, Venda and others through which the 'Bantu' peoples of Southern Africa had formulated their identities. Although much has been said<sup>10</sup> about the christian orientation and culturally pejorative nature of missionary and colonial education of such institutions as Lovedale, Marianhill and other missionary colleges, nowhere in South

African creative and critical writing have the positive elements of such missionary and colonial educational contributions been acknowledged.

The problematics of the South African literary situation had, even before the Union of South Africa Act in 1910, as its material imperative a systematic creation of an élite class with strong christian tendencies. It was through the missionary and colonial education which had the bible and the English literary canon as central texts that the Bantu were to be converted, albeit without assimilation, into a non-English and non-Bantu elite.<sup>11</sup> In other words a new élite class, alienated from both the English and Bantu cultural backgrounds, emerged out of missionary and colonial education.

This is, perhaps, the reason why in the works of the early generation of English writers from the indigenous South African extraction one finds a stark presence of the christian influence. Such works as H.I.E. Dhlomo's Valley of A Thousand Hills, and Thomas Mofolo's Chaka, amongst others, show strong traces of, respectively, romantic and christian missionary influences. Since these writers also largely relied on the missionary printing presses for the publication of their works, it would therefore have been natural to expect those works to display such influences rather than those of their indigenous cultural backgrounds.

The literature produced in the period after the coming to power of the Afrikaner Nationalists in 1948 is of

particular importance to this chapter's concern with the historical context surrounding the language question. The 1970s period, in particular, which, like the Négritude movement period in Africa and the Black Power movement in the Afro-American diaspora, brought into being the concept of 'Black Consciousness' that was to have a major influence on the literary identity of those writers who were drawn from the élite of indigenous extraction. Explaining the reasons for a preference for the concepts 'Black' or 'African' instead of 'Bantu' by the Black Consciousness exponents, N.P. Maake argues that this choice came as a result of what he terms the 'government's abduction of the word 'Bantu' ' (1991: 57).

It is indeed an historical fact that through its policy of separate development the government had abducted the word 'Bantu', but, in my view, the government's success in accomplishing this task came as a result of the crisis of consciousness in the alienated indigenous élite. The indigenous élite, as I earlier pointed out, was neither part of the English world view nor a part of the indigenous cultural processes. They remained a free-floating élite that had to be given a 'new' identity by its creators. It was in that context that such concepts as Black and African, which had not existed in the lexicon of indigenous languages, soon became the identity concepts for the new élite.

The whole enterprise of creating a new élite and identifying it as either a Black or African élite was part of a whole strategy of mental colonization in terms of which, according to Daniel Kunene, this new élite was gradually set apart from its indigenous cultural backgrounds:

The few blacks who obtained education from schools set up by these powers and their missionary adjuncts, acquired their languages and became an educated elite. A significant number of them even went to the metropolitan centers of their colonizers to obtain higher education (1992: 9).

The consequences of this socialization into the culture and values of the colonial metropolitan centres had an effect, according to Kunene, of alienating that élite from its indigenous social values:

Varying degrees of alienation took place, including the habitual use of the new languages, both for ordinary communication and for the creation of literature. Yet, despite the languages they were written in, these emerging literatures were not considered English or French or Portuguese literatures, and thus was born the idea of "African" literature (1992: 9).

All these literatures in European languages were therefore part of the alienating process subtly conducted through the adoption of these languages whose cultural world view excludes the indigenous élite. A poignant reflection of this linguistic and cultural alienation was to find its subtle expression in journalistic cum fictional form of urban English writing in the 1950s and 1960s in Drum by the new élite.<sup>12</sup>



It is through a consideration of the historical context of this double alienation that I argue that the new concepts African and Black, just like the new literatures they brought into being, were coined and bestowed on the new élite by the colonial languages. Kunene offers the following homologous account of the origin of these concepts:

There was a search for roots, a new pride in being black and African, a new kind of literature and poetry and art that expressed the struggle to free oneself. A new identity was being born. Paradoxically, the poetry and literature articulating these new ideas were being written in the languages of the oppressors. One of the reasons for this was that the Africans, having conquered their fear of their master's wrath, had decided to confront him directly in his own language (1992: 9).

If the intellectual search for roots and the determination to confront the master directly in his own language were to yield fruitful results, members of the new élite would have had to depart from a consciousness of the ideological limitations imposed on them through mental and cultural colonization.<sup>13</sup>

A rigorous questioning of the origins of such concepts as Black and African would, perhaps, have indicated that no matter how hard members of the new élite may have tried to confront the master in his own language,<sup>14</sup> the master still unconsciously remained a master who determined the thinking behind their confrontationist stances. Since the concepts African (place-centred consciousness) and Black (race-

centred consciousness) did not exist in the original lexicon of the Bantu languages in Southern Africa, it can plausibly be argued that the language of the colonial master provided these concepts to the new élite which, largely oblivious of this reality, accepted and positively or nationalistically used the concepts without realizing the pitfalls of ideological surrender inherent in the ideology of colonialist discourse.

Reviewing Jacqueline Kaye's and Abdelhamid Zoubir's Ambiguous Compromise: Language, Literature and National Identity in Algeria and Morocco Ben Marrouchi poses the following question, which is also pertinent to our South African situation, about the linguistic and ideological situation of the Maghreb:

The question remains, however. How are we to interpret the colonizer's language, and is it really possible for the Maghrebian writer to utilize it without surrendering to its ideology? (1992: 229).

We may extend the terms of this question when examining the South African linguistic situation by arguing that through a nationalistic and sometimes ahistorical use of the colonizer's language, the possibility of the writers' surrender to the colonial ideology fostered by the urban orientation of African and/or Black English writing in South Africa unconsciously outweighed the new élite's confrontational efforts.

The urban context and nature of, for instance, Drum writing, ostensibly privileged English rather than the indigenous Bantu languages largely spoken by the masses. The consequences of English language privileging in Africa and South Africa resulted, according to Lewis Nkosi, in a situation where

...the masses are effectively sealed off from the educated élite who, through training and the constant use of an official language in creative and intellectual discourse, constitute an objectification on African soil of another culture and its values (1979: 2).

The urban context and the language in which this objectification took place in South Africa led, in my view, to some form of ideological surrender of members of the new élite to the ideology of the 'other'.

Even if such a surrender was not explicit in its manifestations, it placed these writers in a problematic situation of articulating nationalist protest aspirations on behalf of the masses and/or workers who were functionally non-literate. A logical consequence of that situation is that whilst English functioned as a language of nationalist protest of the new élite (i.e. the writers and politicians), the process of articulating that protest message, a message articulated on behalf of the workers and rural segments of the African and/or Black community, ironically ended up as a two-way communication process between the 'representative' members of the new élite and the oppressors. This had far-reaching implications for both the Afro-Centric or Black-

Centred ideological stances of writers expressed through the English literary discourse.

### 1.3.3 Bantu Education and Language Alternatives

The Bantu Education Act No. 47 of 1953 with its emphasis on mother tongue instruction in African and/or Black schools, generally thrust the members of the new élite, the writers in particular, into a position where, in order to achieve their nationalist objectives, and also in order to avoid the literary uses of Afrikaans which was associated with the apartheid establishment, they found themselves increasingly compelled to turn to English as an alternative language of their literary expression.<sup>15</sup> Maake rationalizes this turning to English in the following political terms:

Ever since the advent of Bantu Education, South African black writers, scholars and intellectuals of different political ideologies and persuasions have consistently and persistently been unanimous on the adoption of English as the medium of communication among Africans (1991: 61).

Although I generally agree with Maake's assertion on the impetus of Bantu Education in influencing the choice of English as a medium of communication among members of that new elite, I, however, find this reason insufficient as the sole motivation behind that choice. I would rather contend that the politics of Bantu Education ratified an implicit

preference for English which had been there since the introduction of an English or British orientated education system to the indigenous communities.

The irony of the political reality surrounding Bantu Education's ideological intention of manipulating the indigenous languages and their ideological outlook completed the process of ideological surrender which was a sine qua non for the ideological and cultural alienation of the new elite. A rejection of the apartheid ideology also inadvertently turned into a negation, in my view, of the historical heritage with which the intellectuals and writers had had a closer affinity.<sup>16</sup>

A perception ran through the world view/s of the new intellectuals and writers who began to see the English language as a language of political unity. Some writers even began to perceive the indigenous languages as languages of disunity which were ill suited to the writers' social and ideological roles in their communities.<sup>17</sup> In his exposition on the complex nature of language variables, Ngugi's definition raises crucial questions about the African and/or Black writers' conception of the social function of language:

Language, any language, has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture. Take English. It is spoken in Britain and in Sweden and Denmark. But for Swedish and Danish people English is only a means of communication with non-Scandinavians. It is not a carrier

of this culture. For the British, and particularly the English, it is additionally, and inseparably from its use as a tool of communication, a carrier of their culture and history (1986: 13).

What were the possibilities, to the new élite, of transforming English into a carrier of their indigenous social, political and cultural history in South Africa? Was the choice of English an ideologically and politically sound choice for these writers?

Profound concerns with apartheid's subversion of the indigenous languages was the main motivation for the perception of English as a language of political unity. This is a perception which Maake, Sepamla and Manaka, at a symposium in Soweto, uncritically accepted:

In 1987 the writer of this report shared a stage with Siphso Sepamla...and Matsemela Manaka...which was organised by the students of the Soweto College of Education. The theme of the symposium was the relevance of English in African development. Sepamla expressed unreserved support of English as the language of political unity, and of the imperative need to sacrifice African languages on the altar of political expediency (1991: 61).

Irrespective of the political exigencies of the situation which compelled these writers uncritically to accept English as a politically unifying language, what eluded them was a realization of the ideologically tragic nature of their decision: what was sacrificed to political expediency was their history which is contained in the cultural vehicles of their languages.<sup>18</sup>

A denial of the historical validity of one's own language, even at a moment of political crisis, according to Ngugi, amounts to a tragic denial of one's indispensable instrument of self-definition. This becomes even worse when we consider that during that moment of political crisis in South Africa, the masses continued to make history in their indigenous languages from which the literary content of the works of Sepamla, Maake and Manaka was derived.<sup>19</sup> There is, in my view, nothing problematic about the writer who consciously uses a language other than his/her mother tongue to express his/her social, political, economic and cultural aspirations. What is problematic is an unconscious surrender to the adoptive language's ideology. This situation accounts, as John Mbiti observes, for the high regard the young people in Africa and South Africa have for the foreign languages such as, for instance, English.<sup>20</sup>

What is significant in any writer's use of language is the ability to determine whether such a language permits a level of exteriorisation which it would naturally permit its native speaker and writer. By level of exteriorisation I mean a writer's ability to present and articulate in words the nature of the relationship existing between that writer and his/her language. According to Jean Paul Sartre, there is a certain level at which the writer has a proprietary relationship over his language:

I have a feeling of possession as regards the French language. Except that, as I am trying to explain, I possess it, I own it, as

something external to myself. In fact I think its the only thing I do own. It is mine (1973: 78).

Such a relationship of language possession is difficult to attain for a writer who, like the African and/or Black writer in South Africa, bases the reasons for his uses of English on political expediency alone.

When the political causes of that expediency have disappeared, an interest in the literary uses of English will persist, just as it has been the case in post-independence Africa, within the parameters of a hybrid and syncretic form of discourse which, in my perception, remains immanent within those politically expedient uses of English. The fact of the literary situation in Anglophone Africa and South Africa, in particular, is that both White and Black writers are involved in forging a common hybrid literary culture and language in an attempt to express a common identity. Nkosi makes the point poignantly that:

...even at its most complex and formally competent level, this literature presents to us the aspect of a cultural hybrid in which African and European concerns are inextricably mixed through the twine and woof of a common language (1979: 2).

Although we cannot be altogether sure of what Nkosi means by 'twine' and 'woof', his exposition on the hybrid nature of English writing in Africa is equally applicable to the South African literary situation where African and/or Black



writers, especially, attempt to express their indigenous values through the resources of the English language.

#### **1.3.4 A Return to the Roots**

The point this discussion has been leading to is one of exploring the question of linguistic alternatives as an enquiry which presupposes that a return to writing in one's own language is a return to one's cultural and historical roots. This is a proposal which was first suggested by Obi Wali and later given a theoretical and ideological direction by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o. In the discourse of literary criticism, this stance has come to be known as a nativist ideological stance.<sup>21</sup> It is nativist in so far as it advocates a return to writing in indigenous languages.

The question here is which path is linguistically and ideologically suitable for placing writers from the new élite on the road toward a recovery of their 'lost' cultural and historical identities?<sup>22</sup> Can a search for these roots, in other words, be conducted through foreign languages like English or can it only be conducted through the medium of indigenous languages? The stances of three literary critics, Ngugi, Mazisi Kunene and Daniel Kunene, on this question of whether to use foreign or indigenous languages in expressing the indigenous cultural values should be flexible enough in the light of the post-colonial literary situation, to allow a wider exploration of this issue.

Ngugi's stance on the decolonization of the mind through a return to writing in indigenous languages constituted a major linguistic and ideological intervention in African literary discourse. Ngugi states the terms of his stance on the following materialist and ideological basis:

Economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. To control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others (1986:16).

It is clear, then, that according to Ngugi the process of political and economic decolonization remains incomplete if a primary means of self-definition, language, still remains colonized. Although this stance can somehow be perceived as avoiding the post-colonial realities of cultural and linguistic hybridity and syncreticity in Africa, its call, as I understand it, also recognizes the heterogeneity of the indigenous linguistic and cultural situation of Africa. Inherent in this recognition is also an awareness of the post-colonial condition of 'otherness'.

Ngugi's proposals contain crucial implications for our concern with the language question in South Africa where, as I indicated earlier, the choice of English as a literary language by the African and/or Black élite was largely determined by the country's oppressive political context. The implications of Ngugi's proposals are, however, fraught with some ideological inaccuracies: (1) in his assumption that the indigenous languages he valorizes have an inherent

ideological purity and innocence, Ngugi undermines the actual workings of the dominant ideologies of colonialism and imperialism; (2) by assuming that there are no contending ideological forces within heterogeneous indigenous languages in geographic states in Africa, Ngugi subjects his materialist critique to an ideologically homogenizing nationalist concern.

A rigorous critique of Ngugi's stance is offered by Simon Gikandi who, after examining the author's liberal, nationalist and internationalist or Marxist/Fanonist phases, observes an ideologically problematic trend permeating Ngugi's proposals:

Ngugi's organic notion of language - the belief that a national language represented unalienated Being - was predicated on his investment in an ahistorical notion of a pre-colonial African past in which speakers existed in harmonious relationship with their environment (1992: 132).<sup>23</sup>

A somewhat similar kind of generalization by some writers from the new élite in South Africa contends that indigenous languages have a unique collectivist and objective reality with which any of these writers have a natural and unproblematic relationship. One such writer is Mazisi Kunene whose pronouncements on this aspect of language I now wish to turn to.

According to Mazisi Kunene's Afro-centric nativist and nationalist ideological position, a position which - unlike that of *négritude* exponents - maintains silence on the relation between African and Black identity, all those

writers who write in foreign languages such as English have no claims to his notion of a pure African identity. His stance is predicated on the following organicist claims to a relationship with his indigenous language, Zulu, in which his poems were originally written:

In short, writers who write in a foreign language are already part of foreign institutions; to one extent or another, they have adopted foreign values and philosophical attitudes, and they variously seek to be a member of that culture. They cannot be said to be African cultural representatives who write in another language because, in spirit, at least, they speak from the perspective provided for them by the effective apparatus of mental control exercised by the former colonial power (1992: 32).

The criteria of African literary representativeness, according to Kunene's nativist ideological predications, are determined through a dialectic between linguistic indigeneity and foreignness. As long as a language is indigenous, Kunene implies, it is free of control by the colonizers.

Even if the concept 'African' has been provided by the apparatus of a former colonial power, such a concept should, in the terms of Kunene's argument, still be held as a valid and reliable apparatus for distinguishing indigenous from foreign languages. This ignores the immanent presence in African literary and cultural discourse of the conditions of hybridity, syncreticity and colonial dependence characterizing the post-colonial situation in Africa. This

point is made, from a slightly different but politically and economically significant angle, in Terry Eagleton's observation on how some former colonial countries are still in fee to Western capitalism through their crippling repayments of debts (1983: 196).

In a sharp contrast to the ideological nativism of Mazisi Kunene is Daniel Kunene's circumspective stance which recognizes the deceptive nature of the concept 'African' and its derivatives such as African literature, African writing etc:

One's first gripe, therefore, is that somehow someone came up with the label "African" to characterize a whole host of activities and concepts, including "African" literature. The origin of this term is no mystery. "African" literature is a relatively new concept, not because there was no literature in Africa before the missionaries and other white people "brought it," but because those who performed it in their indigenous languages did not perceive what they were doing as an "African" activity (1992: 7-8).

The most reasonable and sound appraisal of the stances adopted by Mazisi and Daniel Kunene respectively, would seem to be a recognition of the fundamental value of both the foreign and indigenous languages. Such a hybrid approach, although it is challenged by Ngugi<sup>24</sup>, seems to be the only one which, as long as it remains conscious of its discursiveness, preserves the positive aspects of what has been written in foreign languages whilst, at the same time, also allowing a free development of foreign languages.

Rather than have the discourse of foreign languages superimposed on that of the indigenous languages and vice versa, there should, in the light of cross-cultural encounters, be a common acceptance of the principle of hybridity and syncreticity as a constitutive principle of post-colonial writing.<sup>25</sup> This seems to be implied by Daniel Kunene's assertion that:

Africa is not a country but a continent. Obviously, therefore, there is no language called 'African,' any more than there is a language called 'European' (1992: 7).

If there is no language called 'African' in Africa, it follows for Daniel Kunene, that there is also no possible way in which one can talk about an African literary discourse through which, as Mazisi Kunene argues, we can claim an exclusive control over the means of literary communication.

### **1.3.5 Language/s and Institutions**

With the educational institutions, especially the tertiary and other organisational institutions, at the forefront of linguistic development and ideological entrenchment, we also need to evaluate the proposal of a return to the roots in the light of such institutional practices. Institutions such as the English Academy of Southern Africa, the Association of University English Teachers of Southern

Africa, the British Council, the University English Departments, English speaking universities such as Natal, Rhodes, Wits and Cape Town universities, and, of course, the English press, all play a major role in fostering the growth of English and monitoring it at the both national and international levels. Through a funding of projects related to writing and cultural growth of the English language, these institutions play a key role in trying to maintain the metropolitan standards of English.

With the spread of English throughout the world, these institutions and other major international publishing companies such as, among others, the Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press, have since become watchdogs of the linguistic imperialism of English. At the same time as these institutions are monitoring the spread of English and preserving its metropolitan standards, they are also playing a key role in preserving the metropolitan values of English culture. It is within that context of an institutionalized linguistic containment of the spread of English that such institutions as the English Academy of Southern Africa and the British Council emerge as 'prescriptive open-minded'<sup>26</sup> monitors of the spread of the English language. In the face of this linguistic monitoring of English, a variety of Englishes have emerged in Africa, the Caribbean, Australia, America and other former British colonies.

These forms of English have emerged as distinct linguistic forms, expressing the national aspirations and values of their speakers and writers. Ashcroft et al explain the consequences of the formation of these new post-colonial 'Englishes' in the following manner:

Although linguistically the links between English and the various post-colonial englishes in use today can be seen as unbroken, the political reality is that English sets itself apart from all other 'lesser' variants and so demands to be interrogated about its claims to this special status (1989: 8).

The desire of the English language to set itself apart from what it perceives as the lesser variants is not surprising especially when one considers the imperial legacy behind the standard metropolitan English version. It is, in my view, this imperialist legacy of the language that blinds it to the historical illusion which, in Njabulo Ndebele's formulation, constitutes '...the art of giving away the bride while insisting that she still belongs to you' (1987: 219).

Outside the metropolitan British cultural ambience, the fate of the English language entirely depends on those who use it to meet their specific social and economic needs. There is no possible way in which a metropolis that has withdrawn its political control from the colonies can continue to determine the pace and direction which the international growth of English will take. Some examples,



among many others, of an uncontainable spread of English is to be found in the 'Creole Continuum',<sup>27</sup> and Jamaican forms of English which have evolved into totally new dialects. This is where the ideology of linguistic containment, especially if it is not accompanied by powerful forms of economic control, is sometimes found to be wanting.

Even in South Africa either a 'purely' Africanist writer like Mazisi Kunene or a syncreticist one like Daniel Kunene and some other short story writers, push the syntactical and lexical structure of the English language to the political limits of coexistence and linguistic tolerance between itself and other indigenous languages. It is not uncommon to find, in the narratives of some African and/or Black short story writers, a unique mixture of English with some Zulu, Xhosa, Tswana, Sotho and other expressions taken from the indigenous languages. Even if we may term this style of writing a transliteration, this term would still be inadequate in accounting for the background forces leading to the production of this variant form of writing. New expressions and concepts encapsulating the polydialectic forms of thinking and writing characterising the nature of African and/or Black in South Africa and in Africa may yet emerge.

#### **1.4 Audience and Literary criticism**

Any writing practice in any society presupposes an audience which receives - i.e. analyses and criticises - the works of

writers. In the South African literary context, the African and/or Black writers, according to their assertions, also write about and for the communities in which they live. In other words, these writers write about the urban communities or township audiences of which they are a part. This is implicit in assertions by African and/or Black writers about the peoples' 'collective conscience.'<sup>28</sup> Assumptions about the nature of relationships between African and/or Black writers and their audiences are always premised on the category of writing as part of some unspecified traditional practices. Some of these organic assumptions on the writer-audience relationship have imbued some writers with a negative attitude towards literary criticism.<sup>29</sup> Some African and/or Black writers conceive of textuality as of something over which a writer can have control even after the text of a short story collection or anthology has been published and distributed. The whole idea of a text as a public property does not seem to have any place in the ideological framework of these assumptions. It is my argument, here, that once a text has been published it becomes a public property over which the writer only has proprietary or copyright ownership. What this means, therefore, is that a writer may write with a certain audience in mind but there is no guarantee that his/her text will be read only by the intended audience.

According to Mzamane, the writer in African and/or Black communities has a literary and political task of reflecting

and articulating the collective aspirations of his people. In the case where a writer fails to perform this task of being a spokesperson of his people, that writer presumably loses touch with his/her people's collective conscience. Losing touch with this collective conscience implicitly means, for Mzamane, that a writer has historically been judged a social failure by his community:

Very often the African reader judges a writer by his success in projecting the 'collective conscience,' and not by any abstract or spurious standards of artistic contrivance or accomplishment (1984: 148).

The African and/or Black reader's judgement, according to Mzamane, collaborates in the creation of a text's meaning. Through the concept of collective conscience (which, ironically, seems to be a literary standard in disguise) the writer implicitly establishes agreement between himself/herself and the reader with whom, according to Mzamane, the writer has an organic relationship.

Mzamane's assumptions about the collective conscience of the community elevate this concept to the level where its value as a cultural term requires both the writer and the reader to regard it as an unquestionable and unchanging social truism passed through the oral tradition from one generation to the other. It is on the basis of this assumption that Mzamane declares, problematically, that 'The short story or poem within the tradition has a social and political purpose, like any other traditional tale (1984:149). The problematic of this assertion lies in

Mzamane's uncritical assumptions about the nature of the ideological forces behind the tradition.

If we steadfastly adhere to the principle that African and/or Black writers operate within the framework of oral traditional and western literary practices, we should also accept as a corollary of that principle the fact that the short story or poem reflects the hybrid character of the literary influences bringing a writer's work into being. Whilst taking cognizance of this hybrid nature of the writer's work, we should also caution against any negative assumptions presupposing that only an oral culture can be 'traditional'.

A written literature, even if it is of a hybrid nature, can also be traditional. It can be so by virtue of its being passed as an art form, like oral poetic performance, from one generation to the next. The issue of the differences in modes of preservation and continuity of, respectively, the oral and written literary forms does not fall within the scope of this chapter. The major reason for bringing into this argument a discussion of the contentious nature of the claims to traditionality is to draw the attention of African and/or Black writers to the pitfalls of 'monocentric' and exclusivist claims to the conception of the nature and social function of tradition.

We need to evaluate the claims of oral traditional influence of African and/or Black writers within the context of the perceptions of the function and literary significance

of the critical practice. It is my argument that the claims of being influenced by an indigenous oral tradition which, as far as I am aware, did not contain concepts like African and Black (as terms denoting identity) in the lexicon of indigenous languages, tend to create an illusion that African and/or Black writers have an immediate and/or natural relationship with their cultural backgrounds and audiences. Since writing and reading are activities which by their very nature have no such immediacy as the one we would find in an oral performance where the oral poet/storyteller would have close contact with his/her audience, the following question is pertinent here: to what extent is the reader of literary texts 'free' to accept or question the organicism of claims to oral traditional influence and fostering of collective conscience?

This question should be examined within the context of the previously mentioned proposals for a return to the roots of an indigenous culture. Although some of these proposals have already been dealt with in this chapter, it is instructive to return to Ngugi's argument so that our analysis of the perceptions of the state of criticism in South Africa can be placed in a wider context. Whereas Ngugi's stance, in short, is that he perceives his writing in Gikuyu as constituting an 'epistemological break'<sup>30</sup> with the colonial past and its languages, the stances of South African writers suggest that they need not make such a break since their writing already takes place within the framework

of indigenous cultural traditions. Even if, as Mzamane admits,<sup>31</sup> they use material from both their indigenous backgrounds and the western forms, they still tend to dismiss the literary responses western forms may elicit.

A negation of literary criticism by African and/or Black writers using a hybrid of oral traditional and western forms of literary expression is something which, as Njabulo Ndebele points out, abounds in literary comments of writers like Miriam Tlali and Sipho Sepamla. For their informing commentary on the contradictory attitudes of some of these writers towards the practice of literary criticism, it is worth quoting Ndebele's strictures in full:

There appears to be a rather disturbing anti-intellectual attitude in Sepamla and Tlali with regard to the practice of literary criticism. We have just seen above how Tlali's artistic practice contradicts her own critical assertions. She continues later: 'Writing is an art like all the other art forms and it should not be pipelined or squeezed in a water-tight channel' (1988: 339).

Tlali's attitude towards her whole literary practice operates on a false assumption that as authors of their works, writers can predict or keep under a certain form of control the reader-responses triggered by their works.

All these writers appear to expect from their readers is some form of recognition<sup>32</sup> or collaborative response. Any amount of constructive criticism, even if such a criticism aims at enriching the value of a writer's insights by drawing his/her attention to the inherent weaknesses of that

insight, is bound to be rejected in the light of this anti-intellectual attitude. This kind of attitude towards literary criticism is self-negating and, perhaps, contributive to a slow growth of the African and/or Black literary formation in South Africa. It is, therefore, easy for this literary inclination which shuns criticism to end up by degenerating into a sloganeering literary formation.<sup>33</sup>

#### 1.4.1 Storytelling

Alongside the claims of influence by the oral tradition, some African and/or Black writers in South Africa also claim that their storytelling expertise is derived from their membership of communities with long-standing traditions of storytelling.<sup>34</sup> Mzamane explains this influence in the following terms:

Story-telling at the end of a hard day's work, around an open fire in the homestead, was usually done in turns. Invariably a member of the family or from somewhere else in the community would emerge as particularly gifted and would become a literary celebrity among his people (1984: 148).

Although Mzamane does not specify whether he is referring to the precolonial community or the urban townships, my assumption is that he refers to the contemporary urban and rural African and/or Black community backgrounds. This assumption is inferred from his allusions to 'open fire' and 'homestead' oral cultural influences.

If this were the case, one would be inclined to wonder how Mzamane would explain the ideological consequences of using the resources of an oral tradition as inspirational sources, to be narrated through the resources of a western written mode of narration which also forms an important part of the literary training of these writers. To suggest that the literary practice of these writers amounts to a hybrid literary discourse<sup>35</sup> would, perhaps, be the most acceptable approximation and acknowledgement of the debt this literary enterprise owes to both the indigenous oral literary forms and their western counterparts. Such an approach also accepts the interplay between the respective African aesthetic concerns with place and those of Black racial otherness, expressed in short stories, as occurring within the framework of a hybrid and syncretic literary discourse.<sup>36</sup>

The point I have been making here is that if it is accepted that the literary training of those writers who refer to themselves or are sometimes referred to by literary critics as African, Black and Black African or African Black writers in South Africa is derived from both the indigenous and western literary processes, and also that, in turn, these processes are linguistically constituted out of the fabric of the indigenous languages as well as a western language (English), then African and/or Black writers should acknowledge the fact that their ideological projections of South African social reality is



largely achieved through and within a hybrid literary discourse. And this has profound implications for one's perception of the terms 'African' and 'Black' as well.

## Notes

1. See my allusion to this issue on page 27 of this chapter.
2. The phrase is Barbara Johnson's (1992:20).
3. In his aptly titled book, White Writing, J.M. Coetzee expresses, through his analysis of the identity of English speaking South Africans, the following anticipation of a racially transcendent aesthetic: '...it began to be apparent that the ultimate fate of whites was going to depend a great deal more urgently on an accommodation with black South Africans than on an accommodation with the South African landscape' (1988:8). Although Coetzee's point is well taken, it remains unclear, however, whether by 'accommodation' he refers to White cooption of Blacks or to a genuine desire for the establishment of a single African identity in South Africa.
4. Fanon reinforces this observation by arguing that 'The feeling of inferiority of the colonised is the correlative to the European's feeling of superiority' (1992:93). Bernard Magubane also argues that 'The essence of modern capitalism is the ruthless transfer of wealth from the colonized to the colonizer, from black to white, from worker to capitalist' (1979:3-4).
5. Writers, teachers, lawyers, doctors and other members of the elite constitute, through the very nature of their social function, a specific class, an intellectual class. This, however, does not mean that other members of the community of these elites are not intellectuals because, according to Gramsci, 'All men are intellectuals, one could therefore say: but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals' (1971: 9). When some African and/or Black writers in South Africa deny that their social function as writers places them in the category of an intellectual class, and also when some of them adopt anti-intellectual attitudes in their stances (see my comments on page 27 of this chapter), they are negating what is otherwise their social function and class position in their communities. Patricia Morris argues that the Black élite in South Africa is an emergent class whose continued existence or embourgeoisement is largely contingent on the vicissitudes of its White patrons: 'At present in South Africa, the need to foster the existence of a black national 'literature' or the need to reveal its previous existence, on the part of white and black champions of black nationalism and black separatism, presupposes, unwittingly, the substantial embourgeoisement of the black population.

Such embourgeoisement has clearly not taken place, and explains the minute size of the black literary elite' (1980: 15). Although Morris is correct in tracing the origins of the members of the new élite from black nationalist and racial underpinnings (1980:15), her underplaying of the class nature of this elite fails to locate the colonial motives of class formation in South Africa within the broad context of imperialism.

6. The language question which Ngugi addresses in Decolonising the Mind (1986) is rephrased from Obiajunwa Wali's question about the language problem which he posed in 1963. Wali did not only pose the question, but he also went further and declared, after observing the proceedings and debates of an African literature conference held at Makerere University in 1962, that 'Literature after all, is the exploitation of the possibilities of language. It is the African languages that are in crying need of this kind of development, not the overworked French and English' (1963: 15). Also see the responses of, among other people, Mphahlele, Soyinka, Moore and Knappert to Wali's strictures in numbers 11, 12, and 13 in the subsequent (1963) issues of Transition. (Also see Gikandi 1992: 132)

7. Bernard Magubane explains the motives behind western imperialism in general and the British form in particular in the following terms: 'It was in imitation of the English class structure and way of life that new colonial 'aristocracies' emerged, and with them new classes of the poor and oppressed. What the British settlers required in South Africa was that the African subsistence producers become the hirelings of capital and that their means of subsistence be transformed into capital' (1979: 35).

8. Although the role of the missionaries was benevolent and well intentioned, some missionaries collaborated with the British colonialists through their role as educators and preachers. Nosipho Majeke (1952: 4) argues that the role of the missionaries as liberators, educationists and preachers of the gospel should be seen within the context of a world-wide historical movement culminating in the expansion of capital. The irony of this historical process is that a large part of the knowledge which we in the 20th century have of the nature of pre-colonial cultures is available through the documentary sources compiled by the missionaries.

9. The word 'Bantu' in Southern African dialects originally referred to human beings irrespective of the person's racial or political identity until the government's political abuse of it. (Also see Maake 1992: 57) Its social function within language is one of expressing a 'universal humanism.'

10. Although the blame has regularly been laid at the doors of missionary education for the social and political ills of Post-colonial societies, not much is said, however, about the dependence of anti-missionary discourse on the information compiled by the missionaries about pre-colonial societies. The dilemma which faced the missionary educators in the period from the early 1920s to the 50s was summarised by R.H.W. Shepherd, director of the Lovedale press, in the following manner: 'In all its efforts for the spread of literature Lovedale recognised there was a danger lest the missionary agencies, having in their schools taught vast numbers to read, should leave non-Christian and even anti-religious elements to supply the reading matter....' (in Whitaker and Sienaert 1986: 136) Shepherd's assertion gives insights into the didactic nature of missionary ideology.

11. See my exposition on pages 29, 30, and 32 in this chapter on Senghor's and Mphahlele's respective assimilationist and anti-assimilationist stances.

12. Although the writings of the Drum generation in the 1950s and 1960s were journalistic in nature, they, however, also articulated through the English language, the nationalist and protest aspirations of an urban based new élite which saw itself as spokespersons of the indigenous peoples in South Africa. The irony surrounding the nationalist stance of these was that 'The literary forms,' such as Drum magazine, 'available to South Africans as models were rooted in a bourgeois, British tradition of writing, publishing, and reading which would have generally alienated blacks educated in a white educational system.' (Morris 1980: 25) The urban bourgeoisie and English protest message of Drum writers to a certain extent bypassed the workers and rural peasants who were functionally illiterate. Lewis Nkosi (1983: 122) who cites as his evidence a story 'The Situation' by Bloke Modisane, refers to the documentary mode of writing and its preoccupation with the underground life of the Johannesburg township, shebeen life, thugs, pimps and nice-time girls as examples of the limitations of this form of writing. Although this criticism is valid, it, however, it ignores an analysis of the ideological origins of the newspaper or magazine journalistic form of writing.

13. See Nkosi's exposition on what he terms the 'colonial dependency of African literature' on page 8 of this chapter. Also see Fanon's (1991:90) equation of European civilization with colonial racism.

14. Spivak's (1988:284) notion of the 'subaltern' is a particularly apt one here. In her exposition on the discourse of otherness, she poses the following question which, in my view, lies at the heart of what Said (See Spivak, 1988:284) terms the 'permission to narrate': 'Can the subaltern speak?' (1988:284) This is both an epistemic

and political question through which such colonialist and imperialist notions of centre/dominance become decentered by the other's appropriation of the means of literary discourse. A tricky aspect of this appropriation lies, in my view, in the association of imperialist and colonialist associations of discourse with political power and authority. Under what conditions, one can extend the terms of Spivak's question, was/is the subaltern élite of indigenous extraction in South Africa permitted to speak? This is the question which this chapter addresses through its discussion of language acquisition by the African and/or Black writer in South Africa.

15. Although English has historically been associated with British imperialism, the 20th century reality demands a critical recognition of the fact that '...in asserting their right to self determination Africans had to employ the languages of their colonial masters; that the rhetoric of political demand they adopted was better understood in Europe among both the rulers and the common people, than among the African masses for whom, presumably, the demands were being made' (Nkosi, 1979: 1). What Nkosi ignores in his criticism, as Mphahlele points out, is the fact that '...concepts like democracy, liberty, freedom would not have been used at all in traditional society. These concepts are nineteenth-century importations from Europe, and you'd not be able to put them across in an African language (1986: 33). What, in my view, Mphahlele, in his turn, omits here is another important recognition of the foreign origins of the concept 'African' which he uses in his reference to the languages of traditional 'Bantu' societies.

16. See Patricia Morris's exposition on, for instance, the British origins of Black embourgeoisement and the reliance of this emergent class on White literary patronage (1980: 15, 16 & 24).

17. Note Mphahlele's (1965: 22) protest against what he terms 'Bantu culture' which he perceived, in ahistorical and reductionist terms, as justifying the Bantustan policies of the Transkei and other homelands. Even if the apartheid government hegemonistically used the indigenous languages and cultures as examples of Bantu primitiveness, it was disingenuous of Mphahlele to accede to that self-negating ideological manipulation. A critique of the relations between dominant and dominated cultures would, perhaps, have made Mphahlele realize that 'The effect of domination realised by literary production presupposes the presence of the dominated ideology within the dominant ideology itself' (Balibar and Macherey, 1981: 97).

18. By virtue of a mixing of Western and African linguistic and narrative styles and their racially determined White and Black South African literary formations, a new post-colonial

Afro-European version of English has been born. Also see Mphahlele's (1965: 22) exposition on African and Western literary 'integration'.

19. The fact that Sepamla, Maake, Manaka and other township writers attempt, through incorporating cultural motifs from Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho and other indigenous languages, to bridge the gap between themselves and their township audiences is an expression of their yearning for an 'organic' relationship with those audiences. However, their class position and mode of literary expression subvert, in my view, these organicist claims.

20. See Mbiti (1969: 99).

21. I am indebted to Gikandi (1992: 131-2) for his use of this concept in critiqueing Ngugi's redefinition of ethnic languages as authentic languages of literary expression in Africa.

22. This loss has an historical underpinning brought about by the advent of colonial and imperial conquest. This attempt to recover what was lost during this period of conquest constitutes, in my view, an act of self-redifinition and a cultural liberation from the position of 'othering'.

23. Gikandi is correct to point at the ahistorical nature of Ngugi's discourse which assumes that the precolonial past in Africa was African in its nature world outlook. Ngugi's discourse can only revisit the past by departing from a recognition of the tribal nature of its world outlook.

24. Ngugi confirms the hybrid character of this literature even though he sees it as a literature in transition: 'What we have created is another hybrid tradition, a tradition in transition, a minority tradition that can only be termed as Afro-European literature; that is, the literature written by Africans in European languages' (1986: 26-7).

25. Ashcroft et al define the syncretic and hybrid nature of post-colonial writing in the following comparative perspective: '...more comprehensive comparative models which argue for features such as hybridity and syncreticity as constitutive elements of all post-colonial literatures (syncretism is the process by which previously distinct linguistic categories, and, by extension, cultural formations, merge into a single new form)' (1989: 15).

26. In order to maintain the standard level of English, the native English in South Africa have, according to Njabulo Ndebele, '...given birth to a policy of manipulative open-mindedness in which it is held that English belongs to all

who use it, provided that it is used correctly' (1988: 219).

27. The polydialect context of the Caribbean Islands has given rise to what Ashcroft et al. (1989: 44-9), have termed the creole continuum.

28. See Mzamane's contention that 'The African writer is still expected to articulate the people's problems and complaints, and to project their collective aspirations' (1984: 148).

29. This attitude is starkly expressed in Mutloatse's dismissive attitude toward literary criticism: 'We are going to experiment and probe and not give a damn to what the critics have to say' (Ndebele 1988:5).

30. See Gikandi's criticism (1992: 133) of Ngugi's claims to have made a breakaway from colonial history and languages through a mere switching of languages i.e., writing in Gikuyu instead of English. What is also puzzling in Ngugi's claim is his apparent unconsciousness of his close adherence to western literary conventions (for example the novel form) instead of the oral indigenous ones.

31. See Mzamane's exposition on the hybrid character of African and/or Black English writing in *White and Couzens* (1984:147).

32. Ndebele argues that in its preoccupation with the surface social and political symbols, the literature produced by African and/or Black writers in South Africa amounts to a recognition literature. Here is how Ndebele's exposition explains the critical implications for this kind of literature: 'Recognition does not necessarily lead to transformation: it simply confirms.' (1988:332)

33. An overt literary concern with the political problems of their society has sometimes led African and/or Black writers in South Africa into writing a sloganeering type of literature. This preoccupation with politics as an end itself stems from the 'psychology of powerlessness' (Ndebele 1988:331).

34. Ndebele's equation (1988:337) of the conversations in buses and trains with the oral tradition amounts, in my view, to an overestimation of such conversation. In most of the cases, one finds that there is no clear line of demarcation between conversation and gossip. For this reason, I question Ndebele's conception of the nature of the oral tradition and its influence on writers in South Africa.

35. The concept of literary hybridity, according to Ashcroft et al. (1989:33-4), constitutes a decentering of European discourse and an appropriation of it by a different one.

36. See my discussion of these issues on pages 44 and 50 of this chapter.



## Chapter 2

### The Collective and Reconstructive Aesthetic in Mutloatse's Forced Landing and Mzamane's Hungry Flames

#### 2.1. Anthologisation

Before the publication of these two anthologies in 1980 and 1986 by Mutloatse and Mzamane respectively, there had been, to my knowledge, no attempts by 'African' and/or 'Black' South African writers and critics to anthologize short stories. Hence the anthologisation of stories by Mutloatse and Mzamane marked a significant turning-point in the literary history of 'African' and/or 'Black' South African literature.

This project of short story anthologisation may well have had a profound influence on those writers who either refer to themselves or are sometimes referred to by critics as 'African', 'Black' or 'Black African' writers. This chapter's argument challenges these synonymous critical assumptions by calling for their rigorous review which will consequently lead to an attainment of terminological exactitude and clarity of the world view connotations of the concepts 'African' and 'Black'. No matter how arbitrary the

conventional meanings of the concepts African and Black might be, such an arbitrariness which refuses to conceal its premise invites critical examination. One can only hope to fulfil this task by examining the aesthetic, normative and ideological value attached to these concepts in their usage within the context of the short story genre.

The primary aim of this chapter centres on the examination of implications which a synonymous use of the concepts 'African' and 'Black' have had on the writers' and readers' evaluation of the meanings of these concepts. If we accept, as a gesture of deference to common sense usage, that the concepts 'African' and 'Black' have a self-vindicating natural and mutual relationship, then our critical practice would, in my view, have ceased to examine objects of scrutiny in any significant manner. The question which I pose here in order to illuminate the reader's perception of aesthetic conceptualisation is the following: is it possible for those who refer to themselves as 'Africans', 'Blacks' or 'Black Africans' to step out, as it were, of the matrixes of these concepts in order to undertake a disinterested examination of any relations which they may have with these concepts.

Contained within this aim, is a simultaneous argument that behind the choice of short story anthologisation we can perceive certain ideological interpretations of the nature, form and workings of the 'African' and 'Black' aesthetic

terms used in expressing a collectively reconstructive and homologous 'African' and 'Black' literary 'tradition'.<sup>1</sup>

The collectively reconstructive and interventionist efforts of the editors of the two anthologies were, in my view, reparatory initiatives aimed at reconstituting a 'homogenic' African-and-Black aesthetic. A particularly striking aspect of these efforts was the editors' generic perceptions inherent in their assumptions about the existence of a natural socio-political convergence linking 'African' with 'Black' aesthetic values and vice versa. Any reader, critic and researcher who takes a view that there is a natural linkage between these aesthetic values should also be able to explain whether this is either an unassailable truism or an ideological position explainable through delinking these concepts and their assumptions. It is, in my view, only through delinking these concepts that the general readers, writers and critics can arrive at a concrete measurement of their gaps and silences in respect of the notion of an 'African' and 'Black' dialectic.

My stance, in this chapter, espouses the latter critical and ideological viewpoint in order to explain some ideological hiatuses in the linkage argument. It is also part of this chapter's argument that there are inherent contradictions in the editors' projects of collective aesthetic reconstruction. It is only by examining the components of these collective initiatives that we may be able to point at the convergences and valuating

contradictions in anthologised short stories. It is historically imperative that these contradictions should be viewed within the context of the repressive political conditions under which they were produced. For this reason there is also a need to approach the dialectic of linkage and contradiction with the utmost critical patience and caution.

However genuine these initiatives may have been, the two editors may have deliberately suppressed or overlooked inadvertently the aspect of 'dialectical' interplay in the distinct and complex assumptions of the 'African' and 'Black' aesthetic concepts. Their projects specifically ignored the fact that although it may be unanimously accepted that there is an African continent inhabited by African people/s, it is difficult to imagine or even plausibly argue that there is such a thing as a generalized Black continent inhabited by Black people.

The basis of this argument has a universal foundation in terms of which Africa and its people/s form part of a global community which also includes Asiatics, Europeans and others. There would seem hardly any such a community for conceptualisations like, for instance, 'White Europeans' or 'Black Africans'.

It is only in situations and countries where there have been racial polarities and conflict between, say, 'Black' and 'White' people that we can historically and ideologically talk about the existence of Black and White

rigid demarcations of Black and White which were, in turn, reflected in the country's cultural and literary processes.<sup>2</sup>

The implications of this definitional digression have far-reaching consequences for the editors' and readers' formulations of the nature and political function of the 'African' aesthetic which either has an adjunctive or disjunctive relation to the 'Black' aesthetic. Some of these implications are contained in the editorial commentaries of the two anthologies and in some edited stories which either consciously or unconsciously demonstrate this dialectic in their narrative presentations of the socio-political complexities of what has been termed the 'African experience' and the 'Black experience'.

How the intentions of the editors and individual authors converge toward a point where identity is asserted while at the same time they appear to diverge, remains the central issue which should shed some light on the underlying preoccupations of the project of collective aesthetic reconstruction of the concepts 'African' and 'Black'.

### **2.1.1 The Collective Aesthetic Ideology in Mutloatse's Anthology**

The project of creating a collective aesthetic ideology in Mutloatse's anthology involved a broad interventionist initiative which sought, among other things, to transcend genre boundaries. The anthology's sub-title, Africa South:

Contemporary Writings, hints at the editor's intention of producing a representative but homogenising 'African' and 'Black' collective aesthetic constituting a socio-political intervention during the South African political crisis of the 1980s, the time of the anthology's publication. This intervention was meant to persuade the reader to understand and unquestioningly accept the logic which informed Mutloatse's inclusion of the genres of the 'columns' (which fall in the journalistic type of writing) and 'messages' in Forced Landing.

A similar logic of aesthetic collectivisation is expressed in his anthology of essays, Reconstruction: 90 Years Of Black Historical Literature (1981). In his introduction to this essentially 'Black' anthology, Mutloatse expressed some of the broad historical and literary underpinnings of his reconstructive project in the following terms:

Now that we are standing up to be counted as black human beings, it is time to turn our minds and hearts to the work of Reconstruction: because there shall be life, and abundant life at that, when the voiceless majority regain not only their dignity but the truth of their past, their history (1981:5).

Seen in this historically reconstructive context, the anthology of a genre (be it of poetry or short stories) serves a function which goes beyond its literary or fictional intention.

It is through the anthology form that Mutloatse's project of literary reconstruction anticipated the facilitative process of historically relinking the then contemporary 'Black humanistic' concerns, whatever that may have meant, with the values of an unspecified past. As a point of critical departure, this relinking process should have led to the reconstruction of a 'Black' 'majority' collective aesthetic which, in turn, was intended to initiate a socio-political and literary dialogue with its dominant 'White' other. What Mutloatse ignored, however, was a detailed critical examination of the constitutive elements of such a Black 'majority' aesthetic.

This notion of an undifferentiated<sup>3</sup> Black majority is a notion which, during the political heyday of 'Black Consciousness', saw the 'African' values as being contained within the assumptions of the 'Black' world.<sup>4</sup> It was through these assumptions that Mutloatse's 'Black' humanistic concerns were conceived as representing the socio-political values of an incorporationist and reconstructive 'Black' aesthetic.

Elaborating the rationale behind the idea of a Forced Landing, Mutloatse maintains that 'To a degree this anthology succeeds in narrowing what others have referred to as a generation gap in black literature' (1988:5). The narrowing of this generation gap becomes a simultaneous process of re-establishing a specifically 'Black' literary

tradition which was meant to have assigned a collective identity to the edited stories.

The ideological thrust pervading Mutloatse's literary project is articulated through a dialectical process opening a dialogue between the 'marginal' Black literary world and its 'dominant' White other.<sup>5</sup> It is in this context that the moment of interaction between these two worlds reflects the unequal power relations delineating the socio-political and literary boundaries of the Black and White literary and cultural worlds. The discourse of unequal socio-political relations prevailing between the Black and White South African literary traditions<sup>6</sup> shares its boundaries with another discourse of Black 'insider' and White 'outsider' interactive and repulsive 'power' relationships of marginality and dominance.

This inequality and marginality of the Black world is explicitly expressed in the following editorial comment by Mutloatse:

This is a time when black writers should not feel ashamed of portraying the black experience, even though outsiders may hammer them for talking too much about apartheid instead of about 'nice things'. This is not to suggest that black writers should totally ignore the white world (1988:2).

At the heart of this unequal power distribution between the Black and White literary worlds is a socio-political phenomenon of racial demarcation which serves the interests



of an insider and outsider political and literary discourse. It serves this aesthetic demarcation by implicitly positing the Black writer inside the Black majority world which is seen as racially distinct from its White other.

Since the homogenised Black experience of racial and class oppression in South Africa became an inherently constitutive component of the Black aesthetic, it follows that, by implication, the assumptions of the African aesthetic are not immediately concerned with racial issues. What, in my view, forms the basis of the African aesthetic is a certain consciousness of place, Africa, which 'Afrocentric' writers in South Africa and elsewhere in the world historically seek to reflect upon and articulate. Sometimes adjunctively or disjunctively to the African aesthetic, the Black aesthetic takes the phenomenon of Black experience as a constitutive principle of its aesthetic essence.

It is my argument that in the racial situation where White and Black colour and class differences occupy the central position and modus operandi of socio-political dialogue, the significance of such an encounter relegates (at least temporarily) Afrocentric consciousness to a rear-guard ideological presence, a presence which we intuitively take to be located somewhere in the historical moment of passive retreat occurring at the level of linguistic and ideological reflection.

It is through a complex racial and historical struggle over the appropriation of the English language - the literary language of some African and/or Black South African writers - that the respective place-conscious and race-conscious cultural ethos of the African or Black values become entangled in a socio-political struggle of selectively discarding the inherent racial undertones of the English language.

An appropriation of this language by these writers was/is not, in my view, an act of proclaiming faith in the values of Englishness, but, rather, an act of material and historical necessity. It may have been necessitated by the material transformation from the subsistent forms of precolonial production to the racial-capitalist mode of production. Such a process of material transformation is reflected, as I hope to demonstrate later in this chapter, in the uses of English, a language essentially foreign to the élite in Africa, in articulating the African (place-conscious) and Black (race-conscious) aesthetic experiences.

It is within this context of reified cultural and material conditions of economic and literary production that one can perceive Mutloatse's concept of Black experience as expressing some underlying complexities of the racial politics in the Black aesthetic. What is notable in Mutloatse's conception of the Black aesthetic is the constricting nature of its assumption: because the insiders are Black, they naturally have a monopoly claim on their

processes and forms of literary expression. This claim presumably supersedes any relational claims an 'other' and/or White literary world may seek to establish. It was the racial polarities of the South African situation which became the sine qua non to the birth of a racially exclusive Black aesthetic.

Though the aesthetic boundaries between the Black and White literary worlds may have remained racially absolute, the persistent question also remained why their shared claims to an affinity with the place, South Africa, had not brought writers closer to each other? From the White side of the literary stream, Nadine Gordimer in her introspective exposition on, as she puts it, the demand of being a South African, poses the following crucial question: 'Is there such a being as a white African? Who decides?' (1977:87). This existential question should, in my view, have opened, as is currently happening, a mutual dialogue on those issues where there was a national convergence of literary and other interests. The arbitrariness of the ideologically aberrant demarcations between Black and White consciousness reduced the South African literary imagination to what one could advisedly term a racially captive imagination.

These demarcations also had very little to do with the literary value of the Black and White literary streams. Political content understandably played a double function in this demarcation: while it expressed the deep-seated protest sentiments, it also overshadowed questions about the

relation between politics and literature. This meant, according to the 'anti-racist' position of some of these Black writers, that even if the White aesthetic took on an anti-apartheid political stance, it would still have had to do this from the confines of an 'outside' and 'other' White world.<sup>7</sup>

This ideological stance is implied in Mutloatse's superficial acknowledgement of a problematical White South African (colonial) world which he saw existing as an 'other' literary world concerned only with 'literary standards' and 'conventional literary values', i.e. with a foreign (Western) tradition. What Mutloatse's position ignored was the fact that some 'other' White anti-apartheid writers who had experienced state harassment were actually in 'solidarity' with some of their Black counterparts who had gone through a similar experience.<sup>8</sup>

The political and literary consequences of the racially determined and exclusivist aesthetic placed some constrictions on the growth and mutual perception of both the Black and White literary aesthetics. This was a fact borne out by Mutloatse's reactive editorial expressions. Some of these expressions imposed inhibitions on the literary influence and competitive development of the other Black writers who were also advised to turn their backs on the international community:

For a black writer in Southern Africa, what good is international fame when your own

thirsty community is unable to feel, hear and experience your writings, which also happen to involve and affect them in so many ways? The writer has to make the all important decision: which comes first one's home audience or the world at large (which is so remote) (1988:2)?

However understandable the repressive nature of the conditions of literary production may have been, the isolated base of the Black aesthetic may well have contributed to its uneven development.

### **2.1.2 The Search for Authenticity**

From that position of aesthetic introspection sprang the concept of 'authenticity' which Mutloatse turned spontaneously into an absolute principle of a White oppositional Black concept of literary valuation. The Black writer's literary merit, in Mutloatse's terms, was largely measured through 'The recognition of his work as authentic by the black community that is the vital link in the creative process without which all attempts are virtually useless' (1988:2). Mutloatse's concept of authenticity unconsciously underplays the fact that the Black literary aesthetic is primarily a phenomenon of the urban Black townships. It also does not account for the socio-literary and class divisions existing between the Black writers and their township and countryside audiences.<sup>9</sup> However oppressive and exigent the socio-political background which superseded this heavy-handed intervention

may have been, most writers continued to write privately and individually.

The principle of authenticity raises a pivotal question about the nature and complexities of the Black writers' relation to their audiences. The question may be asked whether, when Black writers chose to write in a language such as English, which was accessible only to the minority élite,<sup>10</sup> whom were they addressing and whose world view were they reflecting? Ngugi wa Thiong'o maintains that

Literature as a process of thinking in images utilizes language and draws upon the collective experience of history embodied in that language. In writing one should hear all the whispering, and the shouting and crying and the loving and the hating of the many voices in the past and these voices will never speak to a writer in the foreign languages (1981:60).

If the principle of authenticity was to have reflected the aesthetic of the Black majority, it would have had to have been articulated through the languages in which that majority whispers, shouts, cries, loves, hates and reflects its heroic struggles.

Mutloatse's project of forging a collectively reconstructive aesthetic may have worked as a temporarily demarginalizing socio-political framework which, as I have argued here, had a tenuous relationship with the 'merit' of the stories individually and privately produced by the writers. It is only when we come to a critical analysis of some of these stories that the discrepancies between the

editor's intentions and the content and aesthetics of the stories tend to reflect a less than concrete foundation upon which the collective aesthetic is reconstructed.

### 2.1.3 Mzamane's Anthology Project

Mzamane's anthology, Hungry Flames, also aims at collectively reconstructing the African aesthetic through a collectivist Black literary tradition. Although he also places a considerable emphasis on the 'Black experience',<sup>11</sup> he does this within the tradition of inherited dialectical contradictions between the values of, on the one hand, an essentially place conscious African aesthetic and, on the other hand, a race conscious Black aesthetic. These contradictions abound in some preceding works and also in those contemporary with his own. Unlike Mutloatse, Mzamane attempts to combine socio-political commentary with an adumbrative critical acumen.<sup>12</sup>

It is because of the confluence of socio-political and critical interest in the stories he edited that Mzamane, by and large, displays an explicit ideological and professional motive behind his project of short story anthologisation. The major differences between the anthologising projects of Mzamane and Mutloatse coincide with the different approaches they bring to the respective African and/or Black critical and writing discourse in South Africa: whilst Mzamane displays a certain consciousness of the confluence between

the socio-political material and critical acumen, this kind of consciousness in Mutloatse's project remains largely overshadowed by the ideological rigidity of his editorial prescriptions on Black literary 'authenticity'.

The nature and form of this confluence in Mzamane's socio-political and literary interests is reflected in his attempt explicitly to define the sociological and historical intentions behind his selection of stories:

This selection is limited to modern short stories in English by Black writers of South African origin. 'Black', as understood by the new generation in South Africa, refers to the darker races of acknowledged African, Asian and mixed descent, who constitute the vast majority of the disadvantaged and oppressed in South Africa (1986:ix).

The experience of racial oppression constituted, for Mzamane, a cardinal aspect of the Black aesthetic. Even though such a definition sought to homogenise the ethnic and class differences it was, in his view, still valid as a racially combative concept.

Although the socio-political conditions before and during the time of the publication of his anthology may have played a major role in the construction of the ideology of a White-counteractive Black majority aesthetic, the fact remains that within this majority there were different minorities. Such minorities as the Asians and people of mixed descent respectively have their own languages and



cultures which are the repositories of their normative and world outlooks.

How, then, was this Black aesthetic supposed to have ensured that such differences were never to resurface? One difficult position and source of confusion for the reader lies in accepting that the people of 'mixed descent' also exclusively belong to the category of the Black world. Even if such a position has a certain political and class validity, one may still argue that had it not been for the experience of racial and economic deprivation, people of 'mixed descent' would have been, metaphorically, a socio-political crossroads for the racial, cultural and linguistic interaction of the Black and White peoples. Mzamane's homogenising Black definition therefore has wider literary and ideological implications for his anthology project and for our purposes of identifying its conceptual contradictions.

In a world where ethnic and class differences occupied secondary positions to the exigencies of addressing racial oppression, the English language became a literary and political language of that world. It became, to a certain extent, a language commonly shared by the African, White, Asian and so-called Coloured writers and political activists. Of immediate interest to this discussion, is the manner in which Mzamane critically uses the concept of a Black majority for the purposes of forging a collectively

reconstructive Black (English) literary aesthetic. It was the nature and vicissitudes of a politicised English language which enabled him to conceptualise the idea of short story anthologisation as an avenue for expressing his critical views.

## **2.2 Critical Practice and Aesthetic Ideology**

Mzamane's critical interest in the selected stories is reflected in his metacommentary on the conception and nature of Hungry Flames. The broad intentions, according to him, underlying 'The selections in this anthology demonstrate the springs of Black South African literature in English, its themes and techniques, in the period since 1930' (1986:ix). These are intentions which demonstrate his attempt to establish historical continuity in the practice of Black short story writing.

At the root of this effort to re-establish the Black short story tradition is a latent motive for reconstructing the Black political aesthetic and its literary and cultural underpinnings. It is my argument here that his literary intentions are subsumed in a socio-political objective of fighting oppression through the project of collectively reconstructing the Black literary world. These intentions originated from the ideology of 'Black Consciousness' which emphasised the solidarity and communalistic aspects of a universally oppressed Black people.<sup>13</sup> This is the driving

force behind Mzamane's critical selection of the stories and authors for his anthology.

The political determinants of the aesthetic he forged in this anthology take precedence over the literary concerns. Although this is understandable within the context of South African aesthetic demarcations, it may also have turned out to have been the paradox of the South African literary situation. He explains this paradox in the following problematic terms:

South African literature is closely tied to political developments, which it largely mirrors and which can either retard or advance its growth (1986:x).

In a situation where the Black and White racial and literary demarcations were to become the basis of aesthetic literary production, what were the possibilities for the produced literature to move closer to the position of establishing a national literary confluence? Much as the racial condition of South Africa has fostered separate White and Black literary traditions, the dialectic of literary retardation and growth has also worked against the transcendence of boundaries and the repression of an Afro-European cultural and literary stream in South Africa. It is Afro-European insofar as it utilises a 'European' language, English, as a medium for expressing a variety of Africa-centred forms of consciousness.

The dialectic of literary retardation and growth also meant that even if individual writers were to have wanted to place themselves in both the Black and White literary worlds, this would have amounted to a certain violation of the borders of literarily and politically demarcated aesthetics.<sup>14</sup> For this reason, one might argue that there was an imbalance in the dialectic of literary retardation and growth. The imbalance tended to tip the scales in favour of retardation rather than the process of literary enrichment and growth. Part of the reason for this was the very fact that the literature tended, as I hope to demonstrate in my critical analysis of selected stories, towards a singular focus on predetermined political themes and styles of writing.

What is noteworthy about the anthologisation of these stories is the editor's arrangement of them in terms of the historical contexts within which they were produced. This arrangement enabled Mzamane to assign them a place in his project of collective aesthetic reconstruction. When writing about the historical and ideological issues surrounding the origins of these Black stories, he displays a critical interest that goes beyond Mutloatse's. He traces the origins of these stories from what he terms the pioneering historical context of R.R.R. Dhlomo, Eski'a Mphahlele and others and proceeds to the 'Soweto' era of Njabulo Ndebele, Mafika Gwala, Mzamane himself and other writers of that age.

In this attempt at historical contextualization of the stories lies the intention of forging an historicized and collectively reconstructive Black literary aesthetic. It is here that the dialectical interplay between the respective African and Black aesthetic concerns becomes, for the reader, tacitly reflected. Such a dialectic seems to favour the Black aesthetic which defines and expresses Mzamane's ideological position. In his comments on the period from the age of the pioneers to that of the Black Consciousness or 'Soweto' era, Mzamane assumes that these periods had some shared perceptions of the aesthetic value and meaning of the concept Black with which we are here mainly concerned.

A brief analysis of this assumption should reveal Mzamane's underlying intention of collapsing the individual world views of these stories into his project of collectively reconstructing the Black aesthetic. Citing Tim Couzens, Mzamane observes, without further differentiation, that in Dhlomo's case, 'Many of the themes he raised are "universal" to the Black South African condition and foreshadow the concerns of the present-day African writers' (1986:x). Couzens' comment also leads Mzamane to the conclusion that 'Two recurring themes in Black Consciousness literature appear in Abrahams' earliest work: Black pride and the need for solidarity among the oppressed' (1986:xii). Either consciously or unconsciously, Mzamane takes Couzens' homogenistic uses of the African and Black aesthetic

concepts further and indiscriminately applies them in the formulation of his Black aesthetic position informed by the politics of a transindividualist Black Consciousness world view.<sup>15</sup>

At the heart of this world view lies the collectively reconstructive effort which collapses African into Black values which, in turn, are made to constitute a monolithic aesthetic entity. This entity is itself a reflection of the editor's ideological predilections. This is achieved through a transindividual appropriation of stories from different historical periods into the realm of Mzamane's Black Consciousness ideology. What Mzamane vindicates here is his own ideological priorities rather than those of the stories and their authors. From the manner in which Mzamane has classified these stories, the reader is persuaded to conclude that the 40s and 50s literary period of the 'pioneering age' of such writers as Dhlomo and Abrahams had an ideological affinity with that of the '76 and post '76 Soweto era of writers like Ndebele, Mutloatse and others. Even though the focus of the stories may have commonly revolved around reflections on the African and/or Black experiences in South Africa, these were, according to the arguments here, by no means reducible to a coherent and monolithic historical aesthetic.

Within Mzamane's monolithic Black cultural and literary world there are conceptual contradictions and tensions similar to the ones prevalent in Mutloatse's conception of

Black. Mzamane also uses the concept 'Black' as if it were an all-embracing and incorporationist concept. In his definition of Black, Mzamane lumps together the Africans, Asiatics and people of mixed descent in order to construct his concept of a collective or majority Black aesthetic.<sup>16</sup> Although the rationale of 'political solidarity' underlying his interventionist efforts may have been a politically effective stance taken against extreme repression, this intervention also conceptually contradicted the objective of accomplishing a collective aesthetic. It may have succeeded in temporarily concealing different world views and social values of the Africans, Asiatics and people of mixed descent.<sup>17</sup> It would be of particular interest to ascertain, at a later stage of this analysis, the extent to which the majority Black aesthetic sometimes contradicted the values of an incorporated African aesthetic.

### **2.3 A Dialectical reading of Selected Stories**

A critical reading of eight stories, four from Forced Landing and four from Hungry Flames, should highlight the individual authors' world views expressed through their varying uses of the African and Black aesthetic concepts.<sup>18</sup> The stories taken from Mutloatse's anthology are the following: 'A Different Time' (Chicks Nkosi), 'Heaven Is Not Closed' (Bessie Head), 'African Trombone' (Xolile Guma), and, finally, 'Forced Landing' (Manthatha Tsedu). The

following four stories are taken from Mzamane's anthology: 'Grieg on a Stolen Piano' (Eski'a Mphahlele), 'The Day of The Riots' (Mbulelo Mzamane) and, finally, 'The Music of The Violin' (Njabulo Ndebele) and 'The Park' (James Matthews).

These stories either explicitly or implicitly make use of the concepts 'African' and 'Black' to express the author/narrators' world views. In some of these stories there are explicit uses of these concepts whereas in others the reader has to delve more deeply in order to decode the socio-political meaning/s of the African and/or Black aesthetic assumptions.

The discussion here focuses on the structural and thematic aspects and also on the interactive and disjunctive relations between the respective African concerns with place consciousness and Black concerns with racial consciousness. The structural examination involves an analysis of the authors' arrangement of some aspects of short story narration. Although there are no structural and thematic strategies common to all the selected stories, there is nevertheless a close narrative relation between expressions of the structural, thematic and philosophical views discursively articulated through various techniques like characterisation, point of view and thematic aspects. These expressions are the raw material to be analyzed and read against the background of the editors' theoretical



projects of collectively reconstructing the respective African and Black aesthetics.

### 2.3.1. Nkosi's Concept of Temporal Difference

In Chicks Nkosi's 'A Different Time' we have a story which discursively employs time as its most obvious narrative, thematic and historical device. It is through and within the temporal and historical context that the story of a different time is narrated. The story is narrated by an old man Mncina who tells it to his grandchildren whilst they are eating 'imbasha' at the fireside. Its socio-political plot revolves around the narration of how Nkambule, the story's protagonist, sustained the scar on one of his cheeks. Although Nkambule is the major focus of the narration, the story also incorporates the narration of historical incidents and events which are explicitly set in a different time.<sup>19</sup>

Mncina's grandchildren who want to know how Nkambule sustained his scar prod the old man into embarking on his fireside narration:

We were having our imbasha when bold Mncina started telling us about what they used to do when they were umbutho, the king's regiment (Mutloatse 1988:10).

Two significant generic aspects surrounding the genesis of the narration emerge from the children's preliminary

situation: the story is told at the fireside and, furthermore, it revolves around the historical events and incidents of the past. This exposition raises some questions as to how critics and readers should distinguish between oral and written fictional narrative processes in, respectively, African and Black writing practices?<sup>20</sup>

The children's preliminary narration adumbrates Mncina's narration from whose viewpoint the story of Nkambule and that of regimentation is told. It is Mncina's point of view, unconsciously reflecting on the notion of storytelling, which becomes foregrounded by the narrative. As an old man, Mncina is taken to be the positor of traditional or customary social and cultural values gained through his intergenerational involvement in the processes of 'Swazi',<sup>21</sup> tradition and culture. He occupies a social position equivalent to that of a teacher and oral historian. Beyond the family ties existing between him and his children, there is an equally significant bond between him as narrator/participant and the children who mediate our reception of the story.

As narrator/participant Mncina performs his role through the only means available to him, oral storytelling. It is this resource which privileges him as a narrator over the subserviently recipient position of his grandchildren. This is why, when the children ignorantly ask him 'What are we supposed to do, Mkhulu', he demonstrates this narrative superiority by chastising them, 'Supposed to do? Listen to

them. They ask what are they supposed to do!' (Mutloatse 1988:11). There is a narrative difference between the time of Mncina's world and that of the children's.

His past is explicitly characterised as a Swazi transethnic and precolonial past which stands in sharp contrast to the children's Black present implicitly defined and presented as a racial 'other' of the White Afrikaner world. Mncina's transethnic past is so inaccessible to the children and so remote even to him, that his only way of reconstituting it is through a calculated manipulation of the narrative and historical device of time. Even this time is so distanced from him that when the children want to learn more about Nkambule's and Mncina's regimentation, the author/narrator informs us that 'The old man did not answer. He looked into the distance, the distance of time' (1988:11).

This contradiction between Mncina's time and that of the children reflects the historical contradictions inherent in his social position as someone who is historically a member of two generations: the precolonial generation and the grandchildren's colonial one which forms so much a part of him. This historical sense of belonging to two worlds ironically and politically denies Mncina the temporal difference he seeks to establish. The implications of this denial of difference<sup>22</sup> are that he, like his grandchildren, is historically trapped in the Black/White racial and

colonial dialectic which, as we shall see later, is indifferent to his Swazi precolonial values.

The only resource on which he relies for his imaginative reconstitution of this distanced and different time is, as previously mentioned, that of oral narrative. The question of how this resource can be used in a western fictional medium like the short story, is also a significant problem to be addressed in the course of my argument on the story's structural aspects. The point remains, however, that Mncina relies on oral storytelling in drawing the socio-historical boundaries of difference between his pre-colonial time and the time of political and racial encounter between Swazis and Afrikaners.

Since his transethnic past is imaginatively recalled through the device of oral narration and presented through the resources of a written western fictional medium, it is important to examine how the interactive and/or distinct boundaries of these literary mediums contribute to the story's creation of an Africa-West or Black-White hybrid cultural and literary values. The author/narrator has given the old man narrative authorial powers and an historical insight which holds sway over his grandchildren who constitute his audience.

As mediators in this oral narrative process, the grandchildren have some fundamental limitations: the generation gap between them and Mncina imposes temporal and historical limitations on their role as mediators. Theirs

is simply an acquiescent position *vis a vis* Mncina's historically privileged position. Mncina possesses an absolute narratorial authority which, in larger political terms, would have been comparable to the king's absolute authority.<sup>23</sup> Such narratorial and political inequalities in Mncina's Swazi transethnic oral values are unconsciously transposed into the relations between, on the one hand, the values of an oral performer and his audience and, on the other hand, those of a hybrid fictional medium of the author/narrator and his readers.

The distinction between these narratorial inequalities becomes reinforced in the fictional narrative process. Unlike the audience of a purely oral narrative performance, the reader of the story's fictional text is able to subject both Mncina's and the author/narrator's narratorial authority to a process of simultaneous rigorous scrutiny. Since Mncina purportedly assumes the role of narrator cum interpreter, my criticism of his narrative role should, by implication, also be seen as a criticism of the author/narrator's mediation between the oral and fictional interpretations of a hybrid Black-White (racial) and Africa-West (place-centred) world outlook. The dialectic of this hybrid world outlook stands in sharp contrast to the transethnic precolonial Swazi values.

Since the past in Mncina's narrative is closely bound up with his personal participation in it, how can we then distinguish between the factual and fictional parts of the

story? What prompts this question is Mncina's deliberate strategy of using the first person 'I' in distancing himself from the children's world: 'You cannot understand children of my children. I lived in a different world. You cannot understand' (Mutloatse 1988:11). Although this may sound rhetorical, it may also be interpreted as an expression of Mncina's unwitting desire to alienate himself from the world of racial and colonial contradictions; a world of Black and White racial otherness of the Swazi precapitalists and commercial Afrikaner farmers, which forms so much a part of him. Every effort by Mncina to persuade the reader to endorse his self-differentiating desire gives rise to more historical and political contradictions.

Mncina also seems to shut himself off from even the very literal bond of family and colonial kinship he shares with, respectively, his grandchildren and the encroaching Afrikaner farmers. The worst kind of absurdity in his self-alienating desire lies in his avoidance of the fact that both he and his grandchildren exist within a particular historical time and context: the time and context of Afrikaner arrival in the land of the Swazis.

His desire to avoid acceptance of himself as part of this racial Black-White presence turns him into an unconscious victim of the kind of alienation which throws him into an historical vacuum. His desire to distance himself from the children's world amounts to an ahistorical perception of the process of social change which is having a

major bearing on the socio-political difference between the Black and White worlds of the colonial situation in the land of the Swazis.

If he is distanced from the remote past and also from the world of the children, to which different time then does he belong? Even if it were to be argued that he belongs to the Black precolonial history implied in the author-narrator's use of the expression 'other Black people' (Mutloatse 1988:12), and also in making use of the concept of a 'shining black body' (Mutloatse 1988: 12), which somehow implies that race distinctions essentially deal with physiological human differences, such a view would still be tenuous as it is negated by an accumulation of evidence about a traditionalist African contextualizing of the narrative.

My argument is, therefore, that Mncina is historically trapped in the children's colonial condition of economic and cultural transformation from an oral traditional society into a racial and place-centred consciousness. For this reason, his attempt to set himself apart temporally from his present functions is a futile wish to escape the ineluctable ideological, racial and economic trap which defines the historical future of his society.

The story's socio-political themes, which intertwine with Mncina's and the author/narrator's interpretive assumptions underlying their conceptions of the Black world view, revolve around reflections on the socio-economic

organisation of the Swazi past, on the encounter between Swazi transethnicists and a few White Afrikaner farmers, and also on Nkambule's stock-raiding exploits. All these themes are aimed at an imaginative reconstitution of Black and/or transethnic Swazi precolonial social values which, because of racial otherness, also reflect upon the incident of political conquest that brought an end to the 'different' days of the precolonial times.

The theme of socio-economic organization of the values of Swazi precolonial life, as narrated by Mncina, is important to our perception of it as a reflection of mental and cultural organisation of that world. In the story, this theme takes various forms ranging from its reflections on authority, ownership of land<sup>24</sup> and cattle to the articulation of social values definitive of that society's world view. The significance of this theme lies in its expression of the complexities of a world outlook largely repressed in oral terms; a world outlook in which the king's authority dominated every facet of social and economic life.

Even the land ownership, as the narrator informs us, was vested solely in the king's authority. This tributary pre-capitalist economic formation,<sup>25</sup> constituted the material fabric of that society's orally determined world outlook. This was, according to Mncina, a society in which collective or communal ownership presumably supplemented the king's overriding property ownership powers. Some of these



communalistic elements have subsequently been defined by Black Consciousness exponents as 'solidarity' values of a Black world in which those of an Africa-centred consciousness are relegated to a rear-guard or passive stance.<sup>26</sup>

The major determinant of the socio-economic conditions of life was the land which, according to Mncina, symbolized and surpassed all other forms of wealth.<sup>27</sup> Even if this was the case, the Swazis had made some provisions for the generous loaning or apportioning of land to the strangers:<sup>28</sup>

When they came, they asked for, and were given land by the good king Mbandzeni who was reigning at the time. You see it was our tradition that strangers to a country should be given land and helped to set up home. It was in that spirit that they were given land to pasture their sheep and cattle (Mutloatse 1988:12).

As a subsistent economic, agrarian and pre-capitalist society, Swazi society's incorporation of elements of economic value within its traditional practices reflected an attempt, within their world outlook, to harmonise private and public ownership of property. The king, Mbandzeni in this case, acted as public owner, custodian and executor of the land ownership rights and also acted as an ultimate regulator of that society's communalistic and collective economic sector.

Whilst this character of the economy seemed to have been in line with the monolithic definition of the Black world

within 'Black Consciousness', it also masked the material contradictions such as unequal power relations which were prevalent in Swazi precolonial economy and were subsequently reflected in Black Consciousness' emphasis on the relativity of Black to White racial otherness. Such an emphasis underplayed a place-centred economic interaction between Africa and the West.

Closely related to this economic aspect is the social aspect which was largely symbolised by the regimentalisation of men who, whenever the land was under threat of invasion, had to defend the sovereignty of the state, their property ownership rights and their human dignity. In this instance, the men's role of defending their society was given a moral and heroic proportion inculcated into the children at the earliest stages of their lives. This is why, then, when Mncina didactically reminds his grandchildren, 'Do you not know that you should defend your king, your women, your children, your country and your cattle? Is that not what a man was made for?' (Mutloatse 1988:11), the reader may interpret this as Mncina's and, by implication, also the author/narrator's attempt to remind them of the values of collective social responsibility characteristic of that society's transethnic world outlook.

The theme of encounter between the Swazi transethnicists and the Afrikaner farmers introduces another perspective to the subject of a different time: at the heart of this encounter was an arousal of political, economic and racial

awareness of Swazi people. Such an arrival made them aware of their Black world outlook which symbolised an other of the commercial and racial consciousness of White Afrikaner farmers who, according to Mncina, '... used to come down to Swaziland in the winter, driving flocks of sheep to eat up the king's grass' (Mutloatse 1988:12).

This act of grazing sheep without the king's permission constituted, in the light of the Swazi world outlook, a violation of the king's authority and that traditional world view. This naturally triggered a defensive reaction from the king's regiment. Having failed to expel the encroaching farmers, the traditions of the Swazis proved to be an unequal match for the sophisticated ways of the Afrikaner farmers. What apparently withheld them from mobilising an army against the farmers may have been king Somhlolo's warning against touching the people with White skins who were to arrive in Swaziland (Mutloatse 1988:11).

Although it is difficult to say to what extent the honouring of this prophecy determined the Swazi response to the Afrikaner's territorial violation, it can still be argued that within the context of a peasant world outlook (expressed in an oral tradition) the king's word and authority remained in force even long after his death. Mncina states this arrival of the Whites and the exhortations of the prophecy in the following terms:

You see, it all started a long time ago,

this trouble with the white people. It started when the great king Somhlolo prophesied that people with white skins ...would come from the sea. King Somhlolo said we should not fight them. We should not spill even a drop of that foreign blood on this land (Mutloatse 1988:11).

Behind this prophecy there may have been some realistic inhibitions which forced the Swazis not to spill the blood of the farmers. These inhibitions may, for instance, have been determined by the material realities relating to the military and economic sophistication of the Afrikaners. This is borne out by the fact of an Afrikaner farmer who single-handedly and without the permission of the Swazis decided to establish a permanent settlement on Swazi territory.

The material realities of military and economic imbalances may also have been exacerbated by the following factors: the presence of an Afrikaner police post at Bredersdorp in the Transvaal, horse riding police and the vigilant dogs and guns which fortified the Afrikaners' military might (Mutloatse 1988:13,15). The regimentalised and unsophisticated defence system of the Swazis proved to be deficient when faced with this Afrikaner military presence. Its invincibility served the interest of safeguarding the Afrikaner's economic possessions.

This is illustrated by the prompt response of the Bredersdorp police after a farmer had reported a stock theft (Mutloatse 1988:13). Mncina informs us that when the Boer

police had finished searching, 'They left a few to watch over us and the rest continued to the great palace. They got permission to search our huts. Nothing' (Mutloatse 1988:13). This incident illustrates the military imbalances which enabled the 'Boer' police, who had no trust in the Swazis, to taste self-righteously the ox meat they found being eaten by Mncina and his fellow men at the royal kraal. It was only after the meat tasting that the 'Boer' police sought permission for searching the king's palace.

It is unfortunate that in the narration of this incident, the author/narrator chooses to deny the reader a direct insight into the organisation of the Afrikaner settlement at Bredersdorp. Had he permitted such an insight, the reader would perhaps have been able to arrive at a balanced assessment of the socio-economic organisation of both the Swazi and Afrikaner communities.

The economic aspects of the encounter between Afrikaners and Swazis also reflected the material imbalances between the Afrikaner and Swazi economic systems. As previously mentioned, the Swazi economy and its communal and White oppositional Black values was largely a tributary economy relying on collective distribution of labour and resources whereas that of the Afrikaners, on the other hand, was a formative capitalist one in which individual property ownership was a matter of primary interest.

As a result of such contradictory attitudes towards ownership of property, these economies became locked in a

conflict of material interests which culminated in the Afrikaners' total contempt of and indifference to the Swazi tradition and its world outlook:

Unlike other black people who had come to the country, the whites did not join the Swazi nations. They merely used the privileges and rights without the attendant responsibilities, like serving in the regiments, joining in collective community work and so on (Mutloatse 1988:12).

This conflict was rooted deeply in the material realities dictated by the social difference and economic incongruities which prevailed between the Swazi and Afrikaner world outlooks.

Whereas other Black people (i.e. 'Black' in their opposition to 'Whites') who came to Swaziland shared the communalistic vision of the Swazis, the Afrikaner farmers lived according to social and economic values which set them apart from the Swazis. This difference in the socio-economic organisation of the two communities takes place within the context of narratively repressed historical differences between Swaziland and Bredersdorp. Such differences also had wider implications for Black and White socio-economic relations in both Swaziland and Bredersdorp.

Unlike other White-othering Black people whom Mncina impliedly accepted as part of his transethnic Swazi milieu, the White Afrikaner farmers also owned human labour in the form of workers or 'Kaffir' shepherds:

The whitemen used to come here with people whom they had dressed up in old torn dirty clothing. These people they called their kaffirs, and that is how we came to call them... (Mutloatse 1988:12).

Although the 'Kaffir' slaves stand in sharp contrast to the other Blacks who became members of the Swazi society, they still belonged to this Black world which tried to reject them. The fact of their exclusion as 'Kaffirs' or 'slaves' was a reflection of the ideological incongruities between the White and Black worlds.

Realising their defencelessness when faced with a socio-economic system superior to their own, the Swazis devised some ingenious means of avenging themselves against the Afrikaners' total disregard of their social values and sovereignty. They raided the settled Boer's farm where, under Nkambule's leadership, they stole the sheep. Mncina rationalizes those raids in the following terms:

We did not like to see those flocks driven down from far away Transvaal, coming here to devour our grass free of charge. Especially because those animals, the *tiklabu* sheep were so very tasty to the tongue (Mutloatse 1988:12).

It is this economic need rather than the social and political grudge which prompted the Swazis to avenge themselves.

Unlike the Black old man in Tlali's story (Mutloatse 1988:148) who gratuitously gives his land to White Afrikaner

farmers until he has none, the solitary White farmer who decides to settle on the land of the Swazis demonstrates their inability to dislodge him from the land by protecting his farm with the gun, the trap-bells and also keeping his live stock in his fortified kraals. All these measures did not inhibit the ingenuities of the Swazis who, under the leadership of Nkambule, conducted raids on the farmer's farm:

We used to go in turns to pick up something from the Boer's farm. It happened to be Nkambule's turn that night. He had just got inside the fence when he stumbled over a string. Maye babo, O fathers. The string was tied to a bell on the verandah. The bell went kring, kring, kring. The Boer was up, gun in hand. His workers came out carrying lanterns and kerries. They surrounded the whole place (Mutloatse 1988:15).

The traditional ingenuity of Nkambule and his men proved to be less sophisticated than the security system at the Boer's farm. Trapped within the pigsty, his survival instincts forced Nkambule to find an escape route to avoid falling victim of the Boer's security network.

Even before he could find this escape route, Nkambule realised that the total darkness in the pigsty offered him an opportunity of using it as a shield against the menacing light of the lanterns. Having hidden himself within the darkness of the night, the result was that

His shining black body was difficult to detect among the large black pigs, in the dim light of



the lanterns. They could not spot him, but they knew he was somewhere in there (Mutloatse, 1988:15).

Nkambule's intuitive ingenuity used his physiological traits, like his metaphorically shining black body and the immensely dark enclosure of the night, to his advantage. It was this ingenuity which aided Nkambule in his escape in the early hours of the morning. The story ends on this heroic note with Nkambule outrunning the workers who have given chase and finally with his escape back to the safety of his traditional society.

Structurally and ideologically the story's narrative threads are held together by the device of time. It is through time, and within it, that the social, economic and political differences between the Black and/or Swazi transethnic people, the Afrikaner peoples and/or Whites, the 'Kaffirs' and other Blacks are drawn. It is also through it that Mncina and the author/narrator collaborate in the project of attempting to privilege the precolonial Swazi past. As a manipulable narrative device, time allows Mncina to use it to distance himself from the context of his grandchildren so that the world outlook to which he subscribes can emerge as a materially authentic one. The narrative device of time, therefore, becomes an ideological authenticator of the social values of a White oppositional Black world outlook.

The story's narrative aspects of characterization and the narrator's viewpoint serve the interest of authenticating a racially determined Black world outlook which, as I have earlier argued, is inherently implied in the author-narrator's conception of Black as a trope of White otherness.

We encounter this presentation of Blackness in the 'typical' description and presentation of Nkambule as a man whose act of heroic escape, in the author/narrator's ideological scheme, is meant to be interpreted as marking the 'ingenuity' of the Black world. It is therefore only Mncina and Nkambule who emerge as fully developed characters in this story. Mncina is the narrator/participant and Nkambule, who is incidentally Mncina's friend, is the story's protagonist through whom the heroic past is authenticated.

All these structural elements serve the traditional world which was temporally unrelated to the then present time of racial pre-capitalist social formation. The only relation Mncina's Black world had with that of the period after political conquest, was the racial experience which had a momentum of historical continuity. This would be the only ideological relation which exists between Mutloatse's Black Consciousness inspired project and that of Mncina's different ('African') time.

### 2.3.2 Religion and World Outlook in Conflict

Bessie Head's story, 'Heaven Is Not Closed,' also presents us with the dilemma of ideological and cultural conflict between a racially conscious Black traditional social system of the Tswanas<sup>29</sup> and its White Christian other represented by the missionary.<sup>30</sup> Head's village social system also has its own internal contradictions creating demarcations between believers and non-believers.

Its plot centres around the marriage of the story's protagonist, Ralokae, whose insistence upon marrying his wife through Setswana law leads to Galethebege's excommunication from the Christian church which, in turn, forces her to marry Ralokae in accordance with Setswana custom. The missionary who excommunicates her justifies his action as being not necessarily against Galethebege, but against Ralokae the unbeliever. Once outside the church, Galethebege longs to enter the heaven closed to her by that excommunication. Consequently, she tirelessly prays, throughout her marriage, for herself and her husband to go to heaven. Underlying this plot of conflict between the Christian and village socio-religious norms, is a sub-cultural conflict between indigenous Setswana customs and the harsh Christian law of the missionary.

The resources of this story are constituted out of the figure of an old man, Modise, as a narrator and a fireside storytelling setting where Modise narrates Galethebege's

story to his grandchildren. It is the author/narrator's preliminary narration which sets the story's mood:

All her life Galethebege earnestly believed that her whole heart ought to be devoted to God, yet one catastrophe after another occurred to swerve her from this path (Mutloatse 1988:73).

The catastrophes in Galethebege's life are a reflection of the larger social conflicts between a traditional world outlook of the villagers and its Christian counterpart.

As a bone of contention between these systems, Galethebege is merely a centre around which ideological tensions express themselves. She stands at the centre of a larger conflict between what was originally a White settler religious system and a Black indigenous social system. Between these systems lies an ideological gulf mirrored in the conflict which ensues over the claim to Galethebege.

Modise's narration also aims at inculcating acceptable moral values upon the children. As a source of historical and indigenous Black or Tswana social values, whose triumph over the threat of White Christian and other ideological invasions was necessary for the preservation of the Tswana tribe, Modise's position designates him as the only authentic interpreter of past events.<sup>31</sup>

He combines this interpretive role with a didactic motive of teaching his children about their moral and political duties of upholding, defending and protecting

Setswana law and custom. One of the ways in which he does this is by contrasting the spiritual infirmity of a Christianised Galethebege with Ralokae's uncompromising adherence to his indigenous customs.

The rhetorical and ironical manner in which Modise introduces his story arouses the children's naive curiosity:

`I am of a mind to think that Galethebege was praying for forgiveness for her sins this morning,' he said slowly. 'It must have been a sin for her to marry Ralokae. He was an unbeliever to the day of his death...'  
(Mutloatse 1988:74).

His rhetoric works toward the goal of using Galethebege's spiritual weakness as an avenue leading to the presentation of the Christian world view as meek and discreditable.

This narrating strategy, according to the author/narrator's presentation of it, achieves its preliminary intentions through the arousal of the audience's laughter in anticipation of the old man's story:

A gust of astonished laughter shook his family out of the solemn mood of mourning that had fallen upon them and they all turned eagerly towards their grandfather, sensing that he had a story to tell  
(Mutloatse 1988:74).

This 'gust of laughter' and the anticipation of the story establish a certain bond between the old man, the author/narrator and the grandchildren.

Once these three parties have won each other's mutual trust, Modise uses his oral narrating skills in the service

of presenting the socio-political conflict between Setswana law and Christian morality. His strategy is to use the love relationship and marriage between Ralokae and Galethebege as an occasion for introducing his method of discrediting Christian morality. He rhetorically opens on an apologetic note:

I was never like Ralokae, an unbeliever. But that man, my brother, draws out my heart. He liked to say that we as a tribe would fall into great difficulties if we forgot our own customs and laws. Today, his words seem true. There is thieving and adultery going on such as was not possible under Setswana law (Mutloatse 1988:74).

There is in the old man's logic a naive incomprehension of the immanent contradictions within this discrediting strategy. His apologetic note places his moral didacticism under the strain of an undecided ideological insincerity. As a believer, the old man does not seem to have fully made up his mind on whether the Christian ideology is discreditable.

His strategy is based on a social attitude of calculated moral and ideological evasiveness. He evades the social reality that all laws come into being as a result of specific situations or problems. It is within this context that Setswana law had succeeded in uprooting such crimes as thieving and adultery. Underlying the old man's narration is a deeper conflict between a transethnic and indigenous ideology and its settler adversary. These ideologies become

entangled in the struggle to win the sympathies of those they are aimed at. In the process of this struggle Galethebege happens to be the bone of contention around which the chief representatives of these ideologies, Modise and the missionary, wage their conflict over the claims to world view representationality and indigeneity.

As for the reasons why some of the Tswanas had been won over to the Christian world view, Modise provides the following account:

In those days when they were young, said the old man, Modise, it had become the fashion for all Black people to embrace the Gospel. For some it was the mark of whether they were 'civilized' or not. For some, like Galethebege, it was their whole life (Mutloatse 1988:74).

The internal contradictions in the relations between the young and old Black and/or transethnic Tswanas, between 'civilized' and 'non-civilized' members, reflect the inner tensions of Black and/or transethnic Tswana customs. This condition may have been a fertile ground for the general social malaise of crime and adultery in that Black and/or transethnic community.

Underlying the author/narrator's conceptualization of the social conditions of the Black community is, generally, a tendency to lay the blame for the ills of the Black people at the door of an undefined White community. This attitude reveals itself in the moment of our first encounter with the author-narrator's description of the missionary:

The missionary was a short, anonymous-looking man who wore glasses. He had been the resident missionary for some time and, like all his fellows, he did not like the people. He always complained to his people that they were terrible beggars and rather stupid (Mutloatse 1988:76).

Unlike in the presentation of the identity of Black people, the author/narrator does not explicitly disclose the racial identity of the missionary, his fellows and the generalized 'people'. Since Black identity is racially comparable and seeks to enter a dialogue with its White 'other', it would be simplistic to conclude that the author/narrator's repression of this fact works as part of a narrative strategy assigning all the social ills faced by the Black people to an amorphously 'settled' White Christian ideology.

The clash between an indigenous Tswana tradition and its Christian counterpart explodes when their chief representatives engage in an uncompromising war of the minds centred around their claims to the possession of Galethebege. Whilst proposing marriage to her, 'Ralokae said quietly and finally: I took my first wife according to the old customs. I am going to take my second wife according to the old customs' (Mutloatse 1988:76). Concerning Ralokae's intransigence, Femi Ojo-Ade argues that 'Ralokae is the symbol of protest against the imposed religion and, throughout his life, he stands firm in his conviction' (Ojo-Ade 1990:89).<sup>32</sup> Ralokae is the last symbol of an unbending resistant force against an imposed White foreign religion.



The missionary's refusal to let Galethebege marry according to Tswana law sharply contrasts with Ralokae's refusal to marry according to Christian custom. In her naïveté, Galethebege is unaware of the fact that the intransigence of the representatives of these two systems represents an ideologically unbridgeable gulf:

Her intention in approaching the missionary was to acquire his blessing for the marriage, as though a compromise of tenderness could be made between two traditions opposed to each other (Mutloatse 1988:77).

The enormity of this gulf is such that it has a profound effect on Galethebege who neither has a full comprehension of it nor an interest to be entangled in it. When forced to choose between the love of a man and that of a Christian God, Galethebege's spiritual naivety compels her to vacillate between real love and a metaphysical one.

These love tensions within Galethebege become explosive when they turn into a terrain of ideological conflict between the largely Black indigenous social system of the Tswanas and its White other represented by the missionary. The Black world outlook, rather than the African one, becomes the defining term here because of the way in which it is set up in opposition to White: otherness and difference are the criteria of demarcation and distinction between the two social systems.

The struggle between these socio-religious systems is deeply rooted in contending claims to holiness. The

missionary's assertion that '...Heaven is closed to the unbeliever' (Mutloatse 1988:77). reflects the spiritual poverty of this foreign religion which, instead of winning the hearts and minds of the people, chooses to threaten them in this way.

The missionary's action also provokes his own alienation by arousing in the villagers feelings of solidarity and sympathy towards Galethebege and Ralokae. When Ralokae's relatives decide that if heaven was closed to Galethebege and Ralokae, it might as well be closed to them too (Mutloatse 1988:78), this becomes a logical community decision which sounds Christianity's death knell in the village.

This type of solidarity presumably expresses the spirit of collective identity which used to characterise the communalism of the Black community. It may have been the same spirit which influenced and gave rise to the communalistic values of a transindividual Black world as it was conceived and defined through the Black Consciousness ethos.<sup>33</sup>

The culminating point of this contest of claims to holiness is expressed through the rhetorical question, 'Wasn't there a place in heaven too for Setswana custom?' (Mutloatse 1988:79) which is crucial in this ideological contest. If it were to be answered by noting that since both systems recognise and worship the supremacy of God, then the contest becomes an unnecessary falsification of

the underlying ideological contest between a Black and/or Africa-centred and a White and/or Western oriented system of social valuation.<sup>34</sup>

Although the old man displays a masterful weaving of the narrative threads in his oral narrative, this does not detract the reader from an awareness of the author/narrator's tendency to allow her analytical viewpoint sometimes to dominate the process of narration. Her presentation of the missionary's aversion to the Tswana social customs (Mutloatse 1988:77), her use of such words as 'illiterate and ignorant man and civilization' (Mutloatse 1988:78) and other such instances of erudite intrusive commentary suggest an overtly manipulative intention. Such a learned intention suggests the subtle workings of a sophisticated mind manipulating the reader's philosophic perception of Black-White otherness inherent in the conflict of religions and their world outlook. One might even be tempted to conclude that just as the old man sought to win the children's sympathies, the author/narrator also seeks the reader's approval of her ideological stance of privileging the Black world over the White other as a dominant world outlook in this story.

Characterization in this story foregrounds a contest between morally weak and strong characters. Galethebege, for instance, has a weak character which sharply contrasts with that of Ralokae who has a strong sense of self-will and moral resilience. This sense of self-will and moral

resilience also sharply contrasts with that of the missionary. This type of character construction serves the story's socio-political themes by foregrounding the impact of social and political pressures exerted on the private and public lives of men and women whose lives were entangled in a struggle which pervasively challenged the moral and political ethos of Tswana society. The fact that some transethnic Tswana and/or Black people had been converted to the White missionary's Christian way of life was a sign of the presence of stronger forces working against that society's traditional values.

The conflict between the Black customary values and those of the White missionary is not only a religious conflict, but also a socio-political struggle over mental and material domination and conquest. The ideological struggle in the land of the Tswanas mirrors other similar struggles of colonial and mental (rather than territorial) domination of indigenous ethnic societies by the foreign ideologies. In accordance with my definition of African and Black world outlooks, I would argue that this conflict of values has, within the story's context, a meaningful synchronic content when it is looked at as a conflict between Black and White values. Insofar as it is also a diachronic conflict between the values of Africa and Europe, I would maintain that the conflict essentially concerns the urge toward mental conquest and, consequently, ideological resistance.

### 2.3.3 Africanising the Trombone

In Xolile Guma's 'African Trombone' we are presented with a narrative situation which also focuses on the socio-political rifts between, according to the underlying assumptions of the story's title, the dominant transethnic and/or old African ways of life and the emergent new ideas of a younger and/or westernised generation of neo-colonial Africans. This rift centres around the conflicting claims to authentic Afrocentricity.

According to the Afrocentric assumptions of the story's title, this contradiction takes place between an older African generation which has lost its political dominance and a neo-colonial African generation of the discotheque type. The politically nascent but economically dominant colonial regime is, according to the author/narrator, replaced by the generation of neo-colonial rulers who have no regard for those who fought for the liberation of this unnamed independent African country.<sup>35</sup>

The story seeks to depict the events surrounding the celebration of independence in this unnamed African country. The African trombone carried by an old man who is the subject of the narrative is given attributes suggesting that it is an authentic African instrument. Since the reader is not given any general or specific descriptions of the nature

of this instrument, one may as well contend that this trombone may have been historically appropriated by the old man from its Euro-colonial origins. The concepts 'African' and 'European', as they are employed in this story, are decisive in setting up the inter-continental values of difference and otherness which are the criteria of cultural and political demarcation and points of contact between Europeans, old Africans and neo-colonial Africans.

Once the trombone has been appropriated, the old man uses it as an instrument for communicating his historical message which ironically falls on deaf ears. The question whether the story's events confirm or invalidate the 'Africanisation' of this instrument, remains a polemical issue which we can only resolve by looking at the implications underlying the arguments for and against the authenticity of the instrument and its political message.

The supposed (if ironical) authenticity of the instrument and its message is informed by the author/narrator's perception of the extent to which this instrument has indigenous qualities and expresses indigenous sentiments. Concerns about tradition and the interpretive role of the figure of the old man are narrated through the author/narrator's 'monologic' narrative voice and point of view. Unlike Nkosi's and Head's stories, the point of view of this story is not transmitted by dialogue. Narrated events and situations are primarily presented through the interpretive author/narrator's viewpoint.

Ideological misperceptions and a communication breakdown between the old and new worlds constitute this story's dominant theme. It is through this theme that the author/narrator seeks to bestow on the old African world, which is the implied subject of the story's title, a sense of authenticity which, according to him, is non-existent in the new African world of philistine naïve youthfulness. Underlying this theme, is the author/narrator's attempt to present the neo-colonial African world as socially and politically disillusioned and deluded:

How graphically that arena portrayed history, the old and the new, unable to merge but seemingly capable of peaceful coexistence (Mutloatse 1988:17).

The old and the new can peacefully coexist only for the sake of allowing the festivities of the independence celebration to proceed without inhibition. Other than this common interest in the festivities, there is a suppressed ideological gulf between the world views of the old and the young people of this unnamed country. An uneasy sense of unity sets in between the new and/or neo-colonial Africans and an old indigenously inclined generation of Africans. It is my contention that this unity is an unconscious reflection of the ideological ambivalences existing in the author-narrator's conceptualization of the authenticity of the African trombone.

This would have important implications for the question of how the authenticators or sanctioners of indigenous and new African values are chosen and given authority to decide these value questions? The crucial factor in the choice of value authenticators seems, in this story, to be the age and oral critical judgement of an aesthetic sanctioner. These criteria of cultural valuation have a profound significance for our critical perception of the aesthetic role of the old man and his trombone.

Even though the protagonist may be old, as the author/narrator seems to be saying, his ironical Afro-European trombone is portrayed by the author/narrator as a reliable transmitter and authenticator of unchanging traditional social values of this unnamed African country. What the young people misconceive about the old generation of that country is the historical significance of the elders.<sup>36</sup> The old may be old, but they remain the repository of past and present social values of that country. This is implied in the author-narrator's reference to the old man as 'possessor of the history of this land and the greatest source of information' (Mutloatse 1988: 21). All these assertions reinforce the author-narrator's narrative strategy of foregrounding and privileging what is perceived as the indigenous African values which the old man implicitly represents. The values of indigenous old Africans and those of neo-colonial Africans have their discord revealed through their respective attitudes to the



trombone. This discord over authenticity reveals, to the reader, some deeply imbedded ideological tensions reinforcing the invisible imperial European values inherently and ironically contained in the Afro-European instrument, the trombone, and the message which the old man seeks to transmit through it.

It is through this Afro-European instrument that the old man is thrust into the historical position of disseminating the socio-political values which, in my view, are of a hybrid Afro-European heritage. The hybrid nature of this instrument elevates both the African and European values to the level of political and material coexistence, temporarily repressing the Black and White racial ambivalences. It is through this aesthetic hybridity that African rather than Black values become elevated to the level where the reader is expected to perceive them as authentically African. They are presumably authentic insofar as they exclude the category of race and its attendant material modalities.

It is one of the material and political ironies of history that in post-colonial Africa there is a permeating legacy of surrogate colonial and institutional practices contesting with the indigenous values all claims to African historicity and authenticity. I may even argue here that the post-colonial African values expressed through the medium of foreign languages and cultural artefacts such as the trombone and their connotated world outlooks, subsist within a neo-colonial crisis of mental subjugation and domination.

What these values come to reflect, through an Afro-European instrument like the old man's trombone, is a profound ideological crisis within the very irony of historical hybridity. My approach here questions the very notion of alterity inherent in such a hybrid Afro-European discourse.<sup>37</sup>

The political irony of this historical hybridity lies in the fact that the significance of this instrument's Africanness does not have the same historically determined melodic impact on all participants in the story. Whilst the British ambassador's daughter describes its melody as 'thweet' (Mutloatse 1988:19), the author/narrator perceives its notes as not amenable to chromatic definition (Mutloatse 1988:18), the new type of 'discotheque Africans' are indifferent to it and, finally, the readers may also have different perceptions of its historical value.

There is something dubious about the Africanness conferred on this instrument. The attitude of some characters/participants in the story, like the author/narrator and to a large extent the new Africans, displays ambivalent attitudes to the old man and his instrument. They subject the old man, his history and the values of authenticity to an unconscious questioning:

His trombone became vehicle of his emotions, emotions aroused by his peers, who like himself had actively fought for the day when their country would be free. The notes emanating from that trombone were not amenable to chromatic definition: they emanated from his guts and

seemed to be directed at my guts, like the sound of a cow being slaughtered...(Mutloatse 1988:18).

What is not amenable to chromatic definition is the socio-political significance of this instrument's Africanness.

It would seem that the author/narrator is the only figure who has some sympathy with the African Everyman, the old man. The old man's representative status is ascribed to him by the author/narrator's ideology of authenticating him and his trombone through the ideology of the 'ritualistic'. Through the combination of the melody of the trombone and the rituals of cow slaughter, the author/narrator attempts to authenticate the African aesthetic implied by this instrument. This also amounts to a kind of 'ethnic cleansing' through a process of ritual purification of the European connotations of this instrument.

This authenticating ideology markedly differs from that in Nkosi's story through its attempt to fuse melody and rituals. Otherwise the only similarity between these stories exists in their author/narrators' attempt to privilege the discourse of the old Africans over that of the new and/or neo-colonial Africans. Writing about the sensations aroused by notes emanating from the trombone, the author/narrator, for instance, ritualistically compares them with the '...sound of a cow being slaughtered, blood flowing in viscous rivulets of red, drawing my stomach along for companionship' (Mutloatse 1988:18). This ritualistic mixing of the trombone's notes and the sound of a cow being

slaughtered might lead one to a tentative conclusion that the author/narrator's African aesthetics are essentially ritualistic.

Members of this independent country's younger generation fail to recognize the old man's historical significance as a source of moral and historical wisdom. Instead of heeding the message of his trombone, they display an indifference which is akin to a society's rejection of its most reliable possessor of cultural and political history. Hurt by the philistinism of this younger generation, the old man quickly reminds them always to remember that with his death their greatest source of information also dies (1988:21).

The relegation of the old man to a rear-guard African position ironically places the younger generation in a neo-colonial position of ahistorical social existence. Generally, we can accept that through his wisdom and socio-political experience the old man in this newly independent society occupies a position of social and moral authority. Within the context of the dialectic of transformation taking place in this independent country, the old man and his history occupy a social position forced into a rear-guard African historical presence by the neo-colonial indifference of the young and/or new members of his country.<sup>38</sup> The author-narrator's stance is implicitly critical of this indifference which fails to find a substitute for the old man's authority.

The humiliating treatment of the old man by the minister of religion (Mutloatse 1988:20) as well as by an impatient younger generation crazy about pubs and discotheques, is also a reflection of the changes brought about by a rear-guard presence and workings of a European colonial and hegemonic ideology.<sup>39</sup> Disillusioned with the philistinism of the independence celebrations, the old man, according to the author/narrator's viewpoint, '...left, trombone in hand, disappearing into the night' (Mutloatse 1988:21). This disappearance of the old man and his trombone relegates the past and its traditional world outlook to a passive African presence which is lamentably replaced by the sheer philistinism of the young. It amounts to the passing of an age whose socio-political prime remains, in the eyes of the young, only an archaic historical record. The old man and his trombone remain active only as socio-political artefacts or exotica of this independent country's neo-colonial values. We find a similar contemptuous treatment of the figure of the old man by a group of young thugs in Setuke's 'Dumani' (Mutloatse 1988:63). This treatment of the old man debunks Dangor's myth of an Africa which is a cool and innocent paradise (Mutloatse 1988:161).

The story ends with the author/narrator's nostalgic admonition:

If you ever meet an old man carrying a trombone,  
or as is more likely, blowing his trombone, stop

and listen. That African trombone has a great deal to say, and not much time in which to say it (Mutloatse 1988:21).

The old man's social position and the trombone's time and message have indeed made their mark which, like the fact of colonial oppression against which they fought, has to give way to a neo-colonial way of life.

The structural and thematic aspects of this story are not as coherently organized as in Nkosi's and Head's stories. But its dominant idea of African authenticity raises crucial issues about the problems pertaining to the editor's motive of collectively reconstructing an African aesthetic whose assumptions, as I have earlier indicated, make no reference to Black aesthetic values. Although the story's dialogue explicitly privileges African discourse and, therefore, unconsciously problematizes African rather than Black aesthetic values, the author/narrator appears to be unaware of the debt such a privileging owes to Euro-colonial values.

It is through a total suppression of dialogue between the characters that the author/narrator expresses the story's concerns with the historical and political contradictions plaguing this independent African country. These concerns are voiced only through the old man's trombone and the author-narrator's monologic utterances. The absence of any reference to Black values and the monologic expressions of the values of Africanness, reveal

the inherently monologic preoccupations of the story's Africa-centred consciousness. The problems of coexistence and post-colonial socio-economic adjustment of the old and new Africans reflect broadly the ideological crisis of neo-colonial Africa.

#### **2.3.4 Conquest and Settlement**

Mathatha Tsedu's 'Forced Landing', which is also the anthology's title story, uses the parodic potential of fiction in order to narrate the advent of political conquest. The political plot takes the incident of settlement in a country called 'Anazia'<sup>40</sup> as its narrative subject. A cruising missile from Mars to Saturn is forced by food shortages to make an emergency landing on Jupiter. It soon turns out that the motive of the landing is one of invading the Jupiterians/Anazians rather than that of reinforcing food supplies. The Martians' conspiracy is uncovered and they are then charged with conspiring to overthrow an independent country. Since the penalty for this offence is death, they are then executed by the firing squad.

This complex political plot raises some interesting questions relating to the combination of political and fictional concerns in parodying the science fiction genre. It also suggests important implications about the aesthetic significance of place, Anazia, as an aesthetic expression of

the sense of identity established through an affinity with that country. This story's parody of science fiction concerns such aspects as a fantastic space voyage, the use of flying objects like space crafts and missiles, the use of futuristic dates such as 2561 (1652) (Mutloatse 1988:69) and also the inversion of real names like Azania(Anazia) (Mutloatse 1988:69) or South Africa (Safrika) (Mutloatse 1988:70).

These parodic aspects serve to transpose the mundane South African political realities to the level of an alternative socio-political reality corresponding to the author/narrator's world view. Writing about the general aspects of Science Fiction, Darko Suvin observes that

...as differentiated from fantasy tale or mythological tale, SF does not posit another superordinated and "more real" reality but an alternative on the same ontological level as the author's empirical reality ... the necessary correlate of the novum is an alternate reality, one that possesses a different historical time corresponding to different human relationships and sociocultural norms actualized by the narration (Mutloatse 1979:71).

Some of these elements of Science Fiction in this story are expressed through the author/narrator's use of inverted socio-cultural, historical and political relationships actualised through the incident of conflict between the invading Martians and the indigenous 'Anazians'.

The author/narrator's alternative reality is posited on a historical plane which draws a parallel between the



invasion of Anazia and that of 'Safrika'. It is through a history encyclopaedia brought from the moon by the astronauts who went there in 2560 that the 'Anazians' come to be aware that:

In one of the continents called Afrika there is a country called Safrika. The natives of the country were going through sheer hell at the hands of a handful of settlers. These settlers had conned the local population into allowing them to plant vegetables and fruit. The settlers, however, on realizing that Azania - as it was then called - was very fertile, annexed the land by using sophisticated weapons combined with subtle diplomacy and religion. The settlers then declared themselves rulers over the local population and outlawed their culture as barbaric...The next generation in that country cursed the older generation for selling their birthrights (Mutloatse 1988:70-1).

The alternative socio-political events which occurred in this place or continent called Afrika parallel the events which took place in the country of the Safrikans. It is through this encyclopaedic information that the Anazians and/or Safrikans remain vigilant and succeed in dislodging the invading martians and/or settlers.

Within the narration of this socio-political conflict, some significant expressions about the nature of the respective African and Black aesthetics and that of the other people of 'colour' emerge. Whereas 'Afrika' or Africa<sup>42</sup> is concretely defined in terms of a continental or pan-African sense of belonging and consciousness (Mutloatse 1988:70), through its personalized use in referring to

pan-African sense of belonging and consciousness (Mutloatse 1988:70), through its personalized use in referring to characters like Mr Afrika Zwelethu (Mutloatse 1988:69), the Black and White values, on the other hand, are implicitly defined through references to colour or racial consciousness and otherness (Mutloatse 1988:70). The aesthetic assumptions of these positions implicitly share a common tendency of turning broad generalizations (such as an 'all Africa-consciousness' and an 'all Black-consciousness') into the constitutive principles of their aesthetic assumptions.

Even the real historical names like those of Jan Van Riebeeck, the Dutch commander who established a settlement in the Cape for the DEIC in 1652 (Mutloatse 1988:71) and Hector Peterson, the first victim of police shootings in the Soweto riots (Mutloatse 1988:72) are used as instances of the author/narrator's empirical reality which is transposed into and judged through the alternative 'Safrikan' historical time and events. The author-narrator's alternative reality offers some kind of mental emancipation from the sheer hell of the story's hitherto historically repressive South African situation.

Whereas in Nkosi's and Head's stories there was no explicit preoccupation with the issue of conquest, in this story, on the other hand, the elder Safrikan generation was cursed for selling their birthright which the next generation vowed to win back (Mutloatse 1988:71). Although this curse did not mean an outright rejection of the elders,

it relegated them to a rear-guard socio-political position. The socio-political gulf, implicit in the curse, challenges the collective assumptions of the editor's project. It also challenges the historically homogenizing accounts of political conquest and domination contained in the editorial comments of this anthology.

The editor's project of collectively reconstructing the African aesthetic tradition, through concerns with place-consciousness in Tsedu's story, is fraught with political contradictions. Some of these contradictions, like the African intergenerational concerns in Tsedu's story, reflect the ideological ambiguities between, on the one hand, Tsedu's privileging of the continental 'Pan-African/Afrikan' aesthetic and, on the other hand, the editor's preoccupation with a racially determined and Black majority and/or collective transethnic aesthetic.

Although the collective reconstruction of the Black aesthetic was to be achieved, according to Mutloatse, through the sudden impact of a Forced Landing on Black people, the meaning of this landing in Tsedu's story does not necessarily give rise to a similar socio-political notion of landing. The forced landing of the Martians is ideologically antithetical to that of the anthology's motive of collective aesthetic reconstruction. Its antithesis lies in the fact that whereas the Safrikans saw conquest as an historically 'Pan-African/Afrikan' problem, Mutloatse saw it

as a specifically racial and/or regional problem between the Black and White South African races.

The only level of convergence between these landings takes place at the level of Mutloatse's and Tsedu's literary intervention in respectively attempting to re-establish a Black and/or African literary tradition. Although this was an important development, the fact still remains that the experience of a forced landing may not have had a uniform meaning to all the individual 'landers'. Each lander may have repressed his individual understanding of the impact in order to facilitate a collective response of all the Martians on board the spacecraft. There is, within this collective landing effort, a transethnic African and/or Black landing experience which defines their collective cultural and literary experience.

Although the subtleties of forced landing in Mutloatse's project were mainly concerned with the literary intervention on behalf of the literary tradition of the Black majority, in Tsedu's project such an intervention was subsumed in an ideologically specific agenda of using the 'Pan-African' aesthetic as a tool for critiquing the historical incident of settlement and its political consequences of conquest and domination.

### 2.3.5 Mphahlele's African Paradox

In Mphahlele's 'Grieg On A stolen Piano' we have a situation in which racial or Black concerns override those about Africa and Africanness. There is an emphasis on racial experience as a determinant of South African social relations. Although the story is set in the South Africa of the 1950s, its concerns persisted right up to the era which Mzamane refers to as the 'Soweto' era (Mzamane 1986:xx). These are concerns with the plight of the African and Black people under the South African conditions of racial oppression. The story's subject, therefore, is one of reflecting on the workings of race consciousness in Johannesburg long before the emergence of Black Consciousness.

The story's socio-political plot revolves around the expression of the political experiences of the transindividual protagonist, Uncle. Uncle devises every conceivable means to survive the tyranny of racial oppression: he plays Mohapeloa's 'Leba' on a stolen piano, 'He is a self-made man who, despite having reached the top in his profession, finds difficulties making ends meet, unless he supplements his meagre income from his salary by some other means, mostly illegal' (Mzamane 1986:xii-xiii). Uncle is strikingly a man of all trades; he was, at one time or another, a labourer on an Afrikaner's farm, a teacher, an

illicit diamond dealer, a gambler, a disenchanted husband, a musician, a beauty contest organizer and also a preacher.

The story expresses the emergent Black experience by juxtaposing it with its dominant White counterpart. Somewhere in between these racial poles, the author/narrator reflects on the passively rear-guard African presence which he unconsciously supposes, through his presentation of Uncle's identity in both African and Black terms, to be synonymous with the Black presence as well.

As a counter to White racism, Uncle's Blackness assumes an active political role which, for the time being, shifts his detribalized Africanness to a rear-guard position. It is in the description and presentation of Uncle's character that these concepts acquire their distinctive socio-political and material connotations. It is also in Uncle's involvement in several altercations with the Whites - be they farm foremen, educational authorities, post office clerks or street White boys - that the author/narrator gives Uncle's Blackness its sharpened political and material identity.

In his introduction to the collection Mzamane explains the complexities of Uncle's identity in the following terms:

...the central figure of Uncle personifies Mphahlele's 'African paradox'- detribalised, urbanised and westernised, but still African. There is in Uncle a synthesis of the traditional and westernized African (Mzamane 1986:xii).

As a critique of this crossroads positioning of Uncle's character, it can be argued that Uncle's 'African paradox' implicitly shares its socio-political terrain with that of a White othering 'Black presence'. Uncle learns about the problems associated with his identity as a result of his Blackness, rather than his Africanness, which often led him into big big trouble with the whites (Mzamane 1986:10). To the racially obsessed Whites, his Blackness constituted a wrath-provoking political menace.

As a trope of the socio-political and literary implications of Blackness, the author/narrator uses this concept in a manner which is markedly different from that in which it is used as a metaphor expressing the Afrocentric concerns. There are two sharply contrasting situations where the uses of these concepts reflect their underlying socio-political stances of, respectively, 'rear-guardism' and aggressive social advance. These occur in the episodes where the frightened and fleeing Africans who had engaged in a fight with the racially marauding White gangs are characteristically described as 'the Africans who took to their heels' and also in the instance where we are told that during Uncle's confrontation with the White clerk at the post office, '... the white clerk seemed to feel insulted at the sudden confrontation of such articulate human blackness as thrust itself through the wire mesh of the counter.' (Mzamane 1986:11) A somewhat similar observation on the racial combativeness of the Black world outlook is made by

the author/narrator in Head's 'The Prisoner Who Wore Glasses': 'Span One was assertive and it was beyond the scope of white warders to handle assertive black men.' (Mzamane 1986:69)

Uncle's Black physiognomy was, however, also the most insulted part of his being according to which he was sometimes referred to as '...die pikswart een, die bobbejaan!' ('the pitch-black one, the baboon') (Mzamane 1986:10) or as 'a black Kaffir, a Kaffir monkey, black as tar' (Mzamane 1986:11).<sup>42</sup>

All these instances reflect the conflictual nature of the relations between the Black and White world outlooks. These were conflicts between an emergent Black humanism, if ever there is such a phenomenon, and a dominant White humanism. Consequently, the separation between these worlds was to become 'naturalized' through reinforcement by a racially absolute ideology of White and Black 'apartitionality'.<sup>43</sup>

Although, as Derrida indicates, this term generally sets itself apart even before it can do so to humans, its innate power rests on its institutionalisation as an enforced socio-political difference. We encounter it in its practical manifestations in the story's incident of heated exchange between the Uncle and a new White post office clerk at the post office where there is an impatient long queue waiting for the new clerk to finish arranging and recording postal stamps:



The white man seems to recoil at the sight of Uncle's face. Then, as if to fall back on the last mode of defence, he shouts, 'What are you? What are you? Just a black Kaffir, a Kaffir monkey, black as tar. Now anymore from you and I'll bloody well refuse to serve the whole lot of you (Mzamane 1986:11).

This is the kind of apartitionality which an overly race-conscious society of that time used as a socio-political instrument of advance and defence. Through this confrontation with Uncle's articulate human Blackness, the White clerk tasted the bitter medicine of his own apartitional mentality. The clerk's intimidation by Uncle's volume of Blackness reflects the extent to which this ideology of racial difference came close to completely insulating the Black and White races.

Within this transindividual, transethnic and communal Black world where 'A black man never starves if he lives among his people...' (Mzamane 1986:11), there is an inherent material exploitation best exemplified through the Uncle's exploitation of an unsuspecting girl from the countryside of the Western Transvaal who is smuggled to a beauty contest for a market price. Since beauty contests were specifically metropolitan events, and also since they required that every entrant should have metropolitan physiological features, Uncle's determination to transform her into a suburban marketable type goes to the extent of changing her name from Tumelo to Mary-Jane.

The process of transforming the woman takes place in stages which involve turning her into the `type called in township slang `rubber-necks', the ostentatiously jazz type' (Mzamane 1986:19). It also involves turning her into a marketable product about which `Uncle and I knew we were going to deliver a presentable article of good healthy flesh, comportment, and luscious charm' (Mzamane 1986:19). Uncle's commodification of the village girl reveals an underlying exploitation in the inside situation of the story's African and/or Black world. The urban-rural tension of an Afrocentric consciousness is also echoed in stories like, for instance, Themba's `The Urchins' (Mzamane 1986:45-46) and Motsitsi's `Mita' (Mzamane 1986: 56).

### **2.3.6 The Context of Soweto Riots**

In Mzamane's `The Day of the Riots' we have a story which takes as its central issue the 1976 Soweto revolt. The revolt was of such a nature that it violently set the marginal Black concerns against a dominant metropolitan White centre. The story is an attempt to historicise the events of 1976 so that the reader may fathom them within that fictionalised historical context. Writing a commentary on the story, Mzamane has noted that its primary motive was an attempt

... to convey, in a way that the several accounts of the Soweto uprisings written by journalists and academics do not, what it felt like to be one of those involved or caught up in the crisis and how life in Soweto was transformed in its response to the call of students' (Mzamane 1986:xxiv).

It should be clear then that this narrative combines some of Mzamane's personal experiences with his fictional concerns. As one of the people who were on the political inside of these events, he imparts an insider's perception of the social and political disruptions of those events.

Within that inside world of a rioting Soweto, there was a microcosmic 'insider/outsider' dialectic (Bennet 1990). The township's councillors, intellectuals and other elders felt politically marginalized by the children who had established a virtual government in the township (Mzamane 1986:140). In a situation of rioting such as the one we have in the story, even the parents' authority came under the youths' control. Within the family of the story's protagonist, Sipho, there were political demarcations between parents and children. These demarcations were, however, not as immediately apparent as those which were taking place in the streets where, for instance, such authority figures as the township's councillors were perceived as political outsiders representing the interests of an outside albeit dominant metropolitan centre.

The insider/outsider dialectic leads the reader into critically perceiving the socio-political positions of Rathebe and Chabeli, the two prominent members of the

township's advisory board who entertained White M.P.s and therefore won the sympathies of the commercial media (Mzamane 1986:142), as ideologically placing them in the position of African and/or Black outsiders within the inside world of Soweto.

The fact that they were inside Soweto, the reader may infer, did not make them part of the township's socio-political and class struggles which were struggles between the 'White centre' and a 'Black margin'. Although they had had an illusion of power and control in Soweto, the extent of their unpopularity and 'outsideness' is expressed by the author/narrator in the following terms:

The advisory board's function was to make the views of the people known to the authorities. But few township residents supported it, so that its elections never drew more than five per cent of the electorate. Nevertheless, the government never failed to point out that the advisory board was the only democratically elected body to represent African opinion (Mzamane 1986:41).

In the South African political context of the 70s Chabeli and Rathebe would have represented, within the Soweto inside world, the government's distorted version of African and/or Black political identity and leadership. As functionaries of the government's policies, Chabeli and Rathebe represented, in my view, the dominant ideology's own version of 'legitimate' African and/or Black leadership.

As the government's Uncle Toms, Chabeli and Rathebe also had many other officially sanctioned descriptions such as

`township tycoons', `non-white socialites', `black moderates' and `civic leaders' (Mzamane 1986:142). The most important of all these labels is `Black moderates' which has politically loaded connotations. The government used this label in order to distinguish Chabeli and Rathebe from the rest of Soweto's `resistant' African and/or Black community. In order to set them apart from the rest of that community, the government invested the concepts African and Black with their own political meanings. These were designed `conservatively' to counter the homogenic `radical' association of Blackness and Africanness (inspired by Black Consciousness) with the cultural, social and political `emancipation' of the Soweto community.

There is, in the author/narrator's exposition, a close interplay between the concepts African and Black. Wherever the author/narrator makes use of these concepts, he does this without indicating the political and social boundaries of these concepts. It is my argument that however politically loaded the author/narrator's definition is, a large part of it is motivated by the workings of conceptual insensitivity and an undifferentiating critical disposition.

If the reader is expected truistically to accept that within Mzamane's aesthetic the African values are incorporated in those of the Black world, how are we then supposed to account for the author/narrator's almost interchangeable use of the concepts African and Black in describing the Soweto uprisings? Is the reader supposed to

endorse this confusion or simply accept it as a conceptually and ideologically ineradicable malady of the African and Black world views? In the face of this conceptual and world view malady, I wish to suggest that the source of confusion here is the permeating workings of the 'political unconscious'.<sup>44</sup>

We find this political unconscious at work in many instances where the respective African and Black concepts are indiscriminately used in the story. Here are some instances where the concept African is used in the author/narrator's formulation of its political essence: it is used in the narration of the incident of the students' march against the imposition of Afrikaans in African schools (Mzamane 1986:135); in the government's reference to the advisory board as the only democratically elected body to represent African opinion (Mzamane 1986:141); in the government's attribution of the low voting percentage in Soweto to the fact that Africans were as yet unaccustomed to the intricacies of democratic procedures.' (Mzamane 1986:141); in reference to the 'unlimited' business opportunities which were available to the African businessmen in the homelands (Mzamane 1986:142); in the presentation of the boards' deliberation on the economic ventures like the 'African Development Bank' and the first 'African-owned supermarket' and also in the reference to the proposed 'African Chamber of Commerce' (Mzamane 1986:143). It is used by Sipho's manager in pointing at the

unreliability of Africans and their abuse of company vehicles (Mzamane 1986:145); in the author/narrator's reference to the African market (Mzamane 1986:147); and, finally, in the hyperbolic presentation of the Soweto darkness as a treacherous African night (Mzamane 1986:149).

All these uses of this concept indicate the complex workings of a hegemonic or ruling class ideology whose manipulation of its meaning becomes appropriated by the story's author/narrator and characters. We are not sure, I may caution here, whether it is the Soweto community which does the appropriation or whether that community is appropriated by the hegemonic distortions of the meanings of the concepts African and Black. What emerges from such appropriations is a world view which remains unconscious of its own ideological entrapment. It is my argument here that in the face of bannings and the hegemonic ideology's attempt to dehistoricize Africans by distorting their past, the only permitted uses of the 'African' concept were those which were ideologically prescribed and sanctioned by the Afrikaner apartheid and capitalist ideology. This ideology became, in turn, reflected in such political instruments and processes as the African Development Bank, the African Chamber of Commerce, the African advisory board and other ideological state apparatuses.<sup>45</sup>

The uses of the 'Black' concept also reveal the immanent workings of the political unconscious inherent in its assumptions of racial otherness. The Black people,

according to my view here, would have remained racially unconscious of themselves if it were not for the political condition of White racial otherness.

I contend that what might generally be considered a truism of Black political consciousness in the story, shares its ideological terrain with the politically unconscious lacunae of this very consciousness. Some of the instances where this concept is used in the story, include the following: it is used by Nomsa, the protagonist's young and politically immature daughter, who chooses the song 'Black Power' (the political slogan of the Black Consciousness movement) when asked by her parents to sing a song (Mzamane 1986:135); it is also used by the author/narrator in describing Venter who, after regaining consciousness, absent-mindedly wonders whether the Black women in Sipho's house are actually the ones Sipho has promised to organise in Gaborone (Mzamane 1986: 145); it is also used by the White media in its reference to Chabeli and Rathebe as Black moderates (Mzamane 1986:142) and, finally, it is used descriptively in presenting the Black bus drivers who, when fleeing from the rioting youth, retire with their companies' takings to their homes or to nearby shebeens (Mzamane 1986:136).

The political unconscious emerges through the child's essentially naive political articulations which, in themselves, are echoing the political street unconscious of the marauding youth who have usurped the historically and



politically reliable leadership of conscious workers and parents.<sup>46</sup> In addition, it reveals, through Venter's dreamy recollections, the moral decadence of the Black petty bourgeoisie which, through Siphos conception, reduces the status of Black women to sexual objects.

The uses of the political unconscious in its characterizing of Rathebe and Chabeli as Black moderates and in its description of the fleeing Black bus drivers, have material and political connotations. As long as the moderates were able to act as functionaries of hegemonic ideology and ideological state apparatuses, they did so in a state of unconsciousness about how the events around them had politically brought them into collision with the militant but historically immature Soweto youth. And, finally, the bus drivers' act of fleeing from the youth has a double meaning: they either fled because of their political impotence or they fled because, according to their logic, the occasion allowed for their economic enrichment and drinking so as temporarily to forget about the street events.

In spite of all the government's politically distorted definitions of the concepts African and Black, the Soweto riots, in my view, amounted to a rejection of those politically distorted versions of these concepts. In line with the Black Consciousness notion of an incorporated African world view, the author/narrator singles out this concept in order to live out, for a while, the larger Black

concerns so that he may concentrate on the African townships which started and were at the centre of the riots.

The socio-political contradictions of insider/outsider relationships taking place in Soweto's differently conceived African and Black worlds reflect the inner contradictions abounding in Mzamane's project of using the Black Consciousness ethos in reconstructing a collectively 'organic' aesthetic. Instead of ending with a story which lives up to the expectation of presenting a collective Black aesthetic, he offers a transethnically directed focus which foregrounds the immanent linguistic and ideological contradictions of his Black aesthetic. There lurks a deep political and historical irony in the perception that whereas people of mixed descent (such as those from the Western Cape) generally consider Afrikaans as their *lingua franca*, the African members of that world are perceiving it as a hegemonic ideological state apparatus.

### **2.3.7 Ndebele and the Township Intellectuals**

In Njabulo Ndebele's story 'The Music of The Violin' we have a narrative which uses the African and Black concepts in starkly homologous terms. By the very nature of its starkness, this homologous use presents an immediate challenge to the critic's or researcher's sensitivity to the precision of conceptual meaning. A cursory reading of

the use of the concepts African and Black in this story gives a misleading impression that the idea of a place-centred consciousness is analogous to that of a race-centred world outlook. It is my argument that no matter how hard a discourse of this nature may try to conceal its intrinsic contradictions, a process of unearthing such contradictions will reveal the dialectical subtext of Ndebele's discourse.

Some of the contradictions in Ndebele's discourse are concealed in the inward view his author/narrator takes toward the socio-cultural conditions of an 'African' middle class family in Soweto. The story's protagonist, Vukani, is a young boy whose parents want to socialize him into their middle class world view. He constantly has to entertain his parents' guest by playing music on the violin. Whenever he shows signs of unwillingness, his parents reprimand him until one particular day when he refuses flatly. Vukani is not only harassed by his parents, he also faces harassment from the local township boys who regard him as a social recluse and snob.

Ndebele takes as the subject of his story the socio-cultural critique of the middle class arrivisme of Vukani's parents. This manifests itself in their class positions, social habits and ambitious desires for self-distinction. Vukani's father is a school inspector and his mother a nurse. Their pride in their middle class social status sets them apart from the ordinary members of their community.

They are only prepared to associate with other 'African' and 'White' middle class friends.

The author/narrator in Ndebele's story has an unconscious perception of the identities and class positions of the characters who are homologously presented as African and Black middle class members. One of the possible ways of arriving at a conscious critical perception of the social status and identity of these characters is suggested by Bourdieu who argues that

...one can see how it is that the manner of using symbolic goods, especially those regarded as markers of excellence, constitutes one of the key markers of 'class' and also the ideal weapon in strategies of distinction, that is... 'the infinitely varied art of marking distances' (1984:66).

My analysis of the social position and identity of this story's characters will examine the use of symbolic goods as markers of self distinction in the Soweto setting.

Some social habits of Vukani's parents (their obsessive preoccupation with drinking tea in the drawing room and, in contrast with the township poverty surrounding them, their exclusive concern with the social advancement of their children) not only point at their strategies of class distinction, but also highlight their alienation from the communities for whose benefit, to use another of Bourdieu's expressions, they purportedly acquire their 'cultural capital' (1984:12) or level of education. Their alienation is such that it reflects the social life of this middle

class as removed from the narrator's undefined Soweto social milieu. This is a class which, whilst seeking to be part of the Soweto socio-political milieu, also aspires towards identification with the metropolitan White middle class world outlook. This is why the business of tea drinking, for instance, becomes in itself a fashionable strategy of social distinction.

Theirs is a social life which has created symbolic demarcations within Vukani's family. Vukani has learnt to follow and know what is happening in his parents' living room from the distance of his bedroom: 'A delicate clink of cups and saucers told Vukani the visitors had been served tea' (Mzamane 1986:95). It is not the business of tea drinking as such which creates these social divisions within Vukani's family, but the parents' obsessive preoccupation with it.

In instances where these middle class members use the concepts African and Black as designating their identities, a sense of immediate alienation between their social values and their desired identity presents itself. It finds its most explicit expression when Vukani's mother explains her dislike of visits by their relatives:

'Relatives,' the mother came out, 'can be a real nuisance. Once you have opened the door, they come trooping in like ants...Whites saw this problem a long time ago' (Mzamane 1986:110).

Vukani's father's attenuated and unothering reply to this explanation is that 'Whites are whites; Africans are Africans' (Mzamane 1986:110). There is a terminological contortion in the logic of the story's discourse of otherness: what lies at the heart of this unothering contrast between a race-conscious (White) and a place-conscious (African) discourse is, in my view, the Gordimerian question of who decides whether there is such a being as a White African?<sup>47</sup>

One can in fact extend the terms of this question by rephrasing it: Is the racial category sufficient as a marker of identity or should it function as a cognate of place consciousness? Once posed in this way, this question permits us to reflect on the phenomenologies of the being of White/Black and of Africa/West as categories which are premised respectively on the differential notions of race (Black/White) and place (Africa/West). The absence of this balance in the equation of Ndebele's discourse of otherness constitutes the source of conceptual contradiction and terminological contortion imbedded in the story's discourse.

This contradiction and terminological contortion becomes transposed and, consequently, reflected in the dialogue of the characters. The dialogue between Vukani's father and mother on the relatives is reflective, for instance, of the acuteness of the alienation which determines her to shun the relatives with whom, according to the author/narrator's Afrocentric frame, she is supposed to have a communal and

implicitly place-conscious African kinship. The impact of this alienation is felt by Vukani who envies his friend Doksi for having relatives he can run to in times of trouble. Instead of visiting the relatives, Vukani's mother prefers to be visited by friends like Mrs Kaplinsky and Beatrice with whom she shares a middle class social status.

Other situations where the concepts African and Black are used in the story reflect Ndebele's unconscious failure to perceive their differential meanings. One is not sure whether Ndebele is ridiculing this middle class by letting his characters use such expressions as 'Peace women of Africa' (Mzamane 1986:97), 'fellow Africans' (Mzamane 1986:96) 'Africans elsewhere in the continent' (Mzamane 1986:101), 'Black nation' (Mzamane 1986:97) and 'Black with anger' (Mzamane 1986:103).

Michael Vaughan rightly observes that in Ndebele's fiction 'The destiny of the intellectual, as Ndebele imagines it, is to provide an intellectual guidance and leadership for the wider, largely non-intellectual, society of the townships' (Vaughan 1990:189). Vaughan's analysis has a major critical bearing on Ndebele's project of assigning leadership positions to the emergent intellectuals who do not belong to any of the African, the Black or the White middle class worlds. Even though Ndebele offers a critique of this leadership position of the intellectuals, he does this within carefully circumscribed ideological parameters

critical only of those intellectuals who do not fall in the category of his African cultural 'aristocracy'.

This critique is explicitly expressed in the characteristic feeling of alienation permeating Dr Zwane's observation on 'How difficult it is to bring up a child properly in Soweto! To give them culture. African people just turn away from advancement' (Mzamane 1986:112). This statement reflects a world view crisis between the alienated African intellectuals whose position of despair about African cultural advancement fails to take cognizance of the political and material realities of oppression which militate against the 'legitimate culture' (Bourdieu 1984:18) of the pseudo-intellectuals of Dr Zwane's calibre.

The implicit leadership agenda of these intellectuals also expresses itself in in the middle class characters' wishes for their children to be their 'natural' intellectual and middle class leadership heirs. This becomes apparent when Vukani's parents, who compare him with Mozart (Mzamane 1986:107), consequently want him to conduct himself in a manner befitting such a legendary name. It would seem that the only way, according to Ndebele, in which African intellectuals can assume their leadership roles is through their spontaneous fusion and internalization of their acquired European values with, according to the author/narrator's aesthetic frame, the indigenous African ones. Consequently, his critique is directed at those specific intellectuals who have lost touch with their



African (geographic) and Black (racial) values as conceived by Ndebele. What Vukani's father describes as 'advancement' implicitly refers to a particular form of advancement, namely Afro-Western advancement which is the ultimate representation of a politically unconscious world view - a world view which, no matter how determined its African or Black stance may be, still has to articulate itself through and within the limits of ideological parameters permitted and sanctioned in an historical, cultural, racial, and ideological hiatus between Western Europe and Africa and also between Whites and Blacks in South Africa.

The problem with Ndebele's agenda of promoting this hybrid Afro-European culture in African intellectual leadership may reside in his inability to specify the exact methodology to be used in effecting it. None of the characters in this story achieves this leadership level. The disillusionment and ideological displacement of these characters is the only problem Ndebele has with their social attitude: if these characters incorporated the indigenous 'African' cultural elements, according to Ndebele's implicit agenda, their intellectual leadership positions would be restored. Other class and underclass forms of township life would simply honour their leadership positions.

### 2.3.8 The Effect of Chiaroscuro in Matthews'

#### 'The Park'

'The Park' is a story set in South Africa in the era of racial segregation. Its plot revolves around the depiction of a young boy's longing to use, contrary to the legislative stipulations of the 1960s, the amenities reserved for White people. When the boy is refused access, he naïvely questions the basis of this refusal and insists on his being allowed by the guard of the park to use the recreational facilities. From a presentation of this plot the angle of narration moves to a description of a maid in one White household.

It is through the portrayal of the maid in terms of a chiaroscuro between the Blackness of her skin and the whiteness of her starched uniform that the author/narrator reinforces the theme of racial otherness:

A round faced African girl, her blackness heightened by the white starched uniform she wore, opened the kitchen door to let him in (Mzamane 1986:37).

Although the description confounds the African and Black forms of valuation, the racial preoccupations of the author/narrator have an elaborateness which transcends an Africa or place-centred consciousness. This elaborateness may have been engendered by the then appartitional and racial-capitalist discourse.

While the starkness of the chiaroscuro acknowledges the role of African forms of valuation in the construction of the 'girl's' identity, it also underplays them in the interests of heightening the effect which a racist discourse has on the construction of identity within a specific context of an entrenched hegemonic segregation. Unlike in Ndebele's story where the 'Black' concept is used without any pointers to its intended impact at the level of aesthetic consciousness and social function, the 'Black' concept in Matthews' story has an immediate function of contrasting Black marginality against the dominant White centre.

#### **2.4 Conclusion**

It would appear that Mutloatse's and Mzamane's projects of collectively reconstructing the respective African and Black aesthetic traditions were manifested only in attaining the literary objective of using the anthology form as a political vehicle. In this way they could represent the literary and cultural experiences of those writers who wished to express through the short story their viewpoints on African and/or Black issues. This process also entailed the construction of a transindividual ethos which, according to the editors, was meant to reflect the collective values of African and/or Black viewpoints. Such a situation led to an unconscious suppression of the conceptual and ideological

differences in meaning between the concepts 'African' and 'Black'.

This kind of suppression also led to an uncritical acceptance of the English language which, as I have indicated in my foregoing discussion, still retains a colonial and imperial function. It follows, therefore, that the reigning conceptual confusion about the meanings of 'African' and 'Black' concepts is an ideological replication of a deeply imbedded world view crisis whose hybrid 'Afro-European' or 'Black' and 'White' multiculturalism serves the purpose of ideologically concealing the African and Black condition of entrapment in the predicament of using literarily a language, English, whose cultural background, Englishness, expresses an exclusive heritage of the metropolis.

Even in the light of this cultural exclusivity, it can still be argued plausibly that the process of historical interaction between English and the indigenous languages of South Africa may lead to the birth of an ideologically decentred 'dialect'.

## Notes

1. This 'homogeneous' African and/or Black South African literary tradition is, in my view, no natural successor to the Bantu precolonial cultural processes. If it is at all related to these processes, such a relationship is historically problematic. With the disruptive impacts of such incidents as colonialism and imperialism in Africa, our contemporary African and/or Black writers ought to exercise caution in asserting and claiming to be natural heirs of indigenous Bantu traditions. Be that as it may, these writers have been engaged in protracted struggles to forge, through indigenous and foreign languages like English, their cultural and literary traditions. They have done this from the early 19th century right up to the 20th century under apartheid. This tradition reached a point of relative decline as a result of political bannings in the 1960s, the exodus of many writers and state harassment of those who remained behind. Writing about the conditions of literary production in the 1970s, Mzamane points out that 'The majority of writers of the Black Consciousness era began their work in a near vacuum, with few works in circulation by older writers on which they could model their own writings. They had no surviving tradition of their own which they could follow' (1991:179). Lewis Nkosi (1986:343-50) makes similar observations. Only a few writers like Don Mattera, Richard Rive, James Matthews and others of the '50s generation remained and continued to write. Those writers like Sepamla, Ndebele and others who emerged in the 1970s also used the English language to protest against the repressive conditions under which they and their people were forced to live. Writing about this protest aspect, Nkosi observes that 'Black literature in particular, especially in European languages, has relentlessly sought to expose the conditions of its own existence: conquest, exploitation, and racial discrimination of which, by its very definition, it is a symptom' (1986:434).

2. Even though the use of expressions like 'Black Africa' has become part of the discourse on issues pertaining to Africa, such an expression is an imprecise conceptual hybrid rather than a simple tautology. This expression has some illogical presuppositions: firstly, it assumes that the identity of Africa is always predetermined by the racial features of her people and, secondly, it also assumes that there may even be an alternative White Africa, since Black is supposed to be the antithesis of White. The argument of this chapter is that there is no arbitrary interconnection between Blackness and Africa. If this is accepted as the basis of our argument, it can further be pointed out that it is only after we have examined these concepts as separate

entities that we can then be able to claim any interconnection, if it exists at all, between them.

3. I am indebted to Kelwyn Sole's (1983) uses of this concept in pointing at problematics surrounding what he terms the 'organicist assumptions' in the Black writers' claims of representing their communities.

4. From about 1970, during the period leading to the 1976 political crisis in South Africa, the ideology of Black Consciousness had a pervasive cultural influence. This led writers like Mutloatse, Gwala, Mzamane, Serote and others to express an essentially Black Consciousness protest aesthetic which culminated, for instance, in the dissolution of the multiracial PEN writers' organisation. It was during the frenzied moments of that influence that Black Consciousness values may have been considered as incorporating even those of the African aesthetic.

5. The socio-political relations of 'marginality' and 'dominance' have a uniquely inverted character in South Africa where the Black majority consisting of Africans, Asians and Coloureds is dominated by a White minority consisting of English, Afrikaners, Greeks, Portuguese, Chinese, Germans and many other ethnic groupings. Within the Black world the Africans, for instance, are in the majority and the Asians and Coloureds are in the minority. The same applies in the White world where the Afrikaners are in the majority and the English and other ethnic groups in the minority. Also see Gordimer (1980) in this regard.

6. For a detailed discussion of the assumptions and nature of the White English literary tradition in South Africa, see Coetzee's discussion of what he terms a 'problematical South African-colonial identity' (1988:8) and Gerard (ed) (1986: 173-230).

7. It should be noted here that not many White people in South Africa have either a rudimentary or working knowledge of indigenous Bantu languages. For this reason, I would argue that their identification with South Africa is indeed problematic.

8. Writing long before the publication of Mutloatse's anthology, Nkosi also drew the conclusion that 'White writers may write angry poems and drama against the state but their works are never described as "protest"' (1986:434). This effectively meant that no matter how hard the White writers may have then tried to identify with their oppressed Black and/or African colleagues they had, according to Nkosi and Mutloatse, to do so from outside the Black monopolized protest tradition. They were precluded from this tradition by virtue of their being White and privileged. In the headnote to articles by Coetzee and

Wade, Gerard provides the following account about this racial dichotomization of writers in S.A.: 'white authors, whether they resort to Afrikaans or English or both, cannot but be members of the overprivileged class in a basically colonial society. Whereas the non-white writer knows in his bones and arteries what it means to be a victim of the system, white protest against the selfsame system does not derive from personal experience but usually from some abstract sense of Christian duty or Marxist solidarity, from moral indignation at the painful treatment meted out to others, and from some essentially imaginative and imaginary identification with the oppressed, from fear, too' (1986:216). Gerard's observations, although valid to some extent, ignore, among other things, the fact that several of these White writers did, at various times, experience state persecution of one kind or another.

9. Questions about the actual nature of the relations between these writers and their audiences have been dealt with in a number of critical articles among which is Kelwyn Sole's thorough analysis of what he terms a privileged class of intellectuals out of which these writers emerge (Sole 1983: see especially pages 46, 65,68). I still, however, have some reservations about Sole's synonymous use of the African and Black concepts in his article. Also see note 13 below). Sepamla defines the African writer in S.A. as '...an African (among Coloureds and Indians). He is urban (lacking some knowledge of his counterpart in the 'homelands').' (1982:115). Mphahlele also argued that 'The African writer who is worth anything listens to the speech of his people, to the ring of dialogue in his home language and struggles to find an appropriation of the English equivalent.' (1964:303) Whereas Sepamla, on the one hand, displays a limited awareness of the role played by language in facilitating a relation between the writers and their audiences, Mphahlele, on the other hand, displays an unconscious affection for the English equivalent which, in terms of the illiteracy rate and low readership level in the townships, may not even have been accessible to the working class and other such sub-classes as the hooligans and the unemployed peoples.

10. See Gordimer's (1980) specific arguments on the nature of 'marginality' within the White community in South Africa. Also see Mzamane's (1982:171) discussion of this relation in the Black community.

11. On the question of the relation between White and Black social values, Gwala defensively argued for the Black writers' racially exclusive expression of what he termed the 'Black experience': 'No serious writer [meaning the 'Black' writer] can allow white values and white expressions to override the Black experience.' (Gwala 1986:ix)

12. Mzamane's treatment of the stories under his editorial control demonstrates this attempt to combine his critical acumen with his pedagogic interests. This was perhaps due to the fact that, unlike Mutloatse's journalistic approach, his approach was based on his thorough literary training. In this regard, see Mzamane's 'The Study of Literature in Africa' (1977:1).

13. Kelwyn Sole is the only South African critic I know of who has thus far challenged the homogenizing organicist assumptions often made by African and/or Black writers in their claims of representing and acting as spokespersons of their oppressed communities. In his article on 'Culture, Politics and the Black writer' he points out that 'This article does not attempt to be a definitive look at recent black writing. It rather contains critical comments about some of the common assumptions used by black writers who have followed the philosophy of Black Consciousness and used this ideology in their writing (Sole 1983:37). Although he extends this concern to a critique of such expressions as 'traditional culture and literature', 'black culture and the black experience' and what these writers loosely term their black community and culture (Sole, 1983:38), this extension either underplays or is oblivious of the necessity of distinguishing African from Black concerns. His intention of critiquing the black concerns is somewhat undercut by his conception of Black and African as synonymous concepts on pages 39, 40, 41, 46, 47, 51, and 53 of this article. If the logic of his critique considers the Black Consciousness values as incorporating the African ones, such a logic either remains implicitly unexplained or is non-existent. It would have been useful to me if Sole had explicitly declared his perception of the relation between the African and Black concerns.

14. The voice of the author in some of these stories intermittently interrupts the process of narration. I have preferred to use the term author/narrator rather than Stanzel's (1984) 'authorial narrator'.

15. My understanding of the meaning of this concept is influenced by Goldmann's use of it: 'World views are *historical* and *social* facts. They are totalities of ways of thinking, feeling and acting which in given conditions are imposed on men finding themselves in a similar economic and social situation, that is, imposed on certain social groups (Goldmann 1980:112).

16. He does this by taking the African, Indian and Coloured components of this monolithic Black world as serving the interests of political solidarity which engenders a transethnic Black aesthetic.



17. According to Strini Moodley (1972:20), one of the Black Consciousness leaders, 'Long before the Western Renaissance, long before the Golden Era of Pericles there were flutes humming musical patterns in unison with the falling streams of Africa and the sitar was rising and falling in cadence with the torrential rains of India; and the skin-drum beat the rhythm to the pounding of feet as Black people mourned; prepared for war; danced in joyous festivity; and sang in prayer.' What Moodley ignores is one crucial issue which is pertinent to the Black artist's conception of the relation between the concerns of his world and those of the African world: language is at the heart of any conceptions of the precolonial and post-colonial cultural and artistic processes.

18. The choice of these stories is determined by twofold considerations: the theoretical nature of the subject of this study and the constraints of space. In my attempt to combine the theoretical concerns with the practical ones, I have selected a few major stories from each of the anthologies so as to illustrate empirically the nature and workings of the dialectical aesthetic. There are, however, other stories which, in spite of their fragmentary structural frameworks, also make use of the concepts African and Black. These will be used as back-up material in various pertinent arguments of this chapter. They include the following from Mutloatse's anthology: 'The Truth Mama' Mutloatse, 'Azikwelwa' Matthews, 'Dumani' Setuke and 'Waiting for Leila' Dangor. In Mzamane's anthology a similar pattern of story selection is operational. The minor supportive stories are the following: 'The Park' Matthews, 'The Urchin' Themba, 'The Prisoner Who Wore Glasses' Head and 'Mita' Motsisi.

19. The reader should note here that there are two levels of temporality in this story: firstly, there is the historical time of Mncina's world, and secondly, there is the text time which is the time the reader meaningfully realizes in his/her moment of engagement with the text. As for the time of the traditional African and/or Black world, John Mbiti cautions that 'The question of time is of little or no concern to African peoples in their traditional life. For them, time is simply a composition of events which have occurred, those which are inevitably or immediately to occur' (1969:16). In discussing narrative or text time see, generally, Paul Ricoeur's (1988) distinction between 'lived time' and 'universal time' and also, specifically, Rimmon Kenan's assertion that 'The narrative text as text has no other temporality than the one it metonymically derives from the process of its reading' (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983:44).

20. See Vaughan's (1990:191) criticism of Ndebele's prognosis of the problems besetting African and/or Black S.A. literature. Arguing against Ndebele's suggestion for a

hybrid oral- fictional type of storytelling, Vaughan points out that the first writer who fails to live up to this prognosis is Ndebele himself in whose stories the oral tradition contributes, if at all, very little. In the African colonial and neo-colonial contexts where the indigenous languages had/have a marginal recognition, and also where performative oral literary forms are in a state of being appropriated by the written texts, any claims to oral traditional influence by the Afro-European writers should be treated with circumspection.

21. The author/narrator's use of 'ethnic' identity here has positive and negative connotations: whereas it is positively used as a metaphoric expression of a linguistically and territorially circumscribed identity, it also negatively works against the interests of a homogeneous Black world. The Swazi ethnic interests are not collectively shared by all the members of the Black world. Since my stance holds that a collective social entity recognizes ethnic issues only in their transhistorical and transindividual nature, I have preferred to incorporate their analysis into my critique of their function as part of the editorial collective expressions.

22. I am using this concept in the sense in which Edward Said (1985) uses it in his critique of Jewish/Israeli notions differentiating the Jewish peoples from indigenous Palestinians in Palestine. The Jews do this in spite of the fact that Palestinians are natives of that country.

23. Western notions of democracy and rule through consent of the ruled presumably constitute a major threat to the absolute rule of kings and chiefs in Africa.

24. The question of landownership is at the heart of the African people's identification and self-definition. If these people have been deprived of their land, as was the case in South Africa, they would naturally fight to recover it. Fanon explains the basis of this claim to land ownership and dispossession in the following terms: 'For a colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and, above all, dignity.' (Fanon 1970:126).

25. Just as in some African and/ or Black precapitalist and post-colonial social formations there were/are unequal material relations inherently characterized by the preponderance of conquest and domination, the Swazi socio-economic conditions are still characterized by a situation whereby 'The dominant people receive tribute which is redistributed according to their social institutions and relations of production' (Hindess and Hilts in Bonner 1975:87). The economic and political irony of this situation is that it is the rich who always have to receive

from the poor. Ki-Zerbo (1962) also distinguishes the following three types of classes in the precolonial era in Africa; the mason class, the blacksmith class and the warrior class (Ki-Zerbo 1962:270).

26. See Moodley loc. cit

27. See Fanon loc. cit

28. This was the most practical expression of the transethnic communalism of precolonial societies in Africa.

29. My earlier comments on Swazi ethnicity are equally applicable to Head's use of the Tswana values in her story. Also according to Mbiti 'Traditional religions are not universal: they are tribal or natural' (Mbiti 1969:4).

30. The source of conflict between traditional religions and foreign religions like Christianity and Islam in the Sub-Saharan context may have had to do with the fact that 'Traditional religions have no missionaries to propagate them; and one individual does not preach his religion to another' (Mbiti 1969:3-4). Also see Mphahlele's examination of the writer's relation to his/her traditional religion, Christianity and what he characteristically terms 'churchianity' (Mphahlele 1972:122).

31. See Mbiti (1969:3-4) on the traditional role of the elders.

32. The critical concerns of Ezenwa-Ohaeto (1990) and Femi Ojo-Ade (1990) display a limited perception of the tensions underlying the love relationship and marriage of Ralokae and Galethebege. Though they are able to point this out, they are unable to probe deeply into the underlying complexity of the Tswana and Christian ideologies. They fail to see Ralokae, Galethebege and the missionary as transindividuals representing particular ideological systems. Furthermore, their ignorance of the dialectic between 'African' and 'Black' values leaves much to be desired.

33 The limitations of this stance of Black Consciousness transindividual and transethnic ideological projection lie in the diffuse nature of its nationalist ideology: 'Black Consciousness', argues Mafeje (1978:22), 'is a diffuse nationalist ideology. Nationalist movements can be regarded as progressive in so far as they are anti-colonialist and anti-racist, insofar as they do not see this in the context of class struggle and socialist transformation they are limited.'

34. See page 119 of this chapter for an elaborate discussion of this point.

35. Without mental and class freedom in the sense in which there is no substitution of a colonial bourgeoisie by a neo-colonial one, independent African countries will always remain the imperial satellites of western countries.

36. Also see another jaundiced treatment of the figure of the old man in Bereng Setuke's 'Dumani' (Mutloatse 1988:58)

37. My approach would also question Ashcroft's assertion that 'The post-colonial world is one in which destructive cultural encounter is changing to an acceptance of difference on equal terms' (Ashcroft 1989:36). In a situation such as the one we have in South Africa, where White people are overprivileged, it would be anachronistic to talk of difference on equal terms since the terms remain racially and economically unequal.

38. This indifference is moulded by an unconsciously present colonial bourgeoisie which is represented by the neo-colonial African bourgeoisie. Fanon explains this situation in the following anti-colonialist and materialist terms: 'The colonialist bourgeoisie, when it realizes that it is impossible for it to maintain its domination over the colonial countries, decides to carry out a rear-guard action with regard to culture, techniques, and so on' (1970:126).

39. In this regard, Ashcroft (1989:195-6) quite poignantly observes that 'It is not possible to return to or to rediscover an absolute pre-colonial cultural purity, nor is it possible to create national or regional formations entirely independent of their historical implication in the European colonial enterprise.'

40. An obvious acronym for Azania, the term which the Pan Africanist Congress and the Black Consciousness movements have adopted as their name for a free South Africa. Also see Mutloatse's use of it in the 'The Truth Mama' as a Black Consciousness metaphor expressing the necessity for the Black person's psychological emancipation (1988:154).

41. The difference between 'Africa' and 'Afrika' is, in my view, merely cryptographic.

42. Just as, according to Barbara Johnson (1990:21), 'In Nazi Germany, the seduction of an image of the good was precisely the road to evil', the Apartheid image of racial purity was an ideological aberration reducing the conditions of life to racial concentration camps. In order for the racist supremacists to man such camps, they had to sink to the bottom of an abyss where, just like those whom they sought to encamp, they became prisoners of their image.

43. According to Derrida (1986) the term apartheid has an uncanny tendency of setting itself apart even before it could do this to its referents.

44. Although this is essentially Jameson's (1981) term, this chapter uses it loosely as an anti-hegemonic expression. It is used in a manner which points to the repressive nature of collective world views which are imposed by homologizing ideological totalities such as those of the Black Consciousness and Pan-Africanist aesthetic positions.

45. To Althusser's (1971) list of ideological state apparatuses such as education, the family, the church, culture, the law etc, I have added the South African Urban Bantu Councils, Soweto students, the parents, African Development Bank, Soweto intellectuals like Chabeli and other functionaries of the apartheid state.

46. Among the critics of student leadership during the initial stages of the Soweto revolt, is Mafeje who argues that 'From all evidence it is apparent that in mounting their campaign the students had taken the workers for granted. It was only when they were faced with state power in its nakedness that they turned to the workers. Even then, ideologically and organisationally, they were handicapped' (Mafeje 1978:22).

47. Gordimer's article raises the core concerns of this thesis by arguing that 'To be born a South African is to be presented with *given* facts of race on the same level of reality as the absolute facts of birth and death' (1977:88) She continues by pointing at the paradoxical nature of the notion of difference on which racial consciousness rests: '*...if you are white, you begin from the premise of being white. Are they different because they are black? Or are they black because they are different? This is the crucial paradox whose pervasiveness has given rise to a mound of racial otherness which, however, fails to answer the question of who decides the South Africanness or the Africanity of the White and Black people who, by virtue of their geographical location, should otherwise have shared*

claims to an Africa oriented identity. The major obstacle to the realisation of this national identity was/has always been, according to Gordimer (1977:87-88) a White nostalgic association of Europe with 'home' and a conceptualisation of Africa as a temporary place of abode.

### Chapter 3

#### **Elements of a Hybrid and Synthetic Discourse in Mphahlele's The Living and the Dead and In Corner B**

##### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the creative and critical literary works of one of South Africa's complex and sometimes profoundly ambivalent literary figures. Through a subtle combination of his creative and critical skills, Es'kia Mphahlele provides the reader with rich material for an evaluation of his ideas and concerns on a wide range of issues including notions of aesthetic value, Africanness or African otherness, Blackness or the Black experience, Whiteness or White otherness, cultural relations between Africa and Europe, African humanism and other areas of cultural and literary significance.<sup>1</sup>

These concerns provide the raw material of short stories contained in the collections The Living And The Dead (1962) and In Corner B (1967). It is in some of these stories that Mphahlele polemicizes and attempts to synthesize, through a hybrid and syncreticist discourse,<sup>2</sup> the social and aesthetic values of Africa and Europe, of indigeneity and settlement and those of a Black and White racial otherness in Africa, Europe and the Afro-American diaspora.

The concepts hybrid, syncretic and synthetic are used specifically in this study to refer to a fusion of literary styles, motifs and concerns drawn from a wide range of cultural sources including those from Africa, in particular, and the West. The acceptance of cultural diversity and multilingual processes as constitutive elements of world outlooks creates the conditions in which, according to Ngugi (1993:12), the world is moving steadily into becoming one.

It has been argued that Mphahlele's writing career has involved a tireless and conscious search for a distinctively humanistic literary discourse.<sup>3</sup> To what extent he either succeeds or fails to establish his own literary framework through which his normative values and philosophical concerns are expressed, is a question to which his stories and critical magnum opus should yield answers. Throughout his literary career Mphahlele has been involved in a struggle to come to terms with his social position as an intellectual and a writer in a country and continent where extreme forms of dehumanization and brutalization delineate the historical contours. Over and above these human aberrations, Mphahlele has also been striving to find a point of synthesis in the multicultural and multilingual South African consciousness.

It is in this regard that Mphahlele, like other members of the African and/or Black élite in south Africa, has persistently sought to define, redefine and objectify his social function as a writer and critic who finds himself



located at the centre of cultural divisions and racially aberrant ideologies permeating the South African society. Mphahlele emerges, in my view, from this intellectual immersion with a strong will to search and locate the point of synthesis in the South African cultural and literary mainstream.

### **3.2 The Black and White Racial Dialectic**

The centrality of the writer's position in a racial capitalist situation like the one we have in South Africa denies, according to Mphahlele, the writer any chance of being objective:

Having been born and raised right in the centre of racial conflict, you could not view your life objectively. Objectivity is a luxury in such conditions (1974: 42).

The permeating influence of the racial tensions in South Africa finds its expression in the works of writers in South Africa who either refer to themselves or are normatively referred to by the literary critics as Black writers who constitute an opposition to a dominant White otherness.

The origins of this racial consciousness have a history which dates back as far as the nineteenth century when the

English and Dutch Settlers in South Africa brought with them scientific theories justifying White racial supremacist ideas and dominance.<sup>4</sup> It is not surprising then that these ideas naturally triggered a response, even if it was a nationalist one,<sup>5</sup> against the hegemony of White racial otherness. Throughout his critical and short fictional works Mphahlele demonstrates a profound awareness of and revulsion towards the hegemony of White racial superiority which he perceives as thriving on assumptions of Black inferiority.<sup>6</sup>

Mphahlele's radical nationalist awareness of the mental detriments of Black acquiescence in the assumptions of intellectual inferiority came, according to Jane Watts, as a result of his encounter, in the 1970s, with the ideas of Marx, Fanon, the American Black Panther Movement, South Africa's Black Consciousness Movement and Césaire's concept of a global diaspora (Watts 1989:79-82). This encounter was a catalyst to his ideological transformation into taking a radical nationalist stance which culminated in his revision of The African Image.<sup>7</sup>

His redefinition of Blackness was to incorporate and express the influences of Afro-American and Black Consciousness definitions:<sup>8</sup>

The term 'black' refers to all people who are not of European descent. I have dropped the term non-white (Mphahlele 1974:14).

Apart from what, in my view, are the xenophobic preoccupations underlying the expression 'European descent', the Black Consciousness conception of Black as inclusive of Africans, Coloureds and Asiatic peoples in South Africa had an impact which resounds throughout the revised edition of The African Image. The only perceptible difference between the Black Consciousness definition and Mphahlele's lies in the latter's central concept of descent.<sup>9</sup>

Mphahlele's use of this concept articulates his ethno-critical assumption that descent or one's genealogical lineage is a decisive factor in determining one's racial identity. Hence his use of the term 'European descent' as a term which designates Europe as the place and/or continent of ancestral origin of people whom Mphahlele refers to as non-Black people. These people are, according to Mphahlele's discourse, non-Black in so far as their racial identity is premised outside the parameters of Mphahlele's Black world.

His definition assumes erroneously that Europeanness is the equivalent of a Black racial otherness. By what means, one is interested to know, does Mphahlele arrive at an equation of the expression of identity through a consciousness of place, Europe, with a racial identity inherent in Blackness? Even if the illogicality of pairing Europeanness with Blackness may have filtered into Mphahlele's discourse from a totalizing nationalist fervour

of the 1960s and 1970s, such a discourse, to a conceptually sensitive critic, attempts to conceal the contradictions inherent in its holistic predications about nationhood and racial otherness.<sup>10</sup>

In a chapter entitled 'The Black Man's Literary Image of Himself' contained in the 1962 edition of The African Image, Mphahlele's treatment of the Black literary image displays an erroneous assumption which, in terms of the aesthetic holism of the book's title, considers the Black image to be subsumable under an African one. The African image emerges in Mphahlele's literary discourse as an overarching conceptual monolith in which an assortment of cultural values can be lumped together indiscriminately. What Mphahlele's discourse overlooks is a rigorous examination of the presuppositions these concepts make about the dialectic of otherness.

### 3.3 The African Image

Mphahlele's definition of the African image in the revised edition of his book by the same title is illuminated by an exposition of how he aims to use the concepts African, Coloured, Afrikaner and Asian in a futuristic manner:

I do not think of 'African,' 'Coloured,'  
'Afrikaner,' 'Asian' necessarily as the people

referred to prefer to be called. I use my terms as I envision they will have to be in the South Africa blacks want to see. African will refer to all the people who are culturally natives of Africa. Whites will still have to earn this affiliation, so I distinguish them as whites (Mphahlele 1974:14).

By making the African an other of the White, Mphahlele is, once again, demonstrating the contorted nature of his discourse on otherness: Instead of symmetrically juxtaposing Black with a White racial otherness and African with a European, Asiatic or any other consciousness of place, Mphahlele confounds the parameters of his discourse on otherness.

Mphahlele's definition also privileges the concept of 'nativism' which is loaded with an assumption that identity construction through claims to an indigenous attachment to the place, South Africa, is the only constitutive element of such identity construction. This undermines the element of racial otherness which is historically part of the South African Black and White identity consciousness. A nativist sense of exclusive identity can, in my view, easily be confounded with the racialistic terms of identity construction which are, within the South African context, as important as the nativist terms of identity construction. It is only by placing both terms of identity construction within a dialectical plane of otherness that one can discover their underlying assumptions.

### 3.3.1 African Humanism

According to Mphahlele the African has a distinct form of humanistic existence which is distinguishable from, say, the Western version of humanism. As our point of departure, it is instructive to pay some attention to Mphahlele's generalized definition of a universal humanism:

Humanism is any philosophy that affirms the value and dignity of man as the centre of all things; its theme is human nature, including its limits and aspirations (1986:1).

This definition of humanism as a philosophy whose tenets place an emphasis on the value of the dignity of 'man',<sup>11</sup> demonstrates Mphahlele's search for a universally inclusive humanist ethos. It is only when he places this definition within the local African context that he shifts from its global appeal to what he specifically terms African humanism.

Even though the humanism of the African, according to Mphahlele, is nothing but a fragment of a universal humanist ideal, its social and political relevance in Africa and South Africa in particular lays an emphasis on the specificities of a communalistic definition of 'man's' centrality in African social life. In an interview with Chabani Manganyi, Mphahlele explains African humanism as an ideal in which

...People reach out because they then become self-fulfilled. I think that has a lot to do with African humanism. That is what African humanism is about: you are enlarged and increased when you go out of yourself. And part of the vehicle of this is compassion

(1981:9).<sup>12</sup>

Although Mphahlele does not explain explicitly what he means by self-enlargement and compassion, the reader can interpret the idea of self-exteriorization and compassion or social solidarity as Mphahlele's version of communalistic forms of life which were/are generally considered the hallmark of indigenous social and political precolonial systems in Africa.

Even though these values have somehow been altered radically in post-colonial African societies, according to Mphahlele's pronouncements they survive in the form of hybrid social values existing alongside the dominant Eurocentric values. These are best reflected in formal forms of education where they relegate their largely informal oral indigenous values to rear-guard and marginal forms of subsistence. The concept of compassion, one would argue, is the sole preserve of neither the African nor European culture. It is a concept whose social function presumably expresses the social solidarity and collective sense of struggle in South Africa and in other parts of the world where there has been an experience of oppression.

The ideological shortcomings in Mphahlele's concept of compassion lie, in my view, in the assumption that indigenous peoples in Africa have homogeneous cultural valuations of human compassion. Instead of endorsing such an assumption, this chapter argues that, whilst it upholds the social variations of communal compassion in South

Africa, it also perceives compassion as a solidaristic expression of a transindividual and transethnic world outlook.

In South Africa and in other parts of the world where there are multiple ethnic groupings, these groupings have more than one way of expressing their values of compassion. Mphahlele's ideas on humanism are premised on a contradiction between his holistic nationalist and universalist assumptions of post-colonial otherness: at a nationalist level, Mphahlele prefers to restrict the application of his humanist doctrine to Africans whereas at a universal level his discourse is simply and purely humanist.<sup>13</sup> Between the African and the universal humanist, stands Mphahlele the hybrid and syncreticist humanist. His idea of African humanism has a particular relevance in the South African context where a hitherto dominant racial consciousness has subverted any humanist ideal.

Rather than accept uncritically Mphahlele's stance on the humanist question, I would contend that his version of humanism combines nationalist and universalist assumptions through a personalized discourse. He has since poignantly stated that

I am very much attracted to humanistic existence, where people treat each other as human beings and not simply as instruments or tools; where people become committed to one another as human beings without necessarily declaring the commitment; if one of their kind is in difficulties the others immediately rise to the occasion and do something about it (Mphahlele 1981:9).



This kind of humanistic commitment forms the essence of Mphahlele's discourse. A discourse in which Mphahlele attempts a synthesis between the African and Western social and cultural values which respectively formed part of a process of his informal and formal educational socialization. The formal part of his education entailed an appropriation of the English language and its literary discourse.

#### **3.4 Language, Writer and Storyteller**

Mphahlele is one of the few African and/or Black writers in South Africa who pays considerable attention to the question of the relation between the language question, the writer's social function and the storytelling process presenting and defining the writer's world view. These aspects of a writer's consciousness are important constitutive elements of Mphahlele's discourse.

It was through an appropriation of the English language and its literary discourse that Mphahlele was able to embark upon his writing career which enabled him to conceive of storytelling as a socially definitive function. As a storyteller using the English language as his literary language, Mphahlele was faced with the ideological and epistemic challenges of articulating his indigenous cultural values through the medium of a language whose cultural

background, the British one, only came to him in its mediated form. For this reason, one can argue that Mphahlele's formative years as a writer entailed reconciling the conflicts between the remoteness of his received English world outlook and the immediacy of his indigenous reality.

Language, especially the English language, has a special significance for Mphahlele. In his attempt to express the nationalist aspirations he presumably shares with his people, he recognized the paramount importance of mastering and appropriating the English language and its literary discourse which is, according to him, the cultural instrument of global power and dominance:

The white man's language, the technology he initiated, conveniences that accrue from this technology, the middle-class syndrome, the areas of individual ownership that you were born into...become part of your personality equipment. Your values unconsciously have reference to white values. Because the things to which you have to attach some value, positive or negative, come to you on a white caravan (Mphahlele 1974:30).

The point Mphahlele makes here is that in order to appropriate the language and literary discourse of White English otherness, the Black other found himself/herself in a position of class and colonial entrapment. An entrapment of the kind where the Black social values and world outlook had no independent ideological status other than the one assigned to them by the dominant values of White English otherness.

In a situation where the social relations of linguistic, cultural and ideological domination became definitive of the world view of a White oppositional Black élite in South Africa, how, then, did Mphahlele and other Black writers in South Africa avoid getting completely absorbed into the White English literary culture which had no place for the oral indigenous world outlook of Black cultures? Mphahlele's answer to this question was formulated as early as 1964 when he argued that:

The African writer who is worth anything listens to the speech of his people, to the ring of dialogue in his home language and struggles to find an approximation of the English equivalent (1964:303).

This transliterative form of writing is indicative of the hybrid and syncreticist nature of the cultural framework within which the Black and/or African writer writes.

Even though the language and education of a White English other had an alienating influence upon its oppositional Black other, this influence functioned as a form of ideological test for the writer's ability to use the linguistic resources and narrating styles of both the indigenous and English values in a manner which narrows rather than widens the gulf between the values of the two systems. One formidable problem which the Black writers would have difficulty resolving arises when he/she has to struggle to find an approximation of some abstract English concepts like justice, democracy, capitalism, communism and

others which did not exist in the lexicon of indigenous languages.<sup>14</sup>

The above point can best be examined by looking closely at the various nationalistic assertions Mphahlele makes about the writer's place and social function in South Africa and in Africa. The fact that Mphahlele has been using an adopted language, English, as his literary language in order to reflect on his indigenous cultural background is indicative of his nationalist sensitivity to the alienating influence inherent in Western educational and cultural values. This sensitivity is expressed in the earlier mentioned interview with Manganyi:

We have consciously to be aware that we have been removed from our origins and that we have to make our way back, as it were, and reaffiliate. That is very possible. I don't think there needs to be any psychological block unless alienation is complete (1981:10).

What this awareness of the alienating influence of Western educational socialization conceals is a nationalist repression of the class underpinnings and Western orientations of African and/or Black intellectual activism.

This nationalistic perception of intellectual alienation also has profound and, indeed, damning ramifications for the writer's relation with the audience into whose culture to he/she has reaffiliated himself/herself.<sup>15</sup>

Being unconscious of the consequences of limiting the intellectual perception of a writer's alienation to nationalist terms, the reaffiliated writer/intellectual may

still, as has been the case in South Africa where the majority of the White-oppositional Black people are functionally illiterate, find himself/herself ending up with a vaguely defined Black and White literary audience.<sup>16</sup> Reaffiliation is, therefore, not a guarantee to the writer that his/her works will only be read by the targeted audience.

Having failed to reach the targeted audience the writer ends up, according to Mphahlele, engaging in his literary career with an ideologically ambiguous disposition defining him/her as a man/woman of 'high culture' surviving parasitically

...out of the working masses' 'low culture':  
 We writers are generally parasites. We use 'low life' for our fiction and drama because it is richer for our purpose than middle-class life. But we are writing exclusively for our educated class, which excludes low life (1974:21).

Exclusive writing by the middle class about the masses' social life reflects a convergence of the interests of the Black middle class and its White counterpart. Both these middle class members mediate the ideological conflicts between the culture of the White ruling class and that of the Black working masses who have struggles to wage against the White ruling class ideology.

The cultural and political monolithicism<sup>17</sup> of Black and White racial otherness in South Africa did not have a strong hold on Mphahlele's cultural concerns which sought to transcend the limitations of racial consciousness through

his humanistic social vision.<sup>18</sup> His concern in his fictional and critical writings is with the presentation of the negative and positive aspects of human character whether Black, White or Coloured.

Before embarking on an analysis of stories and their relation to Mphahlele's humanist concerns, we need to focus on his broad conceptions of storytelling or fictional writing. He argues that just like the storyteller in traditional society, the post-colonial writer in South Africa is expected to have a skilful and artistically satisfying style of narration:

A novel may be badly written by western standards, in terms of language, and still portray life vividly and meaningfully for us. One can say this without necessarily implying that African fiction writers do not or need not give serious attention to the use of language. The story-teller in traditional life could not get away with a shoddy or clumsy recital anyhow (Mphahlele 1974:11).

Even though Mphahlele's comments here fall within the ambit of the novel, they are, in terms of the Africa-West dialectic, generally applicable to his conception of story narration both in the African oral traditional sense and in the purely Western fictional narrative processes. These assertions by Mphahlele have a special validity within the framework of his post-colonial hybrid and syncretic discourse.<sup>19</sup>

His pronouncements on story-narration also specifically illuminate the overriding concerns of his shorter fictional projects:

In the short story...the writer trains his light intensely on a single concentrated moment, and in the process uses flashes to illuminate traits of behaviour for that one brief awesome spell. One single short story would be inadequate as an index of the writer's tone and of how he views human behaviour (1974:11).

The singling out of character in order to illuminate the traits of behaviour is the central preoccupation of Western fictional forms of story narration rather than of the Western-oppositional African oral literary forms. This preoccupation is, in my view, contrary to the interests of aesthetic collectivity characteristic of oral-based cultural world outlooks.<sup>20</sup> One has to locate this preoccupation within Mphahlele's discourse so that one can have a better perception of its social and literary function.

It is only after this location that we should be able to explain the underlying logic of Mphahlele's valuation of the humanistic rather than the racial and other potentialities of human character. He has since stated his commitment to the search for an enduring humanistic aesthetic in the following terms:

I would like to think that the writer and the artist will be better able to delve deep down into a people's personality, a people's consciousness. Not the writer who makes statements, but the one who is sensible of the ironies of acceptance and rejection, conflict and reconciliation (Mphahlele 1974:72).

It is this valuation of a humanistic ethos of acceptance, rejection and reconciliation which defines Mphahlele's discourse as an integrationist rather than partisan one.

His humanistic ideas, however, were not popularly received in the South African context where racial monolithicism prevented them from coming into fruition. Even if this was the case Mphahlele, according to Omo Asein,<sup>21</sup> continued to mould his humanist theory:

For well over thirty years, his integrationist attitudes as a person and as a writer have been progressively moulded into definable shapes by a distinctively humanist vision which has its roots in Mphahlele's firm belief in the eternal value of a brotherhood that does not compromise man's essential humanity (1980:39).

Mphahlele's integrationist humanist beliefs have found various forms of expression in his stories where he applies his ideas in the practical act of narrating about the various human attributes. We encounter an expression of this integrationist vision in The Living And The Dead (1962) and in In Corner B (1967). It is in these story collections that he attempts to commit his storytelling expertise to his integrationist vision.



### 3.5 Headnote on the Story Collections

Only a few pertinent stories in The living And the Dead and In Corner B will be used in illustrating Mphahlele's concerns and also in isolating and analyzing the elements of his discourse. There are two reasons for this critical choice: (1) Not all the stories explicate the African and European/Western, Black and White concepts in their narrative processes. (2) Since the concerns of this chapter lay an emphasis on the theoretical and narrative aspects of Mphahlele's discourse, our approach for selecting stories is consequently dictated by the interests of these concerns. A critical treatment of these stories will emphasize a thematic and ideological analysis illuminating the elements of Mphahlele's hybrid and syncretic literary discourse.

Stories chosen from The Living And The Dead are: 'The Living and the Dead'; 'The Master of Doornvlei'; 'We'll Have Dinner at Eight'; 'The Woman' and 'The Suitcase'. Those from In corner B include the following: 'A Point of Identity'; 'Mrs Plum'; 'In Corner B', 'The Barber of Bariga' and other minor stories to which the discussion will allude.<sup>22</sup>

### 3.6 Master-Servant Relationship in The Living And The Dead

The socio-economic and political theme of the master-servant relationship forms the cornerstone of Mphahlele's literary discourse in this collection.<sup>23</sup> It is through it that Mphahlele contemplates and reflects, from the vantage point of his exile, upon the 1950s and 1960s South Africa. This theme has a particular historical significance which enables him to probe the racial polarisation of South African social life. He could do this through an examination of the social relations prevailing in the South African domestic form of labour production. It is, therefore, through these economic and social preoccupations of this theme that we are able to comment on the social dialectic of humanism and inhumanity which defines character in the conditions of racial and economic oppression.

It is instructive to note, before proceeding to a critical analysis of Mphahlele's handling of this theme in the stories, the difficulties Mphahlele faced as a writer trapped in the then South African racial crisis:

I used to worry that, because we see each other through a key-hole - we blacks and whites in South Africa - I cannot portray the character of a white man in the round. Often when I have turned the white stereotype round to look at it from another angle, I have tugged or pushed fiercely so that the figure came back to the initial position. I missed what I had thought I might find...Whatever the results

in the finished product, it had been a severe strain on me (Mphahlele 1974:15).

These frank admissions on Mphahlele's part about the difficulties of writing when one is permitted to glimpse the other only through a tiny racial key-hole, hint at what we, as readers, should expect to see through the same key-hole.

### **3.6.1 'The Living And The Dead'**

Here we have, as Ursula Barnett points out, a story in which 'Plot and character have little chances to develop, either spontaneously toward a pleasing work of art, or according to the laws of probability and the principles of psychology' (1976:71). Although Barnett's comments are valid in their diagnosis of the problems surrounding the presentations of plot and character in this story, her analysis, however, suffers as a result of her failure to perceive these problems as connected with the racial and economic monolithicism to which Black and White people are/were reduced by the dominant ideology. She also fails to specify what she means by the laws of probability and the principles of psychology.

### **3.6.1.1 Structural Aspects**

This is a story set in the Transvaal of the 1950s when the Colour Bar and other racially and economically segregationist laws defined the economic conditions of production as both racial capitalist and semi-feudal.<sup>24</sup> The story's simple and fragmented plot narrates the relations prevailing between Jackson, the servant, and his master, Stoffel Visser. Lebona, a railway worker, Doppie Fourie who is Visser's friend, and other characters mentioned in the story are merely marginal characters whose presence is a constant reminder of Mphahlele's view of character through the restricted vision of a symbolic racial key-hole.

### **3.6.1.2 The Master-Servant Relationship**

The master-servant relationship takes on a special significance in this story where it is foregrounded in various ways. It takes its cue from the stereotypical presentation of characters like Stoffel Visser, Doppie Fourie, Lebona, Jackson and others who are either White or Black according to the definitions of South Africa's racial monoliths.<sup>25</sup> The author/narrator's critique of the socio-economic relationship between Visser and Jackson sometimes

takes a broad outlook defining it as located within a "feudal comfort" of cheap labour:

Some of these kaffir-lovers, of course, hate the thought of having to forgo the fat feudal comfort of having cheap labour within easy reach when we remain black servants to their locations (Mphahlele 1962:9).

The build-up to this socio-economic reflection by Visser, secretary of the Social Affairs Commission of his Christian Protestant Party, comes as a result of his undecided attitude towards the commission's report on the residents' demand that:

...the number of servants in each household be brought down because it wouldn't do for blacks to run the suburbs from their quarters in European backyards (1962:9).

The political irony in this presentation of the relations between masters and servants as, respectively, Europeans and Blacks, plunges us, once more, into a confounding form of otherness. Instead of the masters being racially defined like their Black servants, they are, instead, defined through a conceptual taxonomy bordering on a subtle form of xenophobia.

Through the invocation of the metaphor of suburbia which designates the location of 'home' as a residential place for the White masters/madams and a place of work for the Black maids and gardeners, the author/narrator problematizes notions of home, household and place of work for the participants in the domestic mode of production as it was defined by the then White hegemonic ideology. Fanon

characterizes the notion of suburbia as one which thrives on the complex of mistrust:

Sometimes it may be ascertained that the black minorities are hemmed in by a kind of semi-slavery which renders legitimate that species of wariness, or in other words mistrust, which the countries of Black Africa feel with regard to the countries of White Africa (1976:131).

As the penultimate expression of material conflict the metaphor of suburbia inaugurates and perpetuates the complex of mistrust and its corollary, fear, through which slides both the Black margin and the White metropolis into feelings of social insecurity and paranoia.

The notion of suburbia also introduces the dialectic of home and homelessness which gains a concrete expression in the contradictions between, on the one hand, the metaphor of Visser's and other White residents' fear of the servants' 'backyard' (marginality) which is within the yard but outside the household and, on the other hand, the implicit image of the household as a citadel of White power (dominance). Why, one is bound to ask, should the residents fear the backyards when, as a result of the inherence of the dominated in the dominant, the household has as a permanent part of itself the backyard? The metaphor of an elemental fear of the backyard is a figurative expression of a fear of losing power and dominance.

As a middle class member of his servant race, Mphahlele positively uses his parasitic position as a writer to probe the human condition trapped in a key-holed relationship of

racial domination. Racial otherness, in this story, incorporates that decisive aspect of social conflict, the economic factor. According to the author/narrator, it is the elusive nature of this factor which, at one stage, compels Visser to think hard about the Black-White racial demarcations:

These images turned round and round into a complex bust. He had got into the habit of thinking in terms of irreconcilables and contradictions and opposition and categories. Black was Black, white was white - that was all that mattered (Mphahlele 1962:14).

This moment of epiphany for Visser is, metaphorically, a kind of political doldrums into which the White racial monolith had been frozen. Even if any mutual contact at the racial front was frozen, it, however, subsisted through the material relationship of domination and subservience between masters and servants.

The use of the sculptural metaphor of a 'complex bust' has pertinent connotations through which the author/narrator vividly captures the frozen and symbolically sterile point of White-Black racial interaction. It is at this point of near-despair and dialogue with his inner self that Visser comes to realise how his position as a master is so intimately bound up with that of his dominated servant. This moment of self-examination is crucial in the story because of its ideologically precise location of racial turbulence in the unconscious of a White monolithic psyche.

The fear which this monolithic racial otherness bred in

the master's psyche rendered both the master and the servant to be mere abstractions rather than humans with common biological and other social feelings. Within Visser's household, the complex bust of master/servant frigidity, Jackson and his wife, Virginia, had appeared, in Visser's eyes, as ossified forms of otherness:

For four years he had lived with a servant and had never known more about him than that he had two children living with his mother-in-law and a wife. Even then they were such distant abstractions—just names representing some persons, not human flesh and blood and heart and mind (Mphahlele 1962:16).

Visser's household is metaphorically turned into a museum in which both he and Jackson would have fared well as racial curios or artefacts rather than real humans struggling to define their terms of otherness.

### **3.6.2 'The Master of Doornvlei': A Variation On the Master/Servant Relationship Theme**

'The Master of Doornvlei' is a story which offers a variation upon the master-servant relationship theme. The story's plot is constructed out of a combined treatment of master-servant relationship and of stereotypical characterization of the master and his servants.

The story's plot is as follows: Karel Britz, the master of Doornvlei, and Mfukeri, his Rhodesian foreman,<sup>26</sup> and the



collective pool of other servants live in fear and distrust of one another. In order to fortify Britz's reliance and trust of him, Mfukeri goes about terrorizing the other labourers until they demand that he be fired from his job. The master refuses to accede to this demand and, instead, chooses to fire the workers' leader, Tau Rathebe. In the meantime, however, the relations between Britz and Mfukeri become dominated by distrust and deteriorate to the point where a fight between Mfukeri's bull and Britz's stallion settles the matter when the stallion is defeated and Mfukeri is given the option of shooting his bull or losing his job. Mfukeri opts for the latter.

By making the master depend upon his tyrannical foreman, the symbol of Britz's authority, Mphahlele introduces a slight reversal of the theme of master-servant relationship. Without his servant, the master feels a foreboding sense of insecurity which, quite ironically, is also felt, albeit in a repressed manner, by the conduit. Damian Ruth summarizes Mphahlele's accomplishments in manipulating expertly the element of pathological fear in which Britz/Mfukeri and the workers are trapped:

In Sarel Britz Mphahlele has put his finger on the terror of the master and described the intransigent consciousness that all slaves face in their struggle for liberation (1986:73).

From this presentation of Britz's and Mfukeri's fears, the author/narrator proceeds to a presentation, according to Ruth, of a split in the ranks of the workers:

He has also indicated an extremely important development in the black point of view of this struggle as it is being played out in South Africa. Mfukeri, ...is alienated from the workers and acts as a tyrant on behalf of white oppression; Mphahlele is shifting from colour to class analysis, and allowing a split to develop on the black side of the balance (1986:73).

Although I generally agree that Mfukeri epitomizes a split within the ranks of Black workers on Britz's farm, I would be wary of concluding that such a presentation indicates Mphahlele's shift into a class analysis. Mphahlele has indeed shifted from a pure analysis of racial consciousness, but this does not mean that he has moved into a full espousal of class analysis.

Mphahlele's allowance of this split to develop is yet another testimony to his deep longings for the birth of a humanistic society in South Africa. His shift from preoccupations with the racial side of master-servant relationships is borne out by his humanistic awareness of the limitations both racial and master-servant otherness impose upon the potentialities of unimpeded self-knowledge and development. Mphahlele's ideological perspective lays considerable emphasis on the human side of character trait which, according to his discourse, has the possibility of effecting a synthesis of the aesthetic and cultural contradictions permeating South African society. Mphahlele, however, explores this possibility with a full awareness of the material forces which work against such a synthetic aesthetic.

We encounter the expression of this awareness in the presentation of Mfukeri's unwavering loyalty to his master:

The Rhodesian foreman worked as hard as ever to retain the master's praise. He did not spare himself; and the other workers had to keep up with his almost inhuman pace (1962:33).

This 'inhuman pace' is, in my view, an indicator of the semi-feudal nature of the social relations of production in Britz's farm. These are the conditions which fostered a docile and inhuman relationship between the White master and his Black servants.

The irony in Mfukeri's 'pace' lies in the fact that no matter how hard he labours to win his master's confidence, his master fears and distrusts him. He is, therefore, an historical working class figure who, whilst he has lost the solidarity of his fellow workers, is also bound to lose his master's confidence because of a deeply internalized suspicion and hatred his master has of all those who are Black like him. In this contest of power and powerlessness, Mfukeri's anxiety, his psychological insecurity and his individual struggle to win his master's confidence rather than transforming him into a humane master, relegate Mfukeri to the position of a pitiable foreman doomed to lose the precarious conduit position assigned to him by his distrusting master.

There were illusory moments when Mfukeri thought Britz was on his side rather than the other way round. This

illusion made him generalize his 'power' as symbolic of his success in winning his master's confidence. All this happens after the sacking of the workers' leader, Rathebe, during a crucial moment when the workers had demanded Mfukeri's expulsion from the farm:

He had never in his life dreamt he would work his way into a white man's trust. He had always felt so inferior before a White man that he despised himself. The more he despised himself the sterner and more ruthless he became towards his fellow workers. At least he could retain a certain amount of self-respect and the feeling that he was a man, now that his master looked so helpless (Mphahlele 1962:34).

Mfukeri is a pathological victim of a psychologically devaluative syndrome, a dependence syndrome. He depends so much on his master's trust which he is precluded from achieving by the deeply ingrained suspicion brought to bear upon him by his Black skin, the symbol of Britz's own pathological fears.

Britz had been introduced to the world of living on the fringes of fear through an indoctrination of survivalist Calvinist ethos<sup>27</sup> administered by his late father at his home and also at the university:

Back at university the students had endless talks about the Blacks. Britz had discussed with them his father's theory about allowing the Black man a few rungs to climb up at a time; because he was still a child. Most of his colleagues had laughed at this. Gradually he accepted the line of thinking: the White man must be vigilant. (1962:33)

This kind of indoctrination is so deeply inculcated into Britz's mind that it becomes totally impossible for him to

trust any person who is not a member of his race. This distrust becomes even worse for Mfukeri whose Black skin and dependent working class position already symbolises the nightmare of Britz's fears.

Britz's ageing and widowed mother, the surrogate figure of patriarchal authority, has replaced her husband in playing the role of mentor to Britz. Whenever Britz has to find a reaffirmation of the correctness of his method of applying his father's theory of Kaffir gradual development, it is to his mother that he has to turn for guidance. When, at one stage, he discovers that the workers, under the organised and disciplined leadership of Rathebe, could come to him to demand the sacking of his foreman, he is so alarmed that he decides to consult his mother:

Sarel went and stood right in front of her.  
 " Yes, ma, they're fully grown up; some of them cleverer and wiser than a lot of us Whites. Their damned patience makes them all the more dangerous. Maybe Mfukeri's still somewhat of a child. But certainly not the others. Take today, for instance. A coming together like this has never been heard of on a White man's farm. And they've left everything in the hands of their leader. No disorder. They're serpent's eggs, and I'm going to crush them. (Mphahlele 1962:30)

Britz is aware of the dialectics of power and powerlessness at play during the crisis moment of the strike. He is now aware that so long as his political shield, Mfukeri, remains in his conduit position his power base remains impenetrable. This is why he refuses to sack the foreman. The refusal is, on Britz's part, not a confirmation of an alliance between

himself and Mfukeri, but, rather, a declaration of his refusal to concede the human presence of the other.

The workers' action has forced him into this recognition of human otherness which, according to the ideology under which he has been brought up, always existed as a repressed form of otherness. When this repressed otherness shows signs of its readiness to galvanize its consciousness into action, Britz's immediate reaction takes the form of a confused questioning of his father's theory:

These are no children, no children...They are men...I'm with minds of men...My father was wrong...All my boyhood he led me to believe that black people were children...Oh hemel! they aren't... (Mphahlele, 1962:31).

This recognitive moment of self-realization brings him close to the point of admitting that as a vicious master the oppression he was exercising against his servants was just a cover-up of his deeply internalized social insecurity and psycho-social fears of the human potency of the other.

Mphahlele's use of irony in a situation where social, economic and political insecurity reign supreme is reflected explicitly in the story's ending. The ending ironizes the whole basis of Britz's and Mfukeri's brutal power by transposing that power into the animals owned by the two men. Whilst Mfukeri's bull, Donker, becomes symbolic of his brutal animalistic power, Britz's stallion, Kasper, becomes an image of a brutal but very vulnerable power. The bitter fight between the two animals is an

exteriorized beastly expression of a psychological war corroding each of these men.

The defeat of Britz's stallion which happens against the backdrop of a deep distrust the master has of the foreman and his race leads to the termination of that fragile 'alliance' between the two men:

"Here, destroy the bull!" he ordered Mfukeri, handing him the gun. The foreman hesitated. "I said shoot that bull!" "Why do you want me to shoot my bull bass?" "If you don't want to do it, then you must leave this farm, at once!" (Mphahlele 1962:36)

Britz's insistence on Mfukeri's shooting of the bull and Mfukeri's refusal to do this is an ultimate turning point in the relationships between these two men. There was just no way that Britz, a master who had always considered his foreman to be a member of a servant race, could have accepted the fact that his docile ally was capable of striking a 'mortal' blow against his master.

Rather than submit himself to the taming power of the master, Mfukeri chooses to retain his wild Black self, which has always been an equivalent of the White master, by refusing to shoot his bull and choosing, instead, to keep his wildness with him. The shortcoming of Mfukeri's wildness is that it was not backed up by a theoretical racial grounding similar to Britz's. For this reason, his was the most vulnerable brutishness:

Sarel knew he had been right. As he looked out of the window to the empty paddock, he was stricken with grief. And then he was glad. He had got rid of yet another threat to his

authority. But the fear remained. (Mphahlele 1962:36)

For as long as Britz's fear remained deeply entrenched in his laager mentality,<sup>28</sup> it would always torment him. Getting rid of Mfukeri was yet another way of suppressing any moral questioning of the inhuman basis of his semi-feudal authority.

By presenting Britz and Mfukeri as agents of an oppressive and inhuman social and economic system, Mphahlele, once again, shows that it is through a respect for the humanity of the other that a material and aesthetic synthesis between Black and White, Africa and the West can be effected.

### **3.6.3 The Liberal Predicament in 'We'll Have Dinner at Eight'**

Through a relationship between Miss Pringle, who runs the Sheltered Employment Depot - a place for homeless people, and a crippled man, Mzondi, Mphahlele explores the nature of the predicament of liberalism in South Africa. Mzondi who has been battered in prison for stealing a sum of 2,000 pounds becomes the subject of Miss Pringle's liberal patronage.

Miss Pringle befriends Mzondi and wants to know about his life history. She invites him to her flat where Mzondi



murders her on the suspicion that she is acting in conspiracy with the police who want to take his money away from him. This is the story's simple plot.

Mphahlele has expressed his skepticism of the commitments of liberals in the search for a humanism which does not perceive individuals as representing particular social groupings. He has especially expressed his doubts on the possibility of Black people becoming liberals:

To be a liberal you have to be white. Which is why liberals in South Africa, both as an informal group and later political (now defunct), looked ridiculous when they canvassed African support and membership. A black liberal is a kind of chimera<sup>29</sup> (Mphahlele 1974:50).

The Black liberal would be a kind of chimera in his community because, unlike those of his White counterpart, his ideas would not be backed by a dominant ideological force springing from within the locality of his own community.

Miss Pringle's attempt to understand, from a liberal perspective, the personalities and world outlook of the Black people she comes into contact with is flawed in many respects. This flaw comes as a result of, among other things, flattering testimonials which describe her as having an expert knowledge of the Native (Mphahlele 1962:20). She is inflated by such testimonials to the extent that she takes Mzondi as a paranoid and suspicious character who is an abstraction of a generalized figure of African and/or Black people whom she knows quite well. Throughout her

efforts to win Mzondi's confidence Miss Pringle is unaware that:

Mzondi disliked her in silence. Or maybe he thought he did, simply because he had come to loathe white people in authority. And he couldn't divorce the idea of white people from the idea of authority (1962:19).

What we have in this relationship between Mzondi, the Black other, and Miss Pringle, the contrary image of this other, is a situation in which one form of otherness, Mzondi's, silently represses its failure to comprehend the social meaning and function of its contrary image in Miss Pringle.

The difficulties of mutual comprehension between these two individuals representing different forms of racial otherness frustrate Miss Pringle to the point where her self-assertive and curious attitude drives her into an abstraction of Mzondi's problem as the Black people's social problem :

What's the matter with you black people?  
 Trouble with you is you feel and think you aren't as good as white people or better.  
 Other people trample on you because you are willing to become doormats... (1962:20).

The problem with Miss Pringle's liberal predicament is that it fails to make her perceive Mzondi in human terms. Instead of seeing him as an individual Black other, Miss Pringle chooses to see him as one of a general type of Black people.

Her liberal logic has taught her that Black people are of the same type and, therefore, their social problems are always homogeneous. She also assumes that her knowledge of this general type has equipped her to explain the underlying complexity, if any, of Mzondi's silent discourse. It is with this kind of simplistic perception of the other that she unwittingly and unknowingly invites a begrudging, suspicious and murderously bent Mzondi to her flat. She does this within the limits of her liberal predisposition which permits gradual concessions to the Black man so long as those concessions take place within constitutional and legal parameters. Although she is aware that the police are in the habit of spying on her activities (Mphahlele 1962:24), she nevertheless continues to invite the 'people of colour' to have supper at her flat.

Her invitation of Mzondi to her flat becomes some kind of a victory for her when Mzondi, who has constantly been refusing to accept her invitation, finally decides to accede to her overture. The irony of the whole situation is that Mzondi, whose memory of beatings by the jail warders lingers in his mind, accepts the invitation on the basis of silently hatched murderous grounds.

Although Mphahlele has stringently used the technique of foreshortening in presenting the build-up to the incident in which Mzondi murders Miss Pringle, we are informed symbolically that:

What she would not see was the fact that it had become frightfully important for Mzondi to visit her flat. Nor did she hear the bell that gonged in the man's brains... (Mphahlele 1962:23).

This is the evidence which the story demands the reader to follow like a detective in search of clues to a murder motive. But the problem with this kind of murder is that it is a murder committed by a man whose discourse is silently and suspiciously vengeful. Her murder is so silently committed that the only thing Mzondi himself hears is the cracking of her skull which he crushes with a typewriter (Mphahlele 1962:25).

The silence leading to the commitment of the murder is, strikingly, observed by both the victim and perpetrator of the act. The irony surrounding this silence and the attitude of Miss Pringle before she is murdered is that it all happens so quickly and dramatically: Miss Pringle's effort of going down on her knees in order to exercise Mzondi's leg strikes me as a an ironical act of self-sacrifice on her part. Although she is not aware she is sacrificing herself by attending to the leg of a silent but murderous man, this action and her silence during the perpetuation of the whole act of murder become a symbolic indication of Mphahlele's ironization of the failure of Miss Pringle's White liberal predisposition to conquer the Black other's silently conspiratorial heart.

Miss Pringle, in my view, becomes a casualty of a submerged Black discourse informally institutionalized

alongside of an expressive White liberal discourse which mistakes individuals like Mzondi for representative abstractions of the Black other. Even the policeman who came to Miss Pringle's flat expecting to find her in the middle of an immoral act (Mphahlele 1962:24), only responded by gasping and starrng at the sudden mess that was Miss Pringle's crushed head (1962:25). The metaphor of a crushed head has stark connotations of the defeat of liberal ideas.

Even the alarmed response of a whistle blowing policeman becomes a bizarre reminder of how such symbols of white authority and order, the police, can be confounded by murders which are committed under the veil of silence. The whistle, in such a situation, is a response to an act whose silence defies the expertise of a detective who finds in the flat something which he had not expected.

Another confounding discovery, to the detective, is the body of Mzondi which, according to the author/narrator, was the only thing of importance that would be linked with Mzondi's murder of Miss Pringle (Mphahlele 1962:26). This kind of ending of the story in which a man's corpse becomes the only clue to a murder is itself an ironical ending. Its irony involves the fact that both Miss Pringle and Mzondi have died in silence and their only remains, the dead bodies, highlight the dangers of perceiving racial otherness as a fixed obstacle to the forging of a Black/White and Africa/West humanistic, cultural and political synthesis.

#### 3.6.4 Images of Femininity and Masculinity:

##### `The Woman' and `The Suitcase'

These two stories are of interest only insofar as they permit a contrast between the images of what one could term, in accordance with the author/narrator's conceptual distinction, an African feminine tyranny and a feeble Black masculinity.

`The Woman' centres around Madira, a meddlesome former school-mistress, who dominates the social life of both her tamed son, Joel, and her rebellious daughter, Dinko. When Dinko gets married her husband decides that his wife should live with him at his home rather than on her own. Joel, on the other hand, gets married to Anna and settles in his mother's house. Anna decides to leave Joel after she had a scuffle with her mother-in-law. In the meantime, Joel gets another woman, Rhoda, who disappoints him by failing to turn up at the church on her wedding day. This disappointment quashes all Joel's hopes and leaves him a broken man with only his tyrannical mother at his side.

`The Suitcase' is a story of a Sophiatown man, Timi, who gets sacked from one job after another for petty reasons while he has a pregnant wife to support. While on a bus one day, Timi mistakenly thinks he has struck a fortune when two women passengers leave a suitcase behind when they disembark from the bus. Timi immediately claims the suitcase as his

and he guiltily carries it about Sophiatown until he is searched and arrested by the police for carrying a dead child in that same suitcase. These stories are of interest in this chapter only for their uses of the images of Black, African and White in depicting and presenting the female and male stereotypical characters.

Mphahlele has categorically stated his strong appreciation of women:

When I think of strong people I don't think of men, I always think of women (1981:11).

A tyrannical woman, like Mphahlele's prototypical figure of African feminist tyranny in Down Second Avenue, undercuts the type of feminist figure for whom Mphahlele has admiration.

Mphahlele ironises and satirises this tyrannical figure so that we, as readers, can draw a distinction between a modest and an extreme form of feminine strength. This appreciation of a modest form of feminine courage has its precedents in Mphahlele's experience of the tyranny of his grandmother in Maupaneng and the modesty of his mother in Marabastad.<sup>30</sup> In the previously cited interview with Manganyi, Mphahlele expatiates on his appreciation of feminine courage:

I always think of women who are strong almost as if I didn't expect them to be. There are so many precedents throughout my life. I have always noticed the strong women more than the strong men ... And then again, I think of my

own mother and the way she had to survive on her own and struggle through. The strong women are in the forefront of my consciousness all the time rather the man, yes(1981:11).

It is, of course, strange that in depicting his model of a strong woman Mphahlele chooses an African tyrannical figure like Madira. A possibility also exists that Mphahlele caricatures this figure in order to satirise the extreme forms of African feminine courage similar to that of his grandmother.

Mphahlele combines his depiction of Madira with useful commentary on the values of parenthood forming part of a 'collective' African communal consciousness:

"She is there!" When Africans say a person "is there", they mean you cannot but feel she is alive: she allows you no room to forget she was born and is alive in flesh and spirit (1962:38).

The author/narrator's use of the concept 'African' throughout the narrative is indicative of the level of awareness Mphahlele has of the dialectic between African and Black world views.

The African existential presence of Madira is given its definitive character by her unflinching audacity and boldness:

One of her greatest boasts was that she always looked at a person in the face after sizing him up. In view of the fact that traditionally African women of her age regarded this as a special quality of boldness in Madira (1962:39).

Her audacity and boldness undoubtedly constituted a threat to African patriarchal traditionalism which expects women to



always be subservient to masculine authority. We are not sure whether the education she received in her training as a schoolmistress prepared her for her stance against African male domination and patriarchal traditionalism.

This attitude of Madira towards African men, in general, and to her three husbands, in particular, demonstrates her independent and uncompromising stand towards the traditional African values of her community. The fact that her husbands decide to leave her, rather than her leaving them, becomes indicative of her resolution and moral preparedness to challenge the traditional values at the cost of becoming a figure of extreme social rebelliousness.

Although she wins the admiration of other women members of her community, she nevertheless fails to realize that her individual feminist crusade cannot be sustained without the mass consciousness and support of the other women members of her community. In this respect, her boldness functions as a mere brazen display of courage and as a sign of her domineering attitude.

The most explicit display of this attitude is manifested in her untiring domination of her son. Unlike her daughter Dinko who manages to 'escape' from her domination, Joel remains under her complete domination. He loses a wife and is therefore assisted by his mother in trying to find the next wife:

Joel had been looking about for a wife with the help of his hard working mother. They came upon

one - a pretty girl with dark black eyes. Rhoda was just such a person as could delight the hypercritical eyes of Madira (1962:45).

When Rhoda fails to turn up at the church on the wedding day the author/narrator informs us that Joel responds to this disappointment by laying his head on his mother's lap and crying like a child who has lost his best toy. He becomes a victim of a mother whose love of her child knows no boundaries and whose appetite for social domination and control reduces anyone who falls under her control into an object of manipulation.

In 'The Suitcase' we have a situation in which Timi, the story's protagonist, is presented as a devalued masculine figure who seeks to exploit an ironical 'fortune' he sees as delivering him to his success. But his short-lived fortune turns out to be his source of woe. His Black masculine powerlessness which comes to the fore when he is unable to comprehend the social and economical basis of the exclusivity of a White other reveals him as a caricature for whom Mphahlele has little or no sympathy.

His persistent search for a job always brings him into an encounter with a White other who either mocks him or displays total indifference towards him:

At one firm he had been told, "We've already got a boy, Jim." At the second firm a tiny typist told him, "You're too big, John. The boss wants a small boy - eighteen you know" (Mphahlele 1962:42).

Although he is neither a Jim nor a John his powerlessness and economic deprivation drive him into a position where he is prepared to let himself be humiliated.

Timi's humiliation by a White monolith, the racial and economic antithesis of a Black monolith, delineates the story's concern with a distinctive treatment of racial tropes. The author/narrator's presentation of the typist who humiliates Timi is particularly striking:

Then she had gone on with her typing,  
clouding her white face with cigarette smoke  
(Mphahlele 1962:47).

The monolithic nature and indifference of a White racial other also manifests itself through the actions of, according to the author/narrator, a 'pudgy White man' who offers him a job on his own, the White man's, terms:

At the third place of call a short pudgy white man put down his price in a squeaking voice: "Two pounds ten a week." Three pounds ten a week, Timi had said. "Take it or leave it, my boy," the proprietor had said as his final word, and snorted to close the matter  
(Mphahlele 1962:49).

The determined nature of the white man and Timi's equally determined stand bring, for the first time in the story, the White and Black other into a positive self-assertive encounter.

Unlike Mzondi who solely relied on his silent method of doing things, Timi's method is an ideologically unguided self-assertiveness. Even if one were to argue that Timi's self-assertiveness only comes into action when such decisive

matters as wage dispute are at stake, his unresponsiveness and timid attitude towards those who belittle him become markers of his Black relativism. His passivity in the face of this belittling labeling casts him in the mould of a stereotypical feeble man for whom Mphahlele has little or no sympathy. Unlike Madira who questions the fundamental basis of social authority, Timi only responds with timidity when he is faced with the challenge of articulating a definitive, even if rudimentary, consciousness towards White ideological totality.

What, perhaps, attenuates this timidity is the fact that, Timi, unlike Madira who is a schoolmistress and therefore a member of the middle class, belongs to the class which Mphahlele has characterized as a pathetic proletarian class in South Africa. For this reason, Timi's intellectual resources remain vulnerable to an easy exploitation. Timi is the prototype of a doubly exploited Black worker: he is exploited as a worker and is also exploited as a Black man.

The final straw in Timi's human devaluation comes in his encounter, at the police station, with this man who had persistently told him that the suitcase he claimed to have been his belonged to the women who had alighted from the bus. Here is the author's/narrator's presentation of Timi's encounter with his man who, we can surmise, was the last person Timi would have liked to meet:

His knees felt weak when he recognized the Black man next to him. It was the same man who was the first to argue that the case was not Timi's in the bus ... The man hardly looked at Timi. He just looked in front in a self-righteous posture, as it struck Timi (Mphahlele 1962:53).

Timi's helplessness in the face of the police and the self-righteous man accords with Mphahlele's earlier cited description of the Black proletariat as generally apathetic (1974:42).

Timi's self-assertiveness against the pudgy White man functions as a necessary combative stance against the dominant assumptions of White otherness. The necessity of this stance is engendered by an aggressively permeating racial consciousness which, according to the hybrid and syncretic concerns of Mphahlele's discourse, can be overcome through a synthetic humanistic set of values.

### **3.7 In Corner B**

#### **3.7.1 Identity at a Racial Crossroads:**

##### **'A Point of Identity'**

This story addresses one of the most complex and problematic aspects in South Africa's racial consciousness: how to classify an individual, Karel Almeida, who, according to the then racial laws of South Africa, should have been classified as neither White nor Black but 'Coloured'<sup>31</sup>. It

raises a further question on why, for instance, a person in whom 'White' and 'Black' blood runs should become the subject of such a racially dehumanizing process of classification by the board. The coloured figure epitomized by Karel Almeida is a crossroads trope of the racial variegations in the South African ruling class psyche in the South Africa of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. He is a crossroads figure in whom the racial tempers of the South African psyche both created and thwarted the possibilities of a synthesis and integration of world-views.

The story's plot concerns the protagonist, Almeida, a 'Coloured' man whose late father was a Portuguese and his mother an African. He chooses to live with Africans in the township of Corner B. Almeida's pride in his Coloured identity and the social benefits or advantages of being a second class citizen make him feel 'superior' to the Africans among whom he lives in Corner B. It is not until the establishment, by the government, of a 'racial board' which is to decide on the controversy surrounding the 'purity' of White and Coloured identities, that Almeida's commitment to his Coloured identity is brought to a test.

Even though Almeida has established a love relationship with an African woman, he still has to appear before the board which is to decide the genuineness of his claims to a Coloured identity. This appearance before the board would, if his claims were proved beyond the board's doubt, lead to the termination of his love relationship by the then

segregationist racial laws of the country. Almeida receives this prospect with a mixed reaction: although he wants to continue living with Africans in corner B, he also wants to enjoy the benefits of second class Coloured citizenship.

When, however, the authorities decide that he is Coloured, the White superintendent of Corner B informs him that in terms of the law Almeida will have to live in a residential area reserved for Coloured people. Although Almeida conceals from his lover and other friends the superintendent's order, the lover discovers and reveals it to T, Almeida's closest friend, after Almeida's death.

As a point of identity, Almeida is some sort of a racial Janus of the South African social milieu. He is a protagonist in whom the Black and White blood mixtures create an identity crossroad which, according to the then legislative racial purists of South Africa, presented a biological evidence of miscegenation which the authorities had to repress in order for their segregationist ideas to succeed.

The challenge faced by the White establishment in deciding Almeida's racial identity is best articulated in Jordan Ngubane's observation that:

While race played a key role in Black-White relations, biology had nothing to do with white attitudes (1980:11).

Even in deciding the identity of Almeida and other Coloured people, the board members and other White supremacists

deliberately underplay the biological aspects of White-Black racial otherness.

The board of racial classification is the best expression of a colonialist White ideology of Black-White racial monolithic fronts as defined through a White-centred consciousness. Ngubane traces the origins of White frontier ideas in the 1910 Union Act:

They gave the Union the character of a united front of White monoliths. To maximize the power of the front, the white skin was made the justification for citizenship. The laws made by the front had one meaning on the African side and altogether a different one on the white side. The same applied to Christian morality. This was a fundamental weakness (1980:12).

The board of racial classification functioned as an instrument of oppression whose task was to entrench and consolidate the White monolithic ideas about the monopolization of power.

Preoccupation with an exclusive hold on the reins of political authority in the driving force in the 'unscientific' criteria of the board for deciding identity through one's colour. Even before any discussion of the board's criteria of racial classification, the reader is made aware of the undefined or indefinable specificities of a distinct coloured identity:

Whoever thought up the word "Coloured" must have been one of those people who are so obsessed



with the subject of "colour" that when they  
belch, the reek of it hits you a mile  
away (Mphahlele 1962:62).

As a site of Black and White racial encounter the Coloured figure subverts metaphorically any desire for racial purity and exclusivity.

At the heart of the board's obsessive racial activities is a vague and generalized White hegemonic concern with the dangers miscegenation posed to White civilization:

They had long been worried about the prospect of one coffee - colour race, which would shame what they called "white civilization" and the "purity" of their European blood (1967:66).

Even if, as the author/narrator has pointed out, the major concern of the board is the preservation of white civilization, one doubts whether the board ever rigorously pondered the connection between Whiteness and Europeanness. The board's criteria of racial classification seem to have been premised on a simplistic and facile perception of the interconnection between Whiteness and Europeanness.

In upholding the hegemonic values of White civilization, the board should have been in a position to display the excellence of that civilization through a scientifically sound method of racial classification. This method, in my view, would reveal the soundness, if any, of its policy of racial and biological cleansing. Having failed to find logical justifications for its strategy of racial classification, the board adopted the following trial and

error methods of ascertaining the pureness of Coloured identity candidates:

They were ordered to produce evidence to prove their ancestry (was there a white man or woman in the family tree or not?). The onus was clearly on the subject of the enquiry to prove that he was coloured... A comb was put into their hair; if it fell off, they must have straight or curly hair and so one condition was fulfilled (Mphahlele 1967:66).

The other method entailed provision of proof of the height of one's father. This method, according to the author/narrator, required one to indicate height by horizontally stretching out one's arm so that another condition confirming coloured identity would have been fulfilled (Mphahlele 1967:66).

Occasionally the board would declare some members of the family coloured and others not. This would result, as was nearly the case with Almeida, in the splitting of families into Black and Coloured units. It is probable that this family splitting would even have resulted in the separation of a father/mother from his/her daughter/son.<sup>32</sup>

When this racial obsession is examined within the parameters of Mphahlele's hybrid and synthetic post-colonial discourse, one also needs to account for the African and Black dialectic which is part of the crossroads South African racial conflict. This dialectic was the driving force behind Almeida's vacillations between acceptance of

privileges - which were part of the package of coloured identity - such as prospects of high wages and not carrying a pass, and a loyalty to the African and/or Black communal values which subsisted on a culture of poverty and powerlessness.

It was these prospects of carrying passes and earning a low wage which, according to T's wife, Pulane, repulsed Almeida from entertaining an idea of assuming a Black identity:

"Ach, he's just a coward, finished. Just like all coloureds. Blacks are nice and good as long as a coloured man is not told to become Black. (Mphahlele 1967:69)

Pulane further explains this dilemma of an identity crossroads by pointing at the vacillations of Almeida:

"Isn't that he wants to show the white people he's Coloured. Isn't that he thinks we Blacks are nice to live with as long as he doesn't carry passes as we do and get the same wages as we do?(1967:70)

Almeida's material or working class status perhaps makes his social position pathetic. His perception and the pidgin language he is made to speak evoke the reader's sympathy towards his class and racial limitations.

Although Almeida cannot be blamed for securing the social benefits associated with a Coloured identity, the superintendent's letter evicting him from his house and separating him from his wife functions as a gruesome reminder of the fact that he could not have it both ways: he

could not mix White surrogate privileges with Black communal and feudal comfort.

Mphahlele's discourse attempts, through a discursive foregrounding of the metaphor of racial crossroads, to resolve the question of colour conflict by suggesting, within the framework of universalized humanistic principles, a collapsing of the White/Coloured/Black (Negro) racial dialectic and the African, Indian and European cultural hybridity into a synthetic African identity:

Left to ourselves, we should speak of Africans, whether "coloured", "Whites", "Indian" or "negro" (1962:62).

Mphahlele's proposal of African identity as a post colonial synthesis of the social, political and aesthetic contradictions characterizing the relations and tensions bedevelling the South African human condition is in line with his post-colonial and synthetic humanist ideal.

The major problem underlying such a humanistic ideal is its shortsighted generalization and an almost utopian assumption that a social guarantee of humanism can lead to an automatic resolution of the racial and class problems confronting the (hybrid and crossroads) South African social identity. 'A Point of Identity' is, nevertheless, a story in which the drama of racial conflict brings the Black/White racial dialectic into the frontline of struggle for material advancement. Such an advancement and struggle for power

paves the way, as Mphahlele has suggested, towards the birth of a synthetic African aesthetic and identity.

### 3.7.2 'Mrs Plum' and the Dilemmas of Liberalism.

'Mrs Plum' is a long short story or, as Norman Hodge prefers to call it, a novella:

It can be called a novella, either a short or a long short story, belonging to both the genres and illustrating the basic techniques and features of both; as a short story it shows singularity of design ... as a short novel it has sufficient length to allow for a detailed examination of the complexities of personality in an intense learning situation (1981:33).

Its strength both as a literary text and a documentary fiction focusing on Black-White and servant-master relationships, surpasses that of other stories collected In Corner B.

Its ideological organization reflects Mphahlele's merit as a South African writer who displays a particular concern with the social division and, consequently, the manipulative attitude of individuals and social groups enacting the drama of social existence under conditions of human devaluation in the South African world of master/madam-servant relationships.

The story is divided into four parts, each dealing with a stage in the orientation of Karabo, a young woman from Phokeng near Rustenburg, in the Johannesburg domestic labour environment in the White suburbs. The first part deals with her experience in working for a drunken White family which she leaves as a result of its failure to pay her wages. She leaves her second employers because she is sexually harassed by a relation of theirs. The second part fills in the details of the employment and introduces Miss Plum, her daughter Kate and their gardener Dick: Karabo's White world. The third section introduces her Black world; the Black Crow Club in Bree Street, Lillian Ngoyi, the Black leader, Chimane who works for the family next door to Karabo, and Dick, their friend. This section shows Karabo beginning to question her situation. The fourth part tells the story of the relationship between Mrs Plum and her servants.<sup>33</sup>

Throughout the four parts of this story the critical issues raised reflect on the plot of master/servant domination and its reversal, the servants' defeat of the objectives of liberal social control exercised by Mrs Plum. The interaction between Black servants and their White employers takes place at the 'household' or 'home' level where the social network of relations is determined by the economic and power inequality delineating the relational boundaries between servants and masters. Domestic labour,<sup>34</sup> by its very feudal nature, demands that what is otherwise a

'home' for the master be turned into a site of economic and world view conflict between the servants and their masters.

Before any in-depth discussion of the objectification of the dilemmas of liberalism in this story, one has to define the nature and complexities of domestic production in South Africa:

In South Africa black women do the bulk of all domestic work. Through this labour they maintain existing workers and reproduce new workers. Black women perform this labour on a dual level; they are responsible for these functions in their own households, and fulfill a large part of these functions in the households of the dominant classes as domestic servants. Their double load implies a double exclusion: there is a sense in which domestic servants are squeezed between two households, their own and their employers. Their subordinate status as servants and the long working hours exacted by their employers mean that they are full members of neither (Cock 1982:64).

Being members of neither their own households nor those of their employers, the Black domestic servants constitute a sub-class of workers who, whilst they are part of imagined Black communities and cultures, are totally excluded from the culture of their masters.<sup>35</sup>

Total exclusion from the culture of White masters creates, in this story, the social and economic divisions culminating in absolute and uncompromising class divisions between the servants and their masters. A consciousness of the absolutism of class division is explicitly spelled out by Lillian Ngoyi, the intellectual and vocational teacher of domestic servants, when one of her students at the Black

Crow Club poses the question of moral choice between the good and bad masters/madams:

There are good madams and masters and bad ones. Should we take the good ones for friends? (Mphahlele 1967:174).

Ngoyi replies to this question with an uncompromising rejection of moral choices in the ideological struggle between masters/madams and servants:

A master and a servant can never be friends.. Never, so put that out of your head, will you! (1967:174)

The metaphor of the head as container of ideas which enable people either to dominate or be dominated is particularly poignant here. It is a metaphor which enables Ngoyi to assert her illiberal perceptions of Mrs Plum's liberal world. Although Ngoyi is not a member of the servant class, she nevertheless functions as Mphahlele's version of a strong and politically conscious Black female character.

Ngoyi's role as a political educator has as its central thrust the expurgation of intellectual and moral inferiority in the servants' minds. Her Black Crow Club is a vehicle of a kind of political education which debunks Mrs Plum's liberal ideas. Ngoyi combines her ideas of an assertive self-hood with an awareness of the economic precariousness of the servants plight:

As long as you need their money, face them with respect. But you must know that many sad things are happening in our country and you, all of you, must always be learning, adding to what you already know, and obey us when we ask you to help us (Mphahlele 1967:174).



This is an important political turning point in Karabo's acquisition of political ideas and intellectual growth. Her perception of her own plight as a Black woman and a servant of the White world gives her insights into the inter-connections between gender, race and class oppression in South Africa.

Through this kind of education, Karabo is also made aware of the impossibility of a gender and non-racial political alliance developing between herself and her master/madam. This is reflected in her dawning knowledge of self developing through her rudimentary questioning of Mrs Plum's social and political values:

I always thought of Madam when Lillian Ngoyi spoke. I asked myself, what would she say if she knew that I was listening to such words, words like: A white man is looked after by his nanny and his mother when he is a baby. When he grows up the white government looks after him, sends him to school, makes it impossible for him to suffer from the great hunger, keeps a job ready and open for him as soon as he wants to leave school (Mphahlele 1967:175).

Ngoyi's ideas propel Karabo into this rudimentary critique of the dominant values of White power and morality.

Karabo's education makes her grow to the point where she begins to see herself as a marginal counterpart of a broad but impenetrable White dominant world with which she has an organic feminine relationship:

I was learning. I was growing up. Every time I thought of Madam, she became more and more like a dark forest which one fears to enter, and which one will never know. But there were several times when I thought, This woman is easy

to understand, she is like all women. (Mphahlele  
1967:175)

This is also a crucial moment and a political turning point in Karabo's knowledge of self and of the organization of society. She demonstrates a transcendent feminist consciousness which redefines her perceptions of master/madam-servant relationship.

This kind of transcendental feminine otherness does not find its equivalent in Mrs Plum's liberal disposition. Racial otherness, madam-servant class relationship and Mrs Plum's liberal containment of Karabo's Black world make it impossible for a genuine feminine solidarity to develop between the two women.

Although Mrs Plum tries to demonstrate her genuineness in fighting for the rights of Black people by choosing to go to jail in protest against police harassment of her male gardener, Dick, it is as a liberal that she does so. Her liberal ideology is so precarious that when sensational stories about the rumour of Black servants' plot to poison their White employers' dogs begin to circulate in the media, she decides to sack Dick.

This act of sacrificing Dick in compliance with the sensational views of her White world reveals, to Karabo, the lies surrounding the strategy of Black containment through liberalism:

She and I often told each other lies...  
Like when she came back from jail, after  
that day life had been good in jail. And yet  
I could see she was ashamed to have been there.  
Not like our black people who are always being

put in jail and only look at it as the white man's evil game. Lillian Ngoyi often told us this, and Mrs Plum showed me how true those words are. I am sure that we have kept to each other by lying to each other (Mphahlele 1967:201).

Karabo's ability to see through the facade of her madam's liberal ideas demonstrates a political maturity which surpasses her madam's strategy of liberal containment and subtle domination.

This political maturity is also perceived by the author-narrator as an indictment of the basic tenet of liberalism, namely the firm belief in redressing political and economic imbalances through legal channels (Mphahlele 1967:164).<sup>36</sup> When these ideas are put to a test through the offer of a political choice between sacking Dick in deference to the sensational paranoia of her White world and defending him as she once did, her choice of succumbing to the rumours runs counter to her liberal commitment.

The sacking of Dick leads to Karabo's renunciation of her madam's liberal patronage. She does this under a pretence of going to Phokeng where, according to her, she intends paying her respects at her uncle's grave and expressing her condolences to her widowed aunt. Her intention of going to Phokeng at a time when her employer is dependent on her becomes, in my view, a blow to Mrs Plum's liberalism and also to the labour relations between the two of them. Without her, Karabo knows quite well, Mrs Plum will have nobody to dominate.

Karabo, in Mrs Plum's perception, is an abstraction of African people. Besides this abstractionist perception of Karabo, she also categorises the doctor who is her friend and a one time lover of her daughter Kate as also an abstraction of African people. It appears that her abstractionist thinking has a generalised rather than a specific rationale for categorising people.

She also displays the same abstractionist attitude when she comes to Phokeng to beg Karabo to return to work:

Mrs Plum says to me she says, you know,  
I like your people, Karabo, the Africans  
(Mphahlele 1967:208).

Mrs Plum loves 'Africans' rather than a specific person or individual. This love of people as abstractions is proved wanting by her action of sacking Dick. In this respect, Mrs Plum epitomizes the highest point of ideological contradiction inherent in her liberal world view.

It is through Ngoyi's Black Crow Club that Mrs Plum's liberal values and the racial and class underpinnings of master/madam relationship are characteristically questioned by Mphahlele. Such a questioning takes place through Mphahlele's discourse which longs for a humanistic and synthetic society of the type where racial and class categories would not demarcate the social boundaries.

It is also within this discourse that 'Mrs Plum' becomes symbolic of the racial dialectic which implicitly sets Blackness against Whiteness and Africanness against Europeanness. The ideological consequence of this dialectic

expresses, in my view, the exigency of bringing into being an aesthetic which transcends the limitations of difference and otherness.

### **3.7.3 The Presentation of African, Black and White Images: 'In Corner B', 'The Barber of Bariga' and Other Stories**

The presentation of African, White and Black images in these three stories and also in other minor stories to which I shall allude in the course of this discussion, is, as in 'Mrs Plum', generally indicative of Mphahlele's sensitivity to the politically charged nature of these concepts. As literary images, these concepts are invested by Mphahlele with social and political connotations and profound reflections on how political discourse sometimes leads to their abuse. Although 'The Barber of Bariga' was written during Mphahlele's exile in Nigeria and has a Nigerian setting, its uses of the Black and White images reflect Mphahlele's wide-ranging concerns.

'In Corner B' is a story with a simple plot: Talita, the wife of a murdered insurance salesman, mourns together with her family and community the death of her husband. Through this tragedy Mphahlele vividly captures the ritual of night vigils, petty family intrigues and Talita's reminiscence of her husband. The story makes use of the African, Black and

White images in an unothering manner. These images are used by Mphahlele in his characteristic description of the African and White police officers who storm Talita's house interrupting the vigil with captured hooligans whom they suspect of murdering Talita's husband.

By presenting one police officer as an African constable and the other as a White sergeant, Mphahlele captures, albeit through a distorted discourse, the rear-guard nature of Africanity and the racial dominance of Whiteness as an institutionalized symbol of power and authority over the Black other:

Someone whispered, Mapodisa! Police! With two boys! An African constable came in, preceded by two dirty-looking gangsters in handcuffs (Mphahlele 1967:118).

As a marginal expression of White power and authority, the African constable represents, like the handcuffed gangsters, an institutionalized version of a White defined marginality.

It is a kind of marginality which makes him shun and associate his racial otherness with debasement, and White otherness with moral power and authority:

The big white sergeant doesn't play around with black boys like you as I do (1967:119).

The constable's use of the Black image<sup>37</sup> in perceiving the social identity of the gangsters is an attempt by him to deny and, at the same time, distance himself from the Black racial otherness. He does this through an unconscious acceptance of his racial otherness as inferior and,

therefore, no match for a 'big' White sergeant and his power. Although his inferiority generally derives from his professional ranking as a constable, it is also informed by his derisive undermining of the Black image in terms of which the White power of the sergeant defines and confines him.

Mphahlele ironizes and symbolically presents the image of the Black other through the metaphor of the dead body of Talita's husband:

"When's a black corpse been important!"  
(Mphahlele 1967:112)

This question is a politically loaded statement. In the situation where Whiteness was an institutionalized symbol of power and dominance, the values of a Black other became, in the eyes of a White racial other, as meaningless and impotent as the corpse of Talita's dead husband.

In 'The Barber of Bariga' Mphahlele transposes the Black and White racial conflict into the Nigerian colonial setting. The story focuses on the protagonist, Anofi, who displays his excellence as a barber. It is through an accident Anofi witnesses between a White motorist and a Black cyclist that Mphahlele transposes his preoccupation with White and Black racial matters into the Nigerian social context (Mphahlele 1967:12-13).

It is my argument that in the Nigerian social setting where there has not been an establishment of substantial White settlements, the accident Anofi witnesses could hardly

have evoked such strong sentiments of racial otherness. The author/narrator's presentation of these sentiments represents a return of his repressed experiences of racial otherness.

Another conversation illustrating Mphahlele's transposition of the White-Black condition of otherness takes place between Anofi and his father at the former's barber shop:

The white man can do many things. He can make machines to wash the hair. The white man seems to be clever (1967:10).

Anofi's response to his father's perception of the White other as maker of all things is Mphahlele's definitional expression of Black otherness:

Why always white man white man?  
Cannot the black man do these things? Anofi said in spite of his disgust (1967:10).

Mphahlele's emphasis here is not so much on the White-Black dialectic, but on a transpositional discourse through which his repressed South African experience of racial otherness - a pre-exile experience - takes on a new dimension in the Nigerian colonial context.

This dimension of racial otherness tends to collapse the African into Black values. Both the African and Black values have an element of idealism which ultimately confounds the discourse of White-Black and African-European otherness. Here is one instance where this confounding discourse is starkly expressed:



The African always wins when those of his kind are in authority (Mphahlele 1967:15).

Europe as a repressed other of Africa is implicit in this statement by the White motorist. Even if this is the case, it is still my argument that within the social discourse of otherness, it is logically impossible for Whiteness to stand as an other of Africanity.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

Mphahlele's hybrid and syncretic literary discourse, as I have attempted to point out, is constituted by an amalgam of concerns ranging from universal humanism, African humanism, Black and White otherness and other elements defining his ideological concerns. It is as a humanist who believes in the centrality of mankind's position in the universe that Mphahlele appraises and presents, through his critical material and stories, his peculiar literary discourse. This is a discourse in which, according to Mphahlele's strictures, African rear-guardism has the potential of becoming the ultimate synthesizer of all the cultural, racial, political and aesthetic contradictions inhibiting the birth of a humanistic society.

## Notes

1. The critical examination of Mphahlele's works after a consideration of Mutloatse's and Mzamane's anthologies is based on the following rationale: the individual articulations of a writer like Mphahlele present an opportunity for a particularized focus which in the anthologies become submerged in the dictates of the editors' authority and ideology of collective aesthetic production.

2. Mphahlele's attempt to forge, through his hybrid and syncretic discourse, a synthesis between the African and Black forms of otherness is, in my view, an impossible enterprise. Where, on the one hand, the Black concept expresses racial otherness, the African concept, on the other hand, expresses a geographic form of otherness. It is only when these concepts are placed on this scale of otherness that their repressed equivalents, Whiteness and Europeaness, become activated. Manganyi conceptualizes the racial and continental basis of identity construction in the following words: 'I think the identification with Africa, when one looks at it, appears to be attached primarily to power and privilege and not to the land and to the total context itself.' (1981:42) The concept of discourse is used here to refer to the appropriation of the other's language and power (See Fairclough 1989:77)

3. In a chapter entitled 'The Construction of a Framework: Ezekiel Mphahlele' Jane Watts observes that in South African literature

There is one writer in whose work it is possible to trace, over a period of forty years, both the problems of literary production experienced by South African writers and the stages in the development of an appropriate critical approach: For Ezekiel Mphahlele functioned as artist and critic throughout that period, encountering in his creative and confronting in his critical work the alienation of consciousness and the appropriation of discourse, while his later criticism records the efforts of black writers towards reappropriation (1989:57).

Although I largely agree with Watts' observations on the inherent sustenance of Mphahlele's conscious motive of appropriating the western literary discourse, I find terms like 'reappropriation', 'alienation' and 'appropriate critical approach' used in an unqualified manner. Watts' failure to specify what it is that Mphahlele's approach appropriates leaves the reader unconvinced by the terms of her argument. There is, in my view, a contradiction in

Mphahlele's argument between his idealist and populist tendencies. We find this contradiction especially in his first (1962) edition of The African Image, in the revised (1974) edition of the same book and also in Voices In The Whirlwind (1972). It is my argument here that in the early and middle stages of his literary career Mphahlele seeks to resolve the ideological conflicts between African and European, Black and White values through a discourse which reduces this conflict into a religious conflict between Christianity and the indigenous tribal religions of Africa. We find traces of this reductionist idealism in Voices In The Whirlwind (1972:122). It was only during his sojourn in America which brought him into contact with Afro-American and other ideas that Mphahlele underwent an ideological transformation culminating in his production of the revised edition of The African Image.

4. The influence of Social Darwinist ideas and the science of Eugenics filtered through British imperialism into Britain's former colonies. This filtering had as its consequence the production of rigid nationalist racial monoliths. Marks and Trapido argue that:

...in South Africa both black and white nationalism can in large measure be seen as responses to late-nineteenth century industrialization, imperialism and British 'race patriotism'(1987:2).

This perspective is important particularly for its location of racial domination within the context of racial-capitalist transformation of South Africa. Racial-capitalism not only created the racial stereotypes of Black and White people, but it also resulted in perpetuating social myths and complexes of White racial superiority and Black inferiority. It was in this context that the ideological interventions became, in the 1960s and 1970s, an important contribution towards expurgating the values of social inferiority in the minds of Black people.

5. In a chapter entitled 'The Nationalist' (1974:50-59) Mphahlele argues that nationalism for the African and/or Black people transcends any divisive tendencies inherent in tribal ideologies. What Mphahlele ignores is the fact that such nationalist ideologies are deceptive in their concealment of the class character of their world outlook.

6. See page 34 and note 27 below for Mphahlele's and Magubane's expositions on the inculcation of the feelings of Black racial inferiority by what they term the 'Afrikaner Calvinist ethos'.

7. Both Manganyi and Barnett, Mphahlele's biographers, have either minimized or suppressed analysis of Mphahlele's historical and political transformation which we find strongly expressed in such chapters as 'Blackness on My Mind' and 'Black on Black' in the revised edition of The African Image. What these biographers also ignore in their works is the crucial question of whether Mphahlele perceives in both editions of The African Image a symbiotic link or essential contradiction between the African and Black images. My view here is that Mphahlele struggles to repress his perception of the contradiction between these concepts. This contradiction is evident in the manner in which, in the revised edition of The African Image, he has specifically included distinct chapters on 'The African Personality', 'Blackness on My Mind' and 'The Blacks'.

8. When arguing for a convergence of cultural and political interests between the Black South Africans and Black Americans Mphahlele generalizes this Black experience in the following terms:

Nowhere in Africa does one find such a strong fellow feeling towards the American Black as there exists among the Africans of South Africa. How else could it be? The African in South Africa and the Afro-American have both suffered from and endured White arrogance, and their history is written in blood....(1974:96)

Although one can take Mphahlele's point on the convergence of cultural interests between either the Black South Africans and Black Americans or the Africans in South Africa and the Afro-Americans as some kind of a truistic assumption, one finds the collapsing of Black into African to be confounded by Mphahlele with the discourse of otherness. The point Mphahlele misses about the ideological underpinnings of African and Black values has something to do with the world outlooks of each of these concepts. In a racial capitalist mode of production like the one we have in South Africa the question of racial otherness has a paramountcy which overrides any concerns with a geographic or African identity. Mphahlele's argument on cultural convergence is also located outside the historical and class contexts: Afro-Americans and Africans in South Africa have no homogenic perceptions of otherness. It is the intellectual class of Afro-Americans and the African élite in South Africa who, because of their ability to conceptualize and redefine their historical otherness, have found these cultural convergences in the experience of oppression. It has always been the Black members of the U.S. Congress, some Hollywood stars/musicians and writers/academics who have sought to relink with their African past. The working class which experiences the crudest forms of racial battery and other forms of

oppression have to deal with the exigencies of combating the most sophisticated forms of racism peculiar to the developed form of capitalism in America. In so far as the musical side of this Afro-American and South African connection is concerned, one readily accepts, on the grounds of experience of racial oppression by the Blacks in South Africa and America, that there has been this kind of cultural convergence.

9. Note Mphahlele's exposition (1974:14) on the identity of 'Coloured' people whom he prefers to call 'Africans of mixed descent'. His emphasis, in this respect, is on descent rather than the racial attributes of Coloured people. This shift in Mphahlele's conceptualization of the identity question has far-reaching implications for our notion of identity as, among other things, constructible through tracing genealogical origin as a frame of social identity. What further constitutes a problematic of Coloured identity, which Mphahlele ignores, is the aspect of miscegenation. The White and Black racial aspects of Coloured identity make them, in my view, a racially and biologically crossroads people. They represent, at a biological level, a synthesis between Black and White which, at the political level, is suppressed and undermined by an oppressive racial hegemony.

10. Fanon (1976:122) argues that the historic mission of a nationalist and middle class bourgeoisie in Africa has always been that of acting as intermediaries between the Western bourgeoisie and the mass of illiterate and working class people.

11. My understanding of Mphahlele's uses of this abstract noun, man, is not that he consciously chooses to limit its application to masculinity but that he sees it as a universal concept inclusive of the feminine gender. The basis of my emphasis here stems from Mphahlele's declaration that 'When I think of strong people I don't think of men, I always think of women' (Manganyi 1981:11).

12. Mphahlele's exposition on the solidaristic and collective ethos of compassion is, in my view, a reaction against an emphasis on individualism contained in the capitalist ethic which is the driving force of Western humanism. Mphahlele's exposition ignores the fact that the process of economic transformation is leading gradually to a decline of these solidaristic social values.

13. In his Raymond Dart lecture on 'Poetry and Humanism: Oral Beginnings' (1986) Mphahlele traces his idea of humanism from the Western Greek, Italian, English, Indian and African exposition on the conception of man's centrality in the natural scheme. He quotes such Italian humanist scholars as Ginnozzo Monetti, Marrilio Ficino, Count

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (Mphahlele 1986:2); he also quotes the English metaphysical poets such as John Donne, George Herbert, Richard Crashaw, Henry Vaughan, Andrew Marvell and the German philosopher Martin Heidegger's conception of humanism expressed through language which, according to Heidegger, is '...the house of being' (Mphahlele 1986:12). All these Western notions of humanism, of being, become confounded with those of African writers like Achebe and others (Mphahlele 1986:12), with the sounds of West and Central African drums (Mphahlele 1986:13), with the rituals of the Ewe of South-east Ghana and those of the San, the Khoikhoi and South Sotho peoples. (Mphahlele 1986:14,20) He also cites, in his earlier quoted interview with Manganyi, his indebtedness to Tagore's humanistic ideas (Mphahlele 1981:9).

All these references point to the syncretic nature of Mphahlele's humanist strictures. Mphahlele also argues and, at the same time, explains why his humanism has to exclude other people in South Africa:

In South Africa because the White man's law decrees a separate existence, I must reserve my humanism for people of my race and dictate the terms on which anybody else wants to affiliate or cooperate (1979:10).

After rationalizing this exclusivity along racial lines, he contradictorily asserts the open-mindedness of his approach to the humanist ideal:

My being an African humanist also means that I work with anybody whose aim is to achieve true happiness for man here on earth (Mphahlele 1979:10).

It becomes even clearer now that Mphahlele's notion of African humanism is not a definitionally static concept. It is an ideal which, at one time, liberates man from all life-negating constraints.

14. I have noted the radical departures in Mphahlele's attitude towards the language question. Although the article cited here was published earlier than the revised edition of The African Image, there is, however, an element of continuity in Mphahlele's ideas on language. This continuity is enunciated in his discussion, on page 182 of this chapter, of the linguistic demands the process of narration exacts on the writer.

15. This is exactly the issue which Lewis Nkosi's chapter 'Language Crisis' in Tasks And Masks attempts to address. For Mphahlele, however, it is through language that the past can be made to live alongside the present:

foreign languages so as to reach a wider audience, and in one way or another we feel the desperate need to come to terms with an ever present past (1972:144).

This simplistic linking of the past and the present is characteristic of the ahistoricism in Mphahlele's hybrid and syncretic discourse.

16. Apart from the fact that some of Mphahlele's works had been banned in South Africa for quite some time, even those that were not banned were not widely read in the townships where there is a mass of illiterate people. This is why in his interview with Manganyi (1981:32) he expressed a yearning for a wider South African audience.

17. There is a convergence between Mphahlele's views (1964:167) and those of Jordan Ngubane (1980:12) on how the 1910 Union Act created a White monolithic front against the Blacks. Although this was the case, Ngubane goes on to argue that the post 1910 Afrikaner idea of

The viability of the closed society was conditional upon the co-operation of the Africans and the English. The former had the labour while the English controlled economic power (1980:12).

The Afrikaners within the White monolith, had the numbers on their side which brought them to power. By the same token, the African people within the Black monolith have the numbers which guarantee them ascension to power. It is for this reason that Mphahlele and Manganyi argue that a future non-racial society should base its national culture on the culture of the majority (Manganyi 1981:41).

18. Mphahlele sometimes fails to realise that the determining factor in breaking down the barriers between White and Black racial monoliths does not depend solely upon the humanism of the other. He sometimes realizes that the dialectic of power and privilege is the foundation upon which the White monolith rests:

The White man of this century is very far from thinking African. He thinks of himself as an African when he sloganizes, when he wants to tell us that we must not regard him as European...I wonder whether in this century the white man will ever spiritually feel he belongs to Africa as long as we are not in power, whether he thinks ours is really a culture of poverty (Manganyi 1981:42).

A similar observation is made by Jordan Ngubane who argues that White power is essentially relative:

The recognition of conflict between black and white as a war of minds which the African could win only if he re-organised his resources for the purpose of moving events toward the establishment of the relativity of white power (1980:14).

This recognition of White power as a dialectical relative of Black powerlessness is a poignant one. Also see Mphahlele's early article on 'Black and White' (1960:342) which formed the basis of his ideas on racial otherness.

19. Mphahlele equates this post-colonial hybridity and syncreticity with the various forms of music found in the townships: 'Composers here use European notation and infuse into the vernacular lyrics, librettos and rhythms an African idiom.' (1974:199)

20. Focus on character per se would, in my view, be contrary to the spirit of aesthetic collectivism of Mphahlele's humanistic ethos.

21. Omo Asein makes the following observations, which I intend quoting in full, about Mphahlele's humanism:

\Mphahlele proposes an integrationist resolution, but it is a solution that must be based strictly on a firm guarantee of the humanity of the constituents in that society\ (1980:48).

Asein's conclusion sheds more light on the shortcomings of Mphahlele's humanism:

In sum, Mphahlele's commitment is to the macrocosm; and the political realities in South Africa are a fragment of the totality of the human condition that is central to his thought. His vision encompasses a wider world and community of races(1980:48).

22. Some of the stories appear in both of these anthologies. They also appear in Mphahlele's selected works under the title The Unbroken Song (1979).

23. From what Mphahlele has expressed about his exposure to and influence by the work of Afro-American writers like Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, Langstone Hughes and others (1974:12), we trace his exposition of the master-servant relationship from, for instance, the manner in which Wright and Ellison present, respectively, Black-White relationships



in Native Son and Black Boy. Also see Mphahlele's (1988:20) further exposition on the Afro-American literary influence upon him.

24. The introduction of domestic labour in the Rand was not something confined to racial identity. In the early stages of the discovery of gold in the Rand, and also during the flow of European immigrants into Johannesburg in the period from 1886-1914, there was an employment of both Black and White domestic servants (See Van Onselen 1980).

25. It is interesting to note that there is no reference, throughout this story, to the concept 'African' and to identity denotations. This omission indicates, in my view, the extent to which Mphahlele had come to think in terms of the White-Black monoliths as absolute entities working towards a complete annihilation of humanistic values.

26. Note that Mphahlele's use of the concept African in reference to Mfukeri's subservience as typical of Rhodesian Africans (1967:30) takes the form of a rear-guard and stereotypical characterization of Mfukeri.

27. See Mphahlele's (1974:27) exposition on the Calvinist ethic of the Afrikaner' which he associates with the Christian God. Bernard Magubane offers a more an historical focus on the Afrikaners' or, as he chooses to refer to them, the Boers' justifications of African domination on the bases of religious grounds:

The Boers' espousal of a doctrine of African inferiority, justified on biblical grounds, was interconnected with their desire to justify peonage. These people had inherited from their settler forefathers feudal-like institutions with rigid hierarchical structures. For their ancestors, "race" had provided a suitable principle on which to create a servile population. Their religious leaders found in the Bible the "Curse of Canaan," which they adapted to justify their activities (1979:33).

28. Ruth aptly and skilfully summarizes the symbolic nature of the story's ending in the following terms: 'The story ends with Sarel Britz looking out of his window (laager) into the empty paddock (country) and reflecting...' (1986:72).

29. I disagree with Mphahlele's generalizations here. He in fact contradicts himself by observing that:

...the black/white encounter has produced

among blacks accommodationists, radical nationalists, middle-class reactionaries and radicals, an apathetic and a sensitive proletariat or peasantry, individualists (1974:42).

It was as a radical nationalist rather than a Marxist analyst that Mphahlele made the above comments. This kind of nationalist posture has its roots in the liberal English values inculcated in Mphahlele by the Missionary education. The fact that such an education tended to alienate members of the new-elite, is indicative of a stark impact the dominant English liberal ideology had on the new-elite.

30. See Mphahlele (1959:13). Mphahlele has also expressed abhorrence at the figure of a 'paternal grandmother' (Manganyi 1981:6) along whose lines, one might infer, Madira is modelled.

31. It is my argument here that, contrary to the designs of the architects of apartheid, there is no such a thing as a pure race. Miscegenation has occurred on a scale which almost constituted a defiance of South Africa's racial laws.

32. Unlike the sophisticated scientific ideas on racial classification in the 19th and early 20th centuries in Europe (See Marks and Trapido 1987:6,7), those of the board were based on a primitive obsession with racial classification. Whether families were split or not, the board members, according to this story's author/narrator, carried out its missions of racial segregation.

33. I am indebted to Damian Ruth (1986:76) for an outline of this plot.

34. The reader should note that gender demarcation of Black domestic servants is not clear-cut. There is a substantial proportion of them who are drawn from both the male and female genders. Even if this is the case, our analysis of Mphahlele's treatment of the 'domestic mode of production' (See Cock 1981:68) and the workings of the 'ideology of domesticity' (See Cock 1981:68) will follow the sexual divisions in terms of which the domestic mode of production assigns household labour to females and garden work to males. Also see Cock's (1980:3,85) discussion of the master's control of servants and the dependency syndrome this enforces upon the servants.

35. The only manner in which Black domestic servants whose social identity is fragmented by the racial capitalist mode of production (in which they are, figuratively, members of neither their households nor those of their White employers) attempt to reconstruct their identities is through a fragmented and vague attachment to the traditions

attachment to the traditions and cultural values of the townships and rural or 'homeland' social structures. Benedict Anderson's (1982:68) phrase 'imagined communities' is appropriate for this kind of domestic servants' vague attachment to the values of their communities. A culture of tombs and cenotaphs is, according to Anderson's metaphor, symbolic of a people's imagined attachment to traditions and cultural values. We find this symbolic attachment to imagined community values in Karabo's insistent demand to go to Phokeng, her far way home, where, according to her, she intends

To take my tears and words of grief to  
his grave and to my old aunt....(1967:202)

Although Mphahlele's intention here is to present Karabo as unalienated from her African cultural roots which conceive continuity between the living and the dead. There is, according to John Mbiti (1969:160-1) there is, in African traditional thinking, an anthropocentric perception that once a person is dead he/she becomes a spirit/ancestral medium who still retains his physical name. Mazisi Kunene (1981:xxv) takes this point further by arguing that it is through the observation and offering of sacrifices and libations to the living-dead (ancestors) who, as spirit mediums, can be asked to take the pleas of mankind to the supreme creator. Karabo's attachment to her dead uncle is a typical reflection of this symbolic and imagined attachment of the living to the dead.

36. In spite of her liberal posturing, Mrs Plum adheres to the gender divisions of labour in her house: Whilst Karabo is a nanny who does other chores inside the household, Dick is a gardener who also looks after the dogs. This adherence to this gender division of domestic labour, is indicative of Mrs Plum's deference to the prescriptions of a dominant White patriarchal ideology dividing labour according to sex.

37. The Black image is also used in 'Down the Quiet Street' in defining property relations between the Black man and his coffee cart (1967:143). This is one of the rare instances where the Black man is presented in property ownership terms. An inference one can draw from this description is that Black functions, in this story, as a relative concept to power.

## Conclusion

This study of the dialectic between the 'African' and the 'Black' aesthetic commenced by placing the problem within the context of prevailing definitions, from South Africa and elsewhere in the world, of the actual nature of the components constituting the concepts 'African' and 'Black'. Since it is through and within the complex functions of linguistic codes and signs that such definitions are conceptualised and made operational, it became clear that the parameters of the study would require a detailed analysis of the question of acquisition and literary use of English, the language of the other, by 'African' and/or 'Black' writers.

While the emphasis has been on these definitional and linguistic aspects of the African and/or Black dialectic, these aspects, in turn, necessitated a two-pronged approach in Chapter One to contextualise the dialectic of aesthetic consciousness: while the first one entailed an examination of the African and Black concepts from the point of view of literary definitions by writers and critics, the second focused on the linguistic and ideological aspects of aesthetic conception. This approach helped, hopefully, to impart a linguistic and ideological clarity to the valuative and devaluative literary uses of the concepts 'African' and 'Black'. Even though the writers and critics concerned remained generally silent on the linguistic and ideological links between the two aesthetic concepts, this very silence

suggested the multifaceted complexities of the problem of aesthetic valuation in African and/or Black writing. Thus, the basic approach has been to search for clues of meaning in what remains repressed in definitional and ideological assertions about the aesthetic value of the concepts 'African' and 'Black'.

Certain generalizations about the synonymous conceptualization of these were confirmed, in the preliminary part of Chapter Two, particularly through a rigorous questioning of the notions of anthologization and aesthetic collectivity and reconstruction expressed respectively by Mutloatse and Mzamane in the introductions to their anthologies. Although Mzamane's approach suggests a carefully concealed synonymous conception of the two concepts, Mutloatse, on the other hand, explicitly links the terms as synonyms. He, in fact, subjects the demands of critical sensitivity to an explicit synonymous use of the concepts 'African' and 'Black'. These stances by Mutloatse and Mzamane are dramatised in the range of stories anthologised with the specific purpose of establishing a monolithic African/Black literary aesthetic.

It was only through a critical questioning of the basis of such a monolithic literary world that the direction of this study was determined. The notion of a monolithic or collective aesthetic consciousness displayed an ideological disintegration when the discussion shifted radically to an examination of the stories in each of the anthologies. It was here that the

norms of each of these stories revealed some deeply underlying discords as to what constitutes exactly the formulations of various aspects of the African and Black aesthetic.

Through the dialectical method of reading critically the attitudes and assumptions expressed by the individual authors about their conception of the African and Black valuative terms in Mutloatse's and Mzamane's anthologies, some significant findings came to light. The major results consisted in an exposition of the confounding nature of critical discourse on the African and Black concepts. These results necessitated a clearer definition of the two concepts, expressed by drawing the reader's attention to the underlying connotations in the concepts African and Black: while the assumptions of an African aesthetic reveals a place-centred form of consciousness, those of a Black aesthetic express a race-centred consciousness.

These results were substantiated in my critical engagement with the varied ideological dispositions held, in Mutloatse's anthology, by such short story writers as Chicks Nkosi, Xolile Guma, Bessie Head and Manthatha Tsedu toward the valuative function of the concepts concerned. Similar results emerged from a dialectical reading of stories in Mzamane's anthology by Eski'a Mphahlele, Mbulelo Mzamane, Njabulo Ndebele and James Matthews.

In each of the stories some stark contradictions became apparent the more one dug into the layers of each

of the writer's assumptions about the valuative function of the concepts 'African' and 'Black'. While in writers like Guma and Tsedu there were varied thematic and ideological claims about an Afrocentric or place-conscious aesthetic, in Nkosi's and Head's assumptions there was a persistent refusal by the author/narrative voices to disclose the parameters of aesthetic consciousness. This refusal turned the focus of this study to the areas of aesthetic silence where some implicit geographic and racial concerns were brought to light.

Through an examination of the individual author's pronouncements on the valuative function of the concepts African and Black, the critical path was cleared for this study to engage with Mphahlele's aesthetic assumptions. A number of factors added substance to this examination as it became clear that Mphahlele was not only important because of his literary output, but that his comments in his critical works display a depth of critical sensitivity toward the African and Black concepts which was absent in Mutloatse's and Mzamane's anthologies.

Mphahlele quite consciously and explicitly acknowledges the hybrid nature of African and/or Black writing in South Africa, Africa, the diaspora and elsewhere in the world. His formal educational training in Anglo-South African missionary institutions and his active global involvement in literary conferences during the time of his exile also contributed to the critical and methodological imperative of treating his works in a

separate chapter. This treatment served the crucial purpose of decentering metaphorically and ideologically any notions of aesthetic monolithicism and collectivity.

An examination of Mphahlele's critical works revealed, initially, his complaint that geo-racial ideological divisions deny South African literature and society a chance of generating, like other politically independent countries of the world, a humanistic literary and social ethos. The hybrid nature of his critical discourse on the value of the English language in his construction of an African and/or Black world view also reinforced his yearning for the birth of a humanistic South African society. This concern with the birth of a humanistic South African society also expressed a crucial recognition of the fact that African and/or Black literature in South Africa is born from a fusion of styles and motifs taken from the cultures of Africa and the West. The recognition had profound implications for the study's shift toward a syncretic or synthetic theoretical and critical appraisal of the relations between the Black-White and Africa-West aesthetic concerns.

The racial segregationism of the dominant White supremacist ideology and, consequently, its manifestation in the form of White and Black literary demarcations, inhibited Mphahlele's discourse from attributing to this literature a universally defined humanistic identity. Even if this was the case, Mphahlele's discourse recognized the limitations of a racial discourse of



otherness. This was presented in the form of Mphahlele's awareness of how the Black and White peoples of South Africa have been made to see each other through the dominant ideology's limiting racial key-hole. In terms of the preceding diagnosis by Mphahlele, one infers that his discourse demands, as a precondition for the birth of a humanistic and fully fledged African or place-conscious aesthetic, the dismantling of the dominant racial ideology.

These generalizations by Mphahlele were confirmed in a dialectical reading of some of the stories contained in both his collections. The use of the African and/or Black concepts in his stories demonstrated the range of his consciousness of the valuative processes of the Black concept. This was demonstrated particularly through racial stereotype into which his characters are cast. As far as his Afrocentric pronouncements are concerned, these took the form of a rear-guard ideological presence inhibited from developing into a full-grown national consciousness by the permeating concerns of racial otherness.

There are three broad conclusions arrived at after a critical consideration of the results emanating from the scrutiny undertaken in Chapters One to Three of this study.

The first one entails an epistemic and ideological exhortation against making ambitious claims for the aesthetic value of the concepts 'African' and 'Black'. This exhortation flows from the discovery that the

concepts 'African' and 'Black' originate from outside the cultural and literary forms of Africa. It is further held here that since the peoples of Africa were in precolonial times organized according to tribes or clans and also that racial consciousness is the product of colonial and imperialist conquest, these categories have an historical validity which is sanctioned by the experiences of linguistic, cultural and political conquest. The concepts 'African' and 'Black' as terms denoting identity, did not exist in the lexicon of the precolonial languages in Africa.

The second conclusion argues that on the basis of the permanence of racial capitalist conquest, the concepts 'African' and 'Black' have become appropriated as part of the reified conditions of the post-colonial condition of literary production. This acknowledgement is premised strictly on the recognition of the historicity which surrounds the aesthetic value and difference of the two concepts. While the term 'African' denotes an historical sense of belonging to Africa which contrasts and interacts, say, with a Western consciousness, the term 'Black' stands, for as long as racial segregation remains entrenched in the South African consciousness, as an oppositional other of 'White'.

The third conclusion would be that the precondition for the birth of a humanistic cultural, literary and Afro-centric (or geographically) based aesthetic is premised on the total dismantling of segregationist

racial policies. The pervasive immediacy and untenability of the pseudo-scientific Black and White racial ideological forms of otherness temporarily shift Afrocentric concerns to a rear-guard position of ideological presence. It is only when the racial categories have fallen away that a fully fledged Afrocentric consciousness can replace those racial categories.

The above conclusions do not, however, imply that the racial antecedents of the South African literary mode of production would disappear overnight through the liberation of Afrocentric consciousness. What should be emphasised by these conclusions is the desire, manifested in the current socio-political changes, for the advent of an aesthetic consciousness and national identity which guarantee the freedom and value of individual and social formations.

This study has, as might be expected, its own limitations. Among these should be singled out the dearth of material which specifically deals with the definitional aspects of the concepts African and Black. The available critical works do not engage in a rigorous definitional treatment of the two concepts. Other factors such as the (now defunct) international cultural boycott of South Africa, resulting in unavailability of theses and other texts from other parts of Africa and elsewhere in the world, narrowed the theoretical focus of this study to the South African territory. Where,

however, pertinent works from outside South Africa could be obtained, they were obviously drawn into the study.

It is hoped that this study will generate a new debate around the cognitive, ideological and literary value and function of the concepts 'African' and 'Black' as defined and received within the post-colonial context/s.

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources

#### Short Story Anthologies

Mutloatse M (ed) 1988: Forced Landing: Africa South Contemporary Writings. Johannesburg: Ravan

Mzamane M (ed) 1986: Hungry Flames and Other Black South African Short Stories. London: Longman

#### Short Story Collections

Mphahlele E 1962: The Living and the Dead and Other Stories. Ibadan: Ministry of Education

----- 1967: In Corner B. Nairobi: East African Publishing House

### Secondary Sources

#### Articles

Asein O S 1980: 'The Humanism of Ezekiel Mphahlele' in The Journal of Commonwealth Studies. Vol. XV, No. 2, pp 38-49

Cock J 1981: 'Disposable Nannies: Domestic Servants in the Political Economy of South Africa' in Review of African Political Economy. No. 21 (May-Sept), pp 63-83

Gikandi S 1992: 'Ngugi's Conversion: Writing and the Politics of Language' in Research in African Literatures. Vol. 23, No. 1 (Spring) pp 131-144

Gordimer N 1980: 'From Apartheid to Afrocentrism' in English in Africa. Vol. 7, No. 2 (March), pp 45-50

----- 1977: 'What being a South African Means to me' in South African Outlook. Vol. 107, No. 1273, pp 87-89

- Hodge N 1981: 'Dogs, Africans and Liberals: The World of Mphahlele's "Mrs Plum" ' in English in Africa. Vol. 8, No. 1, pp 33-43
- Kunene D 1992: 'African Language Literature: Tragedy and Hope' in Research in African Literatures. Vol. 23, No. 1 (Spring), pp 8-15
- Kunene M 1992: 'Problems in African Literature' in Research in African Literatures. Vol. 23, No. 1 (Spring), pp 26-44
- Maake N P 1991: 'Language and Politics in South Africa with Reference to the Dominance of the Nguni Languages' in English Studies in Africa. Vol. 34, No. 2, pp 55-64ü
- Mafeje A 1978: 'Soweto and its Aftermath' in Review of African Political Economy. No. 11 (January/April), pp 17-30
- Marrouchi B 1992: 'Book Review' in Research in African Literatures. Vol. 23, No. 2 (Spring), pp 228-231
- Moodley S 1972: 'black consciousness, the black artist and the emerging black culture' in SASO Newsletter. (May/June), pp 18-20
- Morris P 1980: 'The Early Black South African Newspaper and the Development of the Novel' in The Journal of Commonwealth Literature. Vol. XV, No. 1 (August), pp 15-29
- Mphahlele E 1960: 'Black and White' in New Statesman. (10 September), pp 342-344
- 1964: 'The Language of African Literature' in Harvard Educational Review. Vol. 34, No. 2, pp 298-305
- 1979: 'Botho & Ubuntu Humanism' in The Voice. (October 7-13), p 10
- 1983: 'South African Literature vs The Political Morality' (1) in The English Academy Review. Vol. 1, pp 8-28
- 1986: 'Remarks on Chirundu' in English in Africa. Vol. 13, No. 2 (October), pp 21-37
- Mzamane M 1977: 'The Study of Literature in Africa' in DONGA. No. 4 (February), pp 1 and 6
- Ndebele N 1987: 'The English Language and Social Change in South Africa' in TriQuarterly 69. (Spring/Summer), pp 217-235

----- 1988: 'Turkish Tales and Some Thoughts on South African Fiction' in Staffrider Magazine. vol. 7, No.3 and 4 pp 217-235

Ruth D 1986: 'Through the Keyhole: Masters and Servants in the work of Es'kia Mphahlele' in English in Africa. Vol. 13, No. 2 (October), pp 65-88

Sole Kelwyn 1983: 'Culture, Politics and the Black Writer: A Critical Look at Prevailing Assumptions' in English in Africa. Vol. 10 No.1 (May), pp 37-84

Wali O 1963: 'The Dead End of African Literature' in Transition: A Journal of Arts, Culture & Society. Vol. 4, No.10, (Sept) pp 13-14

### Books

Adorno T trans by Lenhardt C 1986: Aesthetic Theory. London: Routledge.

Althusser L 1971: Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays. London: New Left Books.

Anderson B 1983: Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism. London: Verso.

Ashcroft B, Griffiths G and Tiffin H (eds) 1989: The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures. London: Routledge.

Balibar E and Macherey P 1981: 'On Literature as an Ideological Form' in Young R (ed) Untying The Text. London: Routledge.

Barnett U 1976: Ezekiel Mphahlele. Boston: Twayne Publishers.

Bennet T 1990: Outside Literature. London: Routledge

Bonner P 1980: 'Classes, the mode of production and the state in pre-colonial Swaziland' in Marks S and Atmore A (eds) Economy and society in pre-industrial South Africa. London: Longman.

Bourdieu P trans by Nice R 1984: Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Burger P 1990: 'The Problem of Aesthetic Value' in Collier P and Geyer-Ryan H (eds) Literary Theory Today. Cambridge: Polity.

Cabral A 1973: Return to the Source. London: Monthly Review.

Cock J 1980: Maids and Madams: Workers Under Apartheid. Johannesburg: Ravan.

Coetzee J M 1988: White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Darko S 1979: Metamorphoses of Science Fiction. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Derrida J 1985: 'Racism's Last Word' in Gates L (ed) "Race," Writing and Difference. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Dhlomo H I E 1944: Valley of a Thousand Hills. Durban: Knox.

Eagleton T 1983: Literary Theory: An Introduction. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Egejuru P A 1980: Towards African Literary Independence: A Dialogue With Contemporary African Writers. Westport, Connecticut: London: Greenwood.

Ezenwa O 1990: 'Windows of Womanhood' in Abrahams C (ed) The Tragic Life: Bessie Head and Literature in Southern Africa. New Jersey: Africa World Press.

Fairclough N 1989: Language and Power. London: Longman.

Fanon F 1966: 'The Intellectual Elite in Revolutionary Culture' in Cartey W and Kilson M (eds) The Africa Reader: Independent Africa. New York: Vintage.

----- 1976: The Wretched of the Earth. London: Penguin.

----- trans by Markman C 1991: Black Skin, White Masks. London: Pluto.

Gates L 1986: 'Writing "Race" and the Difference it Makes' in Gates L (ed) "Race," Writing and Difference. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Gerard A S (ed) 1986: European Language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa, Vol.1. Budapest: Akademiai Kiado.



- Gordimer N 1974: The Black Interpreters. Johannesburg: Ravan.
- Gramsci A trans by Hoare Q and Smith G N 1971: Selections From the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Gwala M 1982: 'Black Writing Today' in Chapman M (ed) Soweto Poetry. Johannesburg: McGraw Hill.
- Head B 1985: 'Preface' in Khuzwayo H Call Me Woman. Johannesburg: Ravan.
- Jameson F 1974: Marxism and Form: Twentieth Century Dialectical Theories of Literature. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- 1981: The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act. London: Methuen.
- Jeanpierre W 1965: 'Negritude and its Enemies' in Moore G (ed) African Literature and the Universities. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.
- Johnson B 1990: 'The Surprise of Otherness: A note on the Wartime Writings of Paul de Man' in Collier P and Geyer-Ryan H (eds) Literary Theory Today. Cambridge: Polity.
- Kenan-Rimmon S 1983: Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics. London: Methuen.
- Kharin Y trans by Kostrov K 1981: Fundamentals of Dialectics. Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- Kinfe A 1991: Politics of Black Nationalism: From Harlem to Soweto. Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press.
- Ki-Zerbo J 1962: 'African Personality and the New African Society' in American Society of African Culture (eds) Pan-Africanism Reconsidered. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Kunene M 1981: Anthem of the Decades. London: Heinemann.
- Lugira A 1973: 'Black Aesthetic' in Gurr A and Zirimu P (eds) Black Aesthetics. Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau.
- Macherey P 1978: A Theory of Literary Production. London: Routledge.
- Magubane B M 1979: The Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa. New York: Monthly Review.

- Majeke N 1952: The Role of the Missionaries in Conquest. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand.
- Manganyi N C 1981: Looking Through the Keyhole: Dissenting Essays on the Black Experience. Johannesburg: Ravan.
- 1983: Exiles and Homecomings: A Biography of Es'kia Mphahlele. Johannesburg: Ravan.
- Marks S and Trapido S 1987: 'The Politics of race, class and Nationalism' in Marks S and Trapido S (eds) The Politics of Race, Class & Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa. London: Longman.
- Mbiti J S 1969: African Religions and Philosophy. Oxford: Heinemann.
- Miller C L 1990: Theories of Africans: Francophone Literature and Anthropology in Africa. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Mofolo T 1931: Chaka. London: Oxford University Press.
- Moore G (ed) 1965: African Literature and the Universities. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.
- Mphahlele E 1959: Down Second Avenue. London: Faber.
- 1962: The African Image. London: Faber.
- 1965: 'A Reply' in Moore G (ed) African Literature and the Universities. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.
- 1967: In Corner B. Nairobi: East African Publishing House.
- 1972: Voices in the Whirlwind. London: The Macmillan Press.
- 1974: The African Image. London: Faber.
- 1979: The Unbroken Song. Johannesburg: Ravan.
- and Couzens T (eds) 1980: The Black Writer in Africa. Johannesburg: University of Witwatersrand.
- 1986: Poetry and Humanism: Oral Beginnings. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.
- 1988: Renewal Time. London: Readers International.

- Mutloatse M (ed) 1981: Reconstruction: 90 Years of Black Historical Literature. Johannesburg: Ravan.
- Mzamane M 1984: 'The Uses of Traditional Oral Forms in Black South African Literature' in White L and Couzens T (eds) Literature and Society in South Africa. Essex: Longman.
- 1991: 'The Impact of Black Consciousness on Culture' in Pityana B, Ramphele M and Wilson L (eds) Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Ngubane J 1980: 'Forty Years of Black Writing' in Mphahlele E and Couzens T (eds) The Black Writer in Africa. Johannesburg: University of Witwatersrand.
- Ngugi W 1982: Writers in Politics. London: Heinemann.
- 1986: Decolonising the Mind. London: James Currey.
- 1993: Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms. London: James Currey.
- Nkosi L 1979: Tasks and Masks: The Themes and Styles of African Literature. London: Longman.
- 1983: Home and Exile and Other Selections. London: Longman.
- 1986: 'South Africa: Black Consciousness' in Gerard A (ed) European-Language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa Vol. 1. Budapest: Akademiai Kiado.
- Ohaeto E 1990: 'Windows of Womanhood' in Abrahams C (ed) The Tragic Life: Bessie Head and Literature in Southern Africa. New Jersey: Africa World Press.
- Ojo-Ade F 1990: 'Of Human Trials and Triumphs: Bessie Head's Collection of Treasures' in Abrahams C (ed) The Tragic Life: Bessie Head and Literature in Southern Africa. New Jersey: Africa World Press.
- Oppland J 1986: 'The Transition from Oral to Written Literature in Xhosa, 1823-1909' in Whittaker R A and Sienaert E R (eds) Oral Tradition and Literacy: Changing Visions of the World. Durban: Natal University Oral Documentation and Research Centre.
- Ricouer P trans by Blamey K and Pellauer D 1988: Time and Narrative. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Said E 1986: 'An Ideology of Difference' in Gates L (ed) "Race," Writing and Difference. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

----- 1978: Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient. London: Penguin.

Sartre J P trans by Underwood J A and Calder J 1973: Literature and Politics. London: Calder & Boyars.

Senghor L 1965: 'Opening Address by President Senghor' in Moore G (ed) African Literature and the Universities. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.

Sepamla S 1982: 'The black writer in South Africa: Problems and Dilemmas' in Chapman M (ed) Soweto Poetry. Johannesburg: McGraw Hill.

Spivak C G 1988: 'Can the Subaltern Speak' in Cary Nelson and Grossberg L (eds) 1988: Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture. London: Macmillan.

Stanzel F K trans by Charlotte I 1984: A Theory of Narrative. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Vaughan M 1990: 'Storytelling and Politics in Fiction' in Trump M (ed) Rendering Things Visible. Johannesburg: Ravan.

Van Onselen C 1980: Studies in the Social History of the Witwatersrand 1886-1914 Vol. 2. Johannesburg: Ravan.

Watts J 1989: Black Writers from South Africa: Towards a Discourse of Liberation. Oxford: Macmillan.

Whittaker R A and Sienart E R (eds) 1986: Oral Tradition and Literacy: Changing Visions of the World. Durban: Oral Documentation and Research Centre.

Williams R 1983: Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society. London: Penguin.

Zirimu P 1973: 'An Approach to Black Aesthetics' in Gurr A and Zirimu P (eds) Black Aesthetics. Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau.

## **Bibliographies**

Lindfors B 1989: Black African Literature in English,

1892-1986. London: Hans Zell.

Wooper C and Read J (Comp) 1989: Es'kia Mphahlele: A Bibliography. Grahamstown: National English Literary Museum.

### **Theses**

Attwell D 1985: Indigenous Tradition and the Colonial Legacy: A Study in the Social Context of Anglophone Criticism. Unpublished MA thesis: University of Cape Town.

King M 1985: A Study of the Development of the Structures and Themes in the Short Stories of Nadine Gordimer. Unpublished MA thesis: University of Cape Town.